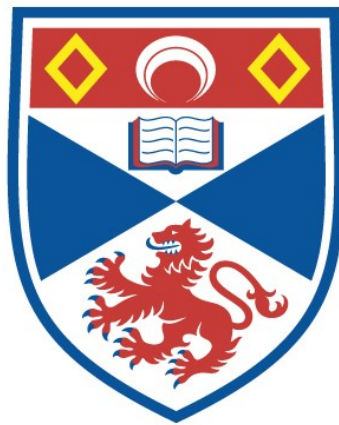


THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

Melanie Jane Henderson Powell

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews



1988

Full metadata for this item is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:
<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:
<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/14864>

This item is protected by original copyright

UNRESTRICTED

In submitting this thesis to the University of St. Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker.

date 11/7/88 signature of candidate

Melanie Jane Henderson Powell



ProQuest Number: 10170774

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10170774

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN
IN
EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

Melanie Jane Henderson Powell
M. Phil (Mode A)
University of St Andrews
March 1988

Tr A 798

I, ..Melanie J. H. Powell....., hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately ...100,000.. words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 28. March 1988 Signature of Candidate

I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No.12 on October 1979. and as a candidate for the degree of M.Phil. (Mode A) on ..March.. 1986; the higher study of which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between ..1979.. (year)..(1982. (year).

Date 28. March 1988 Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of M.Phil. (Mode A) in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 15. March 1988. Signature of Supervisor .

ABSTRACT

This study is a survey of the presentation of women in English drama from 1300 - 1600, and of the relationship between stage views and contemporary attitudes to women during this period.

Its purpose is twofold. It sets out to investigate whether the questioning of current ideas about women which has been well documented in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries was also a feature of earlier drama. It also examines whether the account put forward by Lawrence Stone, in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800, of the way in which major social changes at the time of the Reformation affected the status of marriage and of women is substantiated by evidence from contemporary drama.

Research for the study has been carried out mainly through reading or more detailed analysis of most of the 300 surviving plays from the period, with reference to relevant secondary sources of literary criticism and social history.

The work is presented in four chapters. Chapter 1 considers attitudes to women in the life and drama of the Pre-Reformation period. After an Introduction summarising views of women in mediaeval religious, legal and economic life, it examines the way in which women were presented in the Mystery and Morality plays. Finally, it considers in detail the few but significant interludes produced by dramatists of the Thomas More circle shortly before the Reformation.

Chapter 2 examines what I have called the Testing Plays: the wave of didactic plays which promoted the new Protestant ideal of the obedient wife. They demonstrated how young women should be educated for wifhood, and the way in

ABSTRACT

This study is a survey of the presentation of women in English drama from 1300 - 1600, and of the relationship between stage views and contemporary attitudes to women during this period.

Its purpose is twofold. It sets out to investigate whether the questioning of current ideas about women which has been well documented in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries was also a feature of earlier drama. It also examines whether the account put forward by Lawrence Stone, in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800, of the way in which major social changes at the time of the Reformation affected the status of marriage and of women is substantiated by evidence from contemporary drama.

Research for the study has been carried out mainly through reading or more detailed analysis of most of the 300 surviving plays from the period, with reference to relevant secondary sources of literary criticism and social history.

The work is presented in four chapters. Chapter 1 considers attitudes to women in the life and drama of the Pre-Reformation period. After an Introduction summarising views of women in mediaeval religious, legal and economic life, it examines the way in which women were presented in the Mystery and Morality plays. Finally, it considers in detail the few but significant interludes produced by dramatists of the Thomas More circle shortly before the Reformation.

Chapter 2 examines what I have called the Testing Plays: the wave of didactic plays which promoted the new Protestant ideal of the obedient wife. They demonstrated how young women should be educated for wifhood, and the way in

which the virtues of the perfect wife should withstand stringent testing. The chapter begins with a summary of the importance of the education element in the plays. It then examines the earlier type of Testing Play, in which the husband torments his wife in order to test her constancy, before moving to the later plays concerned with the test of chastity, in which a woman or couple is threatened by the desire of a powerful social superior.

Chapter 3 examines drama's response to the contemporary debate on the correct reasons for marriage. It starts with a study of the artistic influences of romance and classical comedy which enabled dramatic treatment of the topic, before moving to a detailed study of the way in which the plays reflected and explored the whole spectrum of opinion.

Chapter 4 considers the presentation of women in tragedy throughout the period. It examines the limiting influences inherited from classical tragedy and the extent to which they continued to dominate later tragedy. Finally, it looks in detail at three plays which offer an early indication of the genre's potential eventually to produce exciting heroines.

The study concludes that discussion and questioning of current attitudes to women has been an important feature of English drama from its earliest origins. The particularly close relationship between society and drama is demonstrated by the exactness with which contemporary drama reflects Lawrence Stone's account of social changes during the period of the study. However, while Shakespeare's predecessors and contemporaries undoubtedly questioned and investigated current views about women, no-one else seems to have transcended them and shown the insight that he did. The reasons for the uniqueness of his vision remain as difficult to identify as ever.

LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
LIST OF CONTENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION	12
Chapter 1	
THE PRE-REFORMATION PERIOD	13
INTRODUCTION - WOMEN IN MEDIAEVAL LIFE AND THOUGHT	13
The Early Church's View of Women	13
Scholastic Bible Criticism	16
The Mediaeval Church's View of Marriage	21
Women's Position in the Church and in Law	22
Economic Importance	24
WOMEN AND THE MYSTERY PLAYS	26
1. Eve	28
2. Mary	36
3. Mrs. Noah	42
WOMEN IN THE MORALITY PLAYS	54
1. Lechery	54
2. Marriage	66
THE INFLUENCE OF THE MORE CIRCLE	75
THE PLAYS	81
CONCLUSION	103
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1	106
Chapter 2	
HOMILETIC DRAMA AFTER THE REFORMATION:	
PLAYS OF THE EDUCATION AND TESTING OF THE PERFECT WIFE	113
INTRODUCTION	113.
EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING	119
THE TESTING PLAYS	134
1: TESTS OF CONSTANCY	135
An early fore-runner - Godly Queen Hester	135
The archetype - <u>Patient Grissill</u>	137
Robert Greene -	
revival and development of the theme	146

	Page
The tester tested - <u>Faire Em</u>	156
The convention hardens - <u>Vertuous Octavia</u>	163
The archetype re-evaluated - Chettle and Dekker's Grissill	168
2: TEST OF CHASTITY	177
2a Chastity as personal integrity	184
2b Marriage under threat	204
CONCLUSION	237
What happened to the Testing theme, and why	237
NOTES TO CHAPTER 2	248
Chapter 3	
WOMEN IN COMEDIES OF LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE	257
INTRODUCTION	257
THE INFLUENCE OF CLASSICAL COMEDY	265
ROMANCE INFLUENCES ON COMEDY	291
COMEDY OF LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE	302
Introduction	302
A. ARTICULATING PROBLEMS	305
1. Can romantic love be a basis for marriage?	305
2. Is love a female delusion?	317
3. The moral confusion of arranged marriage	324
4. What can a woman do in a joyless marriage?	339
B. SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS	353
1. Confidence in the status quo	353
2. Freedom of choice	374
CONCLUSION	396
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3	399
Chapter 4	
WOMEN IN TRAGEDY	407
INTRODUCTION	407
WOMEN IN NEO-CLASSICAL TRAGEDY	415
WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL TRAGEDY	447
WOMEN IN LATER POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL TRAGEDY	457
1. Chaste Matilda	457
2. Jane Shore	469
3. Gismond of Salerne	490
CONCLUSION	530
NOTES TO CHAPTER 4	532

	Page
CONCLUSION	540
NOTES TO CONCLUSION	555
BIBLIOGRAPHY	556
1. Primary Sources	556
2. Secondary Sources	563

INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, Juliet Dusinberre asserts that "the drama from 1590 to 1625 is feminist in sympathy". Although more recent critics, such as Lisa Jardine, have questioned whether the plays appearing during this period truly did challenge accepted contemporary views of women sufficiently to be considered genuinely feminist, there is no doubt that the dramatists of this period recognised that the question of the value and status of women was one of the major controversies of its time, and that they needed to reflect and add to the debate. Dramatists used the medium of the play to question the validity of current ideas about women, to highlight flaws and to suggest alternatives.⁽¹⁾

The importance of the 'woman question' in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has become an accepted part of modern literary criticism, and this has generated a wealth of investigation and knowledge about the way in which women were portrayed in the drama of this period; and how closely it resembled views of women prevalent in contemporary society. However, the very thoroughness with which the theme has been documented within this particular period of English drama prompts the question: what was the picture before the beginning of the seventeenth century? Did debate about the status and nature of women in English drama originate during this period, or had it featured on the English stage previously? And, if this was the case, what relationship did the stage presentation of women bear to the way in which they were perceived and treated in the real world? Did the view of women put forward by the earliest English dramatists simply reflect or reinforce those of the accepted social morality of their time, or is there any evidence that the exploration and questioning of traditional views of women, which we associate with Shakespeare and his contemporaries, might have been

inherited from earlier drama and simply developed and elaborated by the dramatists of the late sixteenth century?

Juliet Dusinberre argues further that the flourishing of feminist drama from 1590 onwards was the result of a timely combination of social, artistic and economic factors: Puritan ideology, current controversy, the middle-class rather than aristocratic background of the dramatists, the opening of the first public theatres and the status of drama as popular entertainment. Certainly this was a fortuitous array of influences. But any or all of these might have occurred and started a similar reaction at an earlier date, which Shakespeare and his contemporaries could then have drawn upon and developed. Also, although the social conditions which enabled the particular liveliness of debate in the drama of this period were new to it, the artistic influences which enabled it - plot material, models of dramatic structure, theories of what made good drama, and ideas about where women fitted into it - had developed gradually through earlier English drama. A detailed study of the way in which women are presented in surviving plays earlier than the sixteenth century would be valuable not only if this period proved to have had some significant developments of its own, but because it would enable us to identify more precisely the influences Shakespeare and his contemporaries inherited from earlier drama, and the areas in which they were most innovative.

About 300 plays written or performed earlier than the year 1600 have survived, most dating from the fourteenth century onwards. Lawrence Stone's influential study The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800 indicates that the period spanned by these plays saw a number of radical and far-reaching changes in social structures and attitudes which particularly affected the position of women.

Stone asserts that after 1500, economic and political pressures caused a shift away from the extended mediaeval family, with its emphasis on the ties of kinship and clientage, towards the smaller nuclear group and loyalty to the nation-state. This social change was to intensify the effects of the complete change in the status of marriage brought about by the Reformation. Mediaeval Catholicism had regarded marriage as a lower state than celibacy, which was presented as the ideal to which all religious people, both priestly and secular, should aspire. It was regarded much as St. Paul had described it, as an unfortunate compromise for those who were unable to subdue their frail human nature, and was therefore accepted as being a flawed, often unhappy state. Protestantism, however, asserted that marriage was the normal way of life for the virtuous Christian. Harmonious marriage became an ideal in itself, as well as a means by which one's religious beliefs could become part of family and working life. The emphasis of religious observance shifted away from the local church and community and moved to the home and the workplace.

It seems logical to assume that this increase in the moral status of marriage would have resulted in a corresponding increase in the status accorded to women. Whereas under Catholicism, they had been regarded by religious and moral writers and preachers as an evil influence ready to tempt men away from God by threatening their chastity, now they had become the means by which a man could attain the best life available to a virtuous Christian, one of shared beliefs within a harmonious and pious family. It would seem that as women's capacity to influence the quality of religious life increased, the respect and power accorded to them would increase as well.

Ironically, though, Stone finds that the Reformation resulted instead in a positive decline in the status of women, and of wives in particular. This seems to have been

the result of a combination of factors. Since the Protestant Reformers still believed firmly in the natural inferiority of women, they thought that harmony, in the family and in the state, could best be achieved by reinforcing the authority of men. This meant that for a marriage to be harmonious and therefore pleasing to God, all authority and control would have to be firmly in the hands of the husband. The idea that harmony could be achieved by mutual compromise was foreign to them: instead, it had to come from the complete subordination of wives and children to the authority of the head of the household. Just as the increasing concern for the education and welfare of the individual child at this time led to more repressive and cruel measures to eradicate their presumed innate sinfulness, the growing interest in assuring the harmoniousness of the family led to a surge of interest in methods of training girls in obedience and submissiveness, so that they would adapt more easily to a wifely role.

At the same time, several sources of help and support outside the family which had previously been available to women were removed. The decline of kinship meant that married women were more isolated in their new, smaller families, and more fully in the power of their husbands. The end of Catholicism led to the loss of the option of becoming a nun as a respected alternative to marriage, and of the cult of the Virgin Mary and of female saints, which must have provided many women with psychological support and role models to aspire to. Finally, the shift of religious authority away from the local priest to the father of the household meant that women in disagreement with their husbands had no-one to turn to for alternative advice and support. Some Protestant writers went so far as to identify the husband as the representative of God's authority in the household: in disagreeing with him, the wife

rebelled not only against the order God had ordained, but against God himself.⁽²⁾

Stone supports his theory with considerable documentary evidence from contemporary sources such as sermons, conduct-books, diaries and letters. However, because it is basically a work of social rather than literary history, he stops short of investigating whether evidence from contemporary imaginative literature and drama would also back his interpretation of events.

The question of whether Stone's theory is borne out by evidence from contemporary drama in particular is worthy of investigation, I think, because of the unique relationship between drama, reality and social change. Today, television is widely recognised as a pervasive cultural force which both changes society and is changed by it. I would suggest that in mediaeval and Renaissance society, drama both mirrored and influenced society in a similar way.

Firstly, drama had the potential to influence a far wider range of people than any other literary form, because, like sermons and the visual arts, it was accessible to the non-literate. This was a crucial factor at the beginning of the period under discussion, when education was available only to the clergy; even in the Renaissance, when opportunities for learning became more widespread, literacy was still far from universal. Also, like television today, drama was a means of spreading ideas to those who could read, but were not inclined to apply themselves to serious learning, by presenting them in the form of entertainment. Drama was the one medium with the potential to influence the illiterate poor, the idle rich, and the educated bourgeois alike.

A further argument for drama's special relationship with social change comes from the way in which it offers a simulacrum of reality. On the one hand, it seems to contain the possibility of reality, inherited from its earliest origins in sympathetic magic and ritual: by enacting something, we feel that it is more likely to come about. On the other, we are aware that drama is pretence, and that the illusion of reality it offers is spurious, even as we aid it by our suspension of disbelief. This contradiction at the heart of drama makes it an ideal means of investigating different views of the world. The play can become the philosopher's thesis: it can be used to make a model of the society which would result if a particular way of thinking was adopted. Through the play, the dramatist can explore and question such a society and the individuals within it as if it were real, but can discard it once it has served its purpose. The imaginary world becomes real for the duration of the play, and through the play, the dramatist can enable his audience to evaluate different views of how the real world should be.

It is this blend of reality and pretence which convinces me that drama was the most influential as well as the most far-reaching art form of its time. There is also evidence to suggest that for at least some audiences, the reality of stage drama is more than illusory. Just as today many people believe that what they see on television is real, to the extent that many send long letters of advice to soap-opera characters, some people, certainly towards the end of the mediaeval period, believed in the literal reality of the plays they saw. At least one priest cited the performance of the Corpus Christi plays as proof of the reality of what he preached. Even later, more sophisticated audiences might have found themselves more prone to believe in the metaphorical truth of what they were seeing because of its apparent physical reality as it was enacted before them. This tendency would have made drama a

powerful medium with potential to influence, as well as to reflect, current social thinking.

These, then, were the factors which convinced me of the importance of studying the way in which women are presented in English drama pre-dating 1600. In fact, evidence from mediaeval and Renaissance drama seems to bear out Stone's interpretation of the effect of changing religious views on women's status. In the pre-Reformation period, the firm religious control over the Mystery and Morality plays ensures that most women in the plays are portrayed entirely as the Catholic Church regarded them: as examples of purity and meekness, like the Virgin Mary; shrewish, disobedient wives, like Mrs. Noah; or temptresses leading Man away from God, like Eve and the Lechery character in the Morality plays. Yet even in this early, church-dominated drama, more positive views of women and of working marriage begin to surface through the folk-influenced comic episodes. Later Morality plays begin to reflect the growing support for marriage rather than celibacy, as the threatening figure of Lechery is replaced by female virtues whom the hero can choose to espouse.

The radical Humanist philosophy and commitment to equal education for women of Thomas More and his circle produced a brief but fascinating series of plays, in which women appear as strong, rational and articulate individuals. Female characters in these plays use the skills of rational thought and argument - with which the education advocated by the More circle would have equipped women - to select their own husbands, assert their own worth in terms of the value of the work they have chosen, and to make the men in the audience think through and reject literary stereotypes of femininity.

But, as Stone points out, liberal education for women was a brief development, and its influence on the drama faded

quickly as well. As the Protestant ideology of harmonious marriage gained momentum, the ideal of equal education for women was replaced by concern that girls should be taught only what they needed to become perfect wives - chastity, submissiveness, obedience and domestic skills. Conduct manuals and books on education for wifhood proliferated.(3)

This change was reflected in drama by a wave of didactic plays demonstrating how girls should be educated for marriage, and how the effectiveness of this education can be put to the test. The mediaeval tale of Patient Griselda was revived and commended to women as an example in stage adaptations in several European countries, and this sparked off a series of plays in which women are tormented by their husbands and lovers in order to test their constancy. Later didactic plays shifted the focus to the testing of chastity, showing a succession of heroines whose purity is threatened by the lust of social superiors, who have the power to coerce their submission if necessary. At first, chastity testing plays tend to concentrate on chastity as a matter for the individual woman's conscience: later, they focus more on the way in which a marriage is threatened by the would-be seducer, reflecting the increasing value placed on marriage in contemporary society. Contemporary tragedies also show the restrictiveness of this code of education and of virtue, in their polarisation of wicked, active women, and good maidens and wives, whose passive virtues can save their own souls, but are powerless to influence events or to achieve any wider good.

However, even at this relatively early stage, dramatists were beginning to question, burlesque and finally to break away from this conventional image of womanly virtue. Instead, they shifted their discussion of women and marriage into the context of the emerging debate of romantic love versus arranged marriage, apparently because

the conflict it promised between accepted and new views of love and marriage, and between the older and younger generations offered the dramatic possibilities which were completely lacking in plays which promoted the current, limited ideology of virtuous womanhood. Artistic influences from classical comedy and from romance equipped dramatists with the materials they needed to bring to the stage the important contemporary debate about whether marriages should be arranged or allow for romantic love through free choice. The result was a period of detailed discussion of all aspects of the marriage question, with dramatists using comedy in particular to express doubts about the morality of arranged marriage, and whether happiness was possible within it, or about whether romantic love was a suitable basis for marriage. Some used comedy to express their confidence in the status quo; others used it to plead for freedom of choice and to illustrate the new responsibilities such freedom brings with it.

However, although these plays thoroughly aired the love and marriage question, and made some interesting points about women on the way, the view of women which emerges from them is still conventional in that it is limited by the play's purpose. Just as in the earlier testing plays, the women in comedies of love and marriage illustrate not what women are like, but what men would like them to be. Accordingly, they are virtuous and obedient, or independent and non-materialistic, depending on whether the author supports arranged marriage or marriage for love. In the more problematic plays, the portrayal of the women is so ambiguous that it is impossible to arrive at a single reading of them: how they were interpreted would have depended entirely on the audience's own views. There are prominent women characters, but no heroines, since none of them conveys ethical authority in her own right. It is only in tragedy of the same period that heroines begin to emerge,

as female characters start to be portrayed as choosing to die rather than compromise their personal values.

Generally, though, drama during the post-Reformation period fails to deliver the more interesting heroines one would have expected as a result of the enhanced status of marriage. There is questioning and discussion, sometimes even ridicule, of current values, but we are left in no doubt that the basis of the discussion is the accepted, patriarchal view of women and of womanly virtue. Certainly, we find nothing to equal the firm confidence of the women in the More circle interludes until the plays of Shakespeare and his very close contemporaries.

This study, then, is an attempt to trace in detail the development of the presentation of women in the drama, and its relationship to current social ideas. As I have shown, its findings cohere remarkably closely with Stone's reading of the social changes of the time. It also leaves one vital question: that of why, when so many earlier and contemporary dramatists were sufficiently aware of the importance of discussing the nature and position of women to use their plays for questioning and exploration of current ideas, only Shakespeare and a very few contemporaries actually transcended accepted views and created heroines who were realistic individuals and not mere exemplars of a particular system of thought? Possible answers will be explored in the Conclusion.

Several factors which made this study more difficult also confirmed my view that the presentation of women in early English drama was a field which needed further investigation. Firstly, although there are almost 300 surviving plays from this period, secondary material describing them is relatively scarce, especially material concerned with the significance of women. Furthermore, although most of the plays are available in print, many of them are not

easily accessible. Some can be obtained only in very old anthologies, while many are available only as facsimiles of the original black-lettered printed editions.

For the purposes of this study, therefore, I have had to read, or at least scan, virtually all of the surviving plays, excepting only those which I could find from other sources contained no relevant material. This was a laborious task, especially when many difficult plays proved to feature only one joke or observation about women. It is because of the large volume of work involved in reading so many obscure texts that in recording my findings, I have chosen to go against the usual critical practice of assuming that the plots and characters of plays are already familiar to the reader, and concentrating on comment and interpretation. Instead, I have decided to give a plot synopsis of each play dealt with, brief or detailed according to its significance for this study, and have quoted at length from the texts rather than referring the reader to them. While this has resulted in a more lengthy document, I hope that it will save the reader from duplicating my efforts unnecessarily. I also hope that it will make it more useful in giving potential students a more accessible overview of a large number of works which, I believe, contain much significant material and deserve a wider audience.

All quotations are taken from the texts I found most useful, or most easily accessible. Some of the rarer plays were available in only one edition. Where a good recent edition was available, I have used it: in other cases, I have chosen to rely on facsimile editions rather than older editions using modern lettering. My policy throughout has been to reproduce the texts exactly as they appear in my chosen edition, without expanding contractions or other printers' conventions from facsimile editions. Glosses for some of the more obscure terms used in quotations are supplied in the relevant footnotes.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975), p. 5.
2. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800 (London, 1979), pp. 109-46.
3. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 142-44.

Chapter 1

THE PRE-REFORMATION PERIOD

INTRODUCTION - WOMEN IN MEDIAEVAL LIFE AND THOUGHT

Attitudes to women in Pre-Reformation life and drama were largely determined by those of the Church. What the Bible said about women and, more importantly, how mediaeval scholars interpreted it, was a major influence on the spiritual, legal and social status accorded to women.

The Early Church's View of Women

Biblical evidence alone cannot explain the anti-feminism of the early Church, which was passed down largely unchanged to the mediaeval Church. The Old Testament, while it shows us women subject to the social and religious laws of an early patriarchal society, has heroines like Susanna, Ruth, Judith and Esther, who demonstrate that the defence of the family and the nation is for women as well as men. Similarly, the gospels of the New Testament make it clear that while Christ did not choose to include women among his closest associates, they are instrumental both to the redemption and to the spreading of the new religion.

However, at the same time a steady stream of anti-feminist writing emanated from the early Church. It ranges from St. Paul's instruction in his Epistle to the Corinthians that women must not speak in church, and that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' to the more extreme views of the early Church Fathers, who saw women primarily as a potential stumbling-block for men's salvation; as lures which might distract them from the love of God. The Twelve Patriarchs wrote of women "by means of their adornment they

deceive by the glance of their eye - men should guard their senses against every woman". Tertullian told Woman "You are the devil's gateway. You destroy God's image, Man."(1)

Religious writers tried to harden men against the temptation presented by women by directing a flood of the most virulent invective at women's supposed spiritual and physical defects. Ephanious said that "the race of women are prone to slip and are unstable and low in their thoughts", and St. John Chrysostom warned men tempted by a woman's beauty to consider that

The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum and the fluid of digested food... If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulchre.

The same, of course, could have been said of St. John himself, but it is typical of his time that there was no corresponding reflection that attractive men might have presented an equal temptation to female souls.(2)

The question of why the early Church tended to think of most souls as being male, and found it so necessary to arouse disgust for femaleness in general, and the female body in particular, is notoriously difficult to answer. Marina Warner, in Alone Of All Her Sex, attributes the early Church's anti-feminism to the strong influence of Gnosticism and Stoicism, which emphasised particularly the difference between flesh and spirit, and the need to despise the flesh in order to fulfil the spirit. As Marina Warner points out, "in this battle between the flesh and the spirit, the female sex was firmly placed on the side of the flesh." Women, because they gave birth to the next generation, were identified with fleshly life, and men with

the spiritual. Men, urged to view the flesh with disgust, had to view women in this way as well.⁽³⁾

However, the strength of feeling so obvious in the early Church's anti-feminist outpourings seems to indicate a deeper motivation, which may lie in the circumstances of the Church's initial struggle for survival as a new religion. The first Christians would have had a chance to see, and be sickened by, the worst sexual excesses of the Roman civilisation which persecuted them. Furthermore, they were attempting to spread a religion which, as well as emphasising the subordination of the physical to the spiritual, worshipped a father God. This would have presented an obvious challenge to existing cults of nature and fertility, which glorified a virgin/mother goddess and offered sex with temple prostitutes as a sacrament. The episode in the Acts of the Apostles in which the disciples travelled to Ephesus and found some of the local people stubborn in their devotion to Diana is evidence that there was at least one such direct clash between Christianity and a goddess-religion. Acts 19.27 refers to "the temple of the great goddess Diana... whom all Asia and the world worshippeth". It is important to remember that the chastity she has come to symbolise was only one of Diana's attributes: she was widely worshipped in her undecomposed form, combining the characteristics of virgin, fertility goddess and witch.⁽⁴⁾

This episode gives us some clue towards explaining the early Church's emphasis on celibacy for men and seclusion for women. The chaste way of life would be valued as an outward symbol of difference from other religions. Furthermore, given that the gods of an overthrown religion tend to become the devils of the new, Tertullian's "devil's gateway" metaphor becomes intelligible in terms other than those of Edenic myth, since the sexual act would have been seen as a sacrament, allowing contact with the earlier nature/fertility goddess. For a convert, sexual desire

would not be simply a sin in terms of his new religion, but dangerously close to heresy.

Perhaps for a combination of these reasons, the Church Fathers advised men to avoid women if possible, and instructed good women to obscure their physical appearance, to minimise the temptation they represented, like Clement of Alexandria, who said of woman:

Let her be entirely covered, unless she be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects her from being gazed at. And she will never fall who puts before her face modesty and her shawl, nor will she incite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face, (5)

and Tertullian, who suggested that "natural grace must be obliterated by concealment and negligence, as being dangerous to the beholder's eye".

This association of women with sexual desire and therefore with the devil was passed down virtually unchanged to the mediaeval Church, largely because of the tradition of mediaeval scholarship. At this time, proving an argument relied not on making or breaking hypotheses, but on the system of quoting authorities. Being able to show that a number of respected authors had said the same thing was deemed to prove any point. This tended to encourage the passing down of a corpus of accepted ideas from one age to the next, relatively unaffected by changing conditions in the world outside the closed communities of scholarship.

Scholastic Bible Criticism

The particular association of women, sex and the devil re-emerges in scholastic biblical criticism in the middle ages. How mediaeval scholars interpreted the Bible was far more influential at that time than in a literate age, when

almost all religious people have access to a text and are able to make their own interpretation. Scholastic ideas were passed down to the priesthood and used in preaching, which for many people was the only way to learn about the Bible. These additions therefore became identified with, and indistinguishable from, the biblical account.

The influence of scholarship on the Genesis story, and particularly on the character of Eve, played a major part in determining attitudes to women in mediaeval thought and society. Since Eve was regarded as the antetype and mother of all women, the conclusions the Scholastics reached about her were regarded as applicable to all women. In this way, exegesis of the Genesis account came to form the basis of the mediaeval church's attitude to women, which in turn influenced civil and ecclesiastical law.

The Genesis account of the Fall is a straightforward story of disobedience to a divine commandment, in which the only discordant elements which hint at a sexual sub-text are the sudden awareness of nakedness and guilt, and the nature of the punishments visited upon Eve (labour pains and increased desire for Adam). The Scholastics, however, were to use deductive reasoning and the system of authorities to identify it much more strongly with sexual sin.

Probably the most influential interpreter of the Genesis account was Thomas Aquinas, whose Summa Theologica shows his high regard for the theories Aristotle put forward in De generatione animalium. Aristotle thought that women were essentially defective men: monsters conceived by mistake because of lack of energy in the parents, dampness from the south wind or other weakening influences. Working from this view, Aquinas anticipated questions of how God, creating a perfect world, could have created an imperfect being like woman. He deduced that Aristotle's statement that women are imperfect means only that considered as

individuals they are defective and incomplete: considered as part of the species, necessary for procreation, they are perfect.(6)

Although there is no obvious source for this belief in Genesis, most Scholastics agreed that Eve did not have the same capacity for rational thinking as Adam. Some deduced this from the fact that Eve was created from Adam while he was in a deep sleep, since "this defect of male power bears a likeness from which woman is naturally produced", other from the comment in 1 Peter 3:7 that woman is a weaker vessel. Peter Lombard stated categorically that "Eve had weaker powers of reason than Adam".

The pre-lapsarian male, then, was rational and perfect, the female irrational and not perfect as an individual. Because of this, according to the Scholastics, female subjection was necessary from the beginning. Thomas Aquinas explains:

Woman is subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates... and this kind of subjection existed even before the Fall.

(7)

A further aspect of life before the Fall particularly taxed the Scholastic imagination: what was sex like before Original Sin? Thomas Aquinas deduced that God had planned sexual reproduction, since He purposely created a woman to be Adam's helpmate, and clearly, "a man would have proved a more effective help" for any other purpose. The nature, as well as the purpose, of pre-lapsarian sex was much discussed. According to Augustine, it took place "without loss of virginal integrity", and Albertus Magnus deduced that sex must have been far more pleasurable before the Fall than since. It was generally agreed that, before the Fall, sex was not prompted by carnal desire, and that "the force of concupiscence would not have so immoderately thrown itself into pleasure, being curbed by reason". In

other words, there would have been no time at which Adam ceased to be calm, rational and mindful of God.

We are not specifically told by the Scholastics what the Fall actually was, but the nature of Eve's sin, and of the Fall's effects, are well documented. Aquinas anticipated questions concerning how Eve, being God's creation and therefore perfect, could have been deceived. He replied that it was because of her feminine vanity. Eve could not have been convinced by Satan unless "she had already sinned by interior pride". In support of his argument, Aquinas quotes Augustine, who said that Eve could not have been tempted "had she not acquiesced in the love of her own power, and in a presumption of self-conceit". Also, as we have seen already, most Scholastics agreed that Eve was already less rational, and therefore more liable to make faulty judgements.

The Scholastics also give us many details of the effects of the Fall. The Genesis account says that as soon as the fruit was eaten by Adam and Eve, "the eyes of them both were opened". Mediaeval commentators took this to mean that Adam sees Eve in a different way: "woman in her person has become an invitation to lust and concupiscence".⁽⁸⁾

This seems to be the point at which, according to Peter Lombard and Albertus Magnus, sex became associated with carnal desire and with the submergence of the rational faculty. Somehow the sexual act, formerly rational and calm, had become corrupted by the lack of reason and the sensuality the Scholastics associated with the female. Although they avoid describing it overtly, the Scholastics imply that the Genesis account is a cautionary tale of how feminine lust overcomes masculine reason.

Inferences made from the punishment visited on Eve were to form the basis of many beliefs and laws concerning women. Superstition was quick to identify menstruation as "the curse" (of God), and the association of its presence with that of Original Sin explains the importance of fasting, which we now know can lead to loss of menses, to the ideal of female purity in the Middle Ages. Pain in childbirth was also felt to be a punishment for sin, and this belief was to fuel religious opposition to the use of anaesthetics as late as the nineteenth century. God's pronouncement "Thy desire shall be to thy husband" gave another reason for believing women to be naturally lustful.

But the most important and far-reaching pronouncement was the third: "and he shall rule over thee". Even if some critics disagreed with the idea of subjection before the Fall, here was proof that God deliberately ordained it afterwards. This verse was seen as evidence of God's will that women should hold an inferior and subordinate status in law and society.

This, then, was the Scholastic interpretation of the Genesis account which, filtered through preaching, would have coloured most ordinary people's conception of the story of the Fall. Before the Fall, Adam was rational and superior, with Eve physically and mentally inferior and in subjection. Sex was calm and reasonable, aimed only at procreation and unaffected by desire. The Fall itself was Eve's fault, since she was prone to temptation because of her irrational nature and innate pride. After the Fall, sex became infected with desire aroused by Eve's appearance, and Eve was punished with pain, desire and subjection to her husband.

Since Eve was the first woman, beliefs about her were generalised to apply to all women. The Genesis story, with its accretion of Scholastic comment, was an important

element in shaping ideas about women's place in marriage, law and society.

The Mediaeval Church's View of Marriage

Given the threat that, according to Scholastic thought, women presented to men's God-given faculty of reason, and the ancient fears that sexual activity would tempt men away from God, it is not surprising that, for the mediaeval church, celibacy was always the ideal, and marriage the flawed, inferior state. A good illustration of how the two were regarded is given by the author of The Book of Vices and Virtues (c. 1350). He grudgingly admits that marriage is not actually evil, since it was instrumental in the Incarnation, is necessary for the continuation of the human race, and constitutes a sacrament of the Church. However, it is obviously lifelong celibacy which really catches his imagination, since he waxes lyrical about its joys for about twenty pages.

Since the Church regarded celibacy as superior to marriage in all respects, it tried to persuade the laity to adopt it as far as possible. Even married couples were encouraged to try to practise celibacy within marriage. Furthermore, since the Church regarded love as little more than animal intoxication, it believed that it was very sinful to be in love with one's own spouse. Peter Lombard stated in his apologetic De excusatione coitus that "omnis ardentior amator propriae uxoris adulter est" (for a man to love his wife too ardently amounts to adultery). This view is further explained by The Book of Vices and Virtues, which is typical of the mediaeval Church in its view of married love as nothing more than sexual pleasure, and therefore sinful. The sin may be only venial when

þe delite is suget to riȝt and resoun, þat he þat dop þat
he wolde nat do suche þing but to his wif. But whan þe
delite and the lecherie is so grete in his wif that resoun
and riȝt is blent, þat he wolde do as moche to her þeiȝh
sche were not his wif, in þat caas it is dedly synne. For
suche lecheries passen þe bondes of mariage. (9)

Once again, sin is equated with the submergence of the
'discretion of reason', and caused by a woman, by nature
less rational. Marriage was obviously viewed as a rational
arrangement, and any 'unreasonable' love was therefore
adulterous and incurred the wrath of God. The only solu-
tions were confession, penance and to resolve to "kepen
clenliche hire mariage as it is ordeyned and sette" in
order to "ben likyng to God". Reginald Pecock, Bishop of
St. Asaph and Winchester, in his Reule of Crysten Religioun
(1443) left a detailed account of the way in which devout
people were supposed to rid themselves of any spontaneous
expression of affection. He stipulates that a husband must

forbere boþe anentis his wif and alle opere women sig-
tis, spechis, clipping, touchis, kissingis and opere
occasions whiche wolen gendre lecherous þoutis. (10)

Women's Position in the Church and in Law

Interpretation of biblical references to women and
their status formed the basis of much of the mediaeval
Church's treatment of women. St. Paul's injunction in
his Epistle to the Corinthians:

Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not
permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be
under obedience as saith the law. And if they will learn
anything let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a
shame for women to speak in the church (11)

was interpreted as barring women not only from the min-
istry, but from organising any church activities. The

biblical description of women as the 'weaker vessel' was also used to justify women's subordinate position in religious affairs.

Since Civil Law developed from the earlier ecclesiastical law, women's legal status was also derived from religious ideas. Canon Law interpreted the decree from Genesis "he shall rule over thee" as meaning:

it is a natural human order that the women should serve their husbands... there is no justice where the greater serves the less.

Canon Law further deduced:

Since the husband is the head of the wife, while the man's head is Christ, every wife who is not subject to her husband is guilty of the same offence as the man is when he is not subject to Christ, his head. (12)

Furthermore, the idea that a married woman became 'one flesh' with her husband meant that, in the eyes of the law, a married couple was one person - the husband. When a woman married, she lost all her legal rights, and effectively ceased to exist as far as the law was concerned. If a case was brought against her, her husband automatically became the defendant. This was the reason behind the wide acceptance that it was a husband's right to control his wife and inflict what the law described as "moderate chastisement". Every man was entitled to beat his wife with whips or sticks, and to thrash her with a cudgel, although knocking her down with an iron bar was regarded as an offence. In terms of civil rights, "he shall rule over thee" was taken to mean that women should have no role in public life and local politics as well as in church affairs. Women were barred from public speaking and from holding any public office. (13)

Economic Importance

All mediaeval women, except for the very rich, worked extremely hard whether in the home or outside. Domestic work in those days was both strenuous and skilled: all food, for instance, had to be prepared from the basic substances, which would have to be ordered months in advance, and women would also have had to exercise foresight in preserving food for the winter. This was only one aspect of their domestic responsibilities. Women who ran large households also had to oversee the welfare of all their staff. It was taken for granted that as well as being fully responsible for family, household and smallholdings, women would augment their income through spinning and other cottage industries.

Less well known, however, is the extent to which women worked outside the home. In rural areas, there were many female villeins holding land and rendering services for it just as men did, and there is evidence that women were active in most agricultural work; poultry-farming, thatching and sheep-shearing were their special tasks, but they also engaged in heavy work such as ploughing and building.

In the towns, there were many women traders, even though the male-dominated guilds refused to admit them. Many boroughs made special ordinances, which allowed women to register as independent companies, and to have their finances and legal status assessed separately from father or husband. Several trades were female monopolies: the silk trade was wholly run by women, who eventually formed their own guild, and the brewing industry was an entirely female province, except in monasteries. (14)

Obviously, there was a considerable imbalance between women's abilities and responsibilities and the power society gave them. Publicly, they had great economic importance, often working as hard as men but inevitably for lower wages, but had no legal or civil rights. Privately, their contribution to the domestic economy was vitally important, but the husband who chose to insult, dominate, belittle or maltreat his wife had all the force of the Church and the state on his side. There was a considerable conflict between image and reality - and conflict is the life-blood of drama. The following study of the Mystery Plays illustrates how the 'alternative' view, of women claiming the importance to which their work entitles them, crept, via folk influence, into a dramatic form dominated by the Church's traditional view of women.

WOMEN IN THE MYSTERY PLAYS

Women in the Mystery Plays are relatively few and cursorily treated. I find them of interest less for the text itself than for what we can deduce from the plays about mediaeval life and thought, and for what we can see that the mediaeval audience might have learned from them. This second point is particularly interesting, for two reasons. Firstly, since most people in those days were illiterate, all their contact with contemporary theology and philosophy would have been gleaned from what they heard in preaching, or saw demonstrated in the plays or represented symbolically in the visual arts. These would have been their only source of contact with the ideas circulating in the literate, educated world.

Secondly, it is likely that audiences would have believed much of what they saw. Contemporary evidence of this tendency can be found in the G. Mery Tales (1526), which cites the story of the rural priest in Warwickshire, who, though not an educated man, taught his parishioners the Creed and told them:

If you beleeeve not me/thē for a more suerte & suffcytet
auctoryte go your way to Couentre and there ye shall se
them all playd in corpus christi playe. (15)

The plays therefore would have been a very important means for the Church, which controlled their texts, to transmit complicated ideas to a far wider audience than usual. Accordingly, mediaeval theology is therefore the main influence on the way in which women are presented in the plays. At the same time, folk elements are brought to bear on the Biblical stories, perhaps promoted by the Guilds who, as the bodies responsible for producing the plays, were more likely to be in touch with what their audiences enjoyed. Of the main women in the Mystery Cycles, Noah's wife is largely a folklore character, with some theological

are determined almost entirely by the ideas of mediaeval theologians.

Views of women in the plays are further influenced by the way in which Biblical episodes were selected for inclusion in the cycles. Since the number of plays per cycle varies from 25 to 48 at the most, it was clearly necessary to use some selection procedure. In fact, the episodes chosen for the plays were dictated by the mediaeval taste for parallel and interconnection in Biblical interpretation. There were several systems for schematising Biblical episodes, among them the Seven Ages of the World System, the Apostles Creed System, the Hours, used in the popular form of devotional book, which related each hour of the day to a character who praised God, and the Vineyard System, from Aelfric's sermon about those who laboured in God's vineyard at different times.

The most common and influential concept, though, was that of Typology, a system of associating an Old Testament character with one from the New Testament whose actions his own seemed to pre-figure. For example, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac pre-figures God giving Christ for the world. Typological analogies could be very exact: the image of Isaac carrying the faggots for his own sacrifice related to Christ later carrying the cross. This system was very widespread and important in Britain from the twelfth century onward, and was more highly developed in this country than elsewhere. (16)

The use of typology in selecting episodes for the Mystery Cycles had a distorting effect on female characterisation in the plays, since many of the women who are most important in Old Testament stories do not fit into the scheme of typology, and therefore are not included. Thus exciting characters such as Deborah, Judith, Esther and cunning and resourceful wives like Rebecca never appeared in the

resourceful wives like Rebecca never appeared in the Mystery Plays. Instead, the women who do appear tend to be either marginal characters in episodes which are important to the scheme of typology, such as Mrs. Noah who starts off as a minor character, included on the strength of Noah's importance, or are of prime importance to the most crucial episodes, as Eve and the Virgin Mary are.

Furthermore, the way in which individual female characters were presented was also affected by typology, since the aspects of their personalities most necessary for making parallels would have been emphasised. For example, the theme of disobedience is used to connect Eve with Mrs. Noah, and conversely, Mary's meekness can be seen to make her the opposite of both.

The influence of mediaeval Biblical scholarship and of typology can be seen clearly in the characterisation of the three most important female characters in the Mystery Cycles - Eve, the Virgin Mary and Mrs. Noah.

1. Eve

A detailed study of the presentation of Eve in the Mystery Cycles shows that it is closely linked with Scholastic exegesis of the Genesis story, rather than the Biblical account.

Before the Fall, several plays indicate that sex for procreation is not sinful. In the very early Ordo Repraesentationis Adae (tenth century Anglo-Norman), God (Figura) tells Adam and Eve "Por engendrer n'i est hom peccheur" (Man is no sinner for begetting children), and in the N-Town Cycle, God instructs "Look, that you not cease/ Your fruit to increase".

Ordo Repraesentationis Adae also illustrates the Scholastic view of Adam's possession of reason and Eve's state of inferiority and benign subjection before the Fall. God/Figura instructs Adam:

Tu la governe par raison
N'ait entre vus ja tencon,
Mais grant amour, grant con-
servage
Tel soit la lei de mariage

Govern her by reason
Let no dissension come between you
But great love and mutual obedi-
ence
Such is the law of marriage (17)

To Eve:

Il est marid, et tu sa mul-
lier
A lui soies tot tens encline,
Nen isser de sa discipline
Lui serf e aim par bon cor-
age
Car co est drioiz de mariage.
Se tu le fais bon adjutoire,
Je te mettrai od lui en
gloire.

He is your husband and you his
wife
To him be obedient at all times
Do not stray from his discipline
Serve and love him with willing
spirit
For that is the law of marriage.
If you do well as his helpmeet,
I will place you with him in
glory.

Eve replies
Toi conustrai...
Lui a paraille e a forzor

I will acknowledge...
Him as my partner and stronger
than I. (18)

This is especially interesting because it not only shows the idea of Adam's greater reason and Eve's subjection, but their relationship is repeatedly described as demonstrating the law of marriage. The audience is clearly meant to understand that this is how marriage was ordained and should be practised. Furthermore, feminine subjection will be rewarded in heaven: Eve will accompany Adam in glory if she is a good wife.

Centuries later, during the Elizabethan era when patriarchy was being reinforced, someone added an extra verse to God's words to Adam in the York Cardmakers' Play, including the words

Thys same shall thy subget be
And Eve her name shall hight. (19)

The natural inferiority of women which Aquinas and other Scholastics thought was the cause of this benign subjection is also shown in the Mystery Plays. Prologue B of the Norwich Grocers' Play, The Story of the Creacioun of Eve, with the expellyng of Adam and Eve out of Paradyce describes

the deavilles tentacion, diseaivinge with a lye
the woman, beinge weakest (20)

and in the Chester play, Satan decides to offer Eve the fruit

for wemen they be full licourouse
that will shee not forsake (21)

This gives an interesting insight into the considerable verbal subtlety of the Chester playwright. As the Oxford English Dictionary shows, in 1653 licerous had two meanings: fond of delicious food and desirous of pleasure. Later on, it came to mean lecherous as we know it today, meaning lustful or wanton. The 1591 manuscript cleverly applied it to Eve to combine both senses: the taste for food and the tendency to enjoy other pleasures of appetite. This single word neatly links the overt sin of taking the apple with its sexual subtext.

The plays also cohere with the Scholastic view of Eve's sin, that

Though the woman was deceived before she sinned in deed, still it was not until she had already sinned by interior pride. For Augustine says (Gen. ad. lit. xii 30) that the woman could not have believed the words of the serpent, had she not already acquiesced in the love of her own power and in a presumption of self-conceit. (22)

part of a scheme to bring disaster? Since the similarity between God's presentation to Adam and Satan's offer to Eve is never overt or commented upon, the author's purpose is uncertain.

After the Fall, many Mystery Plays stress the pronouncement of punishment upon Eve, with particular emphasis that she is to be made subject to Adam because of her sin. This is often more emphatic than in the biblical account, notably in the N-Town play, in which God says

Woman, thou soughtest this sinning,
And bade him break my bidding:
Therefore thou shalt be underling,
To mannes bidding bend.
What he biddeth thee, do thou that thing (25)

and in the Chester play, in which His judgement is

... for that thou haste done soe todaye,
man shall master thee alwaye;
and under his power thou shalte bee aye,
thee for to dryve and deare. (26)

The reasons for this emphasis are clear: firstly, Eve's disobedience and punishment by further subjection to Adam are important for typological comparison with Noah's wife and Mary; and secondly, it made it very clear to the audience that wifely submissiveness had been ordained by God, and that any truculence against one's husband was a serious perversion of the natural order.

The plays also echoed the Scholastic view that Eve, as a less rational creature, caused Adam to sin by affecting his capacity to reason. The Anglo-Norman Adam makes a long speech repeatedly wishing that God had burned or destroyed his rib rather than making it into a woman. Later, he reproaches Eve

who trusteth them in any intente
truely he is desceaved.

(29)

The reference to the general untrustworthiness of women, the submergence of masculine reason and the implications of words like 'intycement' signal that once again, we are very near to the Scholastic interpretation of the Genesis story as a cautionary tale advising men not to allow their God-like faculty of reason to become distorted by the enticements of wanton women - a view which proceeded directly from the antifeminism of the early Church, and which had passed down to the Middle Ages virtually unchanged via the tradition of argument by authority. Centuries after Tertullian first called woman the devil's gateway, moral commentators like the author of the Book of Vices and Virtues (c.1350) said that attractive women would have to account at Doomsday for all the souls lost because of them, and that woman "hath no membre on hire body þat nys a grynne of þe deuel".⁽³⁰⁾ In his book of advice for his daughters, the Knight of La Tour Landry (c.1372) recounts hearing a sermon in which women were compared with spiders' webs spun by the devil for trapping men's souls.⁽³¹⁾

Lust is aroused by women, and is used by the devil to distract men away from God. The earliest instance I have found in English writing of a predominantly visual image uniting these ideas is in the early devotional work Ancrene Wisse. The author warns the anchoresses to beware of lust, which he describes as the Scorpion of Lechery:

a kind of worm that hath a face, as it is said, somewhat like that of a woman, and is a serpent behind, putteth on a pleasant countenance, yet stingeth with her tail. Such is lechery, which is the devil's beast, which he leadeth to market and cheateth many because they look only at the beautiful head.

(32)

Two of the Mystery Cycles use this image of the female headed serpent to allow them to express the implied meaning

of the story - in which female sexuality is the tempter - without prejudice to the Biblical version, in which Eve is the unfortunate dupe. Satan was identified with feminine seductiveness by making the serpent into a woman. In a small surviving fragment of a Cornish Cycle, a stage direction describes Satan as "a fyne serpen made with a virgyn face and yolowe heare upon her head". In the later Chester Drapers' Play, Satan plans his assault on mankind, using Eve as a naturally susceptible intermediary:

A maner of an edder is in this place
that winges like a bryde shee hase -
feete as a edder, a maydens face -
hir kynde I will take.
And of the tree of paradice
shee shall eate through my contyse;
for wemen they be full licourouse,
that will shee not forsake.

(33)

It is highly significant that the only exception to the rule of heaping blame for the Fall upon women in general and Eve in particular is found in the Norwich Grocers' Play (Text B), which was revised in 1565 and whose more enlightened tone reflects the more humanistic influence of a later age. In this version, Adam and Eve show their willingness to accept their sin and a lower destiny, provided they can be together. Instead of blaming Eve, Adam simply laments their loss, calling her "mine owne sweethearte". Eve replies "I am even as ye, whatso euer me befall". The revision shows clearly how values have changed in the intervening years, placing emphasis on companionship in marriage, rather than on apportioning blame.

The way in which Eve is presented is also influenced by the demands of typology. Eve is the archetype of the most important typological connection of all, that between herself and the Virgin Mary, the Fall and the Redemption. In line with the demands of typology, Eve's disobedience, 'licourouse' nature and role as Satan's intermediary are stressed in all the plays, to make a more telling contrast

with Mary's obedience, purity and role as God's intermediary.

2. Mary

Attempting to present the character of the Virgin Mary on stage must have been fraught with pitfalls. Because of her great importance in theology and in the biblical story, no liberties could be taken with her character. Since she had to be shown to be entirely sinless from her own Immaculate Conception to the Assumption, existing in a special state of grace in which she was entirely immune from sin, even to show her expressing an opinion too strongly might have been construed as blasphemous. Furthermore, Mary's virtues of humility, piety, patience and purity are largely of the quiet, passive kind which are very difficult to convey in dramatic terms.

The way in which Mary is shown in the plays is determined largely by the demands of typology and the need to demonstrate to the audience, in very empirical terms, that Mary was truly 'alone of all her sex' - unique and miraculous in her goodness and purity.

In typology, Mary's role as the second Eve is of crucial importance. The anagram used in the N-Town Annunciation Play "Here this name Eva is turned Ave" was well known to mediaeval people. Church paintings often represented the Temptation so that it would resemble the Annunciation, by placing Eve in the Virgin's usual attitude and having the Serpent, instead of Gabriel, entering from the left. The connection between Eve and Mary would also have been familiar from preaching. Here is just one of three examples of this connection in the E.E.T.S. collection of Middle English Sermons (1378-1417):

Eve, oure first modur, was made in Paradies clene and with-outen synne, but afturword thorough hure defaute, she broughte us all in-to a grett myscheff, for she stered Adam hure husbonde for-to breke Goddes commaundment... But now all is amended by Mary, for she hathe broughte to us liff with-owten ende.

The preacher then quotes St. Bernard

O pon fadur Adam' he seip, 'be glad and make mery, for sumtyme þat fell in-to a myscheff by a womman, now þou arte recured azeyn by a womman. Eve mad þe to fall: Mare made þe to rise. He hap send þe on womman for a nother, a wise for a fooll, a meke for a proude'. (34)

The typological connection between Eve and Mary is made very clear in the Wakefield play of the Annunciation, in which Deus recalls the Creation and Fall, and compares their main elements with those of the future Redemption:

A man, a madyn and a tre
Man for man, tre for tre,
Maydn for Madyn - thus shall it be. (35)

Later, Deus explains to Gabriel that

Angell must to Mary go
For the feynd was Eve fo -
He was foule and layth to sight
And thou art angell fair and bright. (36)

Other such contrasts are made in other plays. The chain of connections even extends forward to the Saints' or Miracle Plays: in the Digby Play Mary Magdalene, Lechery comes to Mary and greets her thus:

hey! lady most laudabyll of aliauns!
Heyl, orient as the sonne in his reflexite! (37)

The strength of the parallel is obvious.

In contrast with the first Eve's disobedience, Mary's meekness and willingness to conform to the demands of arbitrary laws are emphasised. Elizabeth's salutation "Ah! you, Mother of God, you shew us here how/We should be meek that wretches here be" voices the teaching by example which is one intention of the plays, while reinforcing our awareness of this aspect of Mary's character. Meekness is hardly an arresting characteristic, on or off stage, and it was necessary to have other characters to comment on it in order for it to be noticed.

In contrast with Eve's sin of disobeying God's commandment without a good reason, Mary is shown obeying a law from which she is exempt. In the Presentation and Purification play of the N-Town cycle, she attends a Purification ceremony, at which, under Mosaic law, women who had given birth to children were required to make a small sacrifice to atone for their sin in conceiving them, and to be purified from the "unclean" state of childbirth so that they could be re-admitted to the temple. Mary goes in unquestioning obedience "Moyses lawe to fulfil", even though, as Joseph comments

To be purified have you no need,
Nor thy son to be offered, so God me speed,
For first thou art full clean,
Undefouled in thought and deed,
And another, thy son, withouten dread,
Is God and man to mean.
Wherefore it needed not to been,
But to keep the law, in Moses wise.

(38)

However, the most notable feature of the way in which Mary is presented in the plays is the emphasis on repeated demonstrations of her miraculous purity. The N-Town cycle is most remarkable in this respect, anticipating and dispelling any doubts the audience might have, and heaping proof upon proof.

The mechanics of Christ's conception were extensively debated in the Middle Ages, as many people wondered how it could have happened without affecting Mary's purity - a concern fuelled by the mediaeval Church's aversion to sex and tendency to see physical virginity as the prime virtue. Gradually, beliefs grew up that she was impregnated by Gabriel's holy words, through her ear, or that the Holy Spirit impregnated her heart, leaving her body intact. The metaphor of light passing through stained glass was often used to illustrate this idea. A stage direction to the N-Town Incarnation play shows that this was demonstrated in performance:

Here the Holy Ghost discendit with thre bemys to Our Lady;
the Son with thre bemys to the Holy Ghost; the Fadyr Godly
with thre bemys to the Son: and so entre al thre to hire
bosom. (39)

M.D. Anderson and David Bevington both suggest that this effect was accomplished by sliding dolls down wires.

The cycle then goes on to give further proofs of Mary's physical purity. As well as the Biblical episodes of the angel appearing to Joseph to reassure him, and of the Salutation, episodes from the Apocrypha are used. The apocryphal Book of James is the source for the Trial of Joseph and Mary, in which Mary is tried for adultery, and a magic truth drug confirms her story. Its setting in a court of law provides opportunities for rational, academically-phrased speculation on the unlikeliness of virgin birth to be put forward by the judges, while Backbiter and Raise-Slander are tireless in supplying many crudely practical theories to explain the phenomenon. As Bevington comments,

The antifeminist humour and bawdry allow the audience to laugh at typical human failings, and yet perceive that Mary is wholly above feminine weakness. (40)

The Book of James is also the source for the episode of the Doubting Midwives, in the Birth of the Son play, which offers three more proofs of Mary's virgin status. Firstly, Mary invites Zelomy to examine her, saying "I am clean maid and pure virgin/Taste with your hand yourself alone", and he confirms that she is indeed a virgin. Secondly, the miracle of the Doubting Midwife offers further confirmation. The second midwife, Salome, cannot believe Zelomy's diagnosis, and her hand is immediately withered as a punishment for her lack of faith. She is subsequently healed by touching the infant Christ. This effect seems to have been achieved by the use of a special 'withered' glove, which the actor slipped on and off.

The circumstances of the birth itself offer the final proof of Mary's purity. Mary has no labour pains, assuring the audience that:

Of this fair birth that here is mine
Pain and grieving feel I right none,

and Zelomy comments in wonder that Jesus

needeth no washing as other don,
Full clean and pure forsooth is he,
Withouten spot or any pollution.
His mother not hurt of virginity

(41)

and is not "as others are... foul arrayed". Since she is in a state of special grace and not subject to Original Sin, Mary is shown to be immune from its consequences visited on her antetype Eve, and by analogy, on all the rest of womankind.

There is only one incident in the Mystery Cycles in which the characterisation of Mary briefly transcends this methodical supplying of the qualities typology and medieval theology demand of her. This is another apocryphal

episode, in the Wakefield Scourging play, in which Mary, seeing Jesus struggling to carry the cross in a seething crowd, cries

Alas, dere son, for care I se thy body blede!
Myself I will forfare for the(e) in this great drede
This cros on thy shulder bare, to help the(e) in this nede
I will it bere, with greatt hart sare, wheder thay will
the(e) lede. (42)

Although as Bevington says, this scene is of symbolic importance as an allegory of the Church's duty to share Christ's suffering, the incident is extremely moving. In these few words, Mary becomes like a real person, goaded by intense feeling to an act of desperate courage, possessing the independence of public opinion necessary to take upon herself a symbol of shame and criminality amid hostile crowds. It is another example of the Wakefield Master's ability to look beyond the requirements and precedents set by Biblical accounts or recognised character types when portraying women.

This humanising touch, though, is an exception to the rule. The portrayal of Mary is largely restricted by the needs of typology and the necessity to show her sinlessness, as well as by the quiet and undramatic nature of her virtues. The general impression given is of a female character with whom no woman could really identify. As Ian Maclean points out, in The Renaissance Notion of Woman, although Mary was frequently extolled as a perfect model of womanhood, being exempt from all female vice and imperfection, she has little in common with real women.

Far from being the glory of her sex, she is not of her sex in its malediction, tribulation and imperfection. She incarnates certain moral virtues which are consistent with the social and religious role of women but does not ever become a model of behaviour, so very remote is she from others of her sex.

(43)

It seems unlikely that women in the audience could have identified with any of the 'straight' women in the Mystery Plays, presented as they were with Mary's unattainable perfection and Eve's flawed sinful womanhood. The figure they might have recognised and identified with drew on the folk tradition more than religious influence - Noah's Wife.

3. Mrs. Noah

The Noah's Wife character is one of the most interesting developments in the Mystery Plays. Her importance in the Bible account is marginal, but her character is developed much further in the plays as a means of bringing the comedy of domestic argument and violence into the story, and of drawing an important typological parallel with the main female characters of the cycle, Eve and Mary.

In terms of typology, the theme of obedience/disobedience is very important. In all the cycles, Noah's Wife's truculence and disobedience to her husband is emphasised in order to connect her more strongly with Eve. In one play, The Shipwright's Play or Dirge in the Newcastle Cycle, the typological parallel is made extremely strong. The devil appears, hoping to impede the construction of the Ark, and announces his plan:

To Noah's wife will I wynd,
Gare her believe in me;
In faith she is my friend,
She is both whunt and slee.

(44)

The devil's selection of a woman as 'the weak link' recalls the Temptation, and his flattering salutation "my own dere dame" recalls similar addresses to Eve. He then convinces Noah's wife that

All that thy husband goes about
Is little for thy brow.
Yet I shall tell thee how
Thou shalt weet all his will. (45)

He gives her "a drink full good/That is made of a mightful main", which will induce Noah to tell her his activities. When she administers it to Noah, he bursts out

What the devil?
What drink is it?
By my father's soul
I have nere lost my wit! (46)

His horror at losing his wit also recalls Adam's reproaches to Eve for having affected his reason.

Finally, when the angel returns, his announcement that "Thy strokes shall fair be kend/For thou thy wife has told" shows a connection with the version of the story in Queen Mary's Psalter, an apocryphal embroidery on the story in which Noah had promised God that he would tell no-one of the construction of the Ark. When he betrayed the secret to his wife, the next hammer-stroke echoed around the world, and it is to this that the angel refers. Disobedience to God, with consequences of world-wide importance, completes the typological parallel with the Fall: again, a man has been induced, indirectly by the devil, and directly by his wife, to break a pact with God.⁽⁴⁷⁾

There may be yet another typological connection with the Fall. If the drink of mightful main is alcoholic, this may be a reference to the Biblical account of how Noah made wine, got drunk and disgraced himself. Having his wife supply him with the drink and thus precipitate his temptation and fall indicates yet another connection with Adam.

In later plays, the typological parallel between Eve and Noah's Wife remains in subtle verbal allusions. In the

Wakefield Deluge Play, Uxor's choice to send from the Ark a raven, a bird "without any reson" recalls Eve's alleged lack of reason, and during the fight, "beginnar of blunder" is one of the many names Noah calls his wife.

As well as her importance in typology, Noah's Wife's character seems to have been elaborated mainly as a means of introducing broad domestic comedy into the Mystery Cycles. From a vestigial character in the Bible account, she is developed into a character who is shrewish and stubborn, and who refuses to embark on the Ark for numerous reasons - she does not believe Noah's story, or wants to finish her spinning or to bring her gossips on the trip with her. In all the plays, struggles and fights break out as Noah tries to get her onto the Ark.

The idea of developing the Noah's Wife character in this way seems to have come from the traditions of secular entertainment, such as minstrelsy, farce and bawdy popular tales. These relied for their popularity on exaggerations of real life, and accordingly, exaggerated female characters such as nagging wives, tipsy gossips and cheating alewives developed into accepted comic types.

Why did the clerical authors of Mystery Plays choose to include episodes of this type, and how did they originate? There seem to be a number of reasons for their inclusion. Firstly, quite simply, they were popular, as the increasing importance of the Mrs. Noah character in later cycles indicates. According to M.D. Anderson,

mediaeval preachers had sometimes to contend with the attractions of minstrels, jugglers, contortionists, bear leaders and all the motley world of mediaeval show-business which we see carved on benches and bosses. In order to win a hearing, they sometimes lowered the standard of their stories to that of their rivals; the

bawdy comedy of the sheep-stealing Mak, and the truculence of Mrs. Noah, may have come into religious drama by way of the pulpit.

(48)

It seems likely that the plays' clerical authors may have used comic episodes in the same spirit of giving the audience a bit of what they really enjoyed in order to hold their attention long enough to get the serious message across.

A second reason for including comedy based on domestic argument may have been its propaganda value. The clerics who wrote the plays would have been celibate, writing at a time when the Church advocated celibacy as the only proper state for the truly religious man or woman. Church writers tended to exaggerate the torments of marriage in order to dissuade people from entering it, and to demonstrate that marriage was, as they said, merely a compromise with sinful human nature, and incapable of producing happiness or serenity as celibacy was..

Domestic violence on the stage would have been a dramatic demonstration of this idea, and the many scenes of wife-beating and quarrelling couples in Church carvings seem to indicate that iconography was used as another means of communicating the Church's view of marriage to a non-literate public.

These points offer some explanation of why domestic comedy is included in the Mystery Cycles, but how and why did it originate in the first place? If we accept that the theme reflects the concerns of real life, could domestic violence on stage be a reflection of the unhappiness caused by the mediaeval system of arranged marriage?

This is a tempting hypothesis, but one which falls down when we consider that this type of comedy originated from

the peasant classes and bourgeoisie, classes largely unaffected by arranged marriage since they had far less importance in terms of money, property or political influence. Unless their feudal superiors invoked their statutory rights to marry them off, they were entirely free to choose their own partners, though they would have been expected to defer to their parents' wishes.

The true context of domestic comedy seems to be the recurring debate about mastery in marriage. This theme's great importance in mediaeval literature is partly explained by the tension mentioned in the introduction to this section between women's considerable economic importance, and their lack of power and legal rights, both in the public sphere and in the home, where their actual contribution was the greatest. It is no wonder that women seem to have tried to redress the balance of power in the only way that they could - through sheer force of personality and vociferous assertion of what they really deserved. Hence the importance of the theme of mastery in marriage: when the law and religion gave it so completely to the husband, folk literature fulfilled this important need for discussion and change.

In reality, then, the comic figure of the shrewish or nagging wife may have been a healthy sign since, as Eileen Power suggests, it

shows something of the practical equality which prevailed between men and women in the middle and lower classes; for if she is in subjection, the subjection is very imperfectly maintained, and the hen-pecked husband is a suspiciously favourite theme. (49)

The Wakefield play in particular seems to illustrate this view of the mastery struggle, suggesting as it does an altercation within an otherwise successful partnership. It combines the liveliest struggle with the most complete and

credible relationship of all the Deluge plays. Uxor does not believe the story of the Deluge and launches into a description of the difficulties of having "ill husbandys" and humouring their whims

If he teyn, I must tary, howsoever it standys,
With semland full sory, wringand both my handys
For drede

(50)

while all the time she plans to "quite him his mede". Later, when Noah threatens to punish her, she comments on what a bargain it would be to pay for his masses if only she could be a widow, and appeals to the women in the audience

For thy saull, without lese, shuld I dele penny doyll.
So wold mo, no frese, that I se on this sole
Of wifys that ar here,
For the life that they leyd
Wold thare husbandys were dede

(51)

Noah retaliates by appealing to the men in the audience

Ye men that has wifys, whils they ar young
If ye luf youre lifys, chastice thare tong.

(52)

These appeals to the husbands and wives in the audience link the stage action with the real world: the audience's support is sought, which implies that it shares the views expressed by the Noahs to some extent.

Although the play is outstandingly successful as bawdy domestic comedy, it seems that the author is moving towards greater subtlety within the comic form. The Wakefield play is full of elements and implications completely without precedent in other Mystery Cycles.

Firstly, Noah and his wife are a match for one another in many respects, even in arguments and fights. A lot of

genuine humour comes from this equality, partly because a comic fight is more laughable than a comic wife-beating scene, and partly because despite the fact that both the Noahs come off equally badly when they fight, Mrs. Noah is more vociferous about her injuries. "Se how she can grone, and I lig under" comments Noah.

Secondly, unlike the wives of the York and Chester plays, whose rapid slide into insignificance once defeated implies that their only function in the plays was to be truculent, the Wakefield wife remains a vivid and active character, whose conversations with Noah provide the main commentary on events from the embarkation to the end of the play. She takes an active part in the running of the Ark, navigating by the stars and sun and taking the helm while Noah drops plumb-lines.

These factors seem to indicate a view of violent domestic comedy as a difference of opinion in an otherwise stable and successful working partnership; in which husband and wife are equal in their ability to work and respect one another as skilled and valuable companions.

Contemporary evidence that women were indeed respected for their skills and working ability can be found in wooing ballads which enumerate the skills of the loved one, such as Jone can call by name her coves and songs refuting the arguments of religious anti-feminists like the fifteenth century ballad which comments "A woman is a worthy thyng/They do the wash and do the wryng".

A further example of working marriage in the Wakefield Cycle seems to confirm that the playwright held this essentially optimistic view of marriage and of the mastery struggle. In the Second Shepherds' Play Secundus Pastor describes the sorrows of marriage, warning young men

against it. He cites his own wife as a dreadful example: she is "as greatt as a whall" and like most comic women, has a taste for strong drink

Had she oones Wett Her Whystyll
She couth syng full clere
Hyr pater noster (53)

Mak the sheep stealer then makes a similar lament, complaining that his wife

lys walteryng, by the roode
by the fyere, lo!
and a house full of brude
she drynks well to
Etyes as fast as she can (54)

He comments that she is a "fowll dowse", and that he would think it good value to pay for her masses if only she would die.

But Gyll, Mak's wife, instead of being presented as a typical shrew, is shown as an assertive woman who justifies herself and argues to prove her worth. She is still awake when Mak comes home, spinning to make extra money, as a resourceful housewife was supposed to. Furthermore, her caution and inventiveness are of practical worth to Mak: she is the first to think that the shepherds may have followed him, and Gyll herself devises the scheme to conceal the sheep, drawing attention to her usefulness by commenting "Yit a woman avyse/helpys at the last".

However, Gyll clearly sees the value of her domestic work as the main proof of her importance. When Mak returns, she is annoyed at being disturbed from her spinning yet again. Mak angrily accuses her of making a commotion to put up a pretence of working, whereas in fact she does nothing but "lakys and clowes hir toose" - lie about scratching her

toes. Gyll then launches into a passionate defence of the value of her work:

Why, who wonders? who wakys? who commys? who gose?
Who brewys? who bakys? what makys me thus hose?
And than
It is rewthe to beholde
Now in hote, now in colde,
Full wofull is the household
That wantys a woman. (55)

Even in a Church committed to the promotion of celibacy, there were some preachers who agreed on this point: that the bleakness of life without women was ample proof of their worth. One example is St. Bernadino of Siena, a surprisingly feminist preacher, who inveighed against women's vanity, but praised their virtues and urged husbands to treat them with the consideration they deserved. He spoke at length of the loneliness and discomfort he had found in the homes of bachelors, concluding

knowest thou how such a man liveth? even as a brute
beast. I say that it cannot be well for a man to live
thus alone. (56)

It seems then that domestic comedy was included in the plays to fit in with the demands of typology, as in the episode of Mrs. Noah, retain audience interest and advance the Church's message that celibacy was preferable to marriage. But in some cases, due perhaps to the influence of more sympathetic individual writers, the domestic comedy episodes took on a life of their own, becoming enjoyable for their own sake and advancing a more positive view of women and of marriage.

Other comic female characters drawn into the plays from folk tradition are included purely for fun. The main examples of this type are the women associated with ale in the plays - Mrs. Noah's gossips and the Dishonest Alewife.

Mrs. Noah's Good Gossips have no biblical source at all, and are original to the Mystery Plays. At this time, 'gossyppe' still had the sense of godparent, but was acquiring the meaning of a friend with whom one had a god-child in common, and thence a talkative crony. Mediaeval ballads such as "Hoow, gossip myne, gossip myne" and the later "Good morrow Gossip Joan", together with the treatment of gossips in the plays, seem to indicate that gossips were already becoming a recognised comic type.

In all the plays in which they appear, the gossips are left behind and drowned by the rising floods. In the York play, some sympathy is aroused for Uxor's "commodrys and cosynes" by her lament

Allas! my lyffe is full loth
I lyffe ouere longe þis lare to lerne
My frendis þat I fra yoode
Are ouere flowen with floode.

(57)

However, the gossips of the Chester play arrive, sing their song and are submerged without any comment being made. This summary treatment seems to indicate that people already understood that the gossips were comic types, whose fate was not to be taken seriously, and whose function in the play was to entertain the audience with broad comedy illustrating the proverbial heavy drinking indulged in by women and their gossips. In the Chester play, the gossips are shown calling on Mrs. Noah and are more concerned to persuade her to have one last round of drinks with them than with the idea of entering the Ark:

lett us drinke or wee departe
for oftetyes wee have done soe
for at one draufht thou drinke a quarte
And soe will I doe or I goe

Here is a pottell full of malmesaye good and stronge
yt will rejoyse both hart and tonge
Though Noe thinke us never soe longe,
yet wee wyll drinke atyte. (58)

Mediaeval folk tradition associated women not only with the consumption of alcohol, but with its production. The brewing industry was dominated by women, and since quality control was difficult, these ale-wives often broke the rules governing quality and the size of measures. According to Eileen Power

every student of English manorial court rolls will remember the regular appearance of the leet of most of the village alewives, to be fined for breaking the Assise of Ale. (59)

This show the folk-tale figure of the Dishonest Alewife arose. She appears in folk ballads and also in church iconography, most notably in the Ludlow misericord in which she is carried off to hell by two devils. The Chester Harrowing of Hell play elaborates on this idea: the Ale Wife is left behind after hell is harrowed, to undergo further punishment for all the trouble she caused on earth. She describes her former trade:

Sometyme I was a taverner
a gentle gossipe and a tapster
of wine and ale a trustie brewer
which woe hath me wrought.
Of kannes I kept no trewe measure
My cuppes I sold at my pleasure
deceavinge manye a creature
thoe my ale were nought. (60)

This episode was probably popular at the time because medi-aeval people took their beer very seriously, but its interest to the modern scholar is that here a woman appears as a comic representative of a female-dominated trade about which many people felt strongly.

The views of women in the Mystery Plays, then, are those of the mediaeval Church and of folk literature. They reveal the polarised religious view of women - of Mary, the inaccessible ideal, the model whose purity and goodness were recommended to women as an example but could not possibly be attained; and of Eve, the sinful, flawed reality, whose example had formed a basis for many of the attitudes and laws affecting women, in secular as well as religious life. The comic views of women, seen in the characters of Mrs. Noah, Gyll and the gossips were sometimes cynically observed, but seem to be closer to real life.

This difference between the religious and folk influences in the plays emphasises the rift between the well-documented theory of mediaeval womanhood and the reality, which was seldom recorded. Whilst from church and legal literature, one would suppose that women were sinful and submissive, domestic comedy and folk literature hint at the probable reality - that women could be active, assertive and argumentative, going out to work, and, as often as not, relaxing over a drink with their gossips.

WOMEN IN THE MORALITY PLAYS

The Church's view of women and marriage continues to be the chief influence on the way in which women are presented in the Morality Plays. The vices, and later, the virtues which women are chosen to personify, act as a close index to changing social and religious attitudes. Views of women become more positive as the Church's insistence on the value of chastity gives way to the ideal of holy matrimony as a way of life.

According to Lawrence Stone, with the coming of the Reformation

The mediaeval Catholic idea of chastity, as a legal obligation for priests, monks and nuns, and as an ideal for all members of the community to aspire to, was replaced by the ideal of conjugal affection. The married state now became the ethical norm for the virtuous Christian.

(61)

However, the ideas and strength of popular feeling which brought about this change would have been building up for some time before Henry VIII precipitated the English Reformation. There had been much popular opposition to the Church's attempts to encourage celibacy within marriage, and further resistance had come from within, as ordinary members of the clergy continued to marry, risking prosecution for themselves and imprisonment for their wives. The spread of feeling against the Church's denigration of marriage was also probably facilitated by a general mood of anti-clericalism, fostered by anger at its superstition and corruption. Thus the development of more positive views of women and marriage can be seen in some moralities pre-dating the English Reformation.

With marriage regarded as a virtuous state, the symbolic significance of woman in the Morality Plays changes radically. Instead of a temptress distancing the main character from God, she is likely to appear as a wife who brings him closer to God, or as a virtue whom he literally espouses.

1. Lechery

The most common female character in the Morality Plays is that of Lechery, an attractive, fashionably-dressed woman whose role is to tempt the Everyman character into sin and damnation. Like the female-headed serpent and 'licourouse' Eve in the Mystery Plays, this view of woman is derived from the idea that women tempt men away from God by arousing lust, which originated in the early Church.

Mediaeval religious literature contemporary with the plays indicates that this view was still current in the Middle Ages. Some aspects had been elaborated, in particular the way in which attractive clothes increase the danger of lechery by enhancing the appearance; and the belief that the woman whose physical presence prompts male lust is morally culpable for it. Both these points are stressed in The Book of Vices and Virtues (c.1350), which gives a most detailed and revealing account of the mediaeval Church's view of the Sin of Lechery in its various degrees, from unemotional thinking about sex, fantasy, in which "þe hirte abideþ and dwelleþ stille and deliteþ", mental assent and finally the worst degree of "lecherie of herte, þat is to biholde þes ladies and þes maidenen and damseles araied and apparailled". The sight of them causes "desire and þe grete brenning wille þe haueþ to synne". The author then goes on to place the blame on the women and their appearance, even though their only misdemeanour was that they

ofte siþe apparailen hem more queyntely and gaily for to make nyse lokers to loken on hem, and wenep not to do gret synne, for þei haue no wille to do þe synne þe more in dede. But certeynly þei synnep wel greuously, for þei maken and bep cause of losse of many soules, and wherþurgh many man is ded and falleþ in-to gret synne; for men seyn in olde prouerbes, 'Ladies of riche and gay apparail is arwblast of tour'. For sche haþ no membre on hire body þat nys a grynne of þe deuel, as Salamon seiþ, wherfore þei mote zelde accountes at þe day of dom of alle þe soules þat by enchesoun of hem are dampned; þat is to seye whan a womman zyueþ enchesoun and cause to synnen. (62)

One could hardly imagine a more complete description of the transfer of guilt from the man who experiences lust to the sight that prompts it.

It is a very small step from these "ladies and maidenés", guilty of being a temptation, to Lechery, the "flower fairest of feminite", and it comes as no surprise to find that the Lechery character in the plays is invariably fashionably and richly dressed. The association of fine clothes with Lechery is very strong, since as well as reinforcing visual temptation when worn by others, they were a concession to one's own bodily comfort and therefore constituted lechery in the sense that we would call "luxury". The Book of Vices and Virtues defined this sense of lechery as

outrageous etynges and drynkynges and esy beddynges and delicious and softe schertes and smokkes and swote robes of scarlet, and alle opere eses of þe body þat is more þan nede. (63)

These "opere eses of þe body", Gluttony and Sloth, are closely associated with Lechery in the Morality Plays. In The Castle of Perseverance (1405-25), they work as a team to entrap Humanum Genus: Lechery approaches only "whanne þi flesche is fayre fed", and Sloth follows her. In Mary Magdalene (1480-1520), all three are companions of the King of the Flesh, and in the Sprynge of Lechery performed in Wisdom (1450-1500), Idyllnes and Gredynes appear as well as

more obviously lecherous sins. Religious manuals of the time, such as Reginald Pecock's Reule of Crysten Religioun show that it was generally believed that only well-fed people were prone to temptation, and that arousal was partly attributed to eating "hooete foodes", such as onions. This is why the mediaeval Church as well as emphasising the benefits of complete abstinence from food, also urged the avoidance of rich foods as a compromise.

The ultimate aim of Lechery "to cachyn Mankynde/To þe Devyll of hell" is sometimes made clear in the play, but more often it is assumed that the audience knows her real intentions.

The Lechery character is often described in terms familiar from the literature of courtly love: she is "a berd bryth", the "flower fairest of feminite", "courteis gentle and fre", "fresh and faire of hue/And very propre of body". The poetic descriptions in which Lechery is treated as a "lykinge lady of lofte" indicate the suspicion with which the Church, and to some extent, the common people, regarded the idea of courtly love. Generally and predictably, courtly love and religion were antagonistic because of the fundamental difference in their views of love. The Church regarded passionate love as sinful and degrading because it submerged the rational faculty; courtly love was held to be morally ennobling by its adherents. Opposition also arose because of the very different status each gave to women. The courtly love movement came to accord women a degree of veneration rivalling that usually commanded by the Church, which reviled them. Andreas Cappelanus' concern because

some people are so extremely foolish as to imagine that
they recommend themselves to women by showing contempt for
the church (64)

seems to confirm the existence of such a rift.

However, although the Church condemned the idea of courtly love and attempted to discredit its adulterous elements, religious writers realised the emotional impact of its literary idiom. They applied its familiar imagery to descriptions of Christ and the Virgin Mary in an attempt to arouse the reader's love for them, in poems such as A Spring Song on the Passion and others in MS. Harley 2253, and prose passages such as those in Ancrene Wisse in which the author represents Christ as a noble wooer who vividly describes his own wealth, power and physical beauty and promises grandeur, happiness and a blissful heavenly union to his prospective brides. Similar poetry can be found in the Morality Plays: in Mary Magdalene, in which Christ describes his mother in the herbal imagery common in love poetry:

She is the precius pink(e) full of ensens
The precius sinamver, the body-thorow to seche;
She is the muske agens the hertes of violen(s),
The jentill jelopher agens the cardiakilles wrech. (65)

In Wisdom (pre-1483), in which the Christ/Wisdom character is represented as a lover, special use is made of the tradition that love improved the character. Wisdom says to Anima

Beholde now,
How lovely I am, how amyable
To be halsyde and kyssyde of mankynde
• • • • •
My love dyschargethe and purifyethe clene
It strengteth þe mynde, þe sowll makyt pure
And yewyt wysdom to hem þat perfyate bene. (66)

It seems paradoxical that the Church should allow the description of divine love and its ennobling nature in human terms while it resolutely maintained that human love could not possibly have any improving effect on the lover's character. Its attempt to cope with the troublesome phenomenon of courtly love by absorbing and spiritualising some of its aspects while rejecting others did lead to many contradictions and inconsistencies. These are particularly apparent in drama: for example, in The Castle of Perseverance, in which the Virtues are described as "ladyes in lond, louely and lyt/Lykyng lelys" while Lechery, supposed to be their antithesis, is a "likinge lady of lofte". Although these characters are moral opposites, the imagery used to describe them is almost identical.

Female characterisation in the Morality Plays grows more diverse as virtues as well as vices come to be represented by women, and particularly as discussion of the merits of marriage compared with celibacy becomes a familiar theme. The complexity of the process of change makes it necessary to work through the plays in a roughly chronological order, diverging to discuss themes common to several plays.

In The Castle of Perseverance, the Lechery character makes her first appearance in the Morality idiom under the name of Luxuria. It is made clear that her advances to Humanum Genus are intended "to cachyn hym to helle crofte". She is closely associated with Gula and Accidia, transforming the usual connection between Lechery and Sloth into an attractive image of erotic passivity in her words "Wyth my sokelys of swettnesse I sytte and I slepe". Caro, her father, reminds the audience of the temptations of attractive clothes when he instructs her "daperly ze dresse zou so dyngge on desse" before sending her off to entice Humanum

Genus. Rich clothes also feature in Malus' Angelus' attempt to tempt Mankind with the idea of a woman as part of a picture of general material luxury:

Haue þou a gobet of þe werld cawth
þou shalt fynde it good and swete
A fayre lady þe schal be tawth
þat in bowre þi bale schal bete
Wyth ryche rentys þou schalt be frawth
Wyth sylke sendel to sytten in sete. (67)

This is highly reminiscent of The Book of Vices and Virtues' description of Lechery as "alle... eses of þe body þat is more þan nede is". However, Voluptas' later speech seems to indicate that this association of women with material possessions is coming to mean more than the inclusion of all concessions to physical pleasure under the name of Lechery; having a "paramoure" has become a status symbol for the ambitious young man who

... wolde be gret of name
He wolde be at gret honour
For to rewle town and toure
He wolde haue to hys paramoure
Sum louely dyngge dame. (68)

The same association of amorous and material success recurs more than a century later in The Trial of Treasure (printed 1567) and The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art (1559). In each, a female character, Treasure or Fortune, befriends a leading character and claims to be a means to the acquisition of women's favours; Fortune says "He loveth women, I will give him plenty" and Treasure is praised because

As for Venus, you shall have her at pleasure
For she is bought and sold always with treasure. (69)

Such cynicism was fair comment in an age in which visiting brothels or arranging marriages were equally material

transactions; a rich man could afford to choose the most beautiful mistresses and the noblest, richest wife.

Financial transactions for sex feature in several Morality Plays in which ordinary human prostitutes are used to tempt the hero, instead of a symbolic Lechery character. Some, such as 'wanton Sybble', the star attraction of the ship-board brothel in Hickscorner (1513), are not far removed from an abstract idea of lust, since their only attribute seems to be their insatiability. All we learn of Sybble is that she "wyll never saye naye". Other whores, such as Margery and Kate in Henry Medwall's court morality interlude Nature (1495), are more interesting and realistic. Whereas in some plays it is assumed that prostitutes like wanton Sybble are motivated only by insatiable lust, Margery's and Kate's motives are unmistakably financial. Their sharpness and dishonesty amuse even their clients, who remind one another of

... Margery,
She that beguiled you parde! so prately
And bore away your shirt the last morning
Stead of her smock, while ye lay sleeping. (70)

Certainly these women are far from admirable, but their cunning makes them far more amusing and individual than mere personifications of lust.

Although these women are often the subjects of jokes, Medwall also seems to direct his humour against the way in which they are treated by the male characters. Their attitude to women is clearly presented in this exchange between Mankind and Bodily Lust on the subject of a new girl:

Mankind: What thing is it? young or old?
Bodily Lust: Whatever it is, it is able to be sold. (71)

Although this also reflects on women who allow themselves to be made into saleable objects, the crude ideas of Mankind and Bodily Lust seem to be the butt of the jokes. This becomes more evident as the plot develops. Mankind has been converted, but is tempted back into his old habits by an apparent concern for Margery, which vanishes abruptly when Bodily Lust describes the attractions of "this other pretty new thing". Mankind is optimistic, happily passes Margery over to one of his companions, and sends Bodily Lust off to negotiate with the new girl. However, Bodily Lust returns in a state of great annoyance to report that she was "abed with a strange man", and Mankind bursts out in righteous indignation "A mischief on her, whore!". This seems to be a particularly pithy observation of the double standard of morality.

Despite these moves towards more varied attitudes to women, later plays such as Lusty Juventus (1547) return entirely in their use of a single symbolic character to the religious morality model. The only female character in this play is Abominable Livinge, a seductive character whom Juventus meets and kisses in a secretive manner. She seems to symbolise sex, which in turn represents abominable living in general.

Despite this general movement towards a more human presentation of women, from Lechery personified to more realistic prostitutes, they tend to remain as an adjunct to the main action, which is a battle for control of a man's soul. The only exception is Mary Magdalene (1470-90), which is unique in having a female central character, and goes further than any other play in the traditional religious idiom in portraying women as having moral choices to make, and souls to lose or save. Mary, though young and alluring, is not the instrument of male temptation and corruption, but is shown to be herself liable to spiritual harm, as the victim of a plot by Satan, Wrath and Envy "To

entyr hir person by the labor of lechery/That she at the last may com to helle".

The necessity that Mary should be tempted by the female Lechery character forces the author to modify the tradition in which Lechery was simply a fashionable woman whose appearance aroused lust in her victims. Here she resembles the idea of pleasure in general, or luxury. She appears like a well-meaning friend, ostensibly trying to cheer Mary after her bereavement with her advice to "Print yow in sportes which best doth yow plese" and the suggestion of a trip to the tavern. There is a clear connection with Eve's temptation by an apparently friendly serpent, which was often represented as female, particularly since flattery is one of Lechery's main weapons. Mary, like Eve, is extremely susceptible to flattery, which seems to her to be no more than stating the obvious. "Your tong is so amiabyll devidyd with reson" she tells Lechery, after hearing her extravagant praise. Her greeting "Heyl, lady most laudabyll of aliauns!/Heyl, orient as the sonne in his reflexite!" makes a further typological connection in its reference to the Annunciation and to the heroine's namesake, the Virgin Mary.

Once lured into the tavern, Mary is confronted with flattery again, this time from Curiossite, a "frisch new galant". Having last been seen leaving in his company, Mary is rediscovered in her "erbyre" in a state of erotic reverie which recalls Luxuria's words "Wyth my sokelys of swettnesse I sytte and I slepe". Mary decides

I woll restyn in this erbyre
Amouns thes(e) bamys precius of prysse
Until som lover wol apere
That me is wont to halse and kisse.

Here shal Mary lie down and slepe in the erbyre.

(72)

It is significant that Mary is waiting for "som lover"; it indicates that she has abandoned herself to prostitution (or promiscuity) and is enjoying it. It is implied that Mary is committing two types of sin, to which women were supposed to be particularly prone. Firstly, although Mary seems fond of her "Valentines", she values them chiefly for the self-interested and narcissistic reason that "they be bote for a blossom of blisse", which is how she now regards herself. Considering the mediaeval view that it was very wicked to think oneself at all attractive, and her earlier acceptance of flattery, it is not surprising that when the Good Angel appears to Mary, he exhorts her to "Remembyr, woman, for thy pore pride/How thy soule shal lyin in helle fire". Mary is condemned less for lechery than for pride, familiar from the old Tree of Vice wall-paintings as being particularly feminine.⁽⁷³⁾

Secondly, Mary and her several Valentines are a reflection of the belief that once a woman ceased to be a virgin, she became sexually insatiable, a belief that spans society from the crudest jokes of early English comedy to the assertion of Sprenger and Kramer in Malleus Malificarum that most witches are female because "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable". This tradition seems similar to the identification of female goodness with chastity, a convention which is particularly strong in this play. After her conversion, when she is in contact with God and performing miracles, Mary is praised by grateful people in these terms:

Rex: A, blissyd be that puer vergin.

Regina: O virgo salutate, for owr sa(1)vacion!
 O pulcra et casta, cum of nobill aliauns!
 O almyty maidyn, owr soulys comfortacioun! (74)

The possibility that this passage might be a typological connection with the Virgin Mary seems to be diminished by

the reference to "nobill aliauns". Virtue and virginity are so closely identified that it is impossible for the author to think that Mary could be more morally advanced than before her fall and subsequent conversion without having her virginity (or reputation for purity) restored.

Despite this play's uniqueness in concentrating on the struggle for a woman's soul, the identification of women's sexual purity with virtue continues. The sole exception to this convention in the Morality idiom is found in Nature (1495), in the character of Lady Nature. In this interlude, Sensuality is, atypically, presented as a male character, and as a benevolent force when balanced by Reason. It is only when this balance is upset that Sensuality becomes undesirable and disruptive. Benevolent Lady Nature reigns over both Sensuality and Reason, advising Mankind of the purpose of his existence and directing him towards God. She is one of the first female characters to be presented as good without any comment being made on her sexual nature, although the fact that the only other female allegorical character in this play is Innocency indicates that the identification of moral worth with sexual behaviour is still continuing where female characters are concerned.

Although the presentation of women in the plays develops from the Lechery figure to human prostitutes, even extending to a Morality Play in which the soul at stake is female, the characterisation is still largely determined by a religious ethos in which the main value is celibacy. As long as this is the case, women appear in a negative role, since their physical presence constitutes a threat to male chastity, and therefore to male souls. Progress towards the identification of women with virtues in the Morality idiom starts only where holy matrimony is seen as a positive value.

2. Marriage

The discussion of marriage in two particular plays pinpoints the radical changes in religious and social attitudes which were taking place. In Wisdom (pre 1483), marriage is used as an allegorical explanation of the relationship between Wysdome, a Christ figure, and Anima, the human soul, but marriage between ordinary human beings is viewed as a potential moral danger. Lucifer, planning to defile the soul, tempts Wyll by describing marriage as a rational idea, as part of normal life, and asks

Wat synne ys in met, in ale, in wyn?
Way synne ys in ryches, in clothyng fyne?
All thyng Gode ordenyde to man to inclyne.
Lewe yowr nyse chastyte and take a wyff.
Better ys fayer frut pan fowll pollucyon. (75)

The reasoning of the last line is almost identical to that of St. Paul's famous pronouncement on marriage, in which he advises people who lack his own vocation for celibacy

to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband... if they cannot contain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn. (76)

Since St. Paul was accepted by the mediaeval Church as the correct authority on most matters concerning women and marriage, what should one make of the fact that Lucifer paraphrases his advice? Considering that it follows encouragement to enjoy various "eses of þe body", one can only assume that it is used in the tradition of the devil's using Scripture for his own advantage. Lucifer is shown tempting people with the idea of marriage as the lesser of two evils. We can deduce from this that some writers thought that marriage was a slightly more legal way of giving way to sensuality; the thin end of the wedge, and

indeed there is evidence that marriage was regarded in this way.

Certainly, Wyll's behaviour seems to support this view: his admission that Lucifer has put forward a good case for marriage is quickly followed by his rushing off to indulge in "lustys of lechery". It seems that mental assent to marriage is a stage in the soul's downfall, just as mental assent to sex ("I have atastyde lust: farewell chastyte") and looking at attractive women ("A women me semyth a heuenly syght") are stages in the progress towards the sin of lechery, common to the account in The Book of Vices and Virtues and to this play.

Although there is no female Lechery character in Wisdom, it is clear that women are still associated with this sin in particular. Three dances are performed, representing sins of Mynde, Wndyrstondyng and Wyll, the last of which is "a sprynge of lechery" performed by "six women in sut, thre dysgyssed as galontys and thre of matrones". Presumably the women were "Spousebreche and Mastres/Wyth jentyll Fornycacyon", and the "galontys" were Reckleshede, Idyllnes and Surfet-and-Gredynes, weaknesses associated with lechery. Considering that most female parts were played by boys dressed as women, one agrees with Mark Eccles that "it is not easy to see why boys dressed as men should be called women" and that "probably these six dancers were women". In other words, the producers of this play were willing to go to the unusual length of hiring female players in order to ensure that all the sins that come under the generic title of lechery should be represented by women, with the sins of "Reckleshede, Idyllnes and Surfet-and-Gredynes" which conduce to lechery differentiated by being represented by women dressed as young men.

We can see very clearly how attitudes have changed by the time that Youth (1513-29) is produced. This play has a female Lechery character, Luxuria, who like her predecessors is described in courtly poetical language as being "fressh and fair of hue" and "courteis, gentyll and fre", but she differs from them in an essential way. She is introduced to Youth in order to forestall Pride's suggestion to him that "it were expediante that ye had a wife". Ryot says

The devyl sayde he had lever burne al his lyfe
Than ones for to take a wife.
Therefore I saye, so God me save,
He shall no wife have.

(77)

Like the episode in Wisdom, this seems to be a play on St. Paul's statement on marriage, which in this case seems to be combined with the popular folk ballad theme of the wife sent back from hell because the devil was unable to tolerate her. But Youth differs radically from the earlier play. Whereas in Wisdom an evil character advocates marriage in order to corrupt Wyll, in the later play the hero is dissuaded from marriage so that Ryot can introduce him to Luxuria, who is to play a major part in his downfall.

In Youth, marriage is no longer a step towards lechery, and therefore damnation as in the earlier play. Instead, being tempted away from marriage and into lechery helps to precipitate the hero's damnation.

It is a pity that these two plays cannot be dated more precisely than 'pre 1483' (Wisdom) and between 1513 and 1529 (Youth), since this contrast seems to illustrate the beginning of the process of change in social and religious attitudes to marriage which took place at the same time as

the English Reformation. Lawrence Stone describes how, with the coming of the Reformation, the Catholic view of celibacy as the prime value, with marriage no more than an unfortunate necessity to cope with human frailty, gave way to the Tudor Protestant view that holy marriage was actually superior to the single life, since, through it, religious values were spread into the home and into the business of everyday life.

The view that, to be holy and pleasing to God, marriage had to be harmonious, gained rapid currency after the Reformation, until in 1529, Archbishop Cranmer placed his official seal on the process by adding a third reason for marriage, that of 'mutual society, help and comfort' to his new edition of the Prayer Book, in addition to the two ancient reasons (avoiding fornication and procreating children). Since the Tudor Protestants valued domestic harmony and yet were unwilling to legalise divorce in cases of incompatibility, it was necessary for them to oppose purely materialistic attitudes to marriage, and to urge parents to select virtuous and compatible mates for their children, allowing them some say in the matter if they were considered responsible enough.(78)

This rejection of celibacy, and new view of marriage had a radical effect on the presentation of women in the Morality Plays. Previously, any woman to whom the hero was attracted was indisputably evil, since she presented a threat to his chastity. However, if a play is based on the premise that marriage is a good and desirable state, its set of values is completely different. Instead of shunning all women and passively guarding his purity, the hero actively seeks a suitable wife. Since the harmoniousness of this marriage will go far to determine his spiritual well-being, it is important that he chooses the right wife, one with

whom he is compatible, and whose moral influence on him will be good.

There are still bad women, but their turpitude is no longer simply a result of their being female and attractive, but because they are not fitting matches for the hero, and may distract him from his quest to find his wife or bring out the worst tendencies in his character.

The first Morality Play in which marriage is an important theme is Wit and Science (1534-47), dated just after Cranmer's new Prayer Book. The play's setting in a society which is beginning to regard mutual agreement as desirable and to despise marriages made for financial gain is evident from the words of Reson, Science's father. He explains

Of truth I, Reson, am of this mynde:
Where partyes together be enclynde
By gyftes of graces to love ech other,
There let them ioyne the tone wyth the toother. (79)

He explains the couple's attraction for one another and concludes that "syns they both be so meete matches/To love ech other, strawe for the patches of wo(r)ldly mucke!"

Idleness is the play's nearest approximation to a bad woman, since she distracts Wyt from his real goal; Honest Recreation, on the other hand, as an ally of Science, resolutely wards off Wyt's advances, and subtly attempts to remind him of his long-term plans, by bringing Science's name into the conversation and mentioning that "The common voyce goeth/That mariage ye movd her". The impression given is that of a woman trying to behave fairly, and to persuade a man she knows is really committed to a friend of hers to do likewise.

The characterisation of Science is also interesting, if one keeps in mind the play's simultaneous impact of allegorical significance and visual action, especially in the scene in which Fame, Favor, Ryches and Woorshypp, sent by the World to flatter Science, are dismissed. Theoretically, this is because learning alone wins none of these things, but at the same time, the audience sees a female character rejecting the blandishments of fame, favour, wealth and admiration, all of which were traditionally supposed to be irresistible to women. It is an important departure from the beliefs of other Morality Plays, that a woman "whatever it is, it is able to be sold", that the man who has Fortune will always have female company, and that flattery always works because "women of all degrees are glad of the same". Also, although Science is an abstract idea, the character in the play has a recognisably human personality, confiding in her mother her apprehension at not having heard from Wyt for a long time, haughtily pretending not to recognise him when he appears in the clothing of Ignorance (Ignorance), and finally delighted to accept him when he has shown that he deserves her love. The progressive ideas of Redford's play are in keeping with its background: like the earlier Nature it is a court play, and reflects the greater liberalism and humanism of an educated secular setting.

The discussion of marriage is also a feature of A Satire of the Three Estates (1539-45), which uses the traditional morality structure but is concerned with social justice as well as spiritual struggle. Here the earlier plays' theme of the struggle between chastity and lechery is combined with the new concern that the main character should find a suitable wife. The religious Morality Play elements are obvious. Women are identified with sex so that vice and virtue are represented by the opposing characters Chastity, "a fair young maiden cled in white" and Lady Sensuality who is "cled... in the new guise". Sensuality is described in the familiar terms of courtly love as "the berial of all

beauty/And portraiture preclair". She is further connected with literary tradition by the refinement of personifying attributes of Sensuality, Hameliness and Danger, as her attendants, which recalls the same technique in The Romance of the Rose. However, although Chastity is victorious, and Sensuality is tried, found wanting and dismissed, the conclusion differs from earlier endings. Correction's instructions to the reformed King

... Sen ye are quit of Sensuality
Resave into your service Good Counsel
And richt sa this fair Lady Chastity
Till ye marry some Queen of blood royal,
Observe then chastity matrimonial

(80)

show that Sensuality was dismissed partly because she was a poor substitute for a royal wife, and that Chastity is seen as valuable under certain circumstances, in this case as a suitable companion for a king until he marries.

A similar view seems to be expressed in the episode in which the Prioress, who like many mediaeval women has been "compellit to be a nun" by her friends, regardless of the fact that she has no vocation for devotion or chastity, is transformed by shedding her nun's habit, to reveal a bright dress underneath. Having explained her case and concluded that "Nuns are nocht necessare", she decides

I sall do the best I can
And marry some good honest man
And brew good ale and tun.
Marriage, by my opinioun
It is better Religioun
As to be Freier or Num!

(81)

The acceptance of marriage as valuable, as well as affirming women's potential as a good influence, can be seen to foster a more tolerant attitude toward female sexuality. Lindsay regards the Prioress's lack of chastity not as an abomination as the earlier Morality writers certainly would

have done, but as the expression of normal instincts by a woman whose vocation was for marriage rather than celibacy. This play was first performed at Linlithgow in 1540, just after the Dissolution of the Monasteries had taken place in England, and 2,000 nuns had been dismissed with pensions. Perhaps some of them did return to secular life with similar intentions to those of Lindsay's Prioress.

Two later plays which deal with the theme of the effect of worldly success on the character, William Wager's The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art (1559) and The Trial of Treasure (printed 1567) show some interesting changes in attitudes to women. Although sex is an important theme in both plays, it is no longer so closely identified with women. In each play, the Lechery character, Incontinence and Lust respectively, is dressed "like a gallant", indicating a tendency to visualise lechery as the sort of person likely to pursue it, rather than as the visual object likely to prompt it. The female allegorical characters, Fortune and Treasure, are frequently described as being a means to sex, which is "bought and sold always with treasure", but it should be noted that according to these plays, knowledge, power and military strength are also commodities that can be purchased.

In The Trial of Treasure, the liberal tone of the play is raised by the addition of the marriage theme. Just, the hero, must choose between Trust (i.e. religious faith), "a woman plainly apparelled" and Treasure, "a woman finely apparelled", who is described by Lust as "an amorous lady, of beautiful face". Lust chooses Treasure, and is ruined by his abuse of the unlimited power she gives him, while Just is ennobled by his partnership with Trust and advises "emperors, potentates and princes of renown/Learn of Just with Trust yourselves to associate". The influence of the acceptance of marriage's value is clear: the play shows that downfall comes not from associating with women, but

from an unwise choice of companion, while happiness and prosperity result from a relationship with a suitable wife rather than from celibacy.

Attitudes to women in the Morality Plays, then, are largely determined by contemporary religious values for men. While celibacy is valued, women appear as lechery personified, likely to tempt men away from God. As religious and social attitudes change, so that holy matrimony is regarded as a virtuous state, more positive views of women become possible.

However, with the exception of Mary Magdalene, the Morality Plays still show feminine potential for vice or virtue only as it affects the male hero. Furthermore, the types of vice and virtue which tend to be represented by women still show that the ethics associated with women are largely sexual ones.

It is not until the Interludes, short, secular and courtly pieces of the Tudor period, that the movement towards diversity and realism in female characterisation really begins to gain momentum.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MORE CIRCLE

According to Lawrence Stone, the years 1520 to 1560 saw a short-lived movement campaigning for a liberal education for women, headed by Renaissance Humanists like Vives and Erasmus. The result was that, for a short time, a few women became as expert as men in grammar, languages and science. It was natural that the revelation that, given the right opportunities, women were as capable of intellectual effort as men should stimulate discussion of, and new ideas about, women's place in society.⁽⁸²⁾

In England, Thomas More, his household and circle of friends were central to the development of these ideas. More's part was particularly important, both because of his close links with other European Humanist thinkers such as Erasmus, and because of the importance of women's education and place in society in his personal philosophy, as set out in Utopia.

Utopia was More's theoretical solution to the real social problems he observed around him in early Tudor England. He was particularly concerned about the leisured state of the aristocracy, since idleness was fast becoming a status symbol to which more and more people aspired. As more social strata adopted a life of leisure, several problems arose; less wealth was produced, and hundreds of newly-made gentlemen and ladies searched for new pastimes. They spent vast amounts of money on entertainment and ostentatious possessions, with the result that the diminished work-force was tempted away from producing necessary goods by the high prices available for luxuries. Ordinary people found food, clothes and shelter more rare and much more expensive.

More was troubled by the moral effects of aristocratic idleness as well as by its economic consequences. Like

most Christians of his age, he deplored the fact that it was common practice for noblemen to frequent brothels, and for courtiers to amuse themselves with flirtations and intrigue. In Utopia, he condemned many of the values and amusements of the court, honour, pride in one's ancestry, fine clothes and jewels, dicing and gambling as "spurious pleasures". He made hunting the duty of butchers and slaves, in an attempt to make people question the prestige it had attained as the sport of the privileged classes in Britain. He considered that, like most of the values and pastimes of the court, it did not bear rational analysis.(83)

While the aristocracy whiled away its leisured life with dubious entertainments, enforced idleness constituted a huge problem for other social classes. The enclosure movement had left many former smallholders destitute, forcing them into beggary and crime, in which they were joined by 'gentlemen of the road' - former courtiers whose masters had died, and whose contempt for labour and learning alike made them unemployable.(84)

Britain, then, was rapidly becoming a state in which an idle and bored aristocracy and an unemployed and largely criminal class both lived on the labours of those who could and did work, to the extent that the workers were often wage-slaves, with their poverty and work-load steadily increasing.

More proposed two remedies for these social evils, one a specific cure for Britain's current problems, the other a perfect theoretical solution, the Utopian social order. For Britain, More called for radical legislation to return enclosed pastureland to the smallholders, and to prevent such monopolisation from happening again. As a support to this social policy, More stressed that all should learn a

trade, as insurance against any social or economic disturbance. (85)

However, More's ultimate solution to social inequality and all its attendant problems was the complete restructuring of society on the egalitarian principles of Utopia, so that everyone would share the responsibility for labour and the benefits of leisure. Work, or industria, would be freed from the stigma of financial necessity, and dignified with moral value, because all would be aware of its contribution to the common good. Utopia would have a six-hour working day. This would be possible because luxury goods (which sapped so much time and effort in More's day) would be ruled out, leaving time for the production of necessary goods, and because all citizens would work, including the clergy, the aristocracy and their retainers, and all women. More particularly stresses that each woman, as well as each man, would have a trade. In this way, leisure would be available to everyone, and would be used for studium or intellectual pursuits, as More felt that an intellectual life was essential to being fully human, rather than a labouring machine. The pursuit of personal interests would be helped by a variety of public lectures given outside working hours, which More stresses would be open to men and women alike. For the first time perhaps, women are envisaged as deserving an equal share in labour and education.

This, then, was the Utopian solution to social inequality, but how far could the theory become reality? Thomas More often attempted to cultivate Utopian values in his own household (for example, his own lack of concern about finery and his attempts to ensure that his daughters "never be enamoured of the glistening hue of gold or silver" and that "they think no better of themselves for all their costly trimmings, nor any worser for the want of them" are well known).

More also practised what he preached on the subject of equal education for women, with impressive results. His daughter, Margaret Roper, surprised the few people who learned of it by her skill in Latin, and her translation of Erasmus' Precatio dominica in septem portiones distributa was published in 1529. The glimpses of her everyday life which can be gleaned from her father's letters and the remarks of those who knew her are as important as her academic achievements, however, since they show how the possibilities of a woman's life were extended by education. Thomas More's letters to Margaret indicate a relationship full of humour and shared interests; he tells her that he would love her to spend her life continuing her studies in theology and medicine, encourages her in her new field of astronomy, and jokingly tells her to try to beat her husband Will at it. Richard Hyrde, in his Preface to her book, gives the following description of Margaret and William Roper's marriage, stressing that they had

by the occasion of her learning, and his delight therein, such especial comfort, pleasure and pastime as were not well possible for one unlearned couple either to take together, or to conceive in their minds, what pleasure is therein.

(86)

One can almost sense Hyrde's amazement at this phenomenon, and his excitement at the new potential for intellectual companionship in marriage, made possible by equal education.

Indeed, Margaret Roper was probably unique, since although Thomas More felt free to put Utopian ideas into practice in his own household, he knew that they could not be realised in the outside world. He deliberately restricted his ideas to an academic audience by writing in Latin, keeping his radical theories for 'the private conversation of close friends'. Instead, he accommodated his ideas to the prevailing political conditions and used his humour and skill in 'seeking to persuade the prince to act in ways which

will bring the laws and usages of society into closer conformity with equity and the good'.(87)

Writers connected with the More circle who shared his ideas about women's education and role in society adopted similar tactics in writing interludes for court performance.

The Mystery and Morality Plays contemporary with the interludes were highly influential because clerics used them to convey religious and philosophical ideas to ordinary people, who were illiterate through poverty and deprivation. The interludes were directed at the privileged classes, many of whose members, despite all the wealth and leisure at their disposal, were either not inclined to make use of the education they had received, or remained illiterate because of their contempt for learning. Although Thomas More did much to change the climate of opinion, some of the nobility remained actively hostile to education. Richard Powe told Colet about one such conservative landowner, who exclaimed

I would rather have my son hanged than a bookworm. It is a gentleman's calling to be able to blow the horn, to hunt and hawk. He should leave learning to the clodhoppers!

(88)

Others regarded literacy as the proper province of the priesthood, and therefore as degrading to young secular noblemen. However, although many courtiers would be reluctant to read serious literature, watching an interlude for entertainment was a different matter. Once again, drama was used to transmit ideas to people who would not have encountered them in books.

The small group of men, who wrote the interludes found that having access to the court gave them problems and opportunities similar to those of Thomas More. Although they were more intelligent and progressive, and better educated than

their court audiences, as tradesmen and members of the professional classes, they were socially inferior. How could they give moral advice and convey their important new ideas to the aristocracy, the class which had the power to influence events, without being censured for their impudence and presumption? As More did, they adopted humour and entertainment as an ideal way to suggest new ideas, notably about education and work, and the way in which they affected women, and give advice without giving offence.

THE PLAYS

Humanistic ideas concerning work and leisure, women and marriage occur in one of the earliest interludes, Fulgens and Luces (1490-1500, probably produced 1497). It was written by Henry Medwall, also the author of the outstanding humanistic morality interlude, Nature, who was Chaplain and Schoolmaster at the court of Cardinal Morton, where Thomas More served between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. It seems that Medwall influenced him, since some of the ideas in the play are very similar to those More expressed years later in Utopia.

The play's very progressive nature is only partly explained by Medwall's Christian humanist background. Peter Happe suggests that the play was influenced by folk elements, which are certainly apparent in the comedy, and would account for some aspects of the characterisation. However, much of the progressive character of the plot, with its secular setting and two important women, is accounted for by its origins in Italy, where Renaissance ideas were affecting literature long before they began to influence English writers. Medwall adapted the story from the English translation, via a French version, of the Latin original by the Italian author Bonacorso.

Although the play is mainly concerned with the perennial mediaeval controversy over the nature of true nobility, its main purpose being

Not onely to make folke myrth and game,
But that suche as be gentilmen, of name
May be somewhat movyd
By this example for to eschew
The wey of vyce, and favour vertue,

(89)

Medwall also used it to convey his ideas about marriage and women to his noble audience.

The subject of the play, that of the choice of a spouse, is itself surprisingly progressive. Although the topic was gaining popularity, and the Renaissance produced hundreds of treatises on marriage, this was considerably later, in the latter part of the sixteenth century. This upsurge of interest in marriage as a literary topic was particularly pronounced in England, so that many works were published concerning its function, rules, meaning and the importance of the correct choice of partner. Several causes can be suggested, among them the impact of Renaissance themes of English literature (of which Fulgens and Lucres and Calisto and Melebea were the forerunners), and the effect of the Reformation in officially reconciling marriage and religion. Also, as Rupert Habenicht suggests, it is more than likely that the controversial behaviour of Henry VIII caused a degree of insecurity about the laws governing marriage, and provoked the desire to discuss them and re-establish what could, and could not be done within wedlock. However, in England, a few religious works, such as manuals for parish priests, had already discussed the question of selecting a spouse, usually from the man's point of view. In 1523, William of Pagula concentrated on marriage in Oculus Sacerdotis, his treatise on the seven sacraments of the Church. He discussed the problems of choosing between an ugly or beautiful, or rich or poor woman, concluding that as wives, all would bring their attendant benefits and problems. (Most of the other literature on marriage was satirical, supporting the ideal of celibacy by comic exaggeration of the hardships of wedlock.) However, in life, if not in literature, it must have been a topic of almost universal importance and interest.

Fulgens and Lucres is also considerably before its time in its portrayal of how and by whom the prospective husband is

chosen. Medwall shows his heroine choosing for herself, albeit with the good advice of her father, who has given her the right to determine her own future. She thanks him for allowing her "myne owne fre choyse and my lyberte", and assures him that "It is the thyng that pleaseth me well/ Sith I shall have therein yore counsell".

Even after the Reformation, when the need for marriage to be harmonious discouraged parents from marrying off their children purely for money, few writers went so far as to advise that children, and particularly young women, should be able to choose for themselves. The nearest analogy I can find to Fulgens' attitude comes from Fusco, and is dated almost 70 years later than the interlude. Fusco not only recommends that a girl's father should not

regard always wealth, birth, ambition and his worldly interests in marrying his daughter, but to put himself in her place in order to judge more rightly what husband will be good for her all her life,

(90)

but goes even further in saying that

Although she, an inexperienced virgin, can not well judge for herself in this matter, yet perhaps for her own satisfaction she would know better than her experienced father what to do.

(91)

Why, then, are Medwall's ideas so far ahead of his time? The answer seems to lie in the attitude to women's education which developed in his immediate social circle. Lucre, in the interlude, is shown as a rational and educated woman, and clearly Fulgens would not have allowed her to choose her own husband unless he was convinced of her intelligence and discretion. The way in which Lucre makes her choice substantiates his estimate of her abilities, as she is unaffected by material and romantic considerations and makes a completely conscious and rational decision. Although she trusts her own judgement, she defers her final

pronouncement until she has ensured that what "the commune fame" has to say about her suitors matches her own opinion, and seeks "gode advyement" from her father. True to contemporary morality and to the strict 'judgement' structure of the play, romantic love is irrelevant. Lucreces cannot be in love with either suitor, but she does use all her intelligence in choosing the one most like her, with whom she is most likely to establish a love based on similarity and shared values.

Another possible explanation for the progressive nature of the play is its connection with the folk drama of the working classes who, since they were less important and therefore less liable to interference for political and financial gain, usually had more freedom to choose their marriage partners than their social superiors. Peter Happé suggests that Fulgens and Lucreces "owes much to folk plays and festivals", and there are certainly several folk plays which reflect the freedom enjoyed by ordinary people in the independent nature of their heroines. One such folk drama is the Revesby Sword Play, in which the character of Cicely resembles Lucreces in several ways. She is able to make her own choice of suitors, and is independent of material considerations, rejecting Pickle Herring's offers of "a thousand pound" and "a store of gold", and staying constant to the Fool. Also, like Lucreces, who forbids

... all manner of violence
Durynge this matter, and also that ye seace
Of all suche wordis as may gyve occasion
Of brallynge or other ongodely condycion, (92)

Cicely will not allow herself to be fought over, and pleads "I pray, dear friends, fall not out for me!" Unlike the ladies of courtly romance, who were contented to be fought for, since being desired by more than one man enhanced their value, Cicely and Lucreces are considerate and

reluctant to cause disruption, embodying as they do the sensible values of the working classes.

Throughout the play, Medwall seems to be trying to convey to the court the more humanist values of the merchant classes, which often prefigure the opinions of Vives and Thomas More. For example, the general logic of Lucre's decision to reject Publius Cornelius, who despite his noble birth and riches is "voluptuouse and bestiall",

unto the blode I wyll have lytyl respect
Where tho condicyons be synfull and abiect, (93)

is very similar to the opinion expressed by Vives years later, that nobility of birth does not presuppose nobleness of personality, but is an external possession, like beauty or riches. Vives tells his female reader that if she wants to marry a man for his handsome appearance, she might as well marry a beautiful portrait, and that if all she wants is money, she might as well marry a golden statue rather than a living man. He continues

Wouldest thou be married to a gentleman born, which is of
filthy and naughty living, for his blood? As well
mightest thou choose the image of Scipio or Caesar. (94)

The most interesting similarity, though, is that between Lucre's actions and the ideas later developed by Thomas More. It is doubtful whether More ever saw the interlude, since by 1497 when it was probably produced, he had already spent two years at Oxford and had begun his legal training. However, since Medwall was Chaplain and probably Schoolmaster at Cardinal Morton's house where More spent his early teens, it is likely that Medwall's company and conversation were an important general influence on him.

Lucrece, a young woman whose sense and education reflect Humanist ideals, is offered two different ways of life by her suitors. Publius Cornelius promises

riches shall ye have at your will ever more,
Without care or study of laborious besynes,
And spend all your dayes in ease and plesaunt idelnesse.
About your owne apparell ye can do non excesse
In my company that sholde displese my mynd;
With me shall ye do non other maner of besynes
But hunt for your solace at the hart and hynde
.

and yf so be that in huntyng ye have no delygth,
Than may ye daunce a whyle for your disport. (95)

Cornelius offers the leisured, unproductive life of the early Tudor aristocracy, which Thomas More was to criticize, with many of the distractions whose enjoyment he doubted and whose wastefulness he deplored. Significantly, Lucrece rejects this way of life for Gaius Flaminius, who offers the more middle class, humanistic ideal of "moderate riches/And that sufficient for us both doutles", and himself as an adaptable, compatible mate ("a man accordyng/To youre owne condicions in every thyng"). Flaminius also approaches More's ideal of studium et industria, as he explains

One tyme with study my tyme I spende
To eschew Idlenes, the causer of syn;
An other tyme my contrey manly I deffend. (96)

Flaminius, far from killing his time with wasteful amusements, uses it in ways profitable to himself and to society.

Certainly Lucrece allies herself with a husband who practises the new ideals, but how far can she be said to have chosen an ethic for herself? I think that it is valid to say that she has chosen values for her future life, since at that time, as now, the quality of a married woman's life is largely determined by her husband's

personality and habits. Also, since this interlude is contemporary with moralities in which a young man's choice of a wife represents his espousal of a certain principle or attribute, the idea seems plausible. Lucre's decision should have indicated to the audience which way of life was best for a woman.

A close study of the character of Lucre reveals that Medwall held some very progressive views on the value and potential of women. He presents her as a sympathetic and admirable character, and while her appraisal of her suitors is rational rather than sentimental, she comes across as a loving character in a much wider sense, since her consideration for all the men in the play is obvious. Lucre treats her suitors with scrupulous fairness, refusing to listen to either "Tyll ye be both to-ge(d)er in presence", and forbidding them to fight over her. She has too much respect for herself and for other people to play the courtly lady. Lucre even tells her suitors that she will write to them to inform them of her decision,

That of none other person it shall be sayn
Sith it concerneth but onely unto you twayne (97)

which will save the rejected suitor social embarrassment. Later, Lucre informs the audience that although she knows Cornelius to be immoral

... for all that I wyll not dispise
The blode of Cornelius, I pray you thinke not so.
God forbede that ye sholde note me that wyse,
For truely I shall honoure them where so ever I go. (98)

She appreciates that Cornelius' family will probably be piqued by his rejection, and hopes to assuage their feelings by continuing to treat them courteously.

This concern could be dismissed as mere courtesy, noble manners among members of the upper classes, if it were not apparent that Lucre's goodwill extends to her suitors' servants as well. Having received an obscenely garbled message from B., Cornelius' servant, she decides not to mention it, since

Yf his mayster have therof knowlege
He wyll be angry with hym therfore.
How be it, I will speke therof no more,
For hyt hath ben my condiscyon alwey
No man to hender, but to helpe where I may. (99)

Far from disrupting male society by encouraging men to compete for her, or to defend her purity from offence, Lucre supports it with her common sense and consideration.

Lucre's reaction to B.'s crudeness is very interesting, since coping with verbal obscenity has been a problem for women in every age in which female virtue has been thought to depend on sexual ignorance. Vives' standard of behaviour for a girl depends on her ability to feign such ignorance:

Her mind must be set so well in a habit of chastity that when by chance she hears some unchaste word or sees some unchaste sight and is unable to retire, she is so collected in herself that she shows herself not to have seen or understood any dishonesty. (100)

Lucre's calm and sensible way of dealing with bawdy language seems to spring from self-confidence and her own sense of self-worth: when B. hints that perhaps she would rather the audience did not hear what he has to say about her, Lucre replies

Nay, nay, hardely spare not;
As for my dedis I care not
Yf all the worlde it harde. (101)

When B. does tell her his message, far from pretending not to have heard it, Lucres perseveres with him until she is able to glean the real meaning.

Apart from providing comedy and demonstrating the possibility of a woman's dealing with bawdry in a sensible way, B.'s coarseness comically deflates his master's courtly hyperbole, reinforcing Lucres' rational objections. On being told by B. that his master has sworn that he "lovyd you better than his one hart blode", Lucres demurs "Hys harde blode? Nay, nay, /Half that love wolde serve for me", and Cornelius' vows are further undermined by B.'s attempt to be poetic in reassuring Lucres that "He had lovyd you so in hys hart /That he settyth not by hymself a fart". The courtly lover's traditional posture of self-abasement becomes ludicrous when phrased in vulgar language instead of poetry.

Lucres' most striking feature is, as Peter Happe suggests, that despite both her suitors' energetic pretensions to nobility, she emerges effortlessly as the most noble character. Her role as judge involves an assumption of higher worth, and even the comic sub-plot, in which Jone is clever enough to outwit A. and B., emphasises the high status of women in this play. Lucres' superiority seems to be confirmed by Gaius Flaminius' promise that, in him, she shall have a man "accordyng /To youre owne condicions in every thing". This goes against general Renaissance opinion, which dictated that it was a wife's duty to adapt herself to her husband. This was why young wives were preferred, since a girl would

accept more willingly the instructions of her husband, and with better spirit try to apply his corrections to the remedy of her faults; also she would be more adaptable to new habits and ways of living.

All the wifely virtues were those calculated to please the husband, the most important being obedience, which meant that the wife should always do what her husband would command, even if he were absent or dead. The belief that in a marriage, the husband represented the moral absolute was so widespread that in Europe, it became common for husbands-to-be to write books of practical and moral instruction for their future wives, advising them that if they followed the given precepts, they could expect to be happy.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Once again, Medwall is going far beyond his own time in portraying Lucrece as morally superior to her suitors. His heroine is a synthesis of the characteristics of the lady, and the emergent humanistic ideal of female potential, based on education and on the values of the middle classes.

I have already mentioned that class difference was one of the most important factors in early Humanist thought and views of women. John Heywood's works are very interesting in this respect, since some of his plays were written for court performance, and some for popular audiences. The popular roots of his plays can be seen in their form: Johan Johan (1520) is derived from the sotties, French folk-plays revelling in the dominion of folly; The Four PP (1520) uses the old tradition of flyting, and even the more courtly plays, The Play of the Wether (1528) and A Play of Love (1533), use the débat structure and bear some resemblance to Morality Plays.

Heywood's popular plays, A Mery Play Betwene Johan Johan the Husbande, Tib his Wife and Sir Johan the Preest, The Pardoner and the Friar (1519) and The Foure PP are all farcical comedies whose main aim, despite the little moral homilies at the end, is to provoke laughter, usually by means of sexual innuendo, and jokes about women. But basic though it is, the comic content of all these popular plays depends on a single vital assumption: that the working-class women the plays describe have a certain amount of

physical and economic freedom. The jokes about men's inadequacy in the face of their wives' sexual demands, like the amazingly detailed and sustained double-entendre on pinning in The Foure PP, and Tib's confessions with the over-sexed priest in Johan Johan depend on the wives being working women, with a degree of freedom and mobility. Economic independence is also implied: no-one would have serious worries about being left by a woman who lacked the knowledge or ability to survive alone. Heywood raises many laughs at the expense of women, but in doing so treats them as equals, joking about their sexual freedom and their delight in finery without condemning it.

The influence of Heywood's tendency to view women as equals is carried over to his later plays, The Play of the Wether (1528) and The Play of Love (1533), where it is brought to bear on the discussion of more sophisticated and serious themes than in his earlier popular comedies.

The most striking example of this is The Play of the Wether, in which, during a débat between a Launder and a Gentilwoman, the Launder voices populist ideas strikingly similar to those of Thomas More. She criticises the Gentilwoman's "idyll life" and round of entertainments for two reasons. Firstly, like More and Vives, she criticises it on moral grounds, remarking that "vice... hath fre entre where idylnesse doth reyne". Her advice to the Gentilwoman also resembles theirs:

Methinke thou shuldest abhorre suche idylnes
And passe thy time in some honest besines.
Better to lese some parte of thy beaute
Then so oft to jeoberd all thine honeste.

(104)

The Launder's recommendation of absorbing work rather than potentially dangerous diversions is practically as well as spiritually sound advice when one considers that the usual cures for boredom among court ladies were flirtations and

illicit affairs. These could be disastrous for a dependent woman in an age in which the slightest rumour could destroy her chances of marriage, since no man of property would risk doubts about the legitimacy of his heirs.

Secondly, the Launder criticises the Gentilwoman's idleness and amusements because they are financed by other people's labour.

... I perceive in daunsinge and singinge
In eating and drinkinge and thine apparellinge,
Is all the joye werin thy herte is set.
But nought of this doth thine owne labour get.
For haddest thou nothing but of thine owne travaile
Thou mightest go as naked as my naile. (105)

Thomas More also complains that far from being self-sufficient, the aristocracy relies on the labour of the poor not only for necessities, but for its luxuries. He was outraged that England

lavishes great rewards on so-called gentlefolk.
... who are either idle or mere parasites and purveyors of empty pleasures. On the contrary, it makes no benevolent provision for farmers, colliers, common labourers, carters and carpenters, without whom there would be no commonwealth at all. (106)

The Launder too, in her condemnation of the Gentilwoman's idleness, finds it particularly irksome that "such of some men shall have more favour/Than we, that for them daily toile and labour". She even suggests the solution proposed by More, Erasmus and Vives; that even the rich should learn a trade, in order to occupy themselves profitably, and as a means of survival in case of impoverishment or exile.

Despite the importance and interest of these ideas, there is nothing here that could not have been expressed equally well in a more conventional débat between, for instance, a ploughman and a knight. Why, then, would Heywood have

chosen to make the startling innovation of a débat between women, unless he was particularly interested in how different social conditions affected their role in society and their very nature, and in the different ways of life available to them. In contrasting two types of woman and their lives, Heywood encourages his audience to decide which is better. As in Fulgens and Lucrez, the choice is between aristocratic idleness and middle-class industry, but now women are more closely identified with both; not espousing a way of life, but embodying it.

The first type of woman, the Gentilwoman, shows from her first appearance the sheltered existence of which she is a product, and her dependency. She cannot cope with the crowds, and has to ask Mery Reporte for help. Later, her revelation that she has come to ask Jupiter for mild weather shows that her beauty, too, depends on being sheltered. The Gentilwoman complains that

... the sonne in som(m)er so sore doth burne me,
In winter the winde on every side me,
No parte of the yere wote I where to turne me,
But even in my house am I faine to hide me.
And so do all other that be(a)uty have, (107)

and plans that if she is successful in obtaining eternally temperate weather "Then wolde we jet the stretes trim as a parate". It is easier for her to try to effect a change in the climate than to question the current ideal of beauty, even though her efforts to conform to it restrict her activities and freedom, keeping her shut safely indoors. Even when the weather permits them, her activities are the trivial and unproductive amusements Thomas More condemned: her day's timetable consists of dressing, dining, strolling around the streets or chatting indoors, and dancing and singing in the evenings.

Mery Reporte's response to this leisured "woman right faire" is a mixture of enthusiastic courtship and flattery, to which she is sometimes responsive, and sexual innuendo, which she ignores (like Vives' ideal girl who "is so collected in herself that she shows herself not to have seen or understood any dishonesty"). In contrast, the Launder's first line is a rude joke, and throughout her brief appearance, she engages in banter with Mery Reporte, repeatedly proving him to be "an olde baudy knave".

R.W. Bolwell, writing in 1920, explains this as a class difference. The Gentilwoman is genteel, recognising Mery Reporte's "indecent irrelevancies" for what they are and tactfully ignoring them, while the Launder is as "coarse, vulgar and sharp of tongue" as he expects working women to be. I am sure, however, that Heywood intended more than this, especially since bawdy humour was so important in his popular plays.(108)

I suggest that the ability or inability of the female characters to reply to the men's bawdy jokes is symptomatic of their relation to them. The Gentilwoman, as the Launder points out, is not only economically dependent on the working classes, but on men, and must be the sort of woman they will value. Since she needs to meet male requirements, she accepts that her appeal rests on being sexually attractive, so that they will desire her, and mentally pure, so that the man who marries her can rely on his heirs' legitimacy. Accordingly, the Gentilwoman voluntarily restricts her activities, in order to safeguard her beauty, and maintains her reputation by feigning ignorance, tacitly accepting sexual insults.

The Launder, however, can repay bawdry in kind, since her livelihood does not depend on men's opinion of her. Although she was beautiful in her youth

... and so might have kept me if I hadde wolde
And as derely my youth I might have solde
As the trickest and fairest of you all (109)

she realised early the precariousness of living on one's beauty, and "feared pannels that after might fall". Although D. Bevington glosses this as "(spiritual) perils", there is little to indicate that Heywood did not mean practical perils as well, especially since, whether the Launder is referring to prostitution or marriage as the market for her youth, both had many dangers. Prostitution then involved all the risks it does today, with the added horrors of extreme poverty, virulent disease, ignorant or non-existent medical treatment and violence from barbaric laws as well as from the criminal underworld (in 1513 Henry VIII introduced branding in the face as the penalty for soliciting soldiers).⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Marriage, too, was far from safe. Even within the law, married women could be savagely beaten, repudiated on grounds of conveniently discovered consanguinity, and outside the law, anything could happen. Also, since then as now, women had a greater life expectancy than men and the effect was exaggerated by the general belief that a husband should be at least ten years his wife's senior, the death of the breadwinner was a serious worry.⁽¹¹¹⁾ The catastrophic effect of the loss of a paterfamilias is indicated by the fact that in contemplating such an event, even the highly conservative Vives forsakes his taste for total passiveness in women so far as to recommend a wife

... must learn also to contemn worldly chances, that is, she must be somewhat manly and strong, moderately to bear good and evil, lest by the being unmeet to suffer adversity, she be constrained either to do or to think wickedly. (112)

Although the Launder's character would have horrified Vives, her learning a trade "lest vice should enter on every side" in an emergency is a perfect example of his advice in practice. Since men are, at best, mortal, and at

worst, likely to value women only for their attractiveness and to discard them, the Launder has founded her personal security on her ability to work, which does not depend on her appeal to men.

In choosing to be a tradeswoman like the many married or single businesswomen who registered as 'fem sol.' (independent) in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Launder has won financial independence, and emotional independence too. The economic necessity of pleasing men has gone, and with it the constraining values of purity and beauty. She can parry crude jokes, since she has no need to feign ignorance, and the Gentilwoman's taunt that she is a "grose queyne" who "no beauty... can obtaine" means nothing to her. The Launder consciously decided to reject beauty produced by a confined existence in favour of an independent living years previously, and obviously feels that it was a worthwhile exchange. She does not rely on the admiration of others for a conviction of her own worth, because of her pride in the value of her ability to work and earn, which pervades her speeches.

As a result of this independence, the Launder, unlike the Gentilwoman, is able to challenge the existing code of beauty and to suggest her own standard: one consistent with health, hygiene and activity, in which it would not matter if "thy face were sonneburned" as long as one's clothes were clean.

Which way of life is better? Heywood's bias should be very obvious, considering his didactic purpose in presenting populist values to the court, but the débat's status as one of many episodes in the play allows no firm conclusion. However, while summing up before Jupiter, Mery Reporte describes the Launder seriously in terms of her profession, and the Gentilwoman somewhat ambiguously as "a goodly dame, an idyll thinge, iwis!", which seems to indicate a final

judgement. Also, the Launder's final comment, even when she offers thanks to Jupiter on behalf of all laundresses, is partly addressed to the Gentilwoman:

... such as I am - who be as good as you -
His highnes shall be suer on, I make a vow. (113)

I am sure that Heywood, as well as using the Launder to voice some of Thomas More's ideas to the aristocracy in general, was also using her for a particular purpose; to show the ladies of the court the greater freedom enjoyed by their social inferiors because of their economic independence.

Despite his populist roots and skill in imparting the values of the middle classes, Heywood also examines subjects which were entirely the province of the court. In The Play of Love, four characters discuss romantic love as understood in European court circles, from different points of view. One is a Lover Not Beloved, miserable because of his lack of success, one a contented Lover Beloved, another is the Vice, Neither Lover Nor Beloved, who has cynically pretended to be in love, and the only female character is the Beloved Not Loving, drawn from the long-standing tradition of the cruel lady who will not pity her languishing lover.

Heywood, however, while writing in a traditional form, is looking at the conventions of love in a radically different way. In some cases, he exposes the weaknesses of the convention by simple juxtaposition of much-voiced sentiments and implicit assumptions. For example, in his first speech, the Lover Not Beloved tells the audience that their presence means nothing to him, since only his lady exists for him. He complains of her cruelty in the face of his suffering, and in contrast, explains how completely he has given his life to her

For my hoole servyce and loue to that lady
Is gyven under such haboundant fashyon
That no tonge therof can make ryght relashyon. (114)

However, only six lines later, he ruins the effect of all this open-hearted devotion by revealing that he thinks he deserves a reward:

Even of very ryght in recompensyng
she ought for my loue agayne to be louyng. (115)

Heywood shows very clearly that while apparently freely and generously giving service, the lover has been adding up a sort of emotional bill, which his lady has a duty to settle. The terms are of legal and financial obligation: the lover has a right to a recompense, which the lady ought to honour. In fact, this was a point generally agreed by Renaissance writers, that "a potent reason for the return of love is the moral obligation which the lady incurs by accepting the devotion and service of her lover". Ruth Kelso gives the following summary of opinions about the lady's obligation to love in return.

How, in the name of courtesy, faith, loyalty, gratitude, the virtues that should adorn beauty and win love and reverence, should women who are loved not be bound to love in return? To refuse is to show pride, incompatible with womanly sweetness, cruelty - a most unnatural reward for the lover's desire to do good, and ingratitude - brutish and shameful sin, the worst vice in a woman beloved, in whom nothing is more beautiful than a grateful mind, and correspondingly nothing more ugly than an ungrateful. Well deserved is the blame and hatred thus engendered. Indeed men have a right to demand return of love. By nature and desire for good they must love, but love that feeds on love if denied its nourishment either dies or becomes a sterile kind of love. Again, if men are bound by nature to serve women, what merit is there in serving faithfully unless women are obligated to reward them? Women are not required to love as fervently as men... but when love is known for honest love and the necessary resemblance is present, obligation rests upon the beloved to relieve her lover's pain. (116)

Since many of Heywood's humorous plots depend on his view of women as free and independent, it is not surprising that he regarded this imposition of moral obligation upon a woman by someone else's obsession with her, an action over which she had no control, as unrealistic and unfair. In order to expose the falseness of these ideas, Heywood introduces a lady Beloved Not Loving, who promises "Brefely by reason I shall the truth avauce" and proceeds to explode the myth of the cruel lady.

Firstly, the lady outlines her predicament.

I saye I am louyd of a certayne man
Whom for no sewt I can favour agayne
And that haue I tolde hym syns his sewt began
A thousand tymes but euery tyme in vayne.
For never seaseth his tonge to complayne
And ever on tale whiche I neuer con flee
For ever in maner wher I am is he.

(117)

The lady's inability to respond has no effect on her lover's ardour. Since his love began without any encouragement from her, presumably in response to her beauty or some other factor outwith her control, her own feelings are simply irrelevant. Moreover, rejected lovers were not supposed to give up easily, and indeed, literary opinion allowed them to indulge in behaviour which was normally considered reprehensible, such as "following their lady continually, always humbling themselves, spending the whole night sighing and weeping by her door, serving her in any way however low, praising her without being held a flatterer". This was intended to impress upon the lady the quality of her admirer's passion, but in practice, must often have had the less noble effect of wearing down her resistance. Certainly Heywood's lady is unimpressed with this degree of persistence, which makes her bored and thoroughly upset. She describes the tedium of listening to the same plea repeated interminably, and the misery of her suitor's repeated visits:

... when I do remayne
In hys presens, in dedly payne I soiorne
And absent, halfe ded in feare of hys retourne. (118)

The lover was also expected to cultivate pathetic speeches, and an unhealthy appearance in order to indicate loss of appetite and sleepless nights on his lady's behalf, to arouse her pity which was thought to be akin to love. Heywood's lady shows the falseness of this idea. Although love has always been out of the question, Beloved Not Loving finds her suitor's appearance pitiable, indeed harrowing. She describes how

His gastfull loke so pale that onneth I
Dare for myne eares cast toward hym an eye
And whan I do that eye my thought presentyth.
Stryght to my hart and thus my payne augmentyth. (119)

According to tradition, this is a cruel lady because she refuses to return her admirer's love; yet Heywood presents her as sympathetic in the true sense of the word. She is much affected by her suitor's haggard appearance, and finds his pathetic speeches equally emotionally penetrating, explaining

Smale were the quantyte of my peynfull smerte
If hys ianglynge percyd no further than mine erys
But through myn erys dyrectly to myn herte
Percyth his wordys euyne lyke as many sperys,
By whycke I haue spent so mony and suche terys
That were they all red as they be all whyte
The blood of my herte had be gone o thys quyte. (120)

Perhaps it is not too far fetched to suggest that Heywood portrays the suitor's almost brutal persistence as a sort of psychological rape (especially since it was believed in the Middle Ages that conception could take place through the ear). In any case, it is an experience which leaves the lady feeling as if her heart's blood has gone; she is completely emotionally drained.

The rest of the play, although fascinating, is less important from the view of this study, since the happy lover's lady and the adventuress to whom the Vice pretended devotion are, predictably, respectively as happy and true or as promiscuous and cynical as the men who describe them. Heywood's most interesting achievement in The Play of Love is his investigation of an aspect of the courtly love tradition which, while ostensibly elevating women to the status of goddesses, must have often made them its victims. It seems that Heywood may have achieved this understanding by asking himself what it must be like to be a woman beset by a suitor, especially since, during the course of the play, the lady repeatedly asks her male companions to exercise their imaginations. She tries to convey the tortuous effect of repeated entreaties by saying

Nowe, if you to here one thyng every where
Contrary to your appetite sholde be led
Were it but a mouse to sholde pepe in your ere
Or alwey to harpe on a crust of bred
Howe coulde you lyke such harpyng at your hed? (121)

Later, she tries to make the men appreciate her plight by asking them to imagine

... that one to you love did bere
A woman that so ugly were
That eche kys of her mouth called you to gybbes fest,
Or that your fancy abhorred her. (122)

Heywood, having imagined the problems of a lady Beloved Not Loving, through her asks the men on stage and in the audience to imagine the difficulty of being completely unable to respond to affection which is no less repulsive for being repeatedly proffered. Surely few men could do this and still remain convinced that a woman's inability to return her suitor's love was evidence of ingratitude and perversity. Heywood, by demonstrating that under similar circumstances, men feel much as women do, forces men to accord women the emotional freedom they consider theirs by right.

The radical nature of this use of the imagination to prove similarity between the sexes is obvious when one compares it with contemporary religious philosophy, which still asserted that women were different from men in every respect, and reinforces the view of Heywood's attitude to women as one of extreme egalitarianism. His treatment of male and female characters as people with equal potential for good or bad behaviour may well have been influenced by his upbringing in a social class in which men and women had a comparable degree of economic power, and were therefore equally free to develop as they wished.

The playwrights of the More circle, then, succeeded in presenting their courtly audience with an astoundingly vivid and varied picture of the nature and potential of women. This view, as we have seen, was derived from the place Thomas More gave to women in his Utopian philosophy, and from the practical equality possessed by contemporary working women, because of their greater economic independence.

However, as Stone makes clear, the flowering of a liberal education for women and the upsurge of pro-feminist thought which accompanied it, was very brief indeed, lasting only about forty years. It was to be overtaken by the educational theories which went with the Protestant ideal of harmonious matrimony, that a girl's education should prepare her for running a household and obeying her husband, not to take issue with men as their intellectual equal.

This short set of interludes of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century represents a unique survival from this brief phase, and a tantalising glimpse of how attitudes to women might have developed if the confident predictions of the English Humanist educators, that intellectual parity and companionship between men and women would soon be the norm, had been fulfilled. (123)

CONCLUSION

Pre-Reformation drama, because of its close connection with the Church, closely reflects traditional religious views of women. The Mystery Plays offered the contrasting figures of the Virgin Mary and Eve: an unattainable ideal of sinless womanhood and picture of the flawed, culpable reality. However, the comic episodes, which might owe their origins to the Church's interest in demonstrating the inferiority of marriage to celibacy, offered an area in which a more positive view of marriage and of women could be developed. The Wakefield Master in particular seems to have had a humorous but sympathetic view of women, which comes across vividly from Mrs. Noah and Gyll's pride in their achievements. They are women who know they are essential to a working partnership, and that this means they are not afraid of the occasional fight or of asserting their worth.

Similarly, attitudes to women in the religious-based Morality plays are equally dominated by current religious beliefs, but more particularly those which affect men. As long as chastity is the prime value, the main female character is Lechery, thrusting herself between the hero and God. Once marriage becomes a value, women can become identified with the virtues the hero can choose to espouse. As a result, women are seen as not necessarily synonymous with vice, but nevertheless, the association of women with sex continues, with most of the virtues represented by women being sexual ones. Most significantly, apart from Mary Magdalene, the Morality plays are largely concerned with the influence of women to help or hinder the salvation of a man's soul - a preoccupation which reflects the lingering influence of the early Church's view of women primarily as a visual phenomenon provided to put men's souls at risk, while possibly not having souls themselves.

The most revolutionary influences in moving away from this view of women are those of Humanism and education. Even the early Moralities Nature and Wit and Science, which originate in an educated, secular setting, are remarkable for the more positive views of women and marriage which accompany their concern with the wholeness, rather than just the holiness, of the individual personality, and with the values of education.

The remarkable plays which originated within the More circle demonstrate the full development of these influences. Through their contact with ideas like those of More's Utopian philosophy, which gave equal value to work and education, this small group of dramatists transcended the limited stereotypes of women offered by their own religious establishment. Finding that reasoning and argument are learned abilities, rather than ones in which women are naturally deficient, they created a drama in which women were rational and articulate, whether through education or through sheer force of personality.

This view of the potential of womanhood passed as quickly as the belief that liberal education was desirable for women. It was replaced by the Protestant Reformers' ideal of the submissive wife, in whom silence and willingness to accept the will of her husband were of prime importance. Clearly, an education which encouraged independent thought and argument would have been anathema to such an ideal, and the education available to women was reduced accordingly. The image of women in drama was also modified, to present maidens and wives with examples of chastity and obedience, rather than of independence and wit, as role-models to aspire to. An index of the magnitude of the change is that the women in the More circle plays are honest in the way we understand the word today: full of integrity and truthfulness, sometimes even outspoken frankness. In the later Testing Plays, though, 'honesty' clearly means chastity,

and the silence and seclusion which foster and emphasise it. It is difficult to identify many female characters who are honest in the same way as the heroines in the drama of the More circle until many years later.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. John Langdon-Davies, A Short History of Women (London, 1928), p. 129 and 139.
2. Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex (London, 1976), p. 58.
3. Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, pp. 50-59.
4. This idea is suggested by Anthony Burgess, The Kingdom of the Wicked (London, 1985).
5. Clement of Alexandria, Pedagogia, quoted by John Langdon-Davies, A Short History of Women, p. 139.
6. Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman (Cambridge, 1980), p. 8.
7. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, 1920), p. 313.
8. Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman, p. 16.
9. The Book of Vices and Virtues, edited by W. Nelson Francis, Early English Text Society, Original Series No. 217 (Oxford, 1942), p. 247.
10. Reginald Pecock, A Reule of Crysten Religioun, edited by William Cabell Greet, Early English Text Society, No. 171 (London, 1927), p. 553.
11. Corinthians 14.34, Authorised Version.
12. G.G. Coulson, Medieval Panorama: The Horizons of Thought (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 266-67.
13. G. Rattray Taylor, Sex in History (London, 1953), pp. 70-74.
14. Eileen Power, The Position of Women, in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, edited by C.G. Crump and E.F. Jacob (Oxford, 1926), pp. 407-20.
15. A Hundred Merry Tales, edited by P.M. Zall (Lincoln, USA, 1963), pp. 115-16.
16. M.D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 22-23.
17. Ordo Repraesentationis Adae in Medieval Drama, edited by David Bevington (Boston, 1975), p. 84.
18. Ordo Repraesentationis Adae, p. 82.

19. The Cardmakers' Play in The York Plays, edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith (New York, 1963), p. 15.
20. The Norwich Grocers' Play (Text B, Prologue B) in Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments, edited by Norman Davis, Early English Text Society, Supplement 1 (Oxford, 1970), p. 12.
21. The Drapers' Play in The Chester Mystery Cycle, edited by R.M. Lumiansky and D. Mills, Early English Text Society, Special Series 3 (Oxford, 1974), p. 21.
22. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, p. 315.
23. Ordo Repraesentationis Adae, p. 92.
24. The Creation and Fall in the Corpus Christi Play of the English Middle Ages, edited by R.T. Davies (London, 1972), p. 79.
25. The Creation and Fall, p. 83.
26. The Drapers' Play in The Chester Mystery Cycle, p. 27.
27. Ordo Repraesentationis Adae, p. 103.
28. The Armourers' Play: Adam and Eve driven from Eden, in The York Plays, edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith, p. 30.
29. The Drapers' Play in The Chester Mystery Cycle, p. 28.
30. The Book of Vices and Virtues, p. 43.
(Gynne: snare.)
31. The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry (C. 1372), edited by Thomas Wright, Early English Text Society, Original Series No. 33 (London, 1868, revised edition 1906), p. 63.
32. Ancrene Wisse, in John Langdon-Davies, A Short History of Women, p. 189.
33. The Drapers' Play in The Chester Mystery Cycle, p. 28.
34. Middle English Sermons, edited by Woodburn O. Ross, Early English Text Society (London, 1940), p. 332.
35. The Annunciation (Wakefield) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 357.
36. The Annunciation, p. 358.
37. Mary Magdalene (Digby M.S.) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 703.

38. Presentation and Purification (N-Town) in The Corpus Christi Play of the English Middle Ages, edited by R.T. Davies, p. 189.
39. The Incarnation (N-Town) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 356.
40. D. Bevington, Medieval Drama, p. 356.
41. Birth of the Son, in The Corpus Christi Play of the English Middle Ages, edited by R.T. Davies, p. 167.
42. The Scourging (Wakefield) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 564. (Forfare: destroy.)
43. Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman, p. 23.
44. The Newcastle Play: Noah's Ark; or The Shipwrights' Ancient Play or Dirge (B. Edited Text), in Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments, p. 28. (Whunt: quaint (obscure dialect))
45. Non-Cycle Plays, p. 31.
46. Non-Cycle Plays, p. 30.
47. M.D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, p. 108.
48. M.D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, p. 53.
49. Eileen Power, The Position of Women in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, p. 416.
50. Processus Noe cum Filiis (Wakefield) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 297.
51. Processus Noe, p. 302.
52. Processus Noe, p. 302.
53. The Second Shepherds' Pageant (Wakefield) in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 397.
54. Second Shepherds' Pageant, p. 397.
55. Second Shepherds' Pageant, p. 398.
56. Eileen Power, The Position of Women in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, p. 432.
57. Noah and his Wife, the Flood and its Waning in York Plays, edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith, p. 49.

58. The Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee in The Chester Mystery Cycle, edited by R.M. Lumiansky and D. Mills, line 229. (Alyte: alike.)
59. Eileen Power, The Position of Women in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, p. 411.
60. The Harrowing of Hell in The Chester Mystery Cycle, edited by R.M. Lumiansky and D. Mills, p. 337.
61. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977), p. 135.
62. The Book of Vices and Virtues, p. 43.
63. The Book of Vices and Virtues, p. 44.
64. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), p. 40.
65. Mary Magdalene, p. 730. David Bevington glosses this passage: "(She is) the precious cinnabar (a reddish metal or resin used as a purge) to seek through and cleanse the body; she is the musk used medicinally as an antispasmodic, the gentle gillyflower used for heart pain."
66. Wisdom in The Macro Plays, edited by Mark Eccles, Early English Text Society, No. 262 (London, 1969), p. 115.
67. The Castle of Perseverance in The Macro Plays, edited by Mark Eccles, p. 14.
68. The Castle of Perseverance, p. 20.
69. The Trial of Treasure, in Dodsley's Old English Plays, edited by William Hazlitt, III (London, 1874), p. 48.
70. Henry Medwall, Nature in Recently Rediscovered 'Lost' Tudor Plays, edited by John S. Farmer, Early English Dramatists (London, 1907), p. 78.
71. Henry Medwall, Nature, p. 95.
72. Mary Magdalene, p. 707.
73. The author of Ancrene Wisse frequently advises against too much concern for one's own health and beauty, warning that

hire sulf bi-holden hire owune honden hwite
deð herm to moni ancre. þet haueb hem to
veire. ase þeo þet þeoð for-idled. heo

schulden schreapien eueriche deie De eorðe up
of hore putte per heo schulden rotien inne.

- The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe, edited by Mabel Day, Early English Text Society, Original Series, No. 225 (London, 1952), p. 51.
74. Mary Magdalene, p. 745.
75. Wisdom, p. 129.
76. I Corinthians 7.1-9, Authorised Version.
77. Youth in Tudor Interludes, edited by Peter Happe (London, 1972), p. 126.
78. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 135-37.
79. John Redford, Wit and Science in Tudor Interludes, edited by Peter Happe, p. 189.
80. Sir David Lindsay, A Satire of the Three Estates, edited by Matthew McDiarmid (London, 1967), p. 95.
81. Lindsay, A Satire of the Three Estates, p. 155.
82. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 203.
83. Thomas More, Utopia in The Complete Works of Thomas More, edited by E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter (Yale, 1965), IV, pp. 167-69.
84. Thomas More, Utopia, pp. 63-69.
85. Thomas More, Utopia, pp. 69-71.
86. Richard Hyrde, Preface to A devout treatise upon the Paternoster made fyrst in latyn by the moost famous doctour mayster Erasmus Rotorodamus and toured into Englishe by a yong vertuous and well learned gentylwoman of xix yere of age 1529 in Foster Watson, Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women (London, 1912), p. 135.
87. Martin Fleischer, Radical Reform and Political Persuasion in the Life and Writings of Thomas More (Geneva 1973), p. 137.
88. E.M.G. Routh, Thomas More and his Friends (Oxford, 1934), p. 126.
89. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucre in Tudor Interludes, edited by Peter Happe, p. 110.

90. Horatio Fusco, La Vedova in Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Illinois, 1956), p. 92.
91. Doctrine for the Lady, p. 92.
92. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 99.
93. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 107.
94. Foster Watson, Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, p. 111.
95. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 100.
96. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 109.
97. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 106.
98. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 106.
99. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 93.
100. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady, p. 98.
101. Henry Medwall, Fulgens and Lucrez, p. 91.
102. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady, p. 81.
103. Ruth Kelso gives examples of these books, the most complete being Orazio Lombardelli's Directions to his young wife as to her wifely Duties (1577).
Ruth Kelso comments

One is tempted to read between the lines that sixteen-year-old Delia, not having readily enough accepted the overlordship of her husband, Orazio Lombardelli, had been left alone in the country to ponder well what her behaviour was to be. From the city, where he says he has been delayed by various duties, he sends his admonitions on the duty of a married woman, in which she will particularly note the steps which appear most needful to her... Let her rivet closely in her mind that by God's order and no merit of her own, she has been provided with a husband such as himself... She must be contented, or offend God and risk punishment. She ought to hold herself very happy to have to obey a worthy person...

pp. 95-96.

Delia was apparently impressed by this line of reasoning, since when she died in childbirth at the age of nineteen, Orazio wrote to his uncle that she had been an "exemplar of goodness", and was much missed by all his family.

104. John Heywood, The Play of the Wether in Medieval Drama, edited by D. Bevington, p. 1018.
105. John Heywood, The Play of the Wether, p. 1018.
106. Thomas More, Utopia, p. 241.
107. John Heywood, The Play of the Wether, p. 1017.
108. R.W. Bolwell, The Life and Works of John Heywood (New York, 1921), p. 97.
109. John Heywood, The Play of the Wether, p. 1018.
110. E.J. Burford, Bawds and Lodgings (London, 1976), p. 122.
111. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady, p. 81.
112. Foster Watson, Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, p. 203.
113. John Heywood, The Play of the Wether, p. 1027.
114. John Heywood, A Play of Love, prepared by J.A.B. Somerset and checked by F.M. Mares and the general editor, Malone Society (Oxford, 1978), line 41.
115. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 47.
116. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady, p. 151.
117. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 102.
118. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 153.
119. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 880.
120. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 123.
121. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 885.
122. John Heywood, A Play of Love, line 1060.
123. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 203.

Chapter 2

HOMILETIC DRAMA AFTER THE REFORMATION:

PLAYS OF THE EDUCATION AND TESTING OF THE PERFECT WIFE

INTRODUCTION

In an earlier section, I noted the way in which the image of woman in drama changed from that of the evil temptress to that of the good wife, with its implied admission that women could exert a good influence, as the Catholic ideal of celibacy came to be replaced by the Protestant ideal of holy matrimony. Paradoxically, it was this uplifting of the status of marriage which came to restrict the "good woman" to being good only in a very limited way, and produced an image of the ideal wife which came to be almost as restrictive and frustrating as the myth of the "woman of ancyen malice" which it replaced.

Before the Reformation, marriage was regarded as a compromise God allowed man to make with his flawed earthly nature, which was permissible because it helped to avoid fornication, and allowed for the procreation of children. It was regarded as being completely inferior to celibacy, and, being a flawed and imperfect state by definition, marriage was reasonably expected to include some unpleasant elements, such as discord and arguments. The mastery-struggle was familiar to everyone from comic ballads and plays and was regarded as inevitable, a cause for humour rather than shame. Folklorists teased women for nagging, but also advised them never to stop, lest they be carried off by Chichevache, or one of the other mythical monsters said to be permanently lean due to their habit of preying exclusively on patient, meek wives: perhaps people felt that allowing wives to have their say maintained the proper balance in marriage at a time when both partners were

likely to be important to the family's economy, but only the husband had any legal power.

All this changed with the Reformation, which established an entirely new ideology of marriage, as a holy state instituted by God as the normal way of life for virtuous Christians. It was to be, as Archbishop Cranmer's new prayer book of 1549 said, for "mutual society, help and comfort" as well as procreation, and should be Godly, loving and above all, harmonious. Stark commercialism came to be frowned upon as a poor motive for marriage, but obedience to the wishes of one's parents was to remain the most important factor in the selection of a partner.

It seems that this more humane attitude to marriage would have benefited women, but for various complex reasons it had the opposite effect. The necessity for marriage to be harmonious and well-ordered, like all God's creation, was perhaps the most important idea. The Reformers were well aware that harmony can be achieved only by adjustment and concession, but rather than thinking that this should be mutual, they decided that it should be the task only of the inferior partner, the wife. To promote the harmony of the family, her duty was to submit herself completely to her husband, to obey him in everything, and to love him without question, adopting his views and attitudes as completely as she adopted his way of life.

This idea was reinforced by several other characteristics of the Reformation. The Reformers themselves were often firm believers in female inferiority: Luther in particular is remembered for his deduction that women's physical differences from men was a sign that they possess "little wisdom and should stay in the home", and his conviction that "Eve is inferior to Adam as the moon is to the sun". Also, the Reformers' insistence on the absolute authority of the Bible led to the revival of many useful texts,

"proving" on divine authority that women were weaker vessels, and that God had ordained their subjection in kindly providence for this frailty. The argument that Eve's sin justified wifely subjection became more widely used, and the spread of this idea was accelerated by the Homily on Marriage (one of the eighteen homilies read in rotation in churches throughout England after the edict of 1562 which made their use statutory), which reminded the population that

the woman is a weak creature not endowed with like strength and constancy of mind... they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be, and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions. (1)

Wives were told that

ye be in subjection to obey your husbands... for the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church. (2)

This idea of the divine hierarchy, and the treason against husband, father and God committed by opposing it, added the fear of divine wrath to many women's submission. This religious reason for wifely obedience was reinforced by the Protestant idea of the "priesthood of all believers" and that the family was a religious unit: whereas before the Reformation, a woman could regard her family and religious duties as different in kind, and could even appeal to the priest for support if she disagreed with her husband, after the Reformation, the husband represented God's authority within the household.(3)

Social factors also added to the difficulties experienced by women at this time. Marriage was at a bewildering half-way stage, neither mercenary nor free. A virtuous girl had to accept her parents' choice of husband and had to love him as well, for no other reason that it was her duty to

feel such love. Failure in this respect was accounted a woman's own fault, and wives would accept much, rather than start a disagreement which might be construed as lack of love.

Observing such an exacting standard of wifely conduct required careful preparation, and accordingly, the education and upbringing necessary to prepare girls for their vocation as wives became a topic of great importance. Sadly, the emphasis in education changed completely from the academic ideals so confidently envisaged by Thomas More, whose theories produced a great number of educated English noblewomen for a period of only about forty years. After this, the feminine ideal was changed by the influence of the cult of Platonic love on a courtly minority, and of the Protestant ideal on almost every other class, both of which belittled the worth of academic achievement in women. Although the Platonic lover was supposed to be well-educated, sensitive and cultured, his lady was required only to display skill in the social graces of music, painting, dancing and needlework, since anything more intellectually arresting might disturb her lover's concentration upon her beauty which was necessary to his spiritual advancement. Meanwhile, the Protestant ideal of female virtue varied little from Luther's early pronouncement that "Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children", and thus education for women of all classes came to concentrate more and more upon gentle accomplishments and "huswifery". Needlework was particularly recommended, since it bridged the gap between domestic labour and decorative art, and was therefore felt to be an honest activity, suitable for women of every social degree. Spinning, too, was felt to be a sensible accomplishment, of which any woman should be capable.

Some young women still received some formal education, but its nature was defined strictly in relation to the main

issue, which was the protection of their chastity. A girl of noble family would be taught to read, but her reading would be restricted to scripture and other works of an improving nature: romances and poetry were out of the question because of their tendency to foster corruption. In general, though, the idea of virtuous upbringing had supplanted that of formal education, and it was considered most important that a young girl should be taught her religious duties, the supreme importance of chastity of deed and of reputation, and the necessity of complete obedience to her parents, as a preparation for her obedience to the husband she would eventually accept at their command. Dolce summarised the necessary lessons for a virtuous girl as religion and household management, since "constant devotion alone can prevent sinful thoughts that may lead to sinful deeds, and household activities prevent idleness". Once again, the chief virtue of these lessons was that they encouraged the chastity of thought and deed so necessary to the virtuous wife.

Contemporary drama reflects not only this interest in the ideal wife and the education necessary to train her for her vocation, but in another factor, that of the necessity for the wife to persevere in her virtue, not only because her duties were difficult, but because she could expect criticism, slander and all the consequences of loss of reputation if she ever failed, or even appeared to be failing to observe the laws of chastity and obedience. As Ruth Kelso remarks, so difficult was the task and so critical the world that

one finally comes to feel that it was a sort of pitched battle between a woman and the rest of her world, including at times her husband, a world of Peeping Toms on the alert to catch her off guard. (4)

The plays reflect this idea of married life as a series of tests of the wife's virtue, sometimes imposed by her

husband, sometimes by the threatening forces of the outside world, tests in which success comes from selflessness and tenacity in maintaining the code of behaviour learned in girlhood as being appropriate to the perfect wife.

EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING

Sixteenth century drama mirrors contemporary ideas about the crucial importance of a young girl's education and upbringing to her eventual moral well-being remarkably faithfully. Drama reflects the concerns of the moral writers of the time so exactly that almost every factor they felt to be important in a girl's education is represented in the surviving plays from this period.

A very early example of the importance of the themes of upbringing and education in the drama can be found in John Rastell's moral interlude Calisto and Melebea (1525). Rastell radically adapted the Spanish picaresque/romantic novel La Celestina to produce this early play of chastity testing. The heroine, Melebea, who in the scheme of the play typifies "the beaute and good properties of women", almost fails the test of the assault made on her chastity by the combined forces of courtly love and the machinations of the criminal underworld, despite her liberal education and religious beliefs. But she is retrieved from the brink of sin by her father, Danio, who rejoices that the habit of daily prayer he inculcated in his daughter "kepte her from actuall dede of shame" and also "preservyd her good name". He then emphasises the moral of the story, that religious instruction will help "vyrgyns and fayre maydens all... to withstand all evyll temptaciouns".

The importance of education and upbringing is illustrated not only by narrow escapes, but more commonly by cautionary tales illustrating the ill-effects of rejecting education. One such awful warning is given by the fate of Dalila in the Preaty Interlude called Nice Wanton (1550), a moral play concerning the importance of proper upbringing for both sexes. Dalila, though, is of special concern to her conscientious brother Barnabas, since he detects in her not only the criminal tendencies she shares with another

brother, Ismael, but moral laxness, indicated by her eagerness to leave school because her complexion may be spoiled by exposure on the way there, and penchant for bawdy songs. Barnabas tries to redress the balance by reminding her that "Sobrenes becommeth maydes alway" and urging her "Leave apace, syster, and after to spyne and sowe/And other honest huswifely poyntes to knowe". As well as showing the foolishness of rejecting education, Dalila's decline and shameful death as a beggarly, syphilitic whore illustrates the terrible consequences of an over-indulgent upbringing, as she laments

My parentes did tidle me - they were to blame -
Insteade of correction, in yll did me maintain. (5)
I fell to naught and shall dye with shame!

More often, though, the audience is shown the good results of careful upbringing in the plays about women who successfully withstand life's trials. Often this is made more clear by showing the girl's education in progress: in Godly Queen Hester (1527), Mardocheus gives his adopted daughter Hester some last-minute advice before she goes to meet the King. John Phillip's Patient Grissil (1559) and Virginia in R.B.'s Apus and Virginia (1564) are both instructed by their dying mothers. In Jocasta (1566), the Bailo lectures Antigone on the frailty of reputation, and in Robert Greene's James the Fourth (1590), the departing King of England pauses to advise his daughter, the new Queen of Scotland, of what will be expected of her. And, of course, the education extends to the audience, who will be instructed not only by the moral drawn from the plot, but by special homilies within the play, and by didactic prologues and epilogues.

Possibly the most widely discussed aspect of upbringing in Tudor drama is the subject of the need for corporal punishment in early childhood, a topic whose importance was growing in proportion to the spread of the belief that

children were likely to be full of Original Sin, which would manifest itself as "a stubbornness and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must in the first place be broken and beaten down". Pride, the sin of Lucifer and Eve, was particularly threatening because it implied a wish to rise from one's own position in God's carefully ordered hierarchy, and there was a widespread fear that the child would dominate the parents, unless they first firmly subordinated its will to theirs. Children's innate sinfulness could be eradicated only by the fear of God and by severe punishment.(6)

This view of corporal punishment is reflected in contemporary drama. Delivering the Epilogue in Nice Wanton, Barnabas exhorts parents not to neglect their responsibilities to their children "but chastice them before they be sore infect", and in John Phillip's Commodye of pacient and meeke Grissill (1559), Iannickle and Gautier forget their class differences in mutual enthusiasm for the same topic. Both believe that

Wheare children are not punished for their shame
Theare mischiefe to springe doth fully beginne,(7)

a tendency which can be counteracted only if you "Keepe them alwayes under lawfull correction" and "Instruct them to feare God, and their Parentes to obaye". If not, the children's innate pride will lead them "In the end to contemme their superiours".

It was doubly important for a girl to be well aware of her place in society and to renounce any self-will, since so much of her life's success would depend on obedience to her God, her parents and her husband. As Ruth Kelsø comments

Woman's whole life was a lesson in submission to the will of another. Obedience, to win praise, had to be complete, unquestioning, and included the acceptance of correction, even blows, in all humility, subjection, fear, sweetness

and patience without provoking either parents or later, husband, by talking back, babbling or running away. For... God has commanded entire subjection for women(8)

Although all the homiletic plays are concerned with the topic of obedience to some degree, the Commodye of pacient and meeke Grissill covers it in the greatest detail. Grissill herself explains her obedience to God who

Hath formed mee of slimie Claye,
Then whye shoulde I in ought repine,
Or seeke his will to disobaye:
Be it far from me to do such ill,
As to contende against his will (9)

Later, her mother reminds her to

Be not hye minded, Let not Pride infeckt thee,
Let God in his wrath with his scourge correckt thee. (10)

The ideal of humility and obedience includes an acceptance of punishment, which seems to be extended to filial and wifely behaviour.

Grissill's fear of God informs her obedience to her parents, whom He has authorised to rule over her. She is well aware that

I am bound to dread and feare
Them tide and time and euerie hour:
For God to me hath giuen such charge. (11)

The necessity for filial obedience is later reinforced by the words of the dying mother, who instructs Grissill to "Grudge not in ought against thy fathers will/But be alwaies readie his mynde to fulfill" and to "Loue and obay him giue him due veneration". Grissill later passes on this instruction to the audience, telling them

Let all Children bee mindefull of obedience in deede:
Flye selfwill, which doth stoubernes ingender,

To honor your Parentes do dayly remember:
 Be they neuer so poore or indigent...
 To feede and cloth thee, their care did neuer cease,
 Relieue and comfort them, so end thy dayes in peace,
 If not, look for Gods scourge and curssed maledictyon:
 Which shall fall uppon thee, for thy stubberne infection.

(12)

Fear of God motivates wifely submission, as well as filial duty. Gautier is well aware of this, as his description of his ideal wife reveals:

She feareth God, she dreads his name, she leades a Godly
life,

 She will as dutie byndes, hir spoused make obaye
 From husbandes heastes at no time she for anye cause will
straye. (13)

The good Renaissance wife owed unquestioning obedience to her husband, as well as to God. Like God's, her husband's love for her could be seen as bestowed by grace and not desert, and deserving obedience and love in return. Mardocheus explains this concept to Godly Queen Hester in the following terms:

Yf the kinge chose you to his queene
 It is of his goodnes, bountie and grace
 And for none youre merites, the truthe to bee seene
 Therefore to hym repaye must you needes obedience
 Trew love and kyndnes, above personnes all.

(14)

A very similar attitude in real life can be found in Lombardelli's advice to his young wife Delia that the wife must

... rivet closely in her mind that by God's order and no merit of her own she has been provided with such a husband... she must be contented or offend God and risk punishment.

(15)

Homiletic drama includes several instances in which the principle of fearing God and accepting his will without

question is applied to marriage, which will be discussed in a later section of this work.

As Ruth Kelso comments, "the end or crown of this training in obedience would come with the daughter's acceptance of her parents' choice of a husband for her".

In the drama, this exemplary meekness is displayed by Virginia, the exemplary daughter in Apilus and Virginia (1564), and Grissill. Both are initially as reluctant to marry as Vives, who thought that "it is not comely for a maid to desire marriage, and much less to show herself to long therefore", could have wished: Virginia through her contentment with chastity, and Grissill because of concern for her father. However, Virginia is aware that her filial duty may one day require her to marry:

When wedlocke doth require the same
With parentes loue and leaue
Yet obstinate I wyll not be
But willing will me yeeld
When you commaund and not before;
Then duety shall me sheeld.

(16)

Similarly, Grissill consents to marry Gautier only in obedience to her father's wishes.

Even more important than the inculcation of obedience in a marriageable girl was the teaching of regard for chastity, and for the safeguarding of reputation. This priority is reflected not only in the long series of plays dealing with threatened chastity, but in the episodes which deal specifically with education. Grissill in her song advises "ye Virgens all" to be sure to

Conserue and keepe virginite,
Your conscience do not pollute,
But walke in pure integrite,

All sinfull lust do cleane confute,
Fly such men as wold you allure
To spot with lust your liues so pure. (17)

Five years later, R. B. in his Prologue to the Tragicall Comedie of Apius and Virginia (1564), similarly instructs "Virgins you, oh ladies faire" to

Let not the blinded God of Love, as poets tearme him so,
Nor Venus with her venery, nor lechors, cause of wo,
Your virgins name to spot or file: deare dames, observe
the like
That faire Verginia did observe, who rather wish the knife
Of fathers hand hir life to ende then spot her chastety. (18)

In other plays, similar advice is given to the heroine rather than the audience, as in the Pleasant Commodie of faire Em the Millers Daughter of Manchester (1590), in which Em's father advises her to

Regard thine honour. Let not vehement sighes
Nor earnest names importing feruent loue
Render thee subiect to the wrath of lust:
For that transformed to former sweete delight
Will bring thy bodie and thy soul to shame. (19)

He acknowledges, though, that this caution is necessary for practical reasons as well as spiritual welfare. Even "such intycing men" want pure wives, irrespective of their own inclinations, and are sure to

Prefer the most refusers to the choyce
Of such a soule as yeilded what they thought. (20)

This double standard was especially exacting for women, who could not be too careful not only to safeguard their virginity, but to give no cause for suspicion. For both these reasons, Vives recommended that girls and even married women should stay at home as much as possible, venturing outside only to attend church. This standard of behaviour is reflected in several plays, whose heroines are

glimpsed on the way to church, like Virginia. This degree of seclusion was necessary, according to Vives, because "nothing is more fragile than the fame and reputation of a woman", a statement upon which Barbaro elaborated, claiming that

No woman can be counted wholly chaste... if a breath of suspicion falls on her, and suspicion rises from the visible things that modesty is to rule. Let a woman be immodest in behaviour, talk and dress, and she will be suspected of grave faults. (21)

This point of view is echoed in the drama by the advice given Antigone in Jocasta (1566), by the Bailo when he encounters her out of doors. This occurrence prompts him first to enquire

... what cause hath moued now
So chaste a maide to set hir daintie foote
Ouer the thresholde of hir secrete lodge,

and then to explain that

It standes not with the honor of your state
Thus to be seene suspiciously abrode:
For vulgar tongues are armed euermore
With slanderous brute to bleamishe the renoume
Of vertues dames, which though at first it spring
Of slender cause, yet doth it swell so fast,
As in short space it filleth euerie eare
With swift reporte of vnderdeserued blame:
You cannot be to curious of your name:
Fond shewe of euill (though still the minde be chast)
Decayes the credit oft, that Ladies had,
Sometimes the place presumes a wanton mynde:
Repayre sometymes of some, doth hurt their honor:
Sometimes the light and garishe proude attire
Persuades a yelding bent of pleasing youthes.
The voyce that goeth of your vnspotted fame,
Is like a tender floure, that with the blast
Of euerie little winde doth fade away. (22)

In case its instructive nature should be overlooked, this passage is glossed "A glasse for yong women".

Why is such caution necessary for a woman? As Vives explains, "People require perfection of her and at the same time are suspicious of her and ready to slander her". All interpretations of her behaviour were likely to be hostile, and whatever she said was also likely to be misconstrued:

If thou talke little in companie folkes thinke thou canst but little good: if thou speake much, they reckon thee light: if thou speake uncunningly, they count thee dull witted: if thou speake cunningly thou shalt be counted but a shrew: if thou answere not quickly, thou shalt be called proude or ill brought up: if thou answere they shalle saye thou wilt bee soone ouercome: if thou sit with demure countenance, thou art called a dissembler; if thou make much moving, they will call thee foolish(23)

Since a woman's speech was even more prone to misconstruction than her actions, the question arose of whether girls should be taught to speak out or to keep silent. The moral writers were divided on this issue. Some eulogised silence as the most lovely ornament of a maiden, while others thought that women should have opportunities to speak up and demonstrate their prudence, and most compromised by declaring that a woman's words should be few, but full of wisdom. In the drama this sentiment is echoed by Patient Grissill's mother, who advises her

Be sloe to speake let thy wordes be wittye
For, for a Damsell to haue manie words it is unfyttie.

(24)

On the other hand, in the earlier Enterprise of Godly Queene Hester (1527), the heroine proves herself worthy of her royal husband through "Her lernyng and her language eloquent" in giving a discourse on the duties of a queen. It is important to remember, though, that in 1527 the influence of the More circle and their liberal views was still strong, and formal education for women was still approved and admired. It was then still considered a great honour

for a woman to be described, like Hester, as "in learninge and litterature, profoundly seene".

Later plays mirror the change in educational priorities from academic learning to "huswifery". Housework and sewing were recommended for young women of all social classes, since working girls needed them to earn a living and they were advisable accomplishments for young noblewomen. Furthermore, housework was seen as a good way of preventing idleness, which was regarded as particularly dangerous to young women. As the ranting Pedlar of The Pedlers Prophecie (1561) explains

For yong men to be idle it is intollerable
But maydens to be idle and of any state;
Is a thing most pernicious and detestable,
For idleness unto all mischife is an open gate. (25)

It is interesting to note that Patient Grissill who "neuer ceaseth toyling, but laboureth alwaye" practises industry for motives appropriate to aristocracy and peasantry alike. Before she marries Gautier, she is seen carrying water from the well "Now that my spinninge ended is and house full cleanly made/To voyde the gulphes of Idlenes, and use some honest trade", and after her fall from favour, she labours for the same reasons, explaining

These handes shunne idleness the Nurse of wickednes,
My Rocke and Distafe, are instruments doubtles,
With which as I haue in times past, so now in dead,
Will I labor and toile our bodies to fead. (26)

This mixture of reasons for industry is one of the play's many indications of the essential nobility of a girl of humble birth, a theme which Robert Greene was to adopt and develop years later. His portrayals of peasant girls like Margaret, who speaks in blank verse and recognises nobility in others, and of noble ladies like Ida (in James IV), whose dearest wish is to be poor but honest, are

characterised by his elevation of their household chores and needlework to the highest levels of poetic grace. His lavish descriptions of "how beauty played the huswife" in Margaret, as

... there among the cream bowls she did shine
As Pallas, mongst her princely huswifery.
She turned her smock over her lily arms
And dived them into milk to run her cheese;
But, whiter than the milk, her crystal skin,
Checked with lines of azure, made her blush
That art or nature durst bring for compare

(27)

and of Ida's embroidery, which achieves a magical life, and becomes in the words of the smitten Eustace, "true love in act", must have convinced more people of the truth of Vives' view that "no woman should be ignorant in these feates, that must be done by hand, no, not though shee be a Princesse or Queen" than many treatises on the subject.

Some dramatists, however, used comedy to point to flaws in the accepted code of religious and domestic education for women. Their comedies show men putting their faith in this model of education and being disappointed, and women who rebel against it. Gascoigne and Lyly show that the impression of perfection given by adherence to all the well-known rules of conduct can be misleading. In Gascoigne's Supposes (1566), Pasiphilo says of Polynesta

aske the neighbours and you shall heare very good report
of her: marke hir behaviours and you would haue iudged hir
very maydenly; seldome seene abroade but in place of
prayer, and there very devout, and no gaser of outwarde
sightes, no blaser of hir beautie aboue in the windows.

(28)

Nevertheless, this apparent paragon of all feminine virtues is not a virgin, and both Pasiphilo and her father are devastated by the shock. This may, however, be a satire on

feminine hypocrisy, not against the current educational ideal.

John Lyly has a similar joke at the expense of believers in convention in Mother Bombie (1589), when he describes the lovely Silena, whose silence and seclusion would have won the highest praise from Vives, "so faire that she is mewed up, and onely looketh out at the windowes". Appearances are deceptive, though. Silena, though pretty, is an idiot whose mental defect becomes obvious as soon as she speaks, and this apparently virtuous seclusion is an attempt on her father's part to make curious young men fall in love with glimpses of her beauty before they have the opportunity to assess her intelligence. The standard of chastity and seclusion for young women, supposedly invented to safeguard the interests of their prospective husbands, is being used to dupe them.

In the same play, the growing reliance of the leisured classes upon needlework rather than a literary education to keep their women out of mischief is also exposed to ridicule. Prisius, finding that his industrious daughter had, after all, had enough time to plan an elopement, reflects

I perceiue sowing is an idle exercise, and that euerie daie there come more thoughtes into thine head than stiches into thy worke; Ile see whether you can spin a beter mind than you haue stiched.

(29)

Those of the audience old or well-read enough to remember Richard Hyrd's Preface to his English translation of Vives' De Institutione Christianae Foeminae would have known that Prisius' hopes are to be dashed again, since Hyrd had explained his opinion that

wherein all handiworks that men say be meet for a woman, the body may be busy in one place, and the mind walking in

another: and while they sit sewing and spinning with their fingers, may cast and compass many peevish fancies in their mindes. (30)

Only proper academic studies will occupy the whole woman, Hyrd concluded. The joke is on Prisius, who is about to repeat his first error of judgement.

Men in the plays are alarmed when the educational code lets them down, and several women actively rebel against the standards set for them. In the Comodi of Iuli and Iulian (1570), the daughter of a wealthy household, Nan, is worn out with housework and weeping, having just been beaten by her neurotically perfectionist mother, and rails against the standard of beauty and efficiency demanded of women:

first we must be fine, tricke, hansome, & neat,
smal midled, well mad, frolick and feat.
hed, ye, hand, hill, nor nocht must be a wry.
for the lest of thes (I warrāt yu) der we must a by.
we must also locke vnto y_e kichen, and buttery,
and se that albe well, but specially all huswiffery.
well, when I ā lady wenches shall haue more ease.
till then must I neuer be well at ease. (31)

Nan's mother is herself a caricature of the ideal of domestic efficiency, a bossy, domineering woman whose concern for the industriousness and moral state of all her children and servants makes their lives a misery.

It is significant, though, that all the ridicule and questioning of the sort of education recommended for girls during the Renaissance is restricted to comedy, the traditional idiom for mocking current conventions. The more homiletic plays unanimously extol a thorough training in piety, humility, silence, industry, and above all, obedience and chastity, whose status as the prime virtues is indicated by their importance in the plays of testing. Every feminine virtue recommended by moral writers to young

women is represented, at some stage, in the homiletic drama surviving from this period.

It would be impossible to conclude a section on education for wifhood without some mention of the 'crash course' given by Ferando to Kate in The Taming of a Shrew (1589). The ideology of the play is, in general, deeply conventional. Ferando undertakes to tame Kate by subjugating "the stubbornness and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride", a defect usually remedied in early childhood by the breaking of the will. According to Lawrence Stone, "immature children were regarded as mere animals lacking the capacity to reason, and therefore to be broken in just as one would break in a puppy, a foal or a hawk". Ferando sets out to cure Kate of self-will in just the same way, intending

To bridle and hold back my headstrong wife
With curbes of hunger; ease; and want of sleep,
Nor sleepe or meate shall she inioie to night,
Ile mew her up as men do mew their hawkes,
And make her gentlie come unto the lure. (32)

The breaking of self-will also cures the associated problem of rebellion against one's place in the divinely-ordained hierarchy, in accordance with Renaissance theory. When Kate's pride is subdued, she willingly acknowledges her proper place in life, associating her wifely subjection with Eve's sin, as part of God's plan. Similarly, her description of God's imposition of order upon the chaos existing before the Creation,

... a forme without a forme
A heape confused a mixture all deformd,
A gulfe of'gulfes, a body bodiles,
Where all the elements were orderles,
Before the great commander of the world
... in six daies did frame his heauenly worke
And made all thinges to stand in perfit course. (33)

reflects not only her acceptance of her own place in the ordered creation, but her awareness of the change in her own state and gratitude to the agent of change. She describes God the creator as the arbiter of time

for all the course of yeares, of ages, moneths,
Of seasons temperate, of dayes and houres,
Are tund and stopt, by measure of his hand, (34)

and it is interesting to remember that at the crucial point of the play, Kate accepts Ferando's definition of time, taking his word for whether it was day or night. Like God, Ferando has taken Kate's disordered life, "a heape confused a mixture all deformd" and has "made all thinges to stand in perfit course", and in doing so, has created a proper woman, an achievement which Alfonso acknowledges by giving him "another dowry for another daughter". Although it is a comedy, the ideology of the play is entirely conventional, as true to the ideas of its time as any of the homiletic plays, so much so that only the masterly use of humour in the relationship between Kate and Ferando makes it human or credible.

Every topic which contemporary moral writers recommended a young woman's education should encompass is represented, at some stage, in the homiletic drama surviving from this period. This reinforces the point to be made later; that education and parental influence are of crucial importance in helping the girl prepare for the difficulties which will later beset her as maiden or wife. It also emphasises the essentially instructive nature of the testing plays, in that in the 'education' scenes, the moral instruction is frequently addressed directly to the audience, as well as to the heroine. The plays, as well as advising women by implication, frequently set out specifically to extend the process of moral instruction to women in the audience.

THE TESTING PLAYS

The plays in which the heroine's virtue is tested in some way appear to fall into two roughly defined categories. In the first of these, which I shall call "constancy tests", the woman's own husband or betrothed tests her patience, constancy or endurance. In some of the later plays of this type, there is no test as such, but the woman responds to the cruel behaviour of her spouse as if she were being tested. In the second type, the "chastity tests", the chastity of the heroine, (who may be single, married or betrothed) is threatened by a man of superior social status, who has sufficient authority and power over her to be able to force her submission if necessary. In this type of play, the degree of hardship the heroine is willing to endure in order to safeguard her purity is a measure of her moral worth, which may win her eternal fame if she dies rather than lose her virtue, or a good husband if she succeeds in retaining life and chastity. It may have an even more far-reaching effect: by recalling the ruler to his duty, the heroine's virtue may influence her country's well-being.

Although many plays feature both types of test, I have decided to deal with each separately. Different themes and conventions develop within each type of testing story, and it is easier to follow the way in which they evolved by considering them individually.

I shall discuss the tests of constancy first, since they are the earlier form, pre-dating the main body of tests of chastity by several years on the stage, and by several hundred years in folklore.

1: TESTS OF CONSTANCY

An early fore-runner - Godly Queen Hester

Before discussing the more important constancy testing plays, it may be as well to consider the early Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester (1527), which I have included in this section because it does deal with testing, which is imposed by the husband rather than by an influence from the outside world. It is a very difficult play to classify, since it originated in an earlier age than most of the homiletic plays, when women's education was still concerned with academic achievement as well as irreproachable upbringing. Accordingly, the testing is of an academic nature: in fact, Hester is subjected to a viva voce examination by the King, in order to determine her suitability as a prospective Queen. Having heard of her proficiency "in learninge and literature", he asks Hester

... somewhat to proue by communication
Her lernynge and her language eloquent
... Howe saye you Hester haue you aught reade or seene
Of vertues that be best and fittest for a queene.(35)

Here the King is setting a well-known topic, one particularly familiar from Christine de Pisan's account in her Livre des Trois Vertus of the qualities needed by a princess. Hester's answer shows that she is well informed on all the main issues, one of which is that since

... it may chaunce at sundrye season
The kynge wyth hys councell most parte of all
From this realme to be absente, when warre doth call.
Then the Quenes wysdome, sadly muste deale,
By her greate vertue, to rewle the common weale. (36)

It was generally thought that a queen should be able to deputise for her husband: Sir Thomas Elyot praised

Zenobia's skill in this respect in his Defence of Good Women, and Christine de Pisan felt that royal ladies should be able to hold their own in council and to be well-informed on all state issues. Furthermore, says Hester,

sometyme more for loue than for awe
The king is content to be counselled by the queene", (37)

and, as Ruth Kelso points out, tact in "the bestowal of counsel when wifely wisdom sufficed" was a quality necessary to wives of all social levels. Hester concludes that

as many vertues be there muste
Euen in the Quene as in the prynce, (38)

convincing Assuerus that she is a worthy queen. She confirms the wisdom of his choice by immediately acting as intercessor for the poor of the kingdom, an office which Christine de Pisan considered most important of all for a Christian princess.

In general, Godly Queene Hester, despite its educational theme, is less concerned with the ideal of the perfect wife than any of its successors. Firstly, despite the brief homily on wifely behaviour delivered by Mardocheus, the educational standard of the play is one of nobility and culture, rather than the more classless and domestic ideal which became prevalent later. Furthermore, Hester's achievement in the play is as a patriot rather than a wife: her marriage is the means by which she performs the feat of saving her people, not her life's work. The first play completely concerned with the behaviour of a perfect wife was, appropriately, a dramatisation of the traditional story of Patient Grissill.

The archetype - Patient Grissill

Since there was such an upsurge in the popularity of this old story during the Renaissance, it is illuminating to study early versions of it, and especially the comments of the storytellers on its purpose. Boccaccio includes the tale in the Decameron (c1350), and makes his narrator comment that Gualtieri's actions "were remarkable... for their senseless brutality" and adds the caution "Nor do I advise anyone to follow his example, for it was a great pity that the fellow should have drawn any profit from his conduct". On the contrary, the storyteller concludes the tale with the reflection that it would have served Gualtieri right if he had had the sort of wife who, if cast off in destitution as Griselda was, would promptly find another husband to support her.

Chaucer's clerk, and Chaucer himself as narrator, also show disapproval of the husband's behaviour, and deny that the story is intended to suggest real standards of behaviour for wives. Uneasy with Walter's motivation for continuing to test so virtuous a wife, Chaucer reflects that he must have had an obsessive nature, for

ther been folk of swich condicion
That when they have a certain purpos take
They kan nat stynte of hire entencion. (39)

He also makes two additions to the story, one from the Clerk who tells it, and one from the narrator. The Clerk, as befits a religious man, explains that

This storie is seyde, not for that wyues sholde
Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
For it were inportable, though they wolde;
But for that every wight, in his degree,
Sholde be content in adversitee
As was Griselde...

For sith a woman was so pacient
Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte
Recyven al in gree that God us sent. (40)

This religious interpretation is followed by the humorous Lenvoy de Chaucer, in which the narrator advises

No wedded man so hardy be t'assaile
His wyves paciencie in trust to fynde
Grisildis, for in certain he shal faille.
O noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence
Lat noon humilyte youre tonge naille,
Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille
As of Grisildes pacient and kynde
Lest Chichevache yow swelve in hire entraille! (41)

On the contrary, he rallies wives to stand up to their husbands and "dreed them not", concluding that rather than live in virtuous sorrow like Grisilde, they had better

Be ay of cheere as light as leef on lynde,
And lat hym care, and wepe, and wrynge and waille! (42)

It seems that in mediaeval literature, the story of Grissill was not likely to be taken literally, especially not by men with Boccaccio's "obvious adoration of women" and Chaucer's sense of realism and humour. Stage presentations, however, seem to have taken a different approach. The first recorded Griselda play, the French secular romance L'Estoire de Griseldis(1395), was subtitled "Le miroir des dames mariées", and added long discourses on wifely duties to the story. The early Renaissance saw an upsurge of interest in the story, and particularly in its instructive potential. C. R. Baskevill notes that seven other Griselda plays were produced in England, Germany, Italy and Holland during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These included one by Hans Sachs, and one in English which pre-dates the versions which survive today, written by schoolmaster Ralph Radcliffe in c1546.⁽⁴³⁾ The story became regarded as an exemplary illustration of

wifely duty, particularly appropriate to the current view of women because of its stress on Grissill's humility and obedience (she never ceases to regard herself as her husband's servant), and because it was consistent with the current belief that some virtues were appropriate to women of all classes. Guazzo wrote that although both are qualities a peasant might possess, "the two virtues of chastity and good management of the household, well-joined, are enough to ennoble a woman truly to be called honoured". Obviously a story in which the heroine's success depended on her transfer of the piety, industry, obedience and humility appropriate to a feudal serf to the manor house fitted well with the idea that one code of conduct should suit all women.

John Phillip reveals his didactic purpose in the title of his play of 1559, which advertises

The Commoditye of pacient and meeke Grissill, wherein is declared,

the good example of her paciencie towards her Husband: and lykewise, the due obedience of Children, toward their Parentes.

As I have already mentioned, Grissill's behaviour to her parents is exemplary, and suggests that her wifely conduct will be equally submissive and humble, so Gautier's eulogies of his married bliss come as no surprise. As ever, the question of what motive such as a happy man could have for tormenting his wife arises, and John Phillip tries to solve this problem by recourse to dramatic convention. He introduces a Vice named Politicke Persuasion, who may be a development from the scornful courtiers Boccaccio's Gualtieri invented as an excuse for testing Griselda, or, as Cyrus Hoy suggests, a representation of the evil present in flatterers and courtiers. He also puts forward the idea that Phillip may be drawing on mediaeval stage convention for an effect of great psychological subtlety, and that

Politicke Persuasion may be a personification of the cynical, cruel and evil aspects of Gautier's own character, although I have my doubts about this. Certainly there is no indication elsewhere in the play that Gautier is to be regarded as anything other than a god-like figure. (44)

Politicke Persuasion is crudely misogynistic, and tries to dissuade Gautier from marrying by regaling him with horror stories of feminine vice, particularly vanity and shrewishness. He warns Gautier that "the pride of some dames make the husband beare an empty purse", and that

moast wyues are so knappish and cutted now,
that they will be knowen to beare rule I saie to yow,
Rule quoth I, yea and more than reason doth require,
Yea and espesially after that to mastership they aspire.

(45)

He warns that some women try to achieve mastery by violence and "oft times they conquer their husbands in battell", others by nagging or by feminine wiles, in which

... they will counterfait a kind of hipocrisye,
And symper lyke a fyrmentie pot, the finger shal be in
there eye
Theyle saie, loue is forgotten though my loue be showne,
I see you loue another better then your owne,
Tush, tush, I know full well theire meaninge and intent
They be the craftiest cattell in Cristendome or kent.

(46)

Gautier's wedded bliss seems to disprove this view of women, so Politicke Persuasion, influenced by scorn for Grissill's humble origins, wants to prove that even she is flawed. When he finds Gautier singing her praises, he sets him at ease with a cunning admission

If your wyfe be so vertuous as nowe ye import,
Surelie, surely shee is worthy commendacion,
Shee may be made a saynte for her good conuersation:
But harke my Lorde nay nowe harken in your eare,
Try hir that waye and by myne honestie I sweare,
You shall see hir decline from Vertues so rife,

And alter topsie turuie hir saintish lyfe:
Hir pacyence quicklye shall chaunged bee
I warrant your honor will say it is not shee. (47)

The word "warrant" is important, since Gautier seems to embark on the testing of his wife in the spirit of a bet, rather like the Biblical contest between God and Satan over Job's patience, which comes about in exactly the same way. According to the Book of Job,

the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?... But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. (48)

Gautier is like a God to Grissill: she fears him, must obey and love him, and since she owes almost all that she has to him, she is practically his creature, with whom he may do as he wishes.

Like Job, Grissill meets the tests on her patience of the supposed murder of both her children, abandonment and replacement by a younger, nobler and prettier wife with exemplary and incredible resignation. Her response to the murder of her children

This chaunce with pacience, I will sustaine and beare
.
My Lord the Daughter is your owne, with her attempt your
If it seme pleasant to thy heart, thy pleasure now fulfil
will
(49)

is highlighted by the more human reaction of the Nurse, who, like Paulina in The Winter's Tale, asks "Giue me the childe I praye, and saue hir from thes fone/For I will fead and nourishe hir, and take hir as mine own", and when this is refused, defies and reproaches Gautier for his unnatural

cruelty. Grissill's saintly composure impresses even Politicke Persuasion, who admits

... hir constancie and pacience,
Truly that is wouderful stronge in this inconuenience,
But as I haue begon so will I afflict hir still,
I am kyn to a woman in all poynts ile haue my will. (50)

Although he admits Grissill's virtue, his general misogyny is unchanged and he continues to try to prove her goodness superficial.

Grissill's next trial is her reception of the news that popular opinion is against her to the extent that Gautier's social standing and life are endangered. Her first reaction is to wonder if this has been caused by her own inadequacies, and she enquires "Hath wifely troth aye fayled thee, hath dutie bin neglect/Doth anie wight that liueth nowe, of these thinges mee suspect". She then feels that Gautier would be better off without her and offers to "Let thousand wondes by stroak of knives, take Grissill's life away". Even Politicke Persuasion is impressed, and begins to think that she may be the exception to his general rule, as he wonders

Howe manie such wiues maye a man fynde:
Whiche seeyng their husbands opressed with woe,
Would willingly offer their liues to forgoe,
To mittigate the husbands paine, or ease his greef:
Not one I coniecture I am so harde of beleef. (51)

Indeed, Grissill's virtue is so extreme, even superhuman, that it seems inaccessible to ordinary human women, and thus confirms misogyny rather than disproving it: as a solitary perfect woman, she is like the proverbial eel in a barrellful of snakes, which, even if a man is lucky enough to catch "he hath yet but a slipperly eel by the tail". In

this Grissill resembles the Virgin Mary, as a woman whose virtue is impossible for any human to emulate.

Gautier, however, explains that literal self-sacrifice is unnecessary: he merely intends to "wed another wife, which shall mine name advaunce,/To top of Fortuns hautie whele my fame shee shall in haunce", and to send Grissill back to her father in the state of nakedness and poverty in which she first came to him. As Politicke Persuasion comments

To be banished so suddainly from hir husbands side,
And he to marrye another, clockinge Mistris Bride
Would moue the pacience of a good manye wyues,
I dare saie they had rather be ryd of their lyues, (52)

In fact, this kind of repudiation would have been familiar to the audience, from memory or perhaps from more recent experience. In the late Middle Ages, it was common for wives to be rejected by obtaining an edict from the Church (as Gualtieri claims to have done in Boccaccio's version), usually on the grounds of hastily-discovered consanguinity, as new and more useful alliances presented themselves. In early Tudor times, such a case was made against Katherine of Aragon, and the fear of ignominious return to one's father with only the dowry was common among prospective wives at several European courts, particularly since a lady rejected in this way was often regarded as disgraced, and had no hope of an alternative marriage. Since divorce on the grounds of pre-contract or consanguinity was still legal after the Reformation, wives could still be put off in this way, which makes Grissill's patience all the more striking. Far from feeling herself disgraced, she has always considered herself unfit to set foot in her husband's house, and is "well contented in my former state to remain".

This is one of the most important points of the story, which can be emphasised by comparing it with the apparently

similar tale of Cinderella. As Peter and Iona Opie point out, the fairy god-mother and the prince do nothing but restore Cinderella to her true status: she is, after all, her father's rightful heir, temporarily usurped by her stepsisters; an aristocrat, not a servant. Grissill, on the other hand, really is a peasant girl, and even when elevated to the aristocracy, never ceases to regard herself as Gautier's servant, a capacity in which she willingly returns to his house to organise the wedding feast for her successor. She is frequently described as noble, but her demeanour is invariably servile. In fact, the nobility others notice and applaud in her behaviour depends entirely on the contemporary belief that in a wife, uncomplaining acceptance, obedience and other apparently servile qualities are entirely appropriate and therefore noble. Humble Grissill makes a faultlessly noble wife because at this time, a wife is a servant.

Grissill, then, sees no real degradation in her dismissal, and finding her father depressed by it, exhorts him to

Blame not Fortune for my ouerthroe
It was the will of God, that it should be so.
... This Crosse is to trye us, as hee doth his elect.

(53)

Her habit of accepting misfortune as God's scourge or, more significantly, as His test of their faith, seems to explain Grissill's reaction when Gautier restores her wedding ring and children, giving the brief and unconvincing explanation "this whiche I haue done... Was done for this cause, thy Pacience to trye." Without a single word of reproach, Grissill simply receives her children with joy, and praises Gautier for his unceasing goodness to her, and to old Ianickle, whom Gautier has at last allowed to come to the court, remarking that "Now know I assuredly my Lord doth favour mee". It is interesting to remember that in the Bible "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before".

Grissill, like Job, tries to accept the Lord's actions humbly and without question, and also accepts the actions of the Lord Gautier her husband in the same spirit. Gautier is a god to her: all she has is his, to give or to take away, she is bound to obey him, and bears all he can inflict with resignation, trusting in his purpose.

It seems obvious that a story in which a husband is his wife's god should be interpreted as Chaucer and his contemporaries did, as another version of the story of Job, meant to teach that "euery wight, in his degree/Sholde be constant in aduersitee", since a literal reading is disturbing to the point of being sinister. Nevertheless, John Phillip's title offering audiences "the good example of pacience towards her Husband" indicates that he did intend to recommend Grissill's conduct to other women.

It might seem blasphemous to consider giving a man such a god-like status, but some seventy years later, certain religious writers seemed to be encouraging just such a view. One of these writers, William Gouge observed in his Domesticall Duties (1622), that

though a husband in regard of evil qualities may carry the image of the devil, yet in regard to his place and office, he beareth the image of God.

Though extreme, this seems to be an extension of the earlier and more widespread idea that the husband was God's representative within the family, put about by the Protestant reformers. From representing God's authority to possessing it is not a very drastic change.⁽⁵⁴⁾

After Patient Grissill, the wife-testing theme disappeared for almost thirty years, re-appearing only in the more polished plays of Robert Greene. The only exception was the brief episode of the Lady in Thomas Preston's Cambyses.

Having married Cambyses against her will, the Queen applies herself to her unsought duty and becomes "a most obedient wife", who eventually dies because of her dedication to her responsibilities. Since a wife should give good advice to her husband, she expresses her disapproval of Cambyses' fratricide, and even in her attempt to mitigate her husband's murderous rage invokes the ideal of marriage. She requests

... licence give to spouse of thine
Her patient mind to break:
For tender love unto your grace
My words I did so frame,
For pure love doth heart of king
Me violate and blame.
And to your grace is this offence
That I should purchase death, (55)

and reminds him of her wifely obedience, and of the vows they have made to protect and keep one another. Although Cambyses does not intend to test his wife, his insane cruelty has the effect of testing, since it demonstrates her virtue to the audience, showing that even a death sentence does not diminish her piety and virtue. -

Robert Greene - revival and development of the theme

In general though, the wife-testing theme disappeared for many years after its initial impact on the drama, until it was revived by Robert Greene, who was obviously interested by the dramatic potential of chastity and constancy tests. While as an accomplished dramatist, he added poetry, excitement and realistic detail to the basic theme, it is still apparent that most of the female characters are based on Patient Grissill, whom they resemble in their mixture of high and lowly characteristics, and in their attractiveness to noble men. The first, and perhaps most successful, of these heroines is Margaret of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay

(1589), who, like Grissill, is a country girl whose beauty and virtue attract noble suitors. However, as Daniel Seltzer suggests, she really has more in common with Cinderella, since everything about her suggests a noble lady in a humble setting rather than a realistic country girl. Edward's descriptions of Margaret at work combine homely and courtly imagery, and the impression that she is an aristocratic rather than rustic character is reinforced by her use of blank verse, and her immediate recognition of Lacy's nobility. It is unlikely that "his courtesy gentle, smelling of the court" would be identified so swiftly by a real country girl.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Greene's interest in the theme of testing is confirmed by the radical changes he made to his source material in order to include it. In the source, the anonymous prose romance The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon, the hero assists an "Oxfordshire gentleman" and a "faire maide" named Millisant against the rich knight whose suit is favoured by her father. The knight hires Friar Bungay to abduct Millisant by necromancy so that he can marry her against her will, but the plot is foiled by Friar Bacon, who sees the wedding in his specular glass and prevents its conclusion by striking Bungay dumb. In the play, several changes have been made to add to the importance of Margaret and the testing plot: her father, far from being a tyrant, is a friendly character, happy to support her in her choice of suitor, so that all the moral decisions are hers alone, the change of Lacy's rival from a rich knight seeking marriage to a frankly seductive prince gives occasion for a test of Margaret's chastity, and for a series of tests of loyalty, the first of which is precipitated by this incident of the marriage observed and interrupted by necromancy. In the play, however, the marriage was to have been between Margaret and the 'true' suitor, assisted by Bungay, and Friar Bacon is on the side of the would-be seducer.⁽⁵⁷⁾

The very important chastity tests will be discussed in the second section, and for the time being I shall concentrate on the constancy tests to which Lacy subjects Margaret after their betrothal. When they are at last safe from all outside threats, he sends her a letter announcing that he has rejected her in favour of a politically advantageous marriage with one of Eleanor's ladies-in-waiting. Later, after Margaret has conducted herself irreproachably, and suffered considerably, he re-appears, explains that "'Twas but to try sweet Peggy's constancy" and prevails upon her to abandon all the plans she has made in the meantime. No other reason is given for his action, although a very brief incident in Scene xii, in which Lacy is glimpsed boasting to the Lord of Castile

... of the constancy
Of one surnamed, for beauty's excellence,
The fair Maid of Merry Fressingfield (58)

may indicate that Greene meant to develop the idea of a wager, or perhaps that of scornful courtiers like those in the early story of Griselda, to provide an explanation.

Ultimately, though, it is unrewarding to look for realistic motivation, since Lacy's action is intelligible only in terms of the tradition of tests of constancy. As Daniel Seltzer remarks, the test is purely a functional and conventional device which "simply reinforces the natural nobility of the lady of low station" and proves beyond doubt that she is worthy of her noble suitor's love.

Considered in functional terms, Lacy's test is well devised and successful, since it demonstrates to him, the court and the audience not only Margaret's constancy, but her love, nobility and innocence of material motives. As well as the letter, which will sound her reactions to desertion, he sends her a dowry, which an opportunistic woman, ready to settle for money or another man, would probably accept

gladly. But unknown to Lacy, yet another element is added to the test by fate, since during his absence, Lambert and Serlsby have been courting Margaret, and his desertion leaves her at liberty to accept either of these wealthy and ardent country squires.

The test is a very exacting one, but apart from one touch of realistic anger in her assertion that she would never have wavered like him and that

The wealth combined within the English shelves,
Europe's commander, or the English king,
Should not have moved the love of Peggy from her Lord, (59)

Margaret's behaviour is as exemplary as that of Grissill. She proves her innocence of materialism by giving the dowry sent by Lacy to his messenger "for thou comst from Lacy whom I loved", but her virtue is demonstrated most strongly by her restraint. She sends no reproach to Lacy, voices no regret at having refused to be Edward's mistress, and the possibility of accepting either Lambert or Serlsby does not even occur to her. Instead, she quickly decides "I will straight to stately Framlingham/And in the Abbey there be shorn a nun".

The degree of sincerity of Margaret's decision is one of the major problems of the play, and one to which most critics have their own answer. J.A. Lavin thinks that her convictions are genuine and express sincere remorse at having loved to excess and above her station, an idea he links with the theme of repentance in Friar Bacon's eventual renunciation of his magic. On the other hand, Daniel Seltzer thinks that Margaret's renunciation of the world is sincere, but that Greene has deliberately phrased it in words which display to the audience her essential folly. I think that both views are true to a certain

extent, since the whole episode is very complex and ambiguous, but there are other factors to be considered.

Firstly, it is important to remember that this is a historical play produced in a Protestant era, and set in a mediaeval and Catholic past, in which nunneries were common and celibacy likely to be connected with religion. It is likely that Margaret's choice between wifehood and being a nun might have been identified with the more general Elizabethan debate about the relative virtues of marriage and virginity, to which the religious element has been added to make a more complicated point. Perhaps in such an era, the idea of taking the veil may have been thought of mainly in terms of death from the world and its joys, an attitude which was still being recommended to pious widows. Virtuous wives were supposed to love and obey God and their husbands, and ideally, widowhood was to be regarded as an opportunity to re-dedicate all their love to God, to indicate that their priorities had been correct throughout their married lives. Thinking that she has lost Lacy's love, Margaret regards herself as widowed, and her attempt to dedicate her remaining years to God is yet another indication of her exemplary virtue.

However, being jilted and being widowed are very different misfortunes, and Margaret's extreme action in entering a convent shows her high esteem of Lacy in two different ways. Firstly, it ends the possibilities of any other marriage: if she cannot be Lacy's bride, Margaret, as a nun, will become the Bride of Christ, the only other spouse she will consider. Secondly, as Margaret's father tells Lacy "She leaves the world because she left your love". Lacy is Margaret's world, and if his behaviour and words indicate that love is transitory, then this must be true of all worldly love and all worldly joy. A comparison of Lacy's farewell letter with Margaret's words supports this idea.

Lacy says that in general, and in his own experience, love is transitory

fancy, that slippeth in with a gaze, goeth out with a wink; and too timely loves have ever the shortest length. I write this as thy grief and my folly, who at Fressingfield loved that which time hath taught me to be but mean dainties. Eyes are dissemblers, and fancy is but queasy. (60)

Margaret accepts this view of love, partly because it seems to be confirmed by Lacy's behaviour, partly because of willingness to take him at his word. When she next mentions love, she regards it as "a fond conceit/Whose hap and essence hangeth in the eye", and thinks that

All love is lust but love of heavens;
That beauty used for love is vanity.
The world contains naught but alluring baits,
Pride, flattery and inconstant thoughts. (61)

Her disillusionment with transitory earthly love leads her to turn to the possibility of eternal heavenly love.

The seriousness of the language in which Margaret describes the religious life seems to indicate that she has come to a conclusion with much truth in it, even though she has been led to it by false premises. She is not mistaken in thinking that some earthly love is transitory and inferior to the celestial love attainable through the religious life, only in believing that Lacy's love is like this, and her persistence in her discovery, in asking

Is not heaven's joy before earth's fading bliss
And life above sweeter than life in love? (62)

even when she is undeceived shows that she is aware of this.

So why, given the choice between "God or Lord Lacy", does Margaret promptly choose "Lacy for me, if he will be my Lord?" As Warren rather cynically explains the reason, it is "the nature of women, that be they never so near God, yet they love to die in a man's arms", or put less crudely, the view often uttered in conclusion to the virginity versus marriage debate, that

Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage
But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn
Grows, lives and dies on single blessedness. (63)

Greene has prepared us for this by emphasising the "barren" and "cold, fruitless" aspects of religious seclusion by references to the "solemn nunnery", to the despoiling of Margaret's beauty involved in her being "shorn a nun", with its linked image of her father's grey hairs falling before their time because of his sorrow, and by the repeated pleas "bury not such beauty in a cell" and "'Twere injury... to smother up such beauty in a cell". Margaret has discovered that earthly love, like the almond blossoms and may-flies Lacy described, is rooted in earthly matter and therefore doomed to be a "fading bliss", but the alternative, untainted eternal love, entails sterility. Given the choice between "God or Lord Lacy", Margaret admits "the flesh is frail", simultaneously acknowledging its weakness, compared with eternal values, and its "frailty", or susceptibility to the strength of the human attraction of Lacy's "enchanted face". She chooses the more fully human life while aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and it is significant that once the decision is made, there is a resurgence of the descriptions of food and nature which give the play so much vitality. Margaret's father professes himself as happy "as if the English king had given/The park and deer of Fressingfield to me", and there is the promise of a country breakfast for the saddle-sore nobles.

The nunnery episode establishes Margaret's exemplary virtue even more firmly, since it shows that her husband is second only to God in her scale of values. Indeed, although her character shows some touches of realism, Margaret is, in general, a conventional heroine in the mould of Patient Grissill, whose influence is echoed in her final speech

'Tis I, my lords, who humbly on my knee
Must yield up her orisons to mighty Jove
For lifting up his handmaid to this state;
Brought from her homely cottage to the court
.
I vow obedience and such humble love
As may a handmaid to such mighty men. (64)

Greene used the idea of the testing of constancy again in The Scottish History of James the Fourth (1590), in which he incorporated the chastity test theme as well, by presenting two virtuous heroines, Dorothea and Ida, whose goodness is tested by the shortcomings of one man, King James. During his wedding to Dorothea, an English princess, James becomes obsessed by the beauty of Ida, one of the wedding guests, and the play follows Ida's resistance to his pursuit, and Dorothea's wifely patience in enduring his behaviour. At first, this consists of ignoring her husband's neglect of her and obsessive pursuit of Ida, and of giving him the benefit of the doubt. Even when Douglas, Morton and the Bishop of St. Andrews are driven from the court by James' behaviour, Dorothea refuses to escape with them, choosing to believe that "He doth but tempt his wife, he tries my love", an interpretation of this behaviour which depends on the Grissill tradition. She begs the courtiers to stay, explaining

This injury pertains to me, not to you.
The king is young, and if he step awry
He may amend, and I will love him still. (65)

When Bartram tells her of the plot against her life, Dorothea is incredulous, and even when presented with the

concrete evidence of James' signature on her death-warrant, she clings to the hope that "perhaps he wrote it not". One of the most realistic touches in the presentation of this exemplary character is Dorothea's lament over the difficulties of political marriage, which recalls Greene's apparent sympathy with Edward's plight in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. She laments

Oh what avails to be allied and matched
With high estates that marry but in show?
Were I baser born, my mean estate
Could warrant me from this impedent harm,
But to be great and happy, these are twain. (66)

Dorothea's dilemma is further complicated by her moral code, which limits the courses of action open to her. Revenge, which might seem to be the most orthodox stage reaction to attempted murder, is out of the question for a wife who believes implicitly in the indissoluble unity of marriage, as Dorothea explains.

As if they kill not me, who with him fight
As if his breast be touched, I am not wounded,
... We are one heart, though rent by hate in twain,
One soul, one essence doth our weal contain.
What then can conquer him that kills not me? (67)

The only moral action for a wife under these circumstances is unobtrusive flight, and accordingly, Dorothea plans to escape disguised as a country maid. Nano, however, objects to this scheme on the grounds that his mistress' natural nobility would always be apparent if she dressed as a woman of any social level (an idea which seems more comprehensible in the light of the conventions established in Greene's earlier works), and he recommends that she adopt male clothing. Although the success of this plan in obscuring Dorothea's nobility is dubious (Dorothea dresses as a squire, but is seen as a gentleman by Sir Cuthbert and Lady Anderson), the disguise allows her to show positive

courage in defying her assassin's insults, and to defend herself against him instead of being unarmed and helpless.

Dorothea's male disguise also allows another episode of testing to be introduced, in which Lady Anderson is attracted to the "young knight" she nurses and is obviously willing to cuckold her husband for "his" sake. Her fickleness is used to emphasise Dorothea's constancy, and Lady Anderson herself becomes painfully aware of the difference between their moral standards when her guest's true identity is revealed, feeling that she should "blush, grieve and die in (her) insatiate lust". Although Dorothea comforts her with the assurance "Thou hast won a friend/That loves thee as her life by good desert", Greene does not develop the idea that nobility is attractive no matter what its outer appearance, and follows his original purpose in illustrating the virtue of constancy, which Dorothea further explains to Lady Anderson when she advises her to flee the country and leave her husband to his fate:

... constancy, obedience and my love
In that my husband is my lord and chief
These call me to compassion of his estate. (68)

Lady Anderson is inspired to wonder

What wondrous constancy is this I hear?
If English dames their husbands love so dear,
I fear me in the world they have no peer. (69)

Wifely constancy leads Dorothea to seek her husband, despite the risk to her own safety. She finds him about to lead his army against the advancing English army, since his behaviour to her has provoked her father to retaliate, and prevents a war by running between the two armies to reveal that she is still alive. Dorothea then dismisses James' infidelity and attempt on her life with a lack of concern

which cannot possibly be credible in terms of psychological realism, feeling only that

Youth hath misled: tut, but a little fault,
'Tis kingly to amend what is amiss:
Might I with twice as many pains as these
Unite our hearts, then should my wedded lord
See how incessant labours I would take. (70)

Such extreme devotion, without the slightest hint of self-interest, or even of an instinct for self-preservation can only make sense as part of the tradition of Patient Grissill. Even so, our feeling that the heroine's virtue and fortitude are lavished upon a man manifestly unworthy of them is even stronger here than in the Grissill story. (71)

The tester tested - Faire Em

This idea of the possibility that the man for whom the test of constancy is undertaken may not deserve the heroine is developed in a play which appeared in 1590, A Pleasant Commodie of faire Em the Millers daughter of Manchester, an anonymous play sometimes attributed to Robert Wilson, despite its obvious superiority to any of his known works, which are mainly very ponderous late moralities. Faire Em bears a great deal of resemblance to Robert Greene's plays, dealing as it does with a beautiful, virtuous girl who combines the characteristics of lowliness and nobility, and who is courted by several men of higher rank than herself.

Em, though, resembles Cinderella more than Grissill in her lowly nobility, since her father is really Sir Thomas Godard and both are posing as millers in order to be safe during the wave of civil unrest caused by the Norman Conquest, since both are aware that "our harmeles liues... ledd in greater port/Would be an envious object to our

foes". However, they are resolved to keep their natural nobility and to "retaine those honorable mindes/That lately governed our superior state". All Em's suitors believe her to be in fact a miller's daughter, but two of them are aware of her innate nobility, and long to give her the social standing it deserves. Manuile, Em's betrothed, dreams of "Framing thy state to thy desart" even though "A Millers daughter sayes the multitude,/Should not be loued of a Gentleman", and Lord Mountney of "decking her bodie with such costly robes/As may become her beauties worthyness". Only Valingford simply contemplates her beauty, a difference which later becomes significant in the light of events.

However, although Em is in many ways a product of convention, she departs from it in several respects. Unlike that of her predecessors, Em's beauty is not the convenient and rarefied aura which attracts only eligible and titled men, but also appeals to Trotter, her father's assistant, a low character whose ungainly attempts at wooing her add a great deal of comedy to the early scenes of the play. Trotter's passion for her diminishes Em's "ideal" aspect and humanises her, by demonstrating that far from being a magical summons exclusive to noblemen, her beauty is a stimulus to which any man would respond. (Thomas Dekker, in The Shoemakers' Holiday, humanises Rosamund in the same way, by showing that her appeal is not limited to Lord Lacy, but that Simon Eyre's lowest apprentice finds the mere thought of her highly arousing.) Trotter's infatuation also allows Em to demonstrate her tolerance and sense of humour, another characteristic not common in earlier heroines. Em also deviates from the convention in more radical and important ways, which will be explained later.

The idea of testing is first introduced by Em's father, who has reservations about Manuile, his daughter's accepted suitor. As well as urging Em to safeguard her chastity,

Sir Thomas advises "that thou maiest not be by loue deceiued... trye his meaning fit for thy desert". Em though is sufficiently conventional to think that it is her love that should be tested, but, paradoxically, this very conviction leads to the testing of Manuile Sir Thomas Godard recommended.

The major test of the play is occasioned by an argument caused by Manuile's jealousy and anger because Em treats a number of her admirers amiably. He claims

This Em is noted and too much talked on.
Some see it without mistrust of ill.
Others there are that scorning grynne thereat,
And saith, there goes the millers daughters woovers. (72)

Manuile feels that he is losing face, and does not scruple to remind Em how, in loving a social inferior, he has "hazarded/Displeasure of my father and my friends". Em is distressed by his jealousy, and tries to rally him to common sense in the following exchange:

Em. May not a maide looke vpon a man
Without suspitious iudgement of the world?
Manuile. If sight do moue offence, it is the better not to
see.
But thou didst more vnconstant as thou art,
For with them thou hadst talke and conference.
Em. May not a maide talke with a man without distrust?
Manuile. Not with such men suspected amorous. (73)

Em is unable to calm Manuile's sense of wounded pride, and he storms off in a rage. Even though she is well aware that his behaviour is unjustified, being "the fruit of franticke, bedlame ielozie", Em is resolved that "onely Manuile honor I in harte:/Nor shall vnkindnes cause me from him to starte", and she sets out to use their separation as an opportunity to prove her constancy to him. Like Margaret of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, Em decides to take her suitor at his word: just as Lacy's dismissal of

love as mere fancy led Margaret to renounce it and all other worldly joys as folly, Manuile's ludicrous attitude "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" is adopted and taken to its logical conclusion by Em. If it offends Manuile that she sees and hears other men, very well: she will behave as if she were deaf and blind, thus proving the constancy he doubted. Explaining her behaviour later, Em says

That .inticing speeches should not beguile mee,
I haue made my selfe deafe to any but to him.
And lest any mans person should please mee more than his,
I haue dissembled the want of my sight. (74)

Although her pretence is primarily symbolic and idealistic, Em is well aware of its practical advantages, hoping that her suitors would become aware of the futility of courting a girl who could neither hear their elaborate entreaties nor see their costly gifts and turn their attentions elsewhere. Nevertheless, the pretence is chiefly a proof of Em's constancy, which will prove to Manuile her eagerness to become the kind of woman he wants.

Paradoxically, Em's supposed affliction becomes a test of the virtue of her suitors. The more recent admirers, Mountney and Valingford, previously rather suspect because of their high status and neglect of their court duties while courting Em, are ennobled by their reaction to the revelation: they are shocked, but show sympathy and concern for Em. The first thought of both is to find medical aid for her disability, resolving "if Art can make thee whole/Ile by that sence for thee, although it cost me deere". Neither of them knows Em well, and their pity is largely an instinctive sense of sorrow that such a beautiful girl should be struck by illness. Since Manuile has known Em well, one expects his sympathy to be far deeper, and therefore his callous reaction is shocking. Hearing that Em is deaf and blind, Manuile smugly reflects "this is

a testing play: she is the first woman to profess herself angry and grieved with a man, and though she hopes that "for aught else I shall saie/Let my present grieffe hold me excused", few people would object to her very human desire "To see that vngratefull man/Iustly rewarded for his trecherie".

Em's wish is granted in the final scene of the play, in which Manuile is brought to trial for plighting his troth to Em and also to Elnor. Em pleads her own case, explaining why she feigned disability to prove her love for Manuile. He is immensely flattered by this extreme devotion, and pleads "Pardon me, sweet Em, for I am onely thine", but Em rejects his proffered reconciliation, preferring to explain the full extent of her disillusionment and anger. Like Margaret in Friar Bacon, she knows that she would never have behaved in that way to him, and therefore angrily rejects his facile efforts to regain her:

Lay off thy hands, disloyall as thou art,
Nor shalt thou haue possession of my loue,
That canst so finely shift thy matters off.
Put case I had beene blinde and could not see,
As often times such visitations falles
That pleaseth God which all things doth dispose:
Shoulest thou forsake mee in regard of that?
I tell thee Manuile, hadst thou beene blinde,
Or deafe, or dumbe, or else what impediments
might befall to man, Em would haue loued and kept,
And honoured thee: yea, begde if wealth had faylde
For thy releefe.

(76)

This is the crux of the play. The test has made Em aware of something she had not realised before, the different standards of behaviour she and Manuile expected of one another. Both Manuile and Em herself set a very high standard of faithfulness for her: Manuile's demand, which few Renaissance moralists would have considered unreasonable, was that Em should not only be faithful, but give him no reasons for suspicion. Em, like a good Renaissance wife, was prepared to honour and obey him in all circumstances

and to adapt herself to his wishes, even to the extent of preparing an elaborate deception for the rest of the world. However, she assumed that she could expect equally exemplary faithfulness from Manuile, who in fact had no such standards at all. Unlike Em, who considers betrothal as binding as marriage, and that the same behaviour is appropriate to both, Manuile regards it as an agreement from which a man is justified in freeing himself if it is no longer advantageous. Traditionally, the test in drama was used to prove the worth of a lowly woman to a noble man, a convention which presupposed his moral superiority. Em uses it with the usual intention, but it shows that her assumed moral mentor's standards are very inferior to her own.

However, this situation has arisen before, in James the Fourth, and the erring husband repented of attempted adultery and murder and was promptly forgiven. For a moment, it seems that this will happen here too: Manuile asks briefly "Forgiue mee sweete Em" and she replies "I do forgiue thee with all my heart", but with a great sense of the dramatic, the author makes her continue "And will forget thee too in case I can:/But neuer speake to mee, or seeme to know mee". For the first time, it is suggested that a man may be unworthy of a woman, and that his shortcomings may be not just "a little fault", but an indication of low standards and an unpleasant character. Rather than attempt to reform him with patience and forgiveness, Em decides not to bother. That this is not pique is confirmed by Elner's agreement. When Em refuses him, Manuile once more offers himself to Elner, but she assures him "I so detest thy vilanie/that whilest aliue I will abhor thy company". To marry a man who has proved himself so unfeeling would be a serious error of judgement. Instead, Elner waits for another suitor, and Em finally accepts Valingford, whose unusual understanding and perseverance indicate that he has the faithfulness Manuile lacks, and

gives credibility to an ending which might otherwise seem contrived.

The convention hardens - Vertuous Octavia

Faire Em indicates that authors were beginning to depart from and to question the "patient wife" plot, perhaps because it was becoming so well established a convention that its meaning was becoming lost. The Lamentable Tragedie of Loocrine (1591), gives a good example of the strength of this convention, when Gwendolen, a deserted wife urged to revenge upon her husband, makes the traditional objection

O no, his death will more augment my woes,
He was my husband...
More deare to me then apple of mine eye
Nor can I finde in heart to worke his skathe. (77)

She then proceeds to avenge herself with ruthless savagery, driving not only her husband but his concubine and illegitimate daughter to suicide. Obviously, in the minds of some playwrights at least, the convention was reduced to a couple of formulaic phrases and attitudes, and they thought it desirable for their characters to voice the traditional sentiments for their predicaments, even if they were entirely inappropriate to their actual actions.

Whether because of fossilisation or not, the "ideal wife" theme gradually disappeared from drama, a development which Samuel Brandon's play The Tragicomoedi of the Vertuous Octavia (1598) helps to explain. Octavia is the story of Antony and Cleopatra, interpreted as a series of tests of Octavia's wifely virtue. Cleopatra features in the play only in reports from Titus, who is disgusted by her not only because

... for hir artificiall ornaments
For pompe, for pride, for superfluitie,
For all excesse that folly represents
She doth exceed the height of vanitie (78)

but because her ability to "Syrenize" has perverted the natural order of authority. "Proud Cleopatra... rules Antony", and, what is worse to Titus,

She is become our Queene and gouernour
And we whose courage feares the force of no man
By seruile baseness of our Emperour,
Must be content to stoope vnto a woman. (79)

Cleopatra's feminine wiles and taste for domination are contrasted with the domestic virtues of long-suffering Octavia, a Roman wife whose patience, although it probably stemmed from Stoicism, is interpreted by Samuel Brandon as part of the Renaissance code of wifely virtues. Since the play is mainly concerned with demonstrating the virtues of constancy and patience, there is very little dramatic action. The only source of suspense is the question of whether Octavia will be able to continue countering each new outrage of Antony's with constancy and forgiveness, and since Octavia's unusual and exemplary goodness is established early in the play, by three glowing tributes in the first act alone, there is little uncertainty as to the outcome.

Octavia counters unkindness with patience again and again, in the first act travelling hundreds of miles to visit Antony on the battlefield, and returning home without a murmur of reproach when he declines to come to meet her. Next, she insists "My Lord is constant and these are but lies" when Byllius confronts her with the evidence of Antony's adultery. Though he is sympathetic, Byllius is careful to warn Octavia "Let thine owne foote into no errorr slide... let thine owne conscience know no cause of blame". Far from avenging herself by inconstancy, Octavia

goes to Octavius and tries to prevail upon him to alter his plans for revenge upon Antony, using the familiar argument "He is my selfe, his griefe proues my paine". Her ordeal culminates in Act V Scene 2, when Antony marries Cleopatra, disowns Octavia and her children and has them evicted from their home. Just as they are thrown out onto the street, news of Antony's suicide arrives, and Octavia, though destitute and disowned, mourns him as a faithful wife whose grief knows no bounds. Her first reaction to the news is one of instinctive self-sacrifice: "O that Octavia had been slaine for thee".

A member of the audience might be excused for thinking that Octavia's "constancy" or passive acceptance of any cruelty Antony decides to inflict upon her, makes her a natural victim and allows her husband to get away with anything. Samuel Brandon, however, seems to have foreseen that such a thought might occur, and forestalls it by voicing it in a discussion of constancy held by Octavia's maids. Camilla, a great admirer of her mistress, eulogises her faithfulness, but Silvia disagrees, since she feels that

Were I Octavia, I would entertaine
His double dealing with as fine a sleight.
I would nor weep, nor waile, but soon returne
Vpon his head the wrongs he doth pretend.
I would compel him spite of him to learne
It were no iest a woman to offend. (80)

All the maids are duly shocked and Camilla wonders

... doth not Silvia blush to disannul
Hir owne good name, hir faith and constancie?
Doth she nor feare, the wrath of heauen to pull
Vpon her head, for such impietie? (81)

In other words, the virtue of constancy is so necessary to feminine goodness that for a woman to question it is to throw herself into disrepute with man and God. Silvia,

though has no such fears. She regards the glorification of women's constancy as a clever trap which

... workes all womens fall,
Why constancie is that which marreth all
A weake conceit which cannot wrongs resist
A chaine it is which bindes our selues in thrall
And giues men scope to vse vs as they list. (82)

Brandon immediately demonstrates that only a wicked woman could have such rebellious thoughts by making the other maids denounce Silvia as a "foule creature", "leawde monster" and the "staine of thy sexe" for entertaining such ideas, and further discredits her by revealing that she has several lovers. Only such a corrupt and immoral woman, Brandon implies, would question the value of constancy.

Octavia's unquestioning acceptance, on the other hand, wins unanimous praise, most notably from Octavius Caesar, whose plans for revenge on Antony are altered when she explains her own moral outlook:

True patience can mildly suffer long
Where rage and furie do our liues deforme
Tis fortitude which scornes the force of wrong,
And temperaunce not to be mou'd withall:
Tis constancie makes vs continue strong. (83)

Caesar, impressed, remarks "then I see that constancie/Is sometimes seated in a woman's brest", and Octavia, stung by this grudging admission, replies

I know not what you thinke of woman kinde
That they are faithless and vnconstant euer:
For me, I thinke all women striue to find
The perfect good, and therein to perseuer. (84)

This unusual conviction that women are generally virtuous is echoed by the Chorus of Act I, in which Brandon asserts that Octavia's extreme goodness indicates that women, though accounted "vnperfect, weake and fraile" by men, are

in fact their moral superiors, who "in worth prevaile/And men so farre surmount". This extreme point of view is the epitome of the tendency I noted in the introduction to this piece. While the idea of holy matrimony makes it possible for a wife to be regarded as good, the demand for harmonious matrimony allows her to be good only in a very restricted way. Samuel Brandon grants women moral superiority, while telling them that this superiority must consist of passive suffering and an unquestioning acceptance of wrong which is remarkably close to the sort of acquiescence in evil which encourages it to continue. Moreover, for a woman to question the virtue of this attitude is a proof of her moral corruption. This argument works like a trap.

Octavia is in just such a trap. All her value, in the eyes of those around her, lies in being a good wife, and therefore, since any action against Antony will result in the loss of her reputation as virtuous spouse, Octavia can do nothing, since she must be irreproachable. She is aware, too, that her reputation should be a compensation for her lack of freedom, mentally telling the absent Antony "Ile be as famous for a vertuous Wife/As thou notorious for so leawd a life", but this is little consolation for the present, in which he can continue doing as he likes and inflicting suffering which she has no course but to accept. It does indeed seem that, as the discredited Silvia said, that constancy is "a chaine... which bindes our selves in thrall/And giues mens scope to vse vs as they list".

As well as being morally disturbing, the play is very unsatisfactory in artistic terms. It is extremely stationary (Octavia seldom stirs from her house), and lacking in incident, since what little action there is occurs elsewhere and is reported by messengers. Long eulogies of Octavia's goodness appear in almost every scene, to the extent that it is difficult to imagine any audience sitting

through the play. Certainly, the earlier testing plays were sometimes lacking in dramatic incident, but even in the early play Patient Grissill, the moral instruction was enlivened with songs, dances, the evil machinations and bawdy patter of Politicke Persuasion, and violent incidents such as the abduction of the children. The unvaried immobility and prosiness of Vertuous Octavia seems to indicate the degeneration of the "constancy testing" plot.

By the final decade of the sixteenth century, this theme was quickly losing its appeal. When used in a straightforward way, it appeared in fossilised formulae, as in Lochrine, or produced unappealing dramatised sermons like Vertuous Octavia. Already, as in Faire Em, playwrights were beginning to question the worth of the idea of testing women's constancy, and this trend was continued by Chettle and Dekker in their treatment of the original story of the "testing" genre - that of Patient Grissill.

The archetype re-evaluated - Chettle and Dekker's Grissill

Chettle and Dekker's Pleasant Commoedye of Patient Grissill appeared in 1600, and made many innovations. In general, they seem to have attempted to make the plot more plausible, and to suggest more credible motives for the characters. Of course, the main problem is that of the Marquess' reason for subjecting Grissill to so many tests. As Cyrus Hoy remarks, Chettle and Dekker turn the idea of a courtly faction hostile to Grissill, which, in Boccaccio and Chaucer, is a mere pretext fabricated by Gautier, into reality, so that the Marquess is forced to test Grissill in order to give her a chance to prove her worth to her detractors. Chettle and Dekker also introduce the idea that the Marquess is also testing his servants to see whether their allegiance is primarily to him (and the advancement he can offer) or to their own moral standards.

Grissill is instrumental to this test, and the Marquess constantly comments to the audience on the turpitude of the servants who obey his cruel orders, and who scorn such an irreproachably virtuous woman because she is out of favour, and on the virtue of Furio who, while reluctantly obeying his master's orders, weeps and constantly tries to comfort Grissill. In the context of this more general testing, the Marquess' treatment of Grissill seems less arbitrary and outrageous.

However, while the Marquess' motivation is made more comprehensible, Grissill's plight is made infinitely more pathetic. Her trials are multiplied and made more humiliating: the Marquess insults her and makes her kneel before his servants, and summarily dismisses her father and brother from the court. The episodes concerning the children are elaborated: the Marquess has the new-born twins taken from Grissill's bed at night, claiming that she is too common to nurse them. Even this relatively small incident is expanded by Chettle and Dekker into a horrifying study of psychological cruelty. Grissill is at first simply frightened and bewildered by the disappearance of her babies, and wanders around the darkened castle trying to find them. The Marquess suddenly steps out in front of her, frightening her, and tells her that the children have been removed to a more suitable nurse, lest they imbibe corruption from their common mother, a contention which Grissill humbly accepts. Then, to test her acceptance of his command, the Marquess has the babies brought sufficiently near for Grissill to hear their crying, but will not allow her to see or touch them. He stands and watches her weeping helplessly, as milk runs from her breasts in an uncontrollable response to their hunger-cries.

This incident is infinitely more calculatedly cruel and shocking than anything in the earlier play, because the human element has been introduced. When details of

intimate physical responses like lactation are mentioned, we begin to look for human psychology as well, and when this element is brought into the story it acquires a perverse and sinister aspect. The traditional elements of Grissill's banishment and the supposed murder of the children seem anti-climactic after this incident.

The episode of Grissill's return to the castle is also elaborated so that it is more trying to her feelings. Instead of being summoned back in the relatively dignified capacity of housekeeper, she is made to scrub floors and to carry firewood and coal. As a final touch of cruelty, she is made to wait upon the bride as she dresses for the ceremony and to place her own wedding ring upon the finger of her successor.

Although Grissill's patience precludes any expression of her feelings while under trial, the anger and grief her experiences would arouse in real life are fully articulated by a trio of sympathisers. As well as old Janicola, her father, Grissill has been provided with Babulo, a clownish manservant who adores her, and Laureo, an impoverished student brother, so that each new trial arouses comment on three levels: orthodox morality from Janicola, a mixture of the comforts of learning and the cynicism bred by constant poverty in the pursuit of such learning from Laureo, and from Babulo, a simple but sincere desire to inflict grievous bodily harm upon the Marquess. Although Grissill never complains of the suffering and wrongs she endures, the audience is never in danger of forgetting them, or the anger they arouse.

It seems that Dekker and Chettle have an uneasy and ambiguous attitude to their story, since despite their efforts to provide logical explanations for the Marquess' conduct, they seem to realise that it cannot be explained in the terms of normal human psychology. Perhaps this is why,

despite his well-explained motives for testing Grissill, the Marquess finally acknowledges that he has done her harm, admitting "My selfe have done most wrong, for I did try/To breake the temper of thy constancie".

The dramatists' uncertainty about their play's story is further suggested by their decision to offset the character of Grissill with two other contrasting women, Gwenthyan, a Welsh kinswoman of the Marquess who is courted and married by the Welsh knight Sir Owen, and Iulia, the Marquess' sister. Gwenthyan is the classic froward wife who, having consented to marry, makes her husband's life miserable, nagging, fighting, squandering large sums of money on clothes, tearing up their marriage contract every time he protests, and finally humiliating him by giving all the food for an important and meticulously-planned banquet to a group of beggars only minutes before the arrival of the noble guests.

Sir Owen, understandably dismayed, asks the Marquess for advice early in his married life, since Grissill's exemplary behaviour suggests that her husband must be expert at making women tractable. Owen is bewildered when the Marquess agrees to advise him but simply gives him three of six pliable osier rods which he has just cut, mistakenly assuming that the Marquess means him to use them for beating Gwenthyan. The Marquess eventually explains his bizarre action at the end of the play when, producing the three rods plaited into a pattern, he reveals

I tride my Grissills patience when twas greene
Like a young Osier, and I moulded it
Like waxe to all impressions: married men
That long to tame their wiues must curbe them in
Before they need a bridle, then they'll prooue
All Grissills, full of patience, full of loue.

(85)

The technique is for the husband to impress his will upon his wife even before she shows any tendency to want her own

way, but this advice is too late to help Sir Owen, whose wife's temperament is by now as inflexible as his hardened willow wands. Iulia advises that his only course is to adopt patience and endure his wife's moods quietly, but suddenly Gwenthyan herself announces that

it shall not neede; as her cosen has tryed Grissill, so
Gwenthian has Sir Owen... is not pul'd down neither, but
Sir Owen shal be her head. (86)

She claims to have been testing her husband as the Marquess has his wife, and announces that his reward for his patience will be her voluntary submission, but there are several indications that this capitulation is facile and cynical. Immediately after this grant of authority to him, Gwenthyan warns Sir Owen not to take advantage of her submission, since if he does, she will dominate him again, and shortly afterwards, at the end of the play, she solicits loud applause from women in the audience, asking

you then that haue husbands that you would pridle, set
your hands to Gwenthians pill, for tis not fid that poore
womens should be kept alwaies under, (87)

having reverted to her usual role of the dominant wife. Apparently, Gwenthyan has noted from the Marquess' example that it is permissible, even laudable, to torment your spouse, provided that you claim that you were only testing her (or him), and has decided to claim this motive for her behaviour, which, at the time, appeared merely to be outright shrewishness, without any hint of a nobler purpose. Gwenthyan's cynical use of this idea degrades the Marquess' case, since if she can explain ordinary bad temper and violence as testing, why should we assume that he is any different, and that his tormenting of Grissill was a moral action rather than a sadistic and obsessive desire "to breake the temper of true constancie"?

That we are dealing with a play in which the characters observe and learn from one another's actions is confirmed by the views expressed by Iulia. She has been involved with the fates of both couples, trying to warn Sir Owen that Gwenthyan's beauty covers an aggressive nature, and to persuade her brother to "vex not poore Grissill more", and has observed the problems and inadequacies of both marriages. Seeing in marriage only a choice between discord and harmony achieved at the price of self-sacrifice, or between being master or victim, she rejects the idea of matrimony, explaining to her suitors as she tries to persuade them not to return

would you wish me to loue? when loue is so full of hate?
how vnlovely is loue? how bitter? how ful of blemishes?
my Lord and brother insults our Grissill, that makes me
glad, Gwenthyan curbs Sir Owen, that makes you glad, Sir
Owen is maistred by his Mistris, that makes you mad, poore
Grissill is martyred by her Lord, that makes you merrie,
for I alwaies wish that a woman may neuer meete better
bargaines, when sheele thrust her sweet libertie into the
hands of a man... Gwenthians peeushness and Grissills
patience, make me heere to defie that Ape Cupid. (88)

She feels that some of the audience who have shared her experience of the play "that haue behelde Grissills patience,... and Sir Owens sufferance, Gwenthians frowardnes" will agree with her and reach the same conclusion. Soliciting applause at the end of the play, she announces

I trust there are some mayden batchelers and virgin
maydens, those that liue in freedom and loue it, those
that know the war of marriage and hate it, set their hands
to my bill, which is rather to dye a mayde and leade Apes
in hell, then to liue a wife and be continually in hell.

(89)

The case for patience in marriage is given an equally long explanation at the end of the play, but it is weakened in several ways, by not being advanced by Grissill, its most obvious proponent, because "Grissill is weary" after her

tribulations, but by the comic Sir Owen, who does not stick to his subject, but simply counts up types of members of the audience, mentioning those

that haue crabbed husbands, and cannot mend them, as
Grissils had, and awl that haue fixen wiues... and awl
that haue scoldes... and awl that loue faire Ladies (90)

in an all-out attempt to get the most applause. So although patience gets the last word, Iulia's interpretation of the events of the play remains the most convincing. Whereas John Phillip observed that Grissill was an exemplary wife, Iulia observes that if that is the case, women should try to avoid marriage, and, given the evidence of the play, it is a logical conclusion. That it is only a comment on the Grissill story and not a general point of view is obvious from Dekker's optimistic and human treatment of marriage elsewhere in his comedies. The dramatists draw a dark moral from their story, but it would have been difficult for them to have done otherwise, since the tale is unproblematic only when treated as a fable, becoming profoundly disturbing as soon as any element of psychological realism is introduced.

The psychological undertones of the Grissill story which Chettle and Dekker detect and highlight suggest that the appeal of the stories of testing may be more timeless than their obvious value to the Protestant moralists suggests. On the most crude psychological level, the idea of being loved so much that nothing inflicted upon the lover will shake his or her devotion is flattering and gratifying; and it seems that some people do experience an urge to torment their loved ones to find out how much they will endure before withdrawing their affection, which stems from a desire to be loved completely and unconditionally, and a fear that such absolute acceptance may not really exist. The story of Grissill would appeal equally to those who hoped for unconditional love, and to those who might have wished to

prove extreme love by self-sacrifice. The story seems, however, to have even more disturbing psychological connotations. Whenever an attempt is made to envisage it in realistic terms, the story of a virtuous woman passively enduring and accepting any cruelty her husband cares to inflict, acquiescing in the murder of her children and in her own degradation, and helping to adorn her rival to take her place, all because she loves him, the sado-masochistic implications cannot be avoided. In recommending Grissill as an exemplar, moral writers and dramatists were selling women a masochistic idea of love, in which the degree of suffering and self-sacrifice was proportional to the degree of affection, which, encouraged by irresponsible fiction, still persists to this day. A modern story which bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Grissill is 'Pauline Reage''s Story of O, one of the best-selling pornographic novels of the early 1970s. O's lover, whom she adores obsessively, gives her as a servant and prostitute to a private club consisting of his business associates, who subject her to a series of perversions of escalating brutality. O passively submits to this way of life because she hopes that her complete obedience to his wishes will prove her devotion to her lover and, even if this does not induce him to change his mind and take her away, that this will ensure that he will continue to visit her. Except for the fact that there is no ending, so that O's abject love and degradation continue indefinitely, this is the Grissill story all over again, told in terms of sexual rather than social humiliation. At least one reviewer praised the book for its "remarkable insight into love as women experience it". The influence of "patient and meeke Grissill" and "the good example, of her pacience towardes her husband" is closer to some modern attitudes to love and marriage than we might like to think.

The idea of the constancy test, which originated in mediaeval tales which were clearly not meant to be taken

literally, was revived by a later age in which the moral power of the husband over his wife and family was being reinforced, and recommended to women as an exemplary code of conduct. As we have seen, the difficulties it presented for the dramatist were the essential passiveness of the virtues being illustrated, and the unpleasant undertones of the husband's decision to test his wife in this way. Although some dramatists like Samuel Brandon chose to stay firmly within the homiletic convention, others used the elements of the testing plot to present heroines who express their virtue in a more active way, and even to question the motivation and moral status of men who set tests for women.

The second type of testing play, those in which chastity is tested, undergo a similar development. This will be discussed, along with the plays themselves, in the following section.

2: TESTS OF CHASTITY

The origin of the immensely popular theme of the test of the heroine's chastity is not as obvious as that of the constancy test theme. Since it usually concerns a virtuous woman of low degree who finds herself desired by a man who is her social superior, the idea may be related to the story of Grissill. Perhaps the theme of testing, which captured contemporary feeling about the necessity for women to be always on guard to prove their virtue became adapted to demonstrate the most essential female virtue, without which all the others were thought to be useless, that of chastity.

It seems that it has always been thought that the most accurate measure of a woman's purity is the degree of resistance she offers a would-be seducer. Mosaic law's criteria for judging women who had been seduced or raped depended entirely on the idea that a woman who valued her reputation would always raise sufficient outcry to summon help, if attacked in a populated area (Deuteronomy 22. 22-28), and even nowadays it is not uncommon for the moral character of rape victims to be assessed partly on the evidence of how many injuries they were willing to incur in the process of protecting themselves. It is very likely that similar ideas existed during the Renaissance and this, allied to the convention of testing already established, may help to explain the appearance of the theme of the test of chastity.

The convention that the poor and virtuous heroine should be desired by a social superior, with sufficient power and authority over her to be able to persecute her if she resists makes the testing yet more stringent. The heroine must demonstrate not only her independence of worldly advancement, but that she would rather undergo any privation, material or otherwise, rather than sacrifice her chastity.

The test reveals an ideology of chastity which is simultaneously pragmatic and idealistic: heroines object to sexual activity on the practical grounds that their suitors will tire of them eventually and no-one else will want to marry a dishonoured woman, and, at the same time, are prepared to lose security, possessions, human contact and life itself in defence of their purity.

An early foreshadowing of the interest there was to be in this theme can be seen in the moral interlude Calisto and Melebea (1525), adapted from the Spanish novel La Celestina and published by John Rastell in 1530. The author completely re-worked this picaresque love tragedy into a tale of a test of chastity, sacrificing the earlier novel's psychological complexity and humour in the process. Instead, he stylises the characters into a moral diagram. Melebea, in the novel a noble young woman who gradually acknowledges her sexual nature and warms towards the illicit love offered by Calisto, becomes in the interlude an exemplar of feminine virtue whose purity, although great, only just stands the test. Celestina, who in the novel is a rich character combining the skills of "half a dozen trades - laundress, perfumer, maker of fards, mender of virginities, a bawd and a bit of a witch" is instrumental to Melebea's temptation in the interlude, and is used to typify feminine vice. (91)

The very early date of this testing interlude means that its glorifying of chastity has a slightly different emphasis from that found in later plays, since contemporary religious attitudes tended still to venerate chastity as a value in itself, as an alternative to marriage, rather than a preparation for it.

The imposition of a religious ethic on the love story has very interesting consequences. Whereas formerly the story was one of romantic love ending in tragedy, rather like

that of Romeo and Juliet, with many racy low-life characters supplying humorous and ironic contrast and comment, the imposition of the mediaeval religious ethic makes love synonymous with sex, and therefore filthy, bestial and to be avoided. This is not as anachronistic as it seems: many of the Christian Humanists' ideas were an odd blend of new Renaissance ideas and lingering mediaeval traditions, and views on women and sex were often in the latter category, as a reading of Vives will testify. Therefore, the plot, instead of being a psychological study of Melebea's gradual acceptance of Calisto's love and rejection of her parents' standards of purity, is one of chastity tested, threatened and finally saved, and the pervading theme is that of the opposition between religion and purity, and love/sex and depravity. Marriage is never even mentioned.

The character of Melebea, the female ideal, is ample evidence of the interlude's mixture of Renaissance and mediaeval ideas. In many respects, she is the humanistic ideal, unaffected by Calisto's "hygh estate", and rational in her attitude to her own beauty, which she regards not as a reason for pride, but for gratitude to God. Though sympathetic to Calisto's sufferings which lead him "to stryve wyth hym self", she has a rational disdain for "those folysh lovers" because of her understanding of mutability, which leads her to question the wisdom of exposing oneself to even more change than is inherent in the laws of nature. The author seems to have been especially concerned to portray Melebea as well educated, since he transferred quotations from Plutarch and Heraclitus concerning mutability from the Prologue of La Celestina to Melebea's speech in the interlude. It seems that Melebea's learning is of the sort Vives recommended for young women because "the mind set upon learning and wisdom shall... abhor from foul lust, that is to say, as the most white thing from soot".

Despite her accomplishments and amiable nature, Melebea's main virtue is chastity, which Vives thought encompassed all other feminine virtues and described as "the one treasure of woman". She is convinced that all Calisto's emotional pleadings spring from his "voluptuous appetite", and the mediaevalism of the play's outlook is reinforced by the terms in which she phrases her resolution:

Shall I accomplysh hys carnall desyre?
Nay, yet at a stake rather bren in a fyre! (92)

She visualises herself as one of the virgin saints familiar in mediaeval lore, who preferred martyrdom to the threat of losing their purity.

Calisto's passion, which threatens Melebea's purity, has more in common with the courtly love tradition than the more obviously acquisitive lust of would-be seducers in later testing plays. His passion is implicitly condemned, however, by its blasphemous aspect and by comic undercutting.

Calisto's addresses to Melebea are couched in the terms of C.S. Lewis found so objectionable in the Chevalier de la Charette. He pleads

O God, I myght in your presens be able
To manyfest my dolours incomperable!

Greter were that reward than the grace
Hevyn to optayn by workys of pyte.
Not so gloryous be the saintes that se Goddes face,
Ne joy not so moch as I do you to see. (93)

Like Lancelot in the early romance, who kneels to Guinevere as if she were a holy shrine, Calisto has adopted Melebea as a "god of goddesses". This aspect of courtly love must be completely opposed to the Church, since it substitutes the image of the beloved for God as the proper object of

veneration. The religious parallel is made extremely clear by Calisto's declaration

I wold thou knewst, Melebea worship I,
In her I beleve and her I love, (94)

which is a close parody of the Creed.

Apart from receiving implicit condemnation for its opposition to religion, Calisto's passion and particularly his mastery of the language of courtly love is constantly undermined by comedy. Having admitted that "no tong is able well to expresse" Melebea's beauty, Calisto asks Sempronio

I pray the, let me speke a whyle
My selff to refresh in rehersyng of my style, (95)

and proceeds to deliver a very stylish formal descriptio of Melebea's beauty from head to foot. Despite the author's promise of plenty of "the craft of, rhethoryk", the juxtaposition of doubt and extreme articulateness does seem to question the sincerity of Calisto's words.

Calisto's verbal skills are further undercut when it becomes apparent that he applies them not only to his admirable love, but to the less praiseworthy characters who may help him attain her. His extravagant rhetoric becomes particularly ludicrous when its object is dirty old Celestina the bawd, upon whom he lavishes the following praises:

O notable woman, O auncyent vertew!
O gloryous hope of my desyred intent!
Thende of my delectable hope to renew,
My regeneracion to this lyfe present,
Resurrecon from deth: so excellent
Thou art above other. I desyre humbly
To kys thy handes, wherin lyeth my remedy.
.

But myne unworthines makyth resystence.
Yet worship I the ground that thou gost on.

(96)

Celestina is unimpressed with this courteous address. Irritated and impatient to get down to business, she rallies Sempronio:

... can I lyff with these bonys
That thy master gyffyth me here for to ete?
Wordes are but wynd; therfore attons
Byd hym close his mouth and to his purs get,
For money maketh marchaunt that must jet.
I have herd his wordes, but where be his dedes?

(97)

Celestina makes Calisto's raptures ridiculous, not only because she is an unlikely subject for poetic descriptions, but because his life-or-death passion is, to her, all in a day's work, and nothing matters so much as being paid in advance. Calisto longs for "regeneracion to this lyfe present,/Reserrecon from deth", and gives Celestina his cloak and chain as a down-payment. The introduction of money into the proceedings degrades Calisto's idealism: the fact that he tries to buy Melebea through the offices of a bawd undermines the transcendental values with which he has dignified his desire for her.

It seems initially that the play will follow the course of the earlier novel, and that Melebea will gradually mellow towards Calisto. She pours righteous indignation on Celestina's first approach to her, but when Celestina hastily retracts her earlier words, pretending that the "sekenes/Drawyng to deth" of which she was persuading Melebea to cure Calisto was in fact a severe case of toothache, Melebea seizes on the pretence with revealing alacrity. She is only too eager to send her girdle as a charm against this ailment, and promises a special prayer for it as well. Her suggestion to Celestina that she "come agayn secretly" to collect the prayer indicates that she is glad of the toothache story, since it gives her the respectable

pretext of pity through which she can indulge her growing interest in Calisto, which she could not ordinarily admit without losing her reputation. As she leaves triumphantly with the girdle, Celestina announces "Now know ye by the half tale what the hole doth mean", in case the audience has missed the significance of Melebea's surrender of this token.

At this point, just as the psychological interest of the romantic tale is beginning to develop, the adaptor breaks away from his source and ends the play with the dramatic equivalent of a palinode. Religious values re-appear with the arrival of Danio, who holds the combined authority of father, teacher and moral instructor over Melebea. He recounts a dream in which he saw "a hote bath, holsome and pleasyng", representing virtue and "a pyt of foule stynkyng water" or "vyse and syn", into which people fell and died, and towards which he saw Melebea enticed by a "foule rough bitch". Instantly, Melebea becomes "pensyfe and sore abasshyd", and kneels, asking forgiveness for disobeying both God's word and her father's teaching. She confesses to Danio that because Celestina "had almost brought (her) here unto/To fulfyll the foule lust of Calisto", she has sinned in intention, and he agrees that "because ye were somewhat consentyng/Ye have offendid God therein". However, he advises her to pray for mercy, rejoicing that the habit of daily prayer he inculcated in his daughter has "kept her from actuall dede of shame" and even "preservyd her good name".

In this very early chastity test play, then, the heroine's purity almost fails the test, but she is saved in the nick of time as the appearance of her father recalls her to the values he has taught her. The heroines of later plays need no such rescue, because they are shown to have successfully internalised these values.

The theme of the chastity test is touched upon very briefly in John Phillip's Commodye of pacient and meeke Grissill, when old Janickle, not dreaming that Gautier could mean to marry Grissill, imagines that he means to seduce her and advises his master "fly Venus wanton wayes/O mortifie your appetite, doe nought regard hir plaies", and will hear no more until assured that Gautier's intentions are honourable. Similarly, in another brief episode in Thomas Preston's Cambyses (1561), the Lady attempts to discourage an apparently advantageous marriage with her cousin the King, pointing out that such an incestuous union "would the Gods displease". The King, though, like Henry VIII, is determined to crush all opposition to the match, proclaiming

who dare say nay what I pretend, who dare the same
Shall lose his head and have report as traitor ^{withstand} through my
land, (98)

and, even though married against her will, the Lady further proves her goodness by devoting herself to becoming a 'most obedient wife'. In both plays, the brief test of chastity is closely allied to the wider ideal of faithful performance of the duties of wifehood.

2a Chastity as personal integrity

These plays, however, were followed by a series in which, although the test of the heroines's chastity is related to its place in marriage, the drama focuses on its importance to the heroine as an individual - as a symbol of her personal integrity and moral and spiritual well-being. The first of these is R.B.s Tragicall Comedie of Apius and Virginia (1564). It is based on a classical plot, known to the author in its mediaeval form in Chaucer's Phisiciens Tale, which is the source of much of the play's detail, including its interest in female education and virtue. (99)

The play is simultaneously a glorification of virginity, "a rare example of the vertue of Chastitie", and of the broader ethic of family life and good upbringing suggested by the Epilogue, which exhorts the audience

... example do you take
Of Virginia's life, of chastitie, of duty to thy make
Of love of wife, of love to spouse, of love to husband
deare
Of bringing up of tender youth, all these are noted here.
(100)

Virginia is not only chaste, but "sober, meeke and modest too, and vertuous in lyke case", in which she resembles Virginia in Chaucer's Phisiciens Tale, who is presented not just as an example of chastity, but as an embodiment of all the virtues extolled by moral writers like the Knight of La Tour Landry. Virginia, Chaucer tells us

... lacked no condicion
That is to preyse, as by discrecioun.
As wel in goost as body chast was she;
For which she floured in virginitee
With alle humylitee and abstinence,
With alle attemperance and pacience,
With mesure eek of beryng and array.
Discreet she was in answeyng alway;
.
Shamefast she was in maydens shamefastnesse,
Constant in herte, and evere in bisynesse
To dryve hire out of ydel slogardye.
... she wolde fleen the compaignie
Where likly was to treten of folye,
As is at feestes, revels, and at daunces,
That been occasions of daliaunces.
(101)

R.B. never leaves us in any doubt that Virginia's chastity is a part of her preparation for eventual marriage, a marriage which will reflect the harmony enjoyed by her parents. Her future husband would, like Virginius, rejoice in possessing "such a happy spouse, such a fortunate dame/ That no blot or staine can impayre her fame". Virginia, like the ideal girl described by Vives, far from showing an essential lack of chastity of spirit by looking forward to

marriage, feels that she is too young for it, but entrusts the matter to her parents' judgement, showing her obedience by submission to the man of their choice. She promises

When wedlocke doth require the same,
With parents love and leave,
Yet obstinate I wyll not be,
But willing will me yeeld
When you commaund and not before:
Then duety shall me sheeld. (102)

The exemplary nature of her attitude is emphasised by Virginius' admiring outburst "A Gods, why doo ye not compel eche Dame the lyke to showe?/And every Impe of her againe, her duty thus to know?"

The importance of the marriage ethic, and that of harmonious family life, is introduced mainly through dialogue and songs, such as the one whose chorus sums up "The trustiest treasure in earth as we see/Is man, wife and children in all to agree". Although the actual dramatic momentum is chiefly concerned with Virginia's own moral dilemma, and her personal choice of death rather than dishonour, we are also made aware that part of the pathos of her fate is that she will now never have the husband or family her careful upbringing prepared her for.

The vision of orderly family life is contrasted with the lewd brawling of the comic servants, and the chaotic households described by Haphazard the Vice as he muses

Hap may so hazard, the moone may so change,
That men may be masters, and wives will not raunge.
But in hazard it is in many a grange
Lest wives were the codpiece, and maydens coy straunge.
As pecockes sit perking by chaunce in the plomtrey,
So maides would be masters, by the guise of this countrey. (103)

That R.B. puts this speech into the mouth of Haphazard, whose name indicates the moral confusion he represents,

secret caresses she ought to be true to her reputation and not offer herself to her husband like a bold prostitute.

(105)

Apius' fantasies would have established him as potentially evil even before his temptation by Haphazard, who in one brief scene induces him to accept his own modes of speech and of morality. Apius decides "to hap or to hazard what thing shall envade me", showing clearly that he is in the Vice's power, and has relinquished conscious moral effort to control his actions. He reverses the events of his fantasy in order to realise it, deciding "I will deflower hir youth". His corrupt lust and suffering are described in a mixture of sub-Senecan ranting and courtly love language:

The Furies fell of Lyngo Lake
My princely dayes doo shorte.
All drownde in deadly woe I live
That once dyd ioy in sport.
I live and languish in my lyfe
As doth the wounded deare.
I thirst, I crave, I call and crie,
And yet am naught the neare.

(106)

R.B. draws on mediaeval tradition for an effect of unrequited, suffering but basically illicit love, and on Senecan vocabulary for an atmosphere of horror and impending doom. He uses verbal allusions very skilfully to convey the real nature of Apius' passion.

In his treatment of Virginia's dilemma and death, R.B. deviates considerably from his source, making the problem more obviously a test of Virginia's individual virtue and fortitude. In the Phisiciens Tale, it is Virginius who decides that "Ther been two weyes, outhur death or shame", and Virginia eventually agrees to be killed, after begging her father for mercy, weeping, lamenting and fainting, and finally begging her father "that with his swerd he sholde smyte softe". In R.B.s version, however, it is Virginius

who weeps as he tells his daughter of Apius' plot, and begs the Fates

O Sisters; I search, I seeke and I crave
No more at your handes but death for to have,
Rather than see my daughter deflourde,
Or els in ill sorte so vildely devourde. (107)

Unlike Virginia in the source, who merely mentions 'shame' as the only alternative to death, R.B.'s Virginia considers the other options and demonstrates that she understands why death is necessary:

... if I be once spotted
My name and my kindred then forth wilbe blotted;
And if thou my father should die for my cause
The world would accompt me as gilty in cause. (108)

The issues at stake are those of family honour, appropriate to the ideal of domestic happiness and unity established in the first scene, and of reputation. Virginia seizes on her father's suggestion of death and claims it for herself

Then rather, deare father, if it be thy pleasure,
Graunt me the death; then keepe I my treasure,
My lampe, my light, my life undefiled. (109)

Virginius, while still preferring to die himself, admits the logic of her words, particularly since "lemmon thou must be if I were gone", and agrees that

... better it is to dye with good fame
Then longer to live to reape us but shame;
.
Then end without shame so let us persever,
With trompe of good fame so dye shall we never. (110)

Virginia does not weep, but dries her father's eyes and encourages him to keep to their decision, blindfolding herself with her wimple in case her nerve fails and finally inviting him "Now father, worke thy will on me, that life I

may inioy". As her parents remarked earlier, Virginia does not need to be shown her duty: using the same idea as that of Hero's dying "only whiles her slander lived", Virginia feels that the loss of chastity would entail a living death, and that death with honour intact is really "life". Her decision to give Apius her head rather than her maiden-head aptly symbolises her system of values.

R.B.'s interlude, though, does not differentiate between chastity and reputation for chastity, which accords well with the Roman setting of the tale, but might not have satisfied contemporary Christian moralists. The next author to embark upon the chastity test theme, Thomas Garter, gave his play a Christian dimension by choosing to write about Susanna, a Biblical heroine, and, by making her choose between chastity itself and the reputation for chastity, raises the question of whether chastity should be a virtue observed for earthly benefits, such as security and social prestige, or an absolute virtue, for which the individual is accountable only to God.

In The Commodity of the Moste Virtuouse and Godly Susanna (1569), Thomas Garter uses the morality idiom to make the audience aware that the fate of Susanna's own soul, not only that of her marriage, is at stake. He begins the play with a conversation between the Devil and his son Ill Reporte the Vice. The Devil, irritated by Susanna's goodness, has been testing her for some time, hoping to "see if God with all his myght/Can defende this soule from our auncient spyght". Ill Reporte recounts how the Devil has been attempting to overthrow Susanna's virtue by assailing her with temptations to most of the Seven Deadly sins. At first

Her hath he sought by pryde at fyrst to blynde her
youthfull hart,
Tush, tush, she was and is so meeke, he sped not in that
part,
Then did he seeke by gluttony to blynde her fancies to,

Her sober diet him deceiued, and did that quyte subdue,
 Then knowing that all women are giuen much to enuyed
 To force her haue an enuious hart, right many cause did string,
 But she like one not of this world, but like a very foole, bring,
 Did arme her selfe with pacience, till euery cause did
 But here you wiues, I would not wish that you should take coole,
 But if your husbandes anger you, beshrew their crooked her part,
 Well to my matter yet agayne, he sets his seruaunt hart,
 To follow her with sugred steps, in euery place she goeth.
 But busy Susan enuiues the Deuill and all he dooth,
 As she withstandes sloth and his steps, in despyte of his
 tooth.

.
 He gaue her Gold then at her will to make her couetous,
 She takes it but for needefull use, or else doth it
 despise. (111)

By showing her as the focus of a struggle between good and evil, Thomas Garter presents Susanna's apparently passive goodness as an active and effective struggle to repulse the attacks of the Devil, a very innovative view of feminine virtue. The passive wifely virtues of meekness, abstemiousness, patience and industry are described as tactics of actively defying the Devil, which makes the story, and indeed, the ideal of good wifely behaviour, much more exciting, while preparing us to see the test of her chastity in the same way. The tradition of the psychomachia, drawn from the mediaeval morality plays, is here applied to the inner struggle of the wife against earthly problems and temptations.

Ill Reporte goes on to say that the Devil, having exhausted all his other resources,

With filthy lustes of fleshly men, meaneth her to assayle
 And such they be shall her intise, to doe that pleasaunt
 As shall prevayle I tell you true, by force or else by deede,
 meede. (112)

We know, then, from the outset, that Susanna is to be tested by supernatural forces, who have deliberately stacked the odds against her, by selecting seducers with authority over her, and that more is at stake than worldly happiness and reputation. We know that only complete purity can avoid spiritual disaster, so that the wisdom of Susanna's decision to be accountable only to God and forfeit the approval of earthly judges is incontrovertible.

Susanna herself is established at once as a good wife by her concern when her husband Joachim is late for lunch, and by her forgiveness and obedience to him. Unfortunately, unobtrusive forgiveness and patience are difficult to convey on stage and Susanna's remark

I will not say unto you now, what you did cause me think
Indeede I will conceale it now, and at the matter winke

(113)

has the effect of a deliberate attempt to induce guilt and repentance rather than sincere forgiveness. Her obedience is also necessarily rather overstated: she announces to Joachim her intention "both now and alwayes to,/That I should follow yor behestes, as reason wils me to". Later scenes show Susanna's involvement with the running of her household, by showing her in the process of giving very detailed instructions to her servants.

In direct contrast to this evocation of harmonious domesticity, the lust of the Elders for Susanna is described in the terms of illicit, adulterous courtly love. They pray to Venus to be allowed to possess her, making a long elaborate descriptio of her beauty, which becomes very graphic in its fascination with "her breasts that are so round and fayre" and "her buttockes broade and rounde". Thomas Garter skilfully exposes the limitations of sexual obsession which simultaneously idolises and belittles its

object in the Elders' rapturous description, whose celestial pretensions suddenly dive into bathos:

I think an Aungell sure she be
Why all this world, nor ten worldes mo, haue any such as
she.
.
I thinke that Nature which made her, cannot make like
agayne,
Or else that she a Goddesse is, I thinke I tell you playne
A Iudge quoth a: A Iugler Lorde, I would thou madste of
me,
So that I had to Iugle with, such iugling staffe as she.
(114)

Susanna's fall from Goddess to juggling staff in the space of four lines indicates the cruelly reductive nature of the Elders' lust. Their conversation, invented by the dramatist, prepares us for the terms of their proposition to Susanna, which is drawn from the story's Old Testament source. This 'love' is expressed in terms directed only in the securing of its object:

Come lye with vs, we loue thee well, Susan be not afrayde,
For if thou wilt not then we shall, a testimonial lay,
Against thee of a maruailous force, and thus we both will
say
A yongman with thee here we found, in very secrete sport.
(115)

Susanna immediately apprehends the nature to the choice before her:

if I fulfill yor fylthy lust, I know it breedes my death
And if I doe not, then ah, alas, you trap me in yor
bandes. (116)

The dramatist uses the Old Testament episode to focus very closely on the ethical issues of the chastity test. Susanna is forced to choose between the reputation for chastity, with all its advantages, masking actual adultery, and chastity itself, but with loss of reputation and the possibility of execution for adultery. Susanna's choice will show whether her chastity is an absolute virtue, or one undertaken for its material benefits. The audience, having seen the Devil at the beginning of the play, is

aware of the spiritual dimension of Susanna's life and knows that she should consider herself accountable to God, not society, and that her decision that "better it is without the act, yor danger to fall in,/Than to attempt my Lord my God with this so vyle a sinne" is the only right one. Eventually, her faith is justified and she is rescued from execution for adultery by a deus ex machina in the form of the ghost of Daniel, who demands a re-trial and points out an inconsistency in the story of the Elders, proving that it is a fabrication. The Devil is baulked of his prey, complaining

How long haue I with toyling payne, sought Susans blood to
What engines, snares, and other craftes, about that haue I
And yet that God still doth me wrong, he doth my force
And them that I doe seeke to get, he keepes them in his
get,
set,
withstande,
hande. (117)

However, although the message that chastity is an absolute virtue and that the individual is accountable only to God in this respect is predominant, Garter does not devalue reputation for chastity, constantly reminding the audience that the people who cannot believe the accusation hold this opinion because Susanna's "vertue all the world haue noted from her youth", and the Elders themselves thought that their chief obstacle was that

her credite is so great, that if she doe denye,
The moste and least in all the world, beleeeue her by and
by, (118)

and had to resort to circulating slanders about her. Reputation and chastity are both brittle, and a woman's best policy is to safeguard both. Garter does not speculate on the fate a woman who, like Susanna, decided to

preserve actual chastity at the cost of her reputation for chastity, might expect to meet in the real world, where miracles rarely occur to vindicate the inner purity of women against the accusations of an enraged society.

Susanna, then, has several features which came to be common in the chastity test play. The men who desire the heroine have sufficient authority and power to be able to coerce her, and she stands the test by adherence to religious principles learned in childhood when her parents' "chiefest care" was "our Daughter to instruct and teach, the trade of Moyses lawe". It has also another theme which was to become more prevalent in these plays, that of the virtuous woman's being flawed in some way, by her physical beauty, which, since it tempts men, is potentially evil. While the Judge condemns the Elders, he also mentions that in a way, they are victims, since "Fayrenesse hath thyne eyes deceavde, and lust hath made thee blynde". The woman's own physical beauty precipitates her moral testing.

The next surviving 'testing' play, George Whetstone's Historie of Promos and Cassandra (1578), explores the familiar ground of the woman's need to make her own moral decision about the value of chastity in a startlingly innovative way. His heroine decides to put other values before that of physical chastity, and in doing so converts potential tragedy into redemption. At the beginning of the play, the model seems similar to that of Apus and Virginia and Susanna: the virtuous gentlewoman Cassandra finds herself desired by the judge Promos, who holds authority and has power over her because he is able to reprieve her brother who is under sentence of death for fornication. He is made aware of the possibilities of abusing his power by Phallax, who, like his predecessor Haphazard, corrupts his master. However, the morality of the play is far more complex than that of earlier plays.

One of the first signs of this complexity is the blurring of the clear distinction between lawful married love and lawless fornication seen in the earlier plays, a process which is begun when Cassandra, though herself a virgin, argues that sexual intercourse with intention to marry afterwards differs in kind from mere promiscuity, claiming that the law Promos is invoking will always miss its real target because "the lecher fyered with lust is punished no more/Than he who fel through force of love, whose mariage salves his sore". She argues with Promos that in Andrugio's case

Mariage makes amends for what committed is
He hath defiled no nuptial bed, nor forced rape hath mov'd
He fel through love, who never ment but wive the wight he
lov'd. (119)

It is interesting to note that Promos' first thought after hearing Cassandra is "Happie is the man, that inioyes the love of such a wife", and that the qualities in her which attract him are those thought appropriate to a wife by contemporary writers. He notes that "though she be fair, she is not deckt with garish hues for show,/Hir beautie lures, her looks cut off fond sutes with chast disdain". He seems originally to consider Cassandra as a possible wife and then tries to forget her, but his intention is changed by the persuasion of the servant Phallax. He discovers his master's secret and encourages him to believe that "Cassandras flesh is as her brothers, frayle/Then wyll she stoupe (in cheefe) when Lords assayle", especially since "her brothers life will make her glad and fayne". Unlike the evil lusts of earlier plays, Promos' desire for Cassandra is originally a healthy attraction, which is perverted by the consciousness of his power over her, of which Phallax makes him aware.

When Cassandra returns to renew her pleas, and Promos announces his proposition, her response is the conventional one of 'death before dishonour':

Yet honor lyves when death hath done his worst,
Thus fame then lyfe is of farre more emprise. (122)

Andrugio, though, departs from the principle of death before dishonour, and introduces an element entirely new in chastity test plays, that of intention. He replies

Nay Cassandra, if thou thy selfe submyt,
To save my life, to Promos fleashly wyll,
Justice wyll say thou dost no cryme commit:
For in forst faultes is no intent of yll. (123)

Cassandra accepts this, but is worried that no-one would differentiate in her case, and that "dispite wyll blase my crime, but not the cause". Andrugio, though, points out that

... more slaunder would infame
Your spotles lyfe, to reave your brothers breath
When you have powre for to enlarge the same. (124)

His unusual insistence that dishonour is better than death wins Cassandra to consent "her honor for to slay" in order to save his life. On the way to her assignation with Promos, though, her resolution wavers, and she feels that her 'monstrous' appearance in the page's disguise accords well with the sin she is about to commit, and hopes to demonstrate her virtue to Promos by weeping so bitterly that he would "see that I am fit to be his wife,/Though now constrainde to be his concubine". Unfortunately, Promos finds Cassandra's tearful appearance unusually arousing, and the ploy which she had hoped would prevent her seduction in fact precipitates it. Later, she explains her earlier fears of monstrousness have been realised: she is "monster now, no mayde or wife". All her earlier misgivings about loss of virginity have returned, and she fears that no-one will give her credit for her good intentions. Her concept of virtue tells her that if not a

importance, and present her with more pressing moral imperatives.

Perhaps because Whetstone was worried that this might suggest a slightly unconventional ethic to his audience, he later makes Polina voice a highly conventional and didactic lament for the loss of her virginity and its tragic consequences. She rebukes Love who

... so dyst witch our wits as we from reason strayed
Provok't by thee we dyd refuse no vantage of delight: ^{quight,}
Delight, what did I say? nay death, by rash and foule
abuse (126)

and instructs all women to regard her fall as an awful warning:

So that (fayre dames) from such consent, my accyidents of
Forewarneth you to keepe aloofe though love your harts do ^{harne,}
arme. (127)

Despite her self-condemnation, Polina shows that her love for Andrugio was basically that of a wife by resolving to adopt the lifelong mourning recommended to dedicated widows by contemporary moral writers, deciding

I wyll cut off occasions all which hope of myrth may move,
With ceaseless teares yle quench each cause that kindleth
And thus tyl death Polina wyll estraunge her selfe from ^{coles of loue:}
Andrugio, to reward thy love which dyd thy life destroy. ^{joy,}
(128)

Even though Whetstone questions the value of the 'death before dishonour' ethic, stressing the importance of intention, it seems that he cannot convey the essential goodness of his unchaste heroines without reference to the conventional sexual ethic. To make us understand that Cassandra and Polina are virtuous, though unchaste, he

shows that they both experience extreme guilt and condemn themselves.

Whetstone's unusual treatment of the testing theme appears again in the scenes of Cassandra's interview with the King. At first she plans, like raped virgins of the past

To proove that force enforced me to fall
When I have showne Lorde Promos fowle misdeedes,
This knife forthwith shall ende my woe and shame.
My gored harte, which at his feet then bleeddes,
To scourge his faultes the King wyll more inflame. (129)

The King's account of their meeting shows that the will for the deed was enough for him. He stopped her suicide attempt because only the intention was important to him, since it proved that her accusation of Promos was genuine and not a blackmail attempt, explaining that

If Cassandra her goodes, nay, lyfe preferd,
Before revenge of Promos trechery,
I had not known his detestable rape. (130)

The King further upholds the importance of good intentions at the trial, when, the court having heard Cassandra's story, he announces

Thy forced fault was free from evill intent,
So long, no shame can blot thee any way. (131)

Far from being equally guilty as her seducer, Cassandra is judged an innocent victim, while Promos is denounced and sentenced to death, first being ordered "foorthwith thou shalt marrie Cassandra/For to repayre hir honor thou dydst waste".

The marriage and Cassandra's attitude to it forms the turning point of the play. Had she been contented to claim Promos' name and goods, presumably the story would have

ended with his death, and Andrugio's life-long exile, since he would have been unable to come out of hiding. In fact, the marriage presents a further test to Cassandra's virtue, as it alters her circumstances completely. It changes her from a fallen virgin, whose duty is to prove her essential innocence and to her immediate family, into a wife, whose loyalties and duties are entirely different. That she is acutely aware of this alteration is another indication of Cassandra's extreme feminine virtue: she becomes instantly an ideal wife to a husband whose behaviour has been far from ideal. In soliloquy in Act 4 Scene 2, Cassandra explains her altered moral priorities: although originally

Nature wyld mee my Brother love, now dutie commaunds mee
To preferre before kyn or friend my husbands safetie.
But O, aye mee, by Fortune I am made his chiefest foe:
T'was I alas, even onely I, that wrought his overthroe.
What shall I doo to worke amends for this my haynous
deede?
The tyme is short, my power small, his succors axeth
speede
And shall I seeke to save his blood, that lately sought
his lyfe?
Oh yea, I then was sworne his foe: but nowe as faithfull
Wife
I must and wyll preferre his health. (132)

It is Cassandra's virtuous resolution which prompts Andrugio to surrender to the King, even though he believes it will entail losing his own life, since he knows his sister well enough to realise that "whylst that she lyve, no comferte can remove/Care from her harte if that hir husband dye". Andrugio feels that self-preservation at the cost of her husband's life is no way to repay a sister who sacrificed her honour for him. Most surprisingly of all, he adopts Cassandra's original attitude that "Death is but death, and all in fyne shall dye/Thus (being dead) my fame shall live alway". Her dutiful love and forgiveness is the impulse which prompts Andrugio's selfless action, which in turn influences the King to pardon both men, chiefly for

the sake of Cassandra, whose kindness set off this chain reaction of forgiveness and mercy. He says

Cassandra, I have noted thy distresse,
Thy vertues eke from first unto the last:
And glad I am, without offence it lyes
In me to ease thy grieffe and heaviness.
Andrugio's sav'd, the juell of thy joye,
And for thy sake I pardon Promos faulte.
Yea let them both thy vertues rare commende
In that their woes with this delyght doth ende. (133)

Cassandra's chosen course of action, her "vertues eke from first unto the last", has resulted in a final tableau of two happily married couples, linked by ties of kinship and friendship, instead of a deluge of death and mourning, but what have her 'vertues' been? Certainly not the traditional ideal of death before dishonour: had she clung to this, and converted Andrugio to it, he would have been executed, and Polina would have been left to her chosen life of continual mourning, perhaps finding the death for which she longed. Cassandra's virtue seems to consist of the conventional goodness, purity and awareness of duty of the ideal wife, but with the important addition of the 'naturall love' which motivated her sacrifice of her honour for Andrugio's life. A similar desire to act in accordance with the loving rather than vengeful impulses of human nature seems to inform the mass forgiveness which ensures the happy ending, and the King's final speech to Promos similarly emphasises human love in its advice "Be loving to good Cassandra, thy Wife/And friendlie to thy brother Andrugio". Elsewhere the speech commends the morality of the New Testament rather than the Old, in its references to the joy at the recovery of the lost sheep, and of the necessity that "Justice joyne with mercie evermore". It seems, though, that as well as the message of the New Testament, that mercy and forgiveness must inform the old law, Whetstone's play indicates that the accepted law of female virtue, though useful and circumspect, is not in itself enough when moral choices have to be made. It must be

informed by 'naturall love' to make a truly good woman such as Cassandra. It is this innovative idea which makes Promos and Cassandra outstanding among other plays featuring the individual conscience's response to the 'test of chastity'.

2b Marriage under threat

In the earlier plays using the chastity test theme, the focus of attention tended to be upon the chaste woman as an individual soul undergoing a spiritual struggle, maintaining her purity as a value in itself. True, Susanna is married, but the play's concern is clearly on the threat the would-be seducers present to her relationship with God rather than with her husband. In Promos and Cassandra, the focus shifts from the value of chastity to those of justice, mercy and marriage, and this change fuels much of the drama.

This shift of interest continues in many of the later chastity testing plays. Playwrights, perhaps reflecting the continuing social and religious swing towards regarding marriage as a value per se, pay more attention to exploring how the test of chastity affects married couples, or those who intend to marry.

A set of recurring conventions develops quickly where the plot-element of the couple under threat appears. As in the earlier plays, the threat comes from a powerful man of high social status, usually a king, who desires the woman for her beauty. If she is virtuous, she will resist him; if not, the marriage will be destroyed and she may enjoy a brief period of prosperity, but will eventually be punished. The ruler too is faced with a choice. He may follow the dictates of his passion and persecute the couple but if

the heroine is virtuous, her resistance may recall him to virtue, reminding him that as a ruler, he should be concerned with public duty rather than love. The pure heroine is shown to safeguard, through her chastity, not only the interests of her marriage, but those of the state of which the family forms a part. Chastity is transformed from a virtue of the individual woman's body to one which has power to influence the body politic.

As well as reflecting increasing belief in the value of marriage, the development of the theme of the ruler who has to subordinate love to the needs of the state seems to show an increasing willingness to discuss in drama the way in which, in an age of growing concern with married compatibility, members of the aristocracy and royalty still had to marry chiefly for financial and political reasons. In some circumstances, the idea that those with state responsibilities could not follow the dictates of their emotions was a source of pride. Part of the cult of the Virgin Queen relied on the idea that it was appropriate for a monarch to be above human passion. But the need to marry for expediency rather than through choice also aroused sympathy, as some of the plays illustrate.

The emergence of these themes can be seen in John Lyly's Alexander and Campaspe (1584), which was concerned with the fortunes of a beautiful captive, Campaspe, who, though desired by her captor Alexander the Great, falls in love with Apelles, the artist commissioned by the besotted conqueror to paint her portrait. Apelles returns her love but doubts her willingness to marry him because of his poverty, wondering

Will she not think it better to sit under a cloth of
estate like a queene, the in a poor shoppe like a huswife?
and esteeme it sweeter to be the concubine of the Lord of
the world, then spouse to a painter in Athens? (134)

Campaspe, though, is aware that "Apelles love commeth from the heart, but Alexanders from the mouth", and that her vocation is modest wifehood rather than luxurious concubinage. She reflects that "A needle will become thy fingers better than a lute, and a distaffe is fitter for thy hand than a scepter". This proverbial observation that it is far better to be a poor man's wife than a rich man's concubine recurs in many later plays.

The lovers cautiously reveal their affection through many word games typical of Lyly, and conceal it from Alexander, since, as Apelles warns Campaspe, "if hee espy or but suspect, thou muste needes twise perishe, with his hate and thy love". Alexander, however, discovers their love by a trick, and demonstrates the magnanimity of a ruler (a feature which comes to be as important to these plays as feminine virtue), reflecting that "it were a shame Alexander should desire to commaund the world, if he could not commaund himselfe". The impression given throughout the play is that, as a ruler of men, Alexander is somehow above the weakness of love, and not susceptible to passion as ordinary men are. While admitting Campaspe's beauty, Alexander maintains that he is

not so farre in love with Campaspe, as with Bucephalus, if
occasion serve either of conflicte or of conquest, (135)

and he generously gives her to Apelles so that the world
may

see that Alexander maketh but a toye of loue, and leadeth
affection in fetters, using fãcie as a foole to make him
sport, or as a minstrell to make him merry. (136)

It is not made clear whether we are supposed to admire this ruler's utilitarian attitude to sex, which permits him to rise above its folly, or the devoted love of Campaspe or

Apelles, at least one of whom feels that Alexander is completely incapable of such depth of feeling.

Similarly, George Peele's Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe (1587) deals with a threatened marriage in the story of Bathsheba, whom Peele portrays as aware from the outset of the dangerous power of her beauty. The play opens with her song, in which she asks the shade to hide her body as she bathes and to

Let not my beauties fire
Enflame unstaied desire
Nor pierce any bright eye
That wandreth lightly. (137)

Unfortunately, David's wandering eye is caught by Bethsabe's beauty, and he sends Cusay to summon this "Faire Eve plac'd in perfect happinesse". The allusion is significant: Bethsabe is to be the instrument of David's fall, despite the fact that she is at first highly virtuous. When she hears that she is summoned to the King, she is shocked, lamenting

Ah, what is Bethsabe to please the King,
Or what is David, that he should desire
For fickle beauties sake his servants wife? (138)

Brought before David, who invites her to come nearer to him, she attempts to remonstrate with him, claiming that

Too neere my lord was your unarmed heart
When furthest off my haplesse beautie pierc'd,
And would this drerie day had turn'd to night,
Or that some pitchie cloud had chok'd the Sun,
Before their lights had caus'd my lord to see
His name disparag'd, and my chastitie! (139)

Although she reproaches David, Bethsabe seems to regard her own beauty as far more guilty, as she describes David's "unarmed heart" as its victim, an attitude which is

confirmed by her reaction to the news of Urias' death, when she laments

My sweet Urias, falne into the pit
Art thou, and gone even to the gates of hell,
For Bersabe, that would not shrowde her shame? (140)

She suffers in the same way as Susanna and Cassandra, as a good woman whose beauty militates against her virtue, since she has no control over its effects on men. But in this case, her suffering is increased, since her beauty, and the lust it prompted, have destroyed her husband and her marriage.

The most prolific and effective use of the chastity testing theme was made by Robert Greene, who frequently combined it with the constancy testing theme discussed already. In Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, he develops the idea of the heroine's chastity recalling the erring ruler to his duties.

As we have already seen, much of the drama is generated by the tests of constancy to which Margaret is subjected by Lacy. However, earlier in the play, before her betrothal to Lacy is certain, she undergoes a series of tests of chastity as well.

Margaret's circumstances at the outset are familiar: she is a woman of low degree, desired by the heir to the throne, Prince Edward. The Prince's opening speeches, with their references to Tarquin and Lucrece, indicate that he is contemplating seduction rather than marriage, an impression which is reinforced by the insuperable disparity in rank between himself and Margaret, and by consideration of his responsibility, as the heir, to form alliances which will benefit the whole country. We learn from him that

Margaret has already withstood a test of her chastity, since he has already found out that

our country Margaret is so coy
And stands so much upon her honest points,
That marriage or no market with the maide. (141)

Lacy shares her moral standards, and the commitment to the value of marriage which is a recurring theme in these plays. He feels

His wooing is not for to wed the girl
But to entrap her and beguile the lass,
Lacy, thou lovest; then brook not such abuse
But wed her, and abide thy prince's frown,
Far better die, than see her live disgraced. (142)

Their betrothal and attempted marriage is viewed by Bacon and Edward, and precipitates the first test of Margaret's constancy. As in several earlier plays, a jealous monarch threatens a happy couple. Edward reproaches Lacy with treachery, a charge he meets with a statement of his conviction

... that the lovely maid of Fressingfield
Was fitter to be Lacy's wedded wife
Than concubine unto the Prince of Wales. (143)

Edward also assails Margaret with a host of sensuously-phrased blandishments, and failing to shake her constancy, threatens to kill Lacy. Each lover responds by pleading for the life of the other, finally resolving to die together. At this crisis, their devotion shames Edward and makes him reflect

Is it princely to dissever love's leagues
To part such friends as glory in their loves?
Leave, Ned, and make a virtue of this fault
And further Peg and Lacy in their loves. (144)

Like Lyly's Alexander, he realises that "So in subduing fancy's passion,/Conquering thyself, thou getst the richest spoil", and leaves the lovers to their happiness, departing to negotiate a politically advantageous marriage. The virtue of the lovers, especially of the heroine, is the mechanism by which Edward is recalled to his duty, and impelled to the self-mastery necessary in a ruler. This aspect of the exemplary heroine's important influence recurs in several later plays. I am certain that the popularity of this theme of the necessity for a monarch to be above human passion was partly due to its appropriateness to Elizabeth's behaviour. Certainly, it seems significant that this detail was introduced by Lyly, who was extremely close to the court and to its interests.

In this play, though, the issue is more complex than in most others. Whereas in Alexander and Campaspe, Alexander's essential disdain for love was clear from the beginning, in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay the renunciation episode leaves the impression that, although he had no intention of marrying her, Edward's passion for Margaret was deeply felt, which means that his sacrifice is real. He is renouncing his claim to a woman he really wanted, not, like Alexander, giving away a toy which had never claimed his full attention. Edward's parting words "Peggy, I must go and view my wife;/I pray God I like her as I loved thee" leave a note of pathos, and hint at the heavy responsibilities of royalty. Edward cannot marry for love as Lacy can, but must choose a wife for the benefit of his country, which is why it is so important for a monarch to succeed in "subduing fancy's passion". Although his decision to renounce love and return to his destiny is obviously the right one, approved by his conscience and by Margaret, we are left with a sense of unease, which is not dispelled by the smooth and formal avowals of love at first sight which are exchanged by Edward and Eleanor, and is

finally articulated by the jester's joking outburst to the new Queen:

Madam Nell, never believe him though he swears he
loves you. ... Why, his love is like unto a tapster's
glass, that is broken with every touch, for he loved the
Fair Maid of Fressingfield once, out of all ho. (145)

Although it is possible that Edward's swift transfer of passion might be credible in the light of dramatic convention, in which love is inspired only by beauty and thus can occur at first sight, with greater beauty inspiring greater love and eclipsing earlier attachments, it seems to me that Greene intended to suggest doubt about the sincerity of political marriage, and, in doing so, portrayed Edward with far more sympathy than is usually accorded to the seductive nobleman in these plays.

Greene made further use of the testing theme in three very different plays which appeared in 1590. In his spectacular moral play A Looking Glass for London and England he uses it to indicate the general moral climate of ancient paganism. Rasni, the King of Nineveh lusts after his sister Remilia and also desires Alvida, the wife of a neighbouring ruler, both of whom are debarred by law. That neither offers any resistance, and that, on the contrary, both become his concubines until they are struck by the wrath of God epitomises the extreme depravity of Nineveh.

The same theme provides the main interest in a contrasting play, the simple, ballad-like George-a-Green, The Pinner of Wakefield (1590), which, apart from George's feats of strength and daring, celebrates the beauty and chastity of his sweetheart Bettris, who withstands the blandishments of all her suitors, and, despite their wealth and power, "disdains them all/To have poor George-a-Greene to her husband". Her father, enraged by her regular rejection of huge fortunes, locks her up, but Bettris escapes with the

help of Wily, who visits her in the guise of a seamstress taking sewing to amuse the captive, and exchanges clothes with her. (Much comedy results from Bettris' father's susceptibility to the charms of the "seamstress".)

The sub-plot concerns married chastity at a more aristocratic level, for meanwhile, in Scotland, King James is pursuing the virtuous wife of the long-absent knight Sir John-a-Barley, whom he has already "su'd and woo'd with many letters". Jane-a-Barley is adamant that nothing will make her betray her husband, and holds her castle against the King, unperturbed by his threats to demolish it. Only when he threatens to kill her young son Ned (who is waiting outside the castle rather than give the King a chance of admittance by having the drawbridge lowered) does her resolution waver, but then Ned himself steps into the breach and insists that his own death is preferable to his mother's dishonour, persuading her until she agrees. Only the timely arrival of Cuddy and Musgrave to rescue Jane prevents the apparently inevitable tragedy, and the ending of the play shows that this was only a temporary respite. Edward, the King of England, is seen departing for Scotland to "see if Jane-a-Barley be so fair/As good King James reports her for to be". Perhaps Greene intended a sequel, or perhaps he wanted to leave the audience with the impression that though stories may be concluded, the testing of wifely virtue is a continuing process. (146)

Greene's most important play of 1590 was The Scottish History of James the Fourth, in which he incorporated chastity and constancy tests by presenting two virtuous women, Dorothea and Ida, whose goodness is put to the test by the actions of the same weak and corruptible man, King James. The way in which James' lust acts as a test of Dorothea's constancy has been discussed already in the previous section. It also acts as a test of the chastity of Ida who, although unmarried, is betrothed to Eustace, whose

life is put at risk as a result. In this instance, the lustful King threatens both his own virtuous wife and a faithful couple.

James is treated far more uncompromisingly than the earlier love-lorn Prince Edward of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, since he is married and therefore presents a double threat to the central value of married love. His wandering fancy is essentially adulterous, and his weakness also makes him susceptible to the machinations and flattery of Ateukin, an opportunist who hopes for self-advancement in pandering to the King's lusts. Ateukin recalls the earlier tempters Haphazard and Phallax, and thus links James with the weak, easily-led men of earlier plays. Like his predecessors, Ateukin persuades James to go further than he originally intended, suggesting Dorothea's murder and later supplying Machiavellian justifications for the deed when James seems to be repenting, assuring him

Why prince, it is no murder in a king
To end another's life, to save his own,
For you are not as common people be
Who die and perish with a few mens's tears,
But if you fail, the state doth whole default...
Of evil needs we must choose the least:
Then better were it, that a woman died
Than all the help of Scotland should be blent.
'Tis policy, my liege.

(147)

Ateukin also resembles the earlier Haphazard since he encourages the King to imagine implausibly seductive behaviour in the object of his desires, suggesting

Methinks I see fair Ida in thine arms,
Craving remission for her late contempt,
Methinks I see her blushing steal a kiss
Uniting both your souls by such a sweet,
And you my king suck nectar from her lips.

(148)

Ateukin also acts as an envoy in James' pursuit of Ida, and his blandishments present a challenge to her chastity.

Ida, like many heroines of testing plays, is a virtuous maiden whose beauty threatens her purity, and puts the safety of her betrothed at risk. As Sir Bartram tells Eustace when he shows him Ida's portrait,, "her face is dangerous, her sight is ill", even though

All England's grounds yields not a blither lass,
Nor Europe can surpass her for her gifts,
Of virtue, honour, beauty and the rest. (149)

Ida is well aware of the precariousness of her position, which is why she leaves the court and returns to the protection of her mother, the Countess of Arran. Despite her aristocratic standing, Ida recalls the more traditional chaste heroines of humble birth in several ways. In a discussion with the Countess, Ida reveals that rather than "have wealth, and fortune's richest store", she wishes

Yet would I (might I choose) be honest poor.
For she that sits at fortune's feet a-low
Is sure she shall not taste a further woe.
But those that prank on top of fortune's ball,
Still fear a change: and fearing catch a fall, (150)

a view which echoes Grissill's reasons for contentment in poverty: having experienced the worst, she could not be frightened or disappointed. Ida also practises the classless hobby of needlework, since, she explains "my mother here and I/Count time mispent an endless vanity". Her regard for industry connects her with earlier, humbler heroines, as does her piety and fear of God. Arguing with Ateukin, Ida uses religious arguments against unchastity, rebuffing his materialistic considerations and poetic conceits with a practicality which recalls the country-girl's reproofs of the clerk in the early dramatic poem De Clerico

et Puella. Like the smooth-tongued clerk, Ateukin starts with the conceit of dying for love, telling Ida

- Ateuk.: 'Tis impious for to kill our native king,
Whom by a little favour we may save.
- Ida: Better than live unchaste, to live in grave.
- Ateuk.: He shall erect your state and wed you well.
- Ida: But can his warrant keep my soul from hell?
- Ateuk.: He will enforce, if you resist his suit.
- Ida: What though, the world may shame to him account,
To be a king of men and worldly pelf,
Yet hath no power to rule and guide himself. (151)

Once again, Greene alludes to the necessity of self-control in royalty, but this time he adds to Alexander's sentiment "it were a shame Alexander should desire to commaund the world, if he could not commaunde himself" an implication of religious considerations, since Ida's piety seems to recall the Biblical precept "what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?" (Luke 9.25)). Despite her refinement, Ida is easily recognisable as the archetypal chaste heroine of low degree established in earlier plays, and her portrayal varies little from convention.

In the same year, Thomas Kyd chose a different approach to the theme of the faithful couple threatened by the jealous potentate in The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda (1590). Erastus and Perseda are betrothed, but parted by circumstance. They meet again at Soliman's court, when Perseda is brought in as one of Soliman's spoils of war. Although "love never tainted Soliman till now", he is enchanted with the beauty of his captive and offers her many riches and honours, but Perseda steadfastly refuses to become his concubine even when threatened with death. Erastus then arrives and, trusting in Soliman's clemency, explains their relationship to the monarch. Soliman finds himself troubled by a conflict of loyalties, until he arrives at the crucial question, by now formulaic, "What should he doe

with crown and Emperie/That cannot governe private fond affections?" He does his duty and unites the lovers, but there is an intimation that his resolution may be weak, as he mutters "They must depart, or I shall not be quiet".

But Soliman finds that even the couple's departure has not restored his equanimity and begins to regret his selfless gesture, a change of heart which is encouraged by Brusor, another character in the mould of Phallax and Ateukin, who encourages his master's debasement for his own advancement. Brusor employs the same line of Machiavellian argument as his predecessors, assuring Soliman

This onely remaines, that you consider
In two extreames, the least is to be chosen.
... Is it not better that Erastus die
Ten thousand deaths than Soliman should perish? (152)

Soliman agrees, and they have Erastus executed on a trumped-up charge of treason. Even at this stage, Soliman's divided sympathies are apparent, since he is suddenly overcome with repugnance at his action and murders the executioners he employed.

Meanwhile in Rhodes, Brusor's wife Lucina, who is also party to the plot, has been commending Soliman's merits to Perseda, who guesses her guest's motives as soon as she hears of Erastus' death and denounces and kills her. Then, as the Governor's widow, Perseda takes control of Rhodes, deciding

Weele fortifie our walles, and keepe the towne
In spight of proud, insulting Solymans.
I know the letcher hopes to have my love
And first Perseda shall with this hand die
Than yeeld to him, and live in infamie. (153)

The idea of a woman fortifying her town or castle against a threatening man has already been used by Greene in the

Jane-a-Barley episode. Possibly it was so widely used partly because of its symbolic significance: the image of a chaste and beautiful woman as a besieged castle had been used by Henry Goldwell in a court entertainment called The Fortress of Perfect Beauty, or The Four Foster-Children of Desire (1581), in which the castle represented Elizabeth and the knights attacking it, her suitors. In the first two instances, the woman's defence of the castle depended entirely on the strength of the fortifications or on the help of allies, being rather passive in nature, but Kyd adds a new, more dramatic twist. As Soliman approaches, Perseda appears on the ramparts "in mans apparell" defying him, praising the dead Erastus and asking Soliman what he expected to gain by killing him

Didst thou misdoe him in hope to win Perseda?
Ah foolish man, therein thou art deceived,
For though she live, yet will she neare live thine. (154)

Perseda's masculine disguise allows her to defy Soliman and to meet him in single combat, as her husband's champion and her own, combining revenge for Erastus and defence of her own chastity. As her own champion, she tells Soliman "then will I yeeld Perseda to thy hands/If that thy strength shall over-match my might". This is true: if Soliman overcomes the knight, Perseda will have yielded to him, but Soliman, of course, is unaware that since Perseda and her knight are the same, by killing "him" and winning Perseda, he loses her. Whatever the outcome of the combat, Perseda will win on her own terms, since her only objectives are to be revenged on Soliman and to avoid becoming his concubine; in case she fails to kill Soliman in combat, she has had her lips "sawsed with deadly poison".

Soliman, of course, wins the duel and the long-coveted kiss, and to his horror finds the familiar rules of warfare and conquest, by which he has lived, undermined by

Perseda's cunning. His victory is defeat, since by it, he has lost both Perseda and his own life.

Brusor, the tempter, does not escape the general carnage, since Soliman kills him in revenge for his wicked counsel before the poison takes effect. He so frequently expresses his guilt and remorse by killing the servants who realise his twisted desires, that the servants seem to be related to the personified vices and virtues who represented the inner conflict of the central characters of morality plays. Brusor, in such a play, would have been called Lust, the Vice, or Soliman's evil angel, since he seems to be as much a projection of Soliman's worst impulses as a real character.

Despite the limitations of her role in the story as the chaste heroine and of her stylised language, Perseda comes across as a more exciting heroine than those of earlier plays in which the constancy theme is used. Instead of being from the outset a character of finished and static virtue, she develops from an affected girl who values the tokens and conventions of love more than her lover's safety to the woman who sets out to avenge his murder. Whereas other threatened heroines stay firmly within the bounds of feminine behaviour, hoping to escape by appealing to their antagonist's better nature or to a higher authority for justice, Perseda steps out of a womanly role by donning men's clothing and repays violence with violence, setting out to destroy her enemy with every means at her disposal. No other chaste heroine sets out to be a killer: Kyd can allow Perseda to do so because unlike earlier heroines, she is a pre-Christian pagan, and because she is avenging her husband's murder as well as defending her chastity. The role of revenger is necessarily violent but wins sympathy if the revenge is just, and admiration if it is achieved with style and precision. No-one could doubt the justice of Perseda's revenge, since even Soliman admits that his

crime was heinous and grossly immoral, and her ruthlessly meticulous plan, in which failure to kill Soliman on his own terms, as a knight in combat will automatically enable her to kill him through his own inability to resist kissing her when she is wounded and helpless, inspires admiration for her clear-headed cunning. Ruthlessness and cunning, though, are qualities completely foreign to the picture of the ideal wife: although Perseda maintains her constancy and chastity, traditionally the most important womanly virtues, she does so by adopting behaviour which violates the most basic contemporary assumptions about female nature. It is this apparently paradoxical mixture of wifely faith and resourceful violence which makes Perseda such an unexpectedly dynamic character.

Another play of 1590 also uses the chastity testing plot, and in particular the developing theme of the lustful monarch recalled to his duties by the virtue of a woman of lower degree. Faire Em, a play whose innovative use of the constancy test convention has already been discussed in the preceding section, features the chastity test in its subplot, which deals with the fate of Mariana, Princess of Swethia, and her lover the Marquess Lubeck. Lubeck is a close friend of William the Conqueror, to whom he shows a portrait of Blanch of Denmark. William is smitten with the portrait's beauty, and he and Lubeck set out to court her. Upon arrival at the Danish court, where he conceals his true identity under the name of Robert of Windsor, William quickly decides that the painter flattered Blanch too much (he remarks rather crudely "I never saw a harder favourde slut") and finds Mariana far more attractive, since, unlike Blanch, she has "no heavy sullen looke,/Not verie fayer, but ritchly deckt with favour". Blanch, though, falls in love with William, and growing jealousy and tension causes friction at the court, as William stabs his former friend Lubeck on a trifling pretext during a masque, and Blanch torments Mariana, the only person who really tries to be

kind to her, by intercepting and destroying her unwelcome letters from "Robert of Windsor".

The potentially tragic situation is saved by Mariana's resourcefulness and strong loyalty to lovers and friends alike. When she discovers that her admirer is really William the Conqueror, she resolves

Were he the Monarch of the world
He should not dispossesse Lubeck of his Love.
Therefore I will to the Court, and there if I can
Close to be friendes with Ladie Blanch,
And thereby keepe Lubeck my Love for my selfe:
And further the Ladie Blaunch in her sute as much as she
may. (155)

In contrast with the passive heroines of other plays, the women in Faire Em are very active, with Blanch pursuing William and with Mariana trying to resolve the problem in a way which will benefit as many people as possible.

Lubeck also tries to organise the outcome. Since, like Mariana, he values friendships as well as love, and is further attached to William by his formal allegiance to him, he resolves to let Mariana go and tries to persuade her to "love William, love my friend and honour me", arguing that William alone can offer her "the tythe of estate and Maiestie/Fitting thy love and vertues of thy mind". Mariana is adamant that she will not leave Lubeck, despite his entreaties to her to support him in his misguided altruism. Instead, she manages to win Blanch's confidence, planning to ensure the happiness of both women by marrying Blanch to William by a slightly more modest version of the 'bed-trick' familiar to a modern audience from Shakespeare, engineered by a masked assignation and elopement.

The trick is successful, but William is furious when the deception is revealed. Like Manuile who earlier told Em that he had been led "for thy sake (to) abhore women kind",

William has a tendency to generalise about female nature, and his anger with "Vnconstant Mariana" who could trick a man who desired her so much throws him into a fit of general misogyny, explaining

Conceit hath wrought such generall dislike
Through the false dealing of Mariana,
That utterly I doe abhorre their sex.
They are all disloyall, vnconstant, all iniust:
Who tryes as i haue tryed,
And findes as I haue founde,
Will saie thers no such creatures on the ground. (156)

This general hatred of women prompts his vehement refusal to marry Blanch, whom he had already abducted to Britain, which nearly provokes an international incident. Blanch guesses the cause of his extreme antipathy and tries to counteract it, arguing that women are all individuals and that "though some deserue no trust/Thers others faithfull, louing, loyall & just". At this psychological moment, Em's case against Manuile is brought to William for trial, and the contrast of Em's faithfulness with Manuile's blatant opportunism convinces him, as he administers justice, "that women are not generall euils". Having admitted that virtue can exist in women, he can admit its existence in each individual woman, even in Blanch, and notices that "Blanch is faire; Methinkes I see in her/A modest countenance, a heauenly blush". William decides to make the best of the situation, thus placating Blanch, re-establishing his friendship with Lubeck and Mariana, avoiding a war, forming a useful alliance with Denmark and securing the succession to the Danish throne. Even if the possibility of his learning to love Blanch is a little remote, it is obvious where William's duty lies, and it is an indication of the ingeniousness of the playwright that through Em he has observed the tradition of the lowly girl being instrumental in alerting the monarch to his duty, even though in this play they appear in parallel plots, and are never brought together, until the final scene. Of course, the happy ending has also been engineered by Mariana, whose

resourcefulness, willingness to defy the wishes of her lover if she thinks they are unwise and conviction that the end of establishing tranquillity justifies the deception used to achieve it are another interesting departure from the usual virtues found in heroines of testing plays.

By this time, some of the characteristics of the testing play were so well established that they became formulaic, a tendency which is shown in the Lamentable Tragedie of Lochrine (1591). In this tragic romance, Lochrine, married to the obedient Guendoline, captures Estrild, the widow of his conquered foe Humber of Scythia and finds her beauty "like to snares which wylie fowlers wrought/Wherein my yeelding heart is prisoner caught". When he courts her, Estrild rejects him, declaring that she thinks it

Better to die renownd for chastitie
Then liue in shame and endlesse infamie
What would the common sort report of me
If I forgot my loue, and cleave to thee? (157)

They then argue the point, with Lochrine claiming that far from considering public opinion

Lochrine: Kings need not feare the vulgar sentences.
Estrild: But Ladies must regard their honest name.
Lochrine: Is it a shame to liue in marriage bands
Estrild: No, but to be a strumpet to a King. (158)

However, having voiced the traditional reply to such advances, Estrild promptly becomes Lochrine's concubine and bears him a daughter. It seems that the convention may have become so strong that this playwright at least thought it desirable for his heroine to voice the formulaic sentiments on wifely chastity, even if her actions did not accord with them. However, it may be a jibe at the

supposed hypocrisy of women, playing on their traditional tendency to say one thing and mean another.

Another indication that the convention had become well established is that at least one play seems to be subverting the audience's expectations of the genre for comic effect. At first, Anthony Munday's A Knack to Know a Knave (1592) seems to be moving in a very familiar pattern. The King, hearing of the beauty of one of his subjects, decides that "she will serue our turne to make a Concubine" and sends Ethenwald, one of his earls, to court her on his behalf, giving very precise instructions on how to flatter her. If this fails, the King instructs Ethenwald to "tell her I can enforce her love". One might expect Ethenwald to develop as a Lord Lacy character, torn between his loyalty to the King and his love for the virtuous commoner, but here the playwright deals a shock to the audience's expectations of this type of plot: Ethenwald proves to be an even greater rogue than his monarch. Even while on the journey, he resolves to have Alfrida for himself, if she is at all attractive, and reflects

It is the King I cosen of his choise,
And he nil brook Earle Ethenwald should prooue
False to his Prince, especially in loue.
The thus it shal be, Ile tell the King the maid is fair,
Of wet browne cullour, comelie and fair spoken
Worthie companion to an Earle or so:
This will allay the strong effects in loue
Fame wrought in Edgars mind of Alfrida. (159)

Alfrida's beauty does, in fact, live up to its reputation, and Ethenwald quickly woos and wins her. On his return to the court, he reports to the King that Alfrida turned out to be

... well-bodied, but her face was something blacke,
lyke those that follow houshold business:
Her eies wer hollow sunke into her head
Which makes her haue a clowdie countenance,
She hath a prettie tongue, I must confesse,
And yet, (my Lord) she is nothing eloquent

... she is fit to serue an Earle or so
But far unfit for Edgar Englands King. (160)

Unfortunately, King Edgar guesses at once

then she is fit for Ethenwald our Cornish Earle,
But far unfit for Edgar Englands King:
Well Ethenwald, I found your policie. (161)

However, Edgar is clement, and grants his faithless servant leave to marry Alfrida in an obvious parody of the serious renunciation scenes of the testing plays.

In this case, though, the King goes back on his generous behaviour as soon as a glimpse of a miniature of Alfrida assures him that she is not as plain as Ethenwald described her. He promptly decides to visit Ethenwald to repay him for his deception. News of the royal visit sends Ethenwald into a panic, since he is convinced

... he comes to Cuckold me,
And for he means to doe it without suspect,
He sends me word he means to visit me:
The King is amorous, and my wyfe is kinde,
So kind (I feare) that she wil quickly yeeld
To any motion that the King shal make:
Especially if themotion be of loue:
For Pliny writes, women are made lyke waxe
Apt to receiue any impression:
Whose mindes are lyke the Janamyst
That eats, yet cries, and neuer is satisfied. (162)

Unlike the noble husbands from threatened couples in earlier plays, Ethenwald has so little trust in his wife's chastity that he orders her to dress as a kitchen wench for the duration of the royal visit. Despite her protests that his evident fear of cuckoldry is making him ridiculous, Ethenwald insists on his husband's rights of mastery:

... heare you wyfe, while I am master of the Bark,
I means to keepe the helmster in my hand:
My meaning is, you shall be rulde by me,

In being disguised till the King be gone,
And thus it shall be, for I will haue it so. (163)

Even Osric, his father-in-law, objects to his folly, but Ethenwald persists

Father, let me alone, Ile breake her of her will,
We that are married to yong wiues, you see,
Must haue a speciall care to their honestie:
For should we suffer them to haue their will:
They are apt (you know) to fall to any ill. (164)

Despite his unimpeachable knowledge of his rights as a husband, and of the Renaissance theory of the politics of marriage, Ethenwald's attempts to rule his household and to rule out the threat of cuckoldry are foiled. Edgar sees through the deception at once, and quietly asks Ethenwald if he would permit his kitchen wench to join the company at dinner and to talk to him. Once again, Edgar expresses anger at being deceived, but extends the royal magnanimity familiar in testing plays with farcical suddenness:

But see, at last thou hast deceiued thy selfe,
And Edgar hath found out thy subtiltie,
Which to requite, think Edgar is thyemie,
And vowes to be reuenged for this ill.
Go to thy husband beawteous Alfrida,
For Edgar can subdew affects in loue. (165)

As in the more serious plays, Alfrida emphasises the morality of his action

Nor hath your Grace euer bene praised more,
Or ream'd more iust in any action,
Than you shall be in conquering your desires,
And yeelding pardon to Earle Ethenwald. (166)

The comedy seems to parody the familiar elements of the chastity test play. Ethenwald, the proponent of marriage against concubinage, is actually the knave of the title, and later becomes the stock comic character of the husband afraid of cuckoldry. Alfrida's chastity, which should be

the moral pivot of the play, is so little trusted by her husband that he resorts to disguising her, and Edgar's threat to the couple is nothing more than getting his own back on Ethenwald for his earlier double-dealing by giving him a fright. Perhaps this comic subversion of the tradition indicates a certain boredom with the convention, as well as familiarity.

Nevertheless, in the same year Robert Greene returned to the chastity test theme, using it as the main plot in John of Bordeaux or The Second Part of Friar Bacon (1592). Although all that remains of the play is a poor and probably garbled account written by an indifferent copyist, it is obvious that familiar elements are recurring. John of Bordeaux visits the German court with his lovely and virtuous wife Rossalin. Ferdinand, the son of the German Emperor, becomes obsessed with her. She confronts his pleas with an injunction

tempt me not wanton lord with straynes of sin
for no corruption shall inchaunt my mynd, rather in sorrow
let me begg my bread and work in sorow to mayntayne my
state
be fore I falce my fayth vnto my lord. (167)

Ferdinand, like Edward in the earlier Friar Bacon play, then enlists the help of a necromancer, Vandermast, to whom Ferdinand explains his failure to impress Rossalin, since

she scornes the plee of pelfe and Iewells why she
(scornes) them all as trash and but here husband all vnfyt
for her wer the greatest monarke of the world. (168)

Vandermast suggests that these tactics have failed because

... wher weallth wines not a woman vnto love ther rather
is a boundaunce (in) or contempt, but let that damsell be
opprest with wante tuch her with ned and that will mak her
shrincke wer Rossalin deprived of her stat and poor as now

she over flowes with wealth, gert with destres she would
be sone reclamd, and glad for Gould to yeld to anie love.

(169)

Certain that only her comfortable way of life separates
Rossalin from prostitution, Ferdinand and Vandermast bring
a false charge of treason against John of Bordeaux, which
convinces the Emperor. He dismisses and exiles this pre-
viously trusted minister, and decrees

... turn fayre Rossalin and all her brats naked and pore
from forth ther native home, with this proviso that no one
releve this wofull Ladie in her depe extremes with bread
or drinck to quench ther therst.

(170)

Rossalin, hearing the news, is well aware of the source of
their misfortunes, murmuring "ferdenand thy lust prouves
our loss", but is adamant that

yet Rossalin... will triumph in her harmes content to begg
before she suffer shame or yeld to furie of the lustfull
ferdenand.

(171)

Her husband and children must also suffer in the cause of
chastity. Rossalin's concept of honour tells her that she
must "trivmph in my meseries respecting honer mor then babs
or life", and when they are forced into beggary, she en-
courages them with the thought that "though you begg it is
in my behalfe to gard my honer littell ones you b(eg) di we
in want yet honerd shall we die". The prince's lust,
instead of threatening a couple, puts an entire family at
risk in this instance, and as a result seems far more
obsessive and evil in its nature.

As Rossalin begs unsuccessfully, Ferdinand finds her and
reflects

now is the tyme that vandermast foretould whe penurie
should pinch my Lovlie foe se wher she sitts Ill tri yf in
her woe love hath the poure to tempt her marble harte.

(172)

To Ferdinand's surprise, although Rossalin attempts to beg from him, as soon as she recognises him she returns his money, tells him "Ile never ask you penie mor" and repeats her earlier rejection. An attempt at seduction by necromancy also fails when Friar Bacon intercepts the spirit summoned by Vandermast to bring Rossalin from her bed to Ferdinand's and instructs it to take Vandermast's wife instead (a substitution which results in some exquisite comedy when Vandermast finds that his powers of persuasion have convinced his own wife of all the advantages of adultery with the prince), and Ferdinand eventually conceives a violent hatred of Rossalin. He has her sentenced to death for conspiring to commit treason, and only Friar Bacon's intervention can avert tragedy and produce the requisite happy ending.

Discordant elements are beginning to emerge in this comedy, such as the hardships endured by the children, and the degree to which John's exile ages him. When Rossalin sees him in Bacon's specular glass, she exclaims with horror "alass it is my husband how chaunged he is/how pore his lokes how pall his face", and when he appears at the climax of the play to defend his wife at her trial by combat, John is judged too enfeebled and "over old to tose the launce", so that Friar Bacon has to take his place. It seems that Greene may be suggesting that such obsessive assaults on a woman's chastity have a very sinister and cruel aspect, and that the price of honour, in some circumstances, may be inhumanly high.

It may be that dramatists were aware of this sour note in the chastity testing theme, and changed their use of it accordingly, moving the focus of attention away from the

heroine's physical integrity, and towards the way in which the testing she undergoes also acts as a touchstone for the integrity of the men by whom she is tested.

This use of the testing convention has already been seen in the constancy testing plot of Faire Em. Ben Jonson developed it further in his characterisation of Rachel in The Case is Altered (1597). A noblewoman thought by all to be the daughter of a beggar, she is in many ways a conventional heroine. Like many of Greene's female characters she is a beautiful girl combining lowliness with nobility, whose constancy and faithfulness are tested during the course of the play. What is unusual, though, is the extent to which she is seen as a test to the men around her, whose responses to beauty and virtue in a very poor woman, and thereafter to courting a woman they know to be desired by other men, effectively evaluates their moral condition.

Despite her apparent poverty, Rachel is eagerly sought after by suitors on every rung of the feudal ladder. Although her accepted lover is Lord Paulo, the son of Count Ferneze, while he is away at war several men try to court her, each in turn asking the permission of his feudal superior, who is duly taken with the idea and decides to court her himself. Apart from the richly comic idea of a whole chain of betrayals of trust, this sequence of events allows an interesting study of the differing attitudes to Rachel held by her suitors.

Most pragmatic of all is Peter Onion, the groom. He regards Rachel primarily as a special bargain in the marriage market, since though beautiful she is poor, and even hopes that she is "none of the honestest" since that would knock her price down even further. The elderly steward Christophero has no qualms about cheating his employee "having long ere this/Thought her a worthy choice to be my wife", and is pleased that Rachel "hath the name of a very

virtuous maiden" despite her poverty. When the chain reaction reaches the Count, different facets of Rachel's personality are being noticed and appreciated. After his steward has left, the Count reflects

'Tis strange, she being so poor, he should affect her,
But this is more strange that myself should love her.
I spied her lately, at her father's door,
And if I did not see in her sweet face
Gentry and nobleness, ne'er trust me more. (173)

But the Count does not trust himself. Being a mature man, he is a realist, and knows the ways in which the human mind tries to rationalise its irrational desires. Rightly or wrongly, the Count reflects

But this persuasion fancy wrought in me,
That fancy being created with her looks,
For where love is he thinks his basest object
Gentle and noble. (174)

Only his son Paulo, who knows Rachel well, and whose own nature allows the recognition of corresponding nobility in another person, notices in Rachel signs of nobleness which he knows are not imagined. He accounts for this by invoking the more democratic theory which identifies nobility with personal virtue rather descent, countering his friend Angelo's objection that Rachel "is derived too meanly to be his wife/To such a noble, in my judgment" with confidence:

Nay then, thy judgement is too mean, I see:
Didst thou ne'er read in difference of good
'Tis more to shine in virtue than in blood? (175)

Paulo's words are prophetic: while the other characters are evaluating Rachel, their own nobility and moral standards are actually being tested by their response to her, which may show their characters and standards of judgement to be too mean.

The most stringent test of all is undergone by Angelo, who, in a scene reminiscent to a modern reader of Measure for Measure, is requested by Paulo to look after Rachel's welfare while he is away at the wars, and to preserve the secrecy of their relationship. Earlier, Paulo has admitted to having some barely conscious doubts about Angelo's trustworthiness, aware only that

Some spark it is, kindled within the soul,
Whose spark yet breaks not to the outward sense,
That propagates this timorous suspect, (176)

but instead of trusting his intuition, Paulo concentrates on Angelo's actual behaviour, and concludes that he would be injuring him by harbouring suspicions of a friend who has never given actual grounds for it.

But Paulo's fears are justified, since very soon after his departure, Angelo is thinking of reasons for breaking his oath with impunity. He reflects cynically that 'all's fair in love and war':

True to my friend in cases of affection?
In women's cases? What a jest it is?
How silly he is that imagines it!
He is an ass that will keep promise strictly
In anything that checks his private pleasure
Chiefly in love...
.
Because I swore? Alas, who does not know
That lovers' perjuries are ridiculous?
Have at thee Rachel: I'll go court her sure. (177)

Angelo's perjury is infinitely more shocking than any of the chain of betrayals which precedes it, because of his closer relationship with Paulo, but also because of the way in which he regards his decision. Although the servants had no compunction about setting themselves up as rivals to other suitors, Count Ferneze's moral sensitivity has set a different standard for nobles. In keeping with his self-awareness in other matters, the Count is able to admit to

himself that his desire to court Rachel has an immoral aspect, since by doing so he will be betraying the trust of his loyal steward and the memory of his recently dead wife. Although he continues to woo her, Count Ferneze has such a guilty conscience about it that when his son Paulo is taken prisoner, he interprets it as a punishment from heaven which he has deserved "Were it for naught but wronging of my steward".

Angelo, on the other hand, feels that being in love excuses him from all morality. Everyone knows that lovers are ridiculous, taken over by a force which makes them behave in usual ways, and now that he is a lover, he can expect people to condone actions which would be inexcusable by ordinary standards.

True to this resolution, Angelo is absolutely unscrupulous in his pursuit of Rachel, even using the news of Paulo's capture in the wars as a means of making her feel insecure and in need of his protection. Rachel, though, is completely faithful, and, seeing through Angelo's pretence of disinterested concern, has no compunction about countering guile with guile, in order to get rid of him.

Angelo then resorts to a complicated plot, tricking Rachel into going with him to the Ponte Valerio by telling her that Paulo has suddenly returned from the wars and is waiting for her there. Once there, Angelo attempts to seduce her. Rachel is indignant, fighting him off, ordering "Touch not my body with those impious hands", and trying to make him aware of how low he has sunk, not only in betraying Paulo's trust, but by using him as a lure to entrap her. She can hardly believe the way in which Angelo's lust for her has cancelled out every feeling of moral obligation:

... can it be
That men should live with such unfeeling souls,
Without or touch of conscience or religion,
Or that their warping appetites should spoil
Those honoured forms that the true seal of friendship
Had set upon their faces? (178)

Her anger is justified and Angelo knows it, trying to avoid any serious moral argument by countering her objections on the level of trivial word play. Her accusations of dishonour draws only

Dishonour? What dishonour? Come, come fool;
Nay then, I see y'are peevish. 'Sheart, dishonour?
To have you to a priest and marry you,
And put you in an honourable state? (179)

Eventually when he discovers that he can make no progress with her, Angelo turns to brutality and insults, letting out his frustration and annoyance:

... I was accurst to bring you hither
And make so fair an offer to a fool.
A pox upon you, why should you be coy;
What good thing have you in you to be proud of?
Are y'any other than a beggar's daughter
Because you have beauty?...
.
You scornful baggage,
I loved thee not so much but now I hate thee. (180)

Angelo has revealed his true feelings: as well as lusting after Rachel for her beauty, he despises her social position, and does not scruple to use it to try to hurt her. Having himself abandoned all traces of fidelity, Angelo now tries to browbeat a faithful woman with his coarse and materialistic view of female sexual ethics. He interprets feminine chastity, and therefore Rachel's fidelity to Paulo and aversion to him, as coyness, playing hard to get in the hope of gaining more power, money or a more highly connected lover. Hence Angelo's baffled anger at finding 'coyness' in a woman with no social standing at all who, in his view, should have no reason to deny him since she has

no higher stakes to hold out for. Having eschewed morality and individual loyalties himself, Angelo cannot value them in others: he reduces chastity to a game for the rich, ignores the exclusive and personal nature of love, and views Rachel not as an individual, but in terms of her body and her social class.

This jaundiced view of not just female, but human nature receives immediate punishment. Unknown to Angelo, Paulo really has returned from the wars, and appears to denounce his false friend, and to save Rachel from insults and seduction.

Although Rachel's chastity is tested during the play, by the advances of Angelo and the other suitors, the test that her nobility and poverty presents to the men around her is more important, since it reveals exactly what they think about love, money and the morality surrounding courtship and marriage. Ben Jonson shows that the attitude of men to women and to their relationships with women is important, because it is likely to be symptomatic of their attitude to life in general. The truly noble characters, like Paulo and Ferneze, take love and marriage seriously, and see them as calling for even greater moral scruples than ordinary life, whereas the man who, like Angelo, has so little respect for women that he regards love as a ridiculous state, in which all normal morality can be suspended, is an incomplete character, who can only be expected to disgrace himself in other fields.

As we have seen, the early plays tend to focus upon chastity as a personal moral choice for the virtuous heroine, while the later ones tend instead to concentrate on the theme of the marriage under threat, and the moral struggle of the would-be seducer.

The shift of the plays' dramatic focus seems to have been influenced by a combination of social and artistic factors. Firstly, the belief that harmonious marriage was a value in itself was growing stronger, and this probably encouraged the movement away from the idea of chastity as a purely spiritual choice seen in the plays.

This idea would have had a further effect on the development of the testing theme in the plays. Once we accept that happy marriage, which needs personal and social compatibility, is good in itself, our view of the ruler who desires the heroine changes too. In the earlier plays, where chastity was the prime value, the seducer was obviously evil because in desiring the heroine he threatened her purity. With marriage the main value, the ruler figure is dangerous primarily because his social position makes him a threat to the value of marriage. Because of his need to put state considerations first, the ruler cannot offer the humbly-born heroine virtuous marriage, only wealthy concubinage. Furthermore, he has the power to prevent the heroine from marrying a man who can offer her this.

Although considering marriage as the prime value in the later plays makes the ruler a double threat, it also makes sympathy for him possible. However much he may want a virtuous marriage based on personal compatibility, his political importance and need to wed for motives of expediency mean that he is debarred from this ideal, to which more ordinary people have access.

Understanding the ruler's dilemma in these terms means that his psychological struggle is more likely to become the focus of dramatic interest than that of the heroine, since with the exception of Cassandra, whose moral values undergo radical change as she experiences the complex problems real life can entail, the heroine's virtue tends to be established early on, and to remain the same throughout the play.

Within the terms of the early type of chastity play, it cannot change: if it did, it would not be true virtue. The ruler, on the other hand, because of the inner conflict between his conscience and his basest impulses, or in later, more enlightened plays, his personal inclinations and his public duties, is far more exciting and dynamic, since he may at any time overcome his desire, or return to it. He therefore retains his interest throughout the play.

As well as providing more drama by making the ruler-character less morally unambiguous, the shift towards marriage as prime value allowed more interesting female characterisation. As well as safeguarding their own partnerships via chastity, virtuous heroines could be portrayed as promoting marriage in more active ways as well. Perseda's plot to kill Soliman is for vengeance on the destroyer of her husband and her marriage as well as scheme to preserve her own chastity. Mariana adopts trickery as a means of saving her own marriage and promoting Blanch's in the belief that the end is ample justification for the means.

Even so, the way in which later writers burlesqued the testing theme, questioned it by exposing its darker side and finally steered it toward the idea of the heroine being herself a test for the men around her indicates that they felt its limitations. Possible reasons for this disenchantment, and what happened to the testing theme as a result, are discussed in the concluding section.

CONCLUSION

What happened to the Testing theme, and why?

As I mentioned in the Introduction to this section, the most striking feature of the testing plays in their purest form was their homiletic nature and the exactness with which they mirrored contemporary religious and moral ideas. The plays would have had an obvious function as educational or propaganda material for the Protestant moralists, who saw very clearly that the easiest way to achieve the ideal of harmonious marriage, their most popular advance upon Catholic ideology, was to convince wives of the benefits of a submissive and self-sacrificing way of life. Since Protestantism was now the accepted religion of the country, and the precepts of female inferiority and subordination were now read in every church in the realm by royal edict, a playwright endorsing these ideas was unlikely to meet with official or popular disapproval. In fact, the plays were probably quite popular with their audiences, since only a very exceptional man would be able to feel displeased at the thought of being owed complete devotion and obedience by his wife and children, particularly when the Church assured him that such authority was his right, granted him by God. The plays of chastity testing would probably have appealed to the same type of audience, since the value of female chastity was one few men questioned, irrespective of religion or class. Even if a man had no great estate to leave to his legitimate heir, the fear of being derided as a cuckold would be enough to make him concerned about his wife's behaviour. The testing plays were useful and timely propaganda about the correct behaviour for women, at a time at which patriarchy was being reinforced, and the belief that wifely submission was the will of God was spreading.

However, as we have seen, contemporary dramatists clearly found the testing plays limiting and restrictive, since many of them found ways around the convention, diverging from it, burlesquing it and finding ways to question its basic assumptions.

Why did dramatists choose to treat the ethic of wifely endurance and submission, which was to continue to reflect current thinking for at least forty years, in this way? It may be that some were aware of the shortcomings of the ideal of female virtue fostered by the Protestant reformers, and had made a conscious decision to use their art to subvert it, but without detailed biographical information such a theory can never be more than speculative. However, there is strong evidence in the plays themselves that the crux of the matter is the basic incompatibility between the aims of social morality and drama. Whereas social morality is concerned with preserving the stability of society and perpetuating the existing order and structure of power, often at the expense of the individual, drama has entirely different aims, tending to be concerned with change, conflict, action and learning, and to affirm the importance of the individual. While the cultivation of seclusion and obedience in women was probably useful for producing harmonious marriages, quiet and well-ordered families and therefore a certain degree of social stability, it was a disastrous proposition for drama. When one considers the elements of a play which are most obviously 'dramatic' - action, uncertainty, characters making decisions or learning from their experiences, conflict, excitement - it becomes apparent that most depend on the characters possessing a degree of freedom of action or thought. Female characters made in the image chosen by Renaissance moralists could provide none of these, because of their lack of autonomy. Virtuous, obedient heroines are generally static, emblematic characters whose only function is to represent virtue, and who rarely develop or learn

from their experiences, and cannot become credible or sympathetic.

Heroines in testing plays tend to be exciting and sympathetic only to the extent that they are unconventional. This observation is supported by the ease with which one can place the heroines in order of interest. Probably the least interesting women are Grissill and Octavia, who remain within the bounds of the passive, submissive, husband-worshipping ideal; Virginia, who, as her name suggests, seldom becomes more than an emblem of virginity; and Susanna, who, despite Garter's attempt to make the observance of wifely virtue sound as challenging as a battle, emerges as another of these heroines who can best be described as static. They do not act, but endure; their function in the plot is simply to maintain a state of virtue which was already fixed and perfected at the outset; and their mental immobility is reflected by their physical state: these women seldom move from their paternal or marital homes during the entire play.

Secondly, there are Greene's heroines, whose role is to fulfil the dictates of the conventional plot, mainly emblematic, but who are humanised very slightly. While remaining the same in character throughout, Margaret and Dorothea seem more alive than their predecessors because both show positive bravery in the course of behaving in accordance with their virtue. Margaret is made slightly more credible by her admission of disappointment with Lacy, and by the descriptions of her work and her appearance at the fair, which make it easier to imagine her as a real woman because one can envisage her everyday life and place in society. In James IV, Dorothea's unchanging and unreasoning devotion to her husband is counterpointed by the wanderings and change of appearance she has to adopt in the course of following its dictates. Although she adopts a male disguise, Dorothea never explores the freedom it

offers: although outwardly independent and active, mentally she never ventures out of her domesticity, and her idea of goodness remains one of passive endurance and forgiveness.

Finally, there are the more exciting heroines, Cassandra, Em, Mariana and Perseda. Each one advances the story in an active manner: Cassandra has to decide on her course of action and to bring the suit against Promos; Em decides to adopt her pretence and to sue Manuile; Mariana takes sole responsibility for resolving the love-tangle; and Perseda, far from hiding from Soliman, takes command of her city, fortifies it and meets him in combat. Furthermore, most of them change and mature as a result of their experiences in the course of the play: Cassandra learns that her simple code of 'death before dishonour' cannot cope with the complications of real life; Em realises that Manuile is not, after all, her moral superior and leaves him; and Perseda matures from the silly girl who risks her lover's life by insisting that he retrieve her token, to the brave woman who calmly sets out to avenge his murder, using her own death as part of the strategy.

All these characters impress the reader as individuals, but all go against the Renaissance ideal of feminine virtue. Cassandra violates the most basic precept of the chastity plays, and finds that justice and family affection mean more to her than reputation, supposedly the highest value of all for women; while Em shows the unusual qualities of humour, frankness with admirers, and absolute fury with her betrothed when he fails her. Mariana's determination to achieve what she and Blanch want, using cunning and deceit against William, and disobeying Lubeck's wishes, is remarkable in this era of obedient heroines; and Perseda's cool planning and willingness to fight and kill go against the most basic ideas of female nature of the time.

Obviously the playwrights realised that if a heroine were to be active and an individual, it was necessary for her to be free from the restrictive idea of virtuous behaviour for wives and daughters, and from the fathers and husbands who enforced it. How, when the real world still believed that the only good woman was the submissive one who stayed indoors protecting her reputation and obeyed her husband, could the playwrights free their heroines from this code of behaviour, so that they could be active, free and dramatically interesting?

One way was for the dramatist to seek exciting themes which encouraged dramatic values, irrespective of current morality. Romantic love was the topic upon which such a rift between life and literature was most obvious. Lawrence Stone asserts that at this time, literature was the sole vehicle for the idea of romantic love, and that

there was... a clear conflict of values between the idealisation of love by some poets, playwrights and the authors of romances on one hand, and its rejection as a form of imprudent folly and even madness by all theologians, moralists, authors of manuals of conduct, and parents and adults in general. (181)

Once again, the reason for this rift was the tendency of society to value security and the preservation of familiar customs, and of drama to value dynamism and unpredictability.

The introduction of plots dealing with romantic love was to be a further influence on the discussion and portrayal of women in drama, and this development will be discussed in the next chapter.

However, dramatists who wished to set the action of their plays in a social structure which was realistic and familiar, and therefore easily intelligible to their audiences,

had to seek other ways of freeing their heroines from the restrictive contemporary ethical code. The solutions suggested by the dramatists mentioned in this study were male disguise, as used by Perseda and Dorothea, and freedom from paternal authority.

It is no coincidence that all the interesting heroines of the 'testing' plays are unmarried or widowed at the time of the action, and relatively free from paternal restraints. Perseda and Mariana live at court, Cassandra seems to be an orphan, and Em's father is friendly rather than authoritative, allowing her to enjoy the greater freedom of the working girl she pretends to be.

Shakespeare was later to develop both these techniques of freeing his heroines from the restraints of contemporary female behaviour, and the questioning of the testing theme which takes such a code as its basis.

Many of Shakespeare's plays indicate that paternal authority and political importance still are the strongest influences upon a woman's freedom, as the contrast between Beatrice and Hero in Much Ado About Nothing demonstrates. Whereas Beatrice, as an orphan and her uncle's ward, is free to marry as she pleases or not at all, and to mock men and marriage in general, Hero's position is very different. As her father's sole heir, she carries the weight of all Leonato's social and moral ambitions for her. Leonato's outburst when she is discredited reveals the full extent of his expectations, and her responsibilities. Her political importance means that she must be the perfect maiden, whose quiet, modest demeanour indicates that her purity and obedience are beyond reproach. Hero is the conventional ideal, so much so that her obedience, passive suffering and

unquestioning acceptance of the repentant Claudio without protest or reproof recalls Patient Grissill.

Because of the strong authority of fathers over their daughters, many of Shakespeare's active heroines had to be orphaned, or otherwise free from their influence. Beatrice is in the care of her uncle, Helena is an orphan brought up by a foster mother, and neither Isabella, Julia nor Viola seem to have parents. Rosalind and Imogen are both motherless, and their fathers are temporarily absent. Nowadays we might tend to regard orphaned heroes and heroines as an obvious fictional device, but apparently this high proportion of orphans was not unusual in the sixteenth century, when over a third of the population had lost at least one parent by the age of fourteen. Shakespeare simply uses a realistic possibility to increase the dramatic potential.

The necessity of this device becomes apparent from a study of father/daughter relationships in Shakespeare. Although some fathers are wise and pleasant, many tend to be distant, authoritarian characters, liable to sacrifice their daughters' feelings to political and material concerns, or to coerce their obedience. The daughters of such characters tend to be near-tragic, the most pathetic casualty of the ideal of filial submission being Ophelia, who quietly accepts a distorted and trivialising view of Hamlet's love for her, and lets herself be used against him in the schemes of subterfuge which corrupt all involved in them. Perhaps her madness should be interpreted as the most extreme consequence of the code of behaviour which, in demanding that a daughter should be completely obedient to her parents, and particularly to her father, forced her to repress her own wishes and ideas and to act against them, if she wanted to be considered virtuous and worthy of her place in society. It is ironic that Polonius should advise

his son to be true to himself, yet actively deprive his daughter of personal integrity.

Without the influence of fathers to restrict them to lives of obedience and modest seclusion, Shakespeare's heroines are free to act independently. This means that those who set out to demonstrate their worth often achieve their aims by methods which have little to do with the domestic and passive ideal of the earlier plays, actively amending their problems rather than passively enduring them. In All's Well That Ends Well, the play which comes nearest to being a test of wifely constancy in the face of cruelty, Helena, far from quietly enduring her husband's will and trusting to God, uses her own wit, determination and guile to solve her problem, convinced that "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie/Which we ascribe to heaven".

In some cases, though, a further degree of freedom was necessary to allow heroines to venture into the dangerous world beyond home and the court, which, according to moral writers, swarmed with men liable to lust after and discredit women who appeared outside. On a more practical level, it was a place where the artificial code of courtesy and consideration for the weaker sex was less likely to apply, and where rich women might expect to be easy victims. How could noble women venture out into the world, achieve what they must, and return to their ordinary lives without injury or loss of reputation? The answer was male disguise, after the precedent set by Perseda, who used it to allow her to step out of her protective castle and out of the restrictions of the popular conception of female nature, making it possible to fight Soliman on his own terms, man to man. Some of Shakespeare's heroines also escape the restricted idea of feminine virtue recommended to women of the Renaissance, by temporarily escaping femininity through disguise. As men, they are able to act independently, travel freely, make friendships with men

unhampered by all the protocol of courtship, even to penetrate exclusively male provinces such as the legal system. This most extreme way of releasing his heroines allowed them to play truant from womanhood itself.

As well as developing the trend towards heroines who demonstrate their goodness in unconventional and exciting ways, Shakespeare treated the details and concerns of the testing theme in a very innovative manner, taking the growing doubts about its value much further.

Again and again, he exposes the dark side of the theme: the question of why men feel compelled to test virtuous women in this way, the permanent harm inflicted by such testing, and the question of whether the men concerned deserve such virtue anyway. In The Winter's Tale, for instance, which recalls Patient Grissill in the elements of the virtuous wife beset with difficulties inflicted by her husband, the supposed murder of the baby, the righteous anger expressed by Paulina and the eventual reconciliation, Hermione's trials are clearly precipitated by her husband's sudden paranoid obsession, which threatens not only his marriage, but his friendships and the state. Instead of the all-knowing, Godlike husband who tests womanly virtue to strengthen the family and state, we are shown clearly that an obsessive distrust of, and desire to punish, one's wife is symptomatic of a madness which if left unchecked, will threaten the whole of society. Furthermore, Leontes' obsession cannot be dismissed as "a little fault", since the play makes us aware that such behaviour does inflict real harm, and that years may be lost before even a part of it can be repaired.

Setting aside the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus, the tragedy of lost time is frequently recalled by the frequent reminders that sixteen years have passed, Paulina's complaints of being "an old turtle", Hermione's wrinkles and

Leontes' pathetic eagerness to catch up with the news of his family during "this wide gap of time, since first/We were dissevered". In Patient Grissill, there is no such awareness that any length of time has passed at all: one brief scene of Grissill being industrious and cheerful in her poverty has to suffice, with no indication that this fortitude must be maintained for thirteen years. Introducing notes of realism to the fantasy setting it requires can make the plot of sustained testing seem pathological and sinister.

Shakespeare also frequently raises doubts as to whether exemplary female devotion really gets the reward it deserves, especially when heroines have spent much time and ingenuity in winning the affection of men who are morally limited or flawed, as in Twelfth Night, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure. This idea comes across very strongly in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, in which Shakespeare makes his most obvious and systemised use of the testing theme. As in Greene's James IV, one heroine demonstrates constancy, using male disguise, and another chastity, resisting the advances of several suitors in the absence of the beloved. The feeling, familiar from earlier plays, that their virtue is lavished on men who do not deserve it, is very strong by the end, when we have seen that Julia's constancy is directed towards a man who is completely inconstant, and that Silvia's steadfast chastity is rewarded by Valentine's willingness to give her to Proteus, who has just attempted to rape her, in order to preserve a male friendship.

Shakespeare's treatment of the themes of chastity and constancy is generally unconventional and realistic. Although he never denies the value of female chastity when it appears as one of many virtues, Shakespeare repeatedly shows men's obsession with the purity of their wives and daughters as a dangerous tendency and a potential cause of tragedy. Female constancy features highly in his plays,

but is demonstrated in a manner the early writers of homiletic drama would not have recognised as virtuous. Far from staying at home and passively enduring their problems and being faithful to their absent loved ones, Shakespeare's heroines set out to solve their difficulties and to win their loves, using male disguise to transcend the restrictions of the current idea of the limitations of female virtue and capabilities, and using their own resourcefulness, guile, opportunism, defiance of male authority and acting skill, all qualities the moral writers would have deplored in women. Shakespeare's view of women works like an antidote to the narrow Protestant ideal of the perfect wife, since he shows that women have as many different qualities as men, and that a woman's love, kindness and sense of justice can be expressed actively in an unlimited number of ways.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977), p. 138.
2. Doris Mary Stenton, The English Woman in History (London, 1957), p. 106.
3. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 109-13; pp. 136-46.
4. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Illinois, 1956), p. 98.
5. Anon, A Preaty Interlude called Nice Wanton in Specimens of the Pre-Shakesperean Drama, edited by J.M. Manly (New York, 1967), Volume I, p. 469. (Tidle: spoil)
6. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 116.
7. John Phillip, The Commoditye of pacient and meeke Grissill, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1909), line 802
8. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 44.
9. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 220.
10. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 310.
11. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 237.
12. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 598.
13. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 392.
14. Anon, A New Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester, in Materialen zur Kunde des alteren Englischen Dramas, edited by W.W. Greg (Louvain, 1909, Vaduz, 1963), Band 5, p. 9.
15. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 96.
16. R.B., A new Tragicall Comedie of Apius and Virginia in Tudor Interludes, edited by Peter Happe (London, 1972), p. 278.
17. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 251.
18. R.B., Apius and Virginia, p. 275.

19. A Pleasant Comodie of faire Em the Millers Daughter of Manchester, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1928), line 140.
20. Faire Em, line 147.
21. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 105.
22. Jocasta, translated by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinweltershe in Early English Classical Tragedies, edited by J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford, 1912), p. 83.
23. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 48.
24. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 309.
25. The Pedlers Prophecie, edited by W.W.Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1914), line 226.
26. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1781.
27. Robert Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, edited by J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London, 1969), p. 8.
28. George Gascoigne, Supposes in Early Plays from the Italian, edited by R.W. Bond (Oxford, 1911), p. 43.
29. John Lyly, Mother Bombie edited by Kathleen M. Lea and D. Nichol Smith, Malone Society (Oxford, 1939 (1948)), line 405.
30. Richard Hyrde, Introduction to his translation Instruction of a Christian Woman from Luis Vives' De Institutione feminae Christianae in Foster Watson, Vives and the Renascence Education of Women (London, 1912), p. 134.
31. July and Julian, edited by Giles Dawson and F.P. Wilson, Malone Society (Oxford, 1955), p. 10.
32. The Taming of a Shrew in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, edited by G. Bullough (London, 1958), Volume I, p. 909.
33. The Taming of a Shrew, p. 107.
34. The Taming of a Shrew, p. 107.
35. Godly Queene Hester, p. 12.
36. Godly Queene Hester, p. 13.

37. Godly Queene Hester, p. 13.
38. Godly Queene Hester, p. 13.
39. The Clerk's Tale in The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F.N. Robinson, (Oxford, 1966), p. 109.
40. The Clerk's Tale, p. 113.
41. The Clerk's Tale, p. 114. Chichevache: the 'lean cow', a mythical monster said to be permanently emaciated due to its habit of preying only on patient wives.
42. The Clerk's Tale, p. 114.
43. Leo Salinger, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (Cambridge, 1974), p. 39.
44. Cyrus Hoy, Introduction, Notes and Commentaries to texts in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1980), Volume I.
45. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 397.
46. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 428.
47. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 993.
48. The Book of Job, 1. 8-11, Authorised Version.
49. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1107.
50. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1226.
51. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1519.
52. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1544.
53. Phillip, Patient Grissill, line 1769.
54. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 138.
55. Thomas Preston, Cambyses in Pre-Shakespearean Tragedies, edited by Ashley Thorndike, Minor Elizabethan Drama (London, 1958), Volume I, p. 98.
56. Daniel Seltzer, Introductory Notes to Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, edited by Daniel Seltzer, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (London, 1963).
57. J.A. Lavin, Introduction to Friar Bungay and Friar Bacon, edited by J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London, 1969), pp. xiv-xvi.

58. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 77.
59. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 69.
60. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 68.
61. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 85.
62. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 93.
63. William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act I, Scene 1.
64. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 93.
65. Robert Greene, The Scottish History of James the Fourth, edited by J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London, 1967), p. 41..
66. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 57,
67. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 58.
68. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 90.
69. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 90.
70. Greene, James the Fourth, page 96.
71. J.A. Lavin, Introduction to The Scottish History of James the Fourth, pp. xx-xxi.
72. Faire Em, line 432.
73. Faire Em, line 440.
74. Faire Em, line 1230.
75. Faire Em, line 951.
76. Faire Em, line 1459.
77. A Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1908), line 1441.
78. Samuel Brandon, The Tragicomoedi of the Vertuous Octavia, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909), line 1337.
79. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 1325.
80. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 748.
81. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 779.
82. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 783.

83. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 1148.
84. Brandon, Vertuous Octavia, line 1298.
85. Thomas Dekker and Chettle, The Pleasant Commoedye of Patient Grissill in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953), Volume I, p. 288.
86. Dekker and Chettle, Patient Grissill, p. 288.
87. Dekker and Chettle, Patient Grissill, p. 288. The odd spelling is Dekker's attempt to convey a Welsh accent.
88. Dekker and Chettle, Patient Grissill, p. 275.
89. Dekker and Chettle, Patient Grissill, p. 289.
90. Dekker and Chettle, Patient Grissill, p. 288.
91. de Rojas, Fernando, Celestina; or The Tragi-Comedy of Calisto and Melebea, trans. Phyllis Hartnoll (London, 1959).
92. A New Commoedye in English in Maner of an Enterlude, Ryght Elegant and Full of Craft of Rethoryk, wherein is Shewd and Described as well the Bewte and good Properties of Women as Their Vycys and Evyll Condictions, with a Morall Conclusion and Exhortacyon to Vertew, (usually known as the Interlude of Calisto and Melebea) in Three Rastell Plays, edited by Richard Axton (Cambridge, 1979), p. 70.
93. Calisto and Melebea, p. 71.
94. Calisto and Melebea, p. 273.
95. Calisto and Melebea, p. 273.
96. Calisto and Melebea, p. 80.
97. Calisto and Melebea, p. 81.
98. Thomas Preston, Cambyses in Dodsley's Old English Plays, edited by W.C. Hazlitt (London, 1874), Volume IV, p. 230.
99. Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy, (Oxford, 1958).
100. R.B., Apus and Virginia, p. 317.
101. Geoffrey Chaucer, The Phisiciens Tale in The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F.N. Robinson (Oxford, 1976), p. 145.

102. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 278.
103. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 288.
104. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 289.
105. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 100.
106. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 294.
107. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 307.
108. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 307.
109. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 307.
110. R.B., Apilus and Virginia, p. 308.
111. Thomas Garter, The Commodity of the moste vertuous and Godlye Susanna, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1937), line 152.
112. Garter, Susanna, line 176.
113. Garter, Susanna, line 353.
114. Garter, Susanna, line 409.
115. Garter, Susanna, line 748.
116. Garter, Susanna, line 768.
117. Garter, Susanna, line 1382.
118. Garter, Susanna, line 449.
119. George Whetstone, The Historie of Promos and Cassandra in G.M. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1958), Volume II, p. 432.
120. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 460.
121. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 461.
122. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 462.
123. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 462.
124. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 461.
125. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 469.
126. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 475.
127. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 475.

128. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 476.
129. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 480.
130. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 485.
131. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 499.
132. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 506.
133. Whetstone, Promos and Cassandra, p. 513.
134. John Lyly, Alexander and Campaspe, edited by
W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1933),
line 1000.
135. Lyly, Alexander and Campaspe, line 844.
136. Lyly, Alexander and Campaspe, line 1585.
137. George Peele, The Love of King David and Fair
Bethsabe, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society
(Oxford, 1912), line 34.
138. Peele, David and Bethsabe, line 104.
139. Peele, David and Bethsabe, line 142.
140. Peele, David and Bethsabe, line 603.
141. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 10.
142. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 35.
143. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 46.
144. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay p. 50.
145. Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, p. 78.
146. Robert Greene, A Looking Glass for London and England
and George a Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield in
The Works of Robert Greene, edited by Thomas H.
Dickinson, Mermaid series (London, 1909).
147. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 73.
148. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 72.
149. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 28.
150. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 30.
151. Greene, James the Fourth, p. 36.

152. Thomas Kyd, The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda in Complete Works of Thomas Kyd, edited by F.S.Boas (Oxford, 1901), p. 211.
153. Kyd, Solyman and Perseda, V, (iii).
154. Kyd, Solyman and Perseda, p. 215.
155. Faire Em, line 599.
156. Faire Em, line 1402.
157. Lochrine, line 1517.
158. Lochrine, line 517.
159. Anthony Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, edited by Arthur Brown, Malone Society (Oxford, 1963), line 901.
160. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1306.
161. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1314.
162. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1412.
(Janamyst: mythical monster whose appetite could not be assuaged. (Corruption of Jane-a-must?)).)
163. ,Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave line 1460.
164. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1471.
165. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1550.
166. Munday, A Knack to Know a Knave, line 1560.
167. Robert Greene, John of Bordeaux or The Second Part of Friar Bacon, edited by W.W.Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1936), p. 12.
168. Greene, John of Bordeaux, p. 14.
169. Greene, John of Bordeaux, p. 14.
170. Greene, John of Bordeaux, p. 20.
171. Greene, John of Bordeaux, p. 24.
172. Greene, John of Bordeaux, p. 36.
173. Ben Jonson, The Case is Altered, in The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, edited by G.A. Wilkes (Oxford, 1981), Volume I, p. 126.
174. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 126.
175. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 116.

176. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 106.
177. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 140.
178. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 165.
179. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 165.
180. Jonson The Case is Altered, p. 165.
181. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 128.

Chapter 3

WOMEN IN COMEDIES OF LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the conclusion of Chapter II, dramatists became increasingly disenchanted with current social morality and with its code of feminine virtue, because of the limiting effect it had on dramatic possibilities. Instead, they tended to ally themselves with the emerging idea of romantic love, which invited the essentially dramatic themes of individual learning, change and fulfilment, as against society's more collectivist values of stability achieved through conformity.

The emergence of this theme in drama and literature coincided with the reinforcement of patriarchy which accompanied the English Reformation, and which continued and intensified into the seventeenth century. This heightening of the belief that fathers held moral, as well as legal and financial power over their families increased their control over their children's choice of occupation and of spouse. As Lawrence Stone writes:

the accepted wisdom of the age was that marriage based on personal selection, and thus inevitably influenced by ephemeral factors such as sexual attraction or romantic love, was if anything less likely to produce lasting happiness than one arranged by more prudent and more mature heads.

(1)

Whether or not the child's opinion was taken into account at all depended entirely on the outlook of the individual parent. Some were probably kind and considerate, but current thought about family responsibilities was very unlikely to incline parents to rank their children's

opinions equally with their own. Stone gives a chilling catalogue of the ways in which some parents coerced unwilling children into marriage, ranging from emotional and economic blackmail and physical violence.

Such a degree of power, in any society, would naturally generate questioning and resistance; and comedy has traditionally been the means by which institutions can be questioned and challenged with a measure of impunity. However, native British comedy had always tended to focus on the difficulties of existing marriages, like the mastery struggle and fears of cuckoldry, or the problems of the virtuous wife within marriage, rather than romantic love and courtship. The tradition of comedy dealing with these issues, and combining them with the need to challenge and subvert parental authority, was that of classical comedy.

As Leo Salinger writes, the classical New Comedy, unlike earlier forms of drama, was concerned with personal and domestic matters, particularly marriage. It often featured the struggles of a young patrician to marry a plebeian girl against the wishes of his father, who would be determined to arrange a marriage to ensure the maximum financial benefit. Usually the son would turn to deception to get his own way and would employ a devious, inventive slave to help him invent various complicated schemes to achieve the desired love-match.(2)

This form of comedy started to influence English drama from the late 1530's. Its influence came through in two ways: directly through English translation from classical originals, and indirectly through the medium of Italian comedy. This resulted in the entry to English drama of plots drawn from novelle, which were even more complicated than those of classical comedy, involving disguise (perhaps drawn from the custom of staging plays at carnival time), contemporary settings and vernacular dialogue. The plots remained much

the same, though, in their concentration on the struggle of the young to defy their elders and marry for love, the main difference being that the character of the elderly man who blocks the desires of the young appears much more frequently, and is often exposed to ridicule. As well as the miserly or greedy fathers of Roman comedy, there are rich and lascivious old men, perhaps based on the well-known figure of Pantalone, pursuing girls who are obviously better suited to their sons, wards or other young rivals, and elderly husbands with attractive young wives, terrified of cuckoldom. The sympathy is almost always with the young, and a frequent motif is that of general relief when the censorious father's praise of prudence and ridicule of sexual love are exposed as hypocrisy when his own amorous proclivities are made known.⁽³⁾

The classical plays and their Renaissance Italian descendants are clearly linked by the importance they give to deceiving or undermining paternal authority. The social conditions of the Renaissance were sufficiently similar to those of the classical world for the need to overcome or avoid paternal resistance to a love-match to be as great as ever.

The classical model of comedy, then, was a potential vehicle for bringing the struggle for romantic love to the British stage. Its emphasis on love and courtship also invited a more important role for women in the drama, with the possibility of portraying them as breaking away from the passive and restrictive ideal of female virtue to achieve romantic love.

Another genre which raised exciting possibilities for female characterisation made its appearance in English drama shortly after: that of romance.

As Leo Salinger shows, although the surviving plays from 1565 to 1584 show a predominance of the morality idiom and classically influenced drama, a view which takes account of the many lost plays of the period shows the great importance of romance plays on the stage of that time. Surviving titles and other evidence indicates that there were many types of romance drama, ranging from tales with a mythological basis to chivalric romances and novelle plots.⁽⁴⁾

Many characteristics of the romance genre invited the creation of exciting heroines. The romance author had immense imaginative freedom: independent of the constraints of realistic writing, he could set his heroes and heroines in the past, in exotic countries, in imaginary lands in which they could experience adventures which the social customs existing in real life would have made impossible, especially for women. While in real life, young women were restricted by the demands of social morality that they lead modest and inactive lives in the seclusion of their homes, for romance heroines nothing was impossible. The dramatist interested in creating heroines and exploring female nature had almost limitless possibilities open to him.

Furthermore, by the time the romance genre reached the English stage, some very interesting types of female character had already emerged in the many different forms of romance, so that the dramatists inherited a number of ideas rich in dramatic potential. Leo Salinger describes in great detail the stage romances of mediaeval Europe, which tended to feature the character of the persecuted queen. The royal heroine, wrongly accused of adultery, infanticide or giving birth to monsters by some enemy, would undergo an ordeal of wandering and exile before her vindication and restoration to husband and court. The period of exile sometimes involved extensive travel, the

adoption of male disguise for protection, and the seeking of work appropriate to a man, often at the court of some nobleman who proved to be a long-lost relative. Such a role offered great possibilities for the creation of active heroines, even though the stress on the queen's patience, suffering and forgiveness was in line with the most conservative views of woman's nature and social role.⁽⁵⁾

This potential for interesting female characterisation is found in other types of romance as well, even in Arthurian romance, whose women might well be assumed to be simply the ladies of courtly love, inspiring devotion and sending knights on quests, rarefied, distinct and inactive. In fact, apart from the conventional ladies, enchantresses and pining maidens, there are also women best described as 'healers', less exalted and more human and active than the courtly ladies. Rather than accepting devotion, the healer is herself susceptible to love, tending to be struck with passion for her knightly patient. The idea of a woman cherishing unspoken love and desiring to be of service added to the variety of female roles in the tradition of romance.

In Crusade literature, female types become even more diverse. Ariosto's Orlando Furioso features a varied range of female characters, from evil temptresses like Alcina to slightly unprincipled beauties like Angelica, from persecuted queens to threatened virgins. Most interesting of all, though, are the female knights. This innovation in crusade romances seems to have been made by Tasso, who was inspired by reports from the Crusades that Saracen women participated in some of the battles to create Clorinda, the romantic armour-clad Amazon in Gerusalemme Liberata. In Orlando Furioso, Ariosto develops this idea by creating several female knights of distinct character and habit. Marfisa, the Saracen knight, is "mighty" and "lofty", described in terms of great physical strength and stamina,

while Bradamanta, the heroine, is renowned for her courtly exploits as well as military prowess: like the gentler type of male knight, she is courteous and outstandingly faithful in love. As Jan Kott remarks, Bradamanta was one of the first transvestite heroines to be mistaken for a man and loved in error by a woman, a theme which became highly important in Italian, and later English comedy.⁽⁶⁾

Clearly romance literature was an exciting influence on female characterisation, since even though it perpetuated the traditional image of the venerated courtly lady, it also provided many types of more active heroine, often pointing some interesting contrasts. However, both of these new genres also embodied characteristics which militated against the development of interesting stage heroines. Although the freedom offered by romance gave the writer's imagination full rein, this very freedom could make romance a poor medium for discussing any social issues concerning women, since the setting and stories could be too far removed from reality for such topics to have any impact.

Furthermore, the typical incident-filled romance plot tended to leave little scope for characterisation, which resulted in the creation of a range of instantly recognisable character types, similar to those found in fairy stories. Female characters seem to have a particular tendency to become stereotyped in this way, especially in drama, which must use its limited stage time to advance the action, and cannot use the narrative techniques available to non-dramatic literature to set the scene and flesh out its characters.

The genre of classical comedy shares this limitation since the main appeal of this type of comedy was its complicated plot, in which new schemes were adopted and discarded with great rapidity. Its most important and attractive

character was that of the cunning slave, the trickster, who deftly manipulated the many illusions he created; indeed, in many plays he was the only rounded character, since such an emphasis on a rapid, complex plot militates against subtle characterisation. A playwright keen to plunge into an intricate story would be glad to use stereotyped characters, since they would be familiar to his audience, and would leave their minds free to concentrate on following the plot.

This degree of stereotyping affects most characters in classical drama, but women most of all. Traditionally, the young man's beloved, the cause of all the confusion, often did not even appear in classical comedy. Although the hero's desire to marry her provided the impetus for all the action, she was often locked in a house somewhere off-stage, or even kept in the country. This was partly for reasons of decorum, since the young mistress was sometimes pregnant, and classical drama was less relaxed in this respect than mediaeval drama, but partly for functional reasons: the young woman was needed to create the problem, but there was no necessity for her to assist in providing the solution.⁽⁷⁾

Both genres, then, carried elements which seemed to offer important new directions for the presentation of women in drama, but also had other characteristics which inhibited such development. How far their potential to produce interesting heroines was realised seems to have depended upon the degree to which playwrights were able to achieve a synthesis between the opportunities offered by the new genres - the courtship element in classical comedy, the mobile heroines in romance - and the themes already established in native comedy - the discussion of current social issues, and the move towards more detailed and psychologically credible female characters.

I shall now look in detail at the influence of both genres upon English comedy, assessing how far they seem to have achieved their potential.

THE INFLUENCE OF CLASSICAL COMEDY

As we have seen, classical comedy's main potential to influence the presentation of women was its emphasis on love and courtship, and on plots in which marriages were achieved by outwitting the oppressive father. Earlier native British comedy had tended to focus on the difficulties of existing marriages, and the violent but good-natured knock-about comedy of the mastery struggle seems to have retained its popularity well into the late 1560's. Sometimes this old type of comedy appears in its original form, sometimes modified into more diverse types of battle of the sexes or subtler forms of domestic disagreement. One such re-appearance of this theme is in the Biblical interlude of The Historie of Jacob and Esau (1554), sometimes attributed to Nicholas Udall, in which its influence can be seen in the characterisation of Rebecca as a wife whose apparent piety and obedience mask her subversiveness. Rebecca may be devout, but she sees no harm in scheming to help God's will along a little, and does so with all her resourcefulness, inventing the trick, helping Jacob escape to safety and persuading Esau of the sinfulness of revenge. Rebecca manipulates all the action, and almost manages to pass herself off as an ideal wife, her husband's obedient handmaid, as well. Only a few subtly ironic verbal exchanges reveal her real role.

A more straightforward descendant of the earlier mastery-struggle comedy is Tom Tyler and his Wife (1560), whose completely traditional background is confirmed by the use of allegorical characters like those of the morality plays. Tom Tyler's shrewish wife, Strife, unlike her predecessors, does no useful work to offset her taste for domineering, drinking and gossip: on the contrary, she intends to live like a lady at Tom's expense, and keeps him under her thumb by the constant threat of violence. Eventually, when Strife humiliates him by beating him up in front of her

gossip Sturdie and Tipple the local ale-wife, Tom can bear it no longer, and asks his friend Tom Taylor to cure his wife's frowardness by beating her on his behalf, since he is too cowed to do it himself. Taylor disguises himself as Tyler, comes home at the usual hour and astounds Strife by replying to her insults and blows, and beating her into submission. But Tom Tyler's mastery lasts only as long as the deception. As soon as he admits that it wasn't him who did the beating, Strife rails at Tom at great length, almost beats him to death and then prepares to do the same to Tom Taylor. Sturdie and Tipple sing a celebratory song, which comments "through some be sheep, yet some be shrowes/ Let them be fools that lust", and depart wishing all wives could be as fortunate as Strife. Poor Tom, left alone, asks Destinie to predict how his unhappy marital life will end, but Destinie will only give equivocal answers: Tom can only be patient and endure it.

Tom Tyler and his Wife differs very little from the early mastery struggle plays. The story is more sustained, and varied by the introduction of a disguise-plot and many songs, but the basic concern is still the fight for dominance between husband and wife. Classical influences were relatively slow to affect this traditional comic approach to marriage. The earliest classical influence on British drama, that of direct translations from the original Latin and Greek, seems to have worked as a gradual influence on British comedy, introducing certain stock characters such as the miles gloriosus (Thersites (1537)) and the trickster (Jacke Jugeler (1555)) into the familiar interlude. The early classically-inspired plots are concerned with complex deception (Jacke Jugeler, Gammar Gurton's Needle (1553)) and mistaken identity and recognition of a long-lost son (Misogonus (1570)), rather than love and courtship. In spite of this, some of the plays show subtle characterisation of women, which is out of proportion to their marginal importance in the plot. This seems to be a

development of existing native influences, which will be discussed briefly later.

The important plots of love and courtship came into English comedy indirectly, through Italian comedy, and did not begin to influence it until much later. However, as we shall see, female characterisation in these plays was to be successful only when dramatists managed to transcend the limitations imposed by very complex plots and inherited convention of the 'absent mistress'. These plays become truly interesting only when they combine some element of discussion of current ideas about marriage and women with the courtship and trickery plot.

One exceptional play goes beyond all others in this genre in its presentation of women. This seems to have come about because of its skilful synthesis of all the elements most likely to produce lively female characterisation: the classical plot involving courtship, and a contemporary social setting, with discussion of current ideas. The play is Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister (1552).

Udall's sensitive portrayal of the women in this play is all the more remarkable when one considers that in the play's sources, the courtship plot is merely a vehicle for the miles gloriosus character. In the original play, the conceited soldier imagines himself to be irresistible to women, and is encouraged in his folly by his parasite. Udall combines these aspects of the character with a story based on the sub-plot of Terence's Eunuchus, in which an army officer courts a faithful woman during her lover's absence, eventually becomes annoyed with her and attacks her household, and is eventually forgiven. Both sources concentrate on the clever trickery of the parasites, so that

most of the other characters remain stock types, the women most of all.⁽⁸⁾

Udall seems to have been well aware of his tasks of synthesising the elements of native and classical entertainment: in the prologue he refers to his play as "our Comedie or Enterlude". He transposes his five-act play into a contemporary London setting, turning the braggart soldier into Ralph Roister Doister, a typical tavern boaster, and his parasite into the more sympathetic Mathew Merygreeke, a very credible young waster who cultivates Ralph's acquaintance in order to get a few laughs, as well as meals, at his expense. The most striking change, though, is in the characterisation of the woman embarrassed by the boaster's courtship, who is transformed from the standard pretty courtesan of classical comedy into the very credible, complex and individual Dame Christian Custance. Even Custance's social position as a fairly rich city widow is very realistic, according to Geoffrey Hindley, who in England in the Age of Caxton cites many cases of widows left with their late husbands' property, who were free to re-marry entirely for personal inclination, and were accordingly wooed most enthusiastically.⁽⁹⁾

As well as being a realistic character in the sense that women in her position existed historically, Christian links the action to the values of real life, since she seems to represent the more serious side of the comedy, the "vertue in decent comlynesse" Udall said in the prologue should be combined with mirth. As well as using a romantic theme of courtship, a complicated classically-based plot and realistic characterisation, Udall gives his play some moral content, thus making it a true comedy.

Custance's problem, like that of many later heroines, is the safeguarding of her chastity and reputation during the absence of her betrothed lover Gawin Goodlucke. Unlike the

heroines of the chastity-testing plays, though, Custance demonstrates the scope of the problem in a human way, and in a recognisable social setting. Custance's chastity is not the oath of seclusion and joylessness of a home-bound maiden or wife, but the inner resolution of a free and independent woman, who intends to lead an active life while guarding her reputation.

Custance's independence is far more of a challenge to her virtue than conventional seclusion: she goes out to dine, and Ralph spots her and becomes besotted with her beauty and the reports of her income; she lives independently, without male relatives, running her household and trying to control her servants, who, despite their regard for her, are very susceptible to bribery by suitors who promise new clothes. Probably because she knows the difficulty of maintaining a spotless reputation until Gawin's return, Custance is scrupulous to the point of being strait-laced about accepting attentions from other men, as the first scene in which she appears shows. Custance accepts the letter brought from Ralph by Mage Mumblecrust only because

I thought verily thys had bene some token
From my dere spouse Gawin Goodlucke, whom when him please
God luckily sende home to both our hertes ease. (10)

It is very easy to sympathise with Custance here, since her words convey more than extreme honour and circumspection: obviously she had hoped the letter had been from Gawin, just as anyone separated from a loved one hopes every communication is from him, and is betraying her disappointment. Custance's constancy is clearly based on deep affection as well as moral principles and is accordingly staunch: despite all Mage's blandishments on behalf of the 'lustie gay bachelor', Custance refuses even to open the letter, and forbids Mage to bring her any others. We are not told whether this is to avoid temptation or slander, but both motives are likely. Custance seems to be

concerned with the reality of constancy, as well as its appearance.

Similarly, Custance later scolds Tibet for bringing her tokens from her unknown admirer, reminding all her maids that "Good wenches would not rampe abrode ydelly,/But keepe within doores, and plie their work earnestly." For a moment Custance sounds like a moralist of the school of Vives, recommending seclusion for young women, but it soon becomes apparent that her ethics are more humanistic. She tells her maids

If one would speake with me that is a man likely,
Ye shall have right good thanke to bringe me worde
quickly.

But otherwyse with messages to come in post
From henceforth I promise you, shall be to your cost.⁽¹¹⁾

Christian is willing to speak to any man face to face, but feels that letters and tokens must be discouraged because of their underhand and therefore illicit amorous connotations. That she is far from prudish and humourless emerges from a later conversation with Mathew Merygreeke, in which she comments very drily on her suitor's unusual idea of wooing her by promising to marry her lest she die of love for him. She eventually relaxes as soon as she guesses that her admirer is Ralph Roister Doister, since she feels confident that she can deal with his visits easily. "Let him come when hym lust, I wishe no better sport" is now her attitude, and she even decides "I will in, and reade my great letter/I shall to my woer make answere the better", since she knows now that it is safe for her to do so. Ralph is no threat to her affections, and she assumes that everyone else will know this too.

From this point on, Custance seems to be appreciating the humorous side of her predicament even as she tries to convince Ralph that his idea that she loves him is without

foundation. Her words at their last meeting "I will not be served with a foole in no wise/When I choose an husbände I hope to take a man" are most decided in their import, but nevertheless Custance is obviously sharing a joke with Merygreeke when she hands him Ralph's ambiguous love-letter, commenting "see what letter it is to winne a woman." While making it quite clear that she wanted Ralph to "seeke no more", Custance enjoys the fun: it is only when Ralph and Merygreeke embarrass her by pestering her during a visit from Sym Suresby, an envoy from Gawin Goodlucke, that Custance realises that the joke is going too far, guessing that

Sym Suresby here perchance shal deme therof som yll.
And shall su(s)pect in me some point of naughtinesse,
And they come hitherward. (12)

Ralph confirms all Custance's worst misgivings, incriminating her in Suresby's eyes by calling her his wife and alluding to the ring and tokens he has sent her. Custance is too sensitive to be misled by Suresby's excuse that he has other business to attend to, and knows that he has gone to tell Gawin that she has been unfaithful during his absence, guessing "surely this fellowe misdeemeth some yll in me".

Understandably, Custance's usual charm is wearing thin, and eventually she loses all patience with Ralph. It is interesting to note that she stops addressing him politely as 'ye' as soon as Merygreeke mentions the tokens which seem to incriminate her, but when Suresby has gone and Ralph keeps insisting that Custance shall have him, the full extent of her anger is shown as she bursts out:

No, the devil shall have thee.
I have gotten this houre more shame and harme by thee,
Then all thy life days thou canst do me honestie...
... He hath stained my name for ever this is cleare. (13)

Custance, while authoritative and competent in her own household of women, knows that in the outside world her worth will be assessed by men's moral judgement of her, and therefore persuades a man to vouch for her by phrasing her appeal in terms of the virtues men respect. Perhaps she even expresses her distress more freely than usual, since she could not help but be aware that her tears would be seen as a proof of sincerity and would be helpful in producing a protective reaction. Custance's different ways of tackling her problems may well be a subtle but important moral comment on a society which has come to allow women a certain amount of freedom and authority, but in which their moral worth is still defined by the judgement of men.

Whether Custance's behaviour is entirely ingenuous or slightly contrived, it has the desired effect. Trustie agrees "to be a witness/That in all (her) lyfe (she) never intended thing lesse", and even Mathew Merygreeke comes clean, explaining that he encouraged Ralph only for "a sporte and a pastime". All three plot together how best to continue the jest, and Custance returns to her "womens warre" with the approval of both men.

The battle is an easy victory for Custance and her "knightesses": in fact, her fierceness convinces Ralph

... by the matte she is mankine
I durst adventure the losse of my right hande,
If shee dyd not slee hir other husbände.

(16)

Part of the fight's significance, for Custance, is that it is a proof of her honesty to offer to Tristram Trustie, who promises to act as a character witness for her and to "depose for (her) honestie". This proves to be a necessary measure, since Gawin Goodlucke will not trust Custance's warm, affectionate welcome or her declarations of her faith

to him, preferring to believe the report he has heard of her. Custance can satisfy him only by telling him that:

Tristram Trustie, sir, your true and faithfull frende,
Was privie bothe to the beginning and the ende.
Let him be the Judge, and for me testifie, (17)

and Gawin agrees "I will the more credite that he shall verifie" as he goes to consult Trustie.

But even as Custance uses the alibi she has found to clear herself, her more self-assertive streak is beginning to show in her annoyance with Gawin for his credulousness and lack of trust in her, which makes him more open to any man's account of her behaviour rather than hers. One can almost hear her tone of disappointment and anger as she asks Gawin "Coulede any mans reporte your minde therein persuade?", and she chides him for his lack of trust: "What feare ye? that my faith towardses you should chaunge?" As Ewald Flugel remarks in his Preface, there is an impression "that Goodluck had better not doubt too much, because Custance's patience might reach a limit, and her natural independence might sharply bring him to his senses."

The interplay between Custance's conventional and less conventional attributes continues, and the next scene shows her praying for vindication. At first her prayer sounds distinctly indignant:

O Lorde, howe necessarie it is nowe of dayes,
That eche bodie live uprightly all maner wayes,
For lette never so little a gappe be open,
And be sure of this, the worst shall be spoken (18)

but later becomes more conventionally devout, as Custance recalls that only God, unlike men, can know the sincere

intentions beneath the dubious appearances, and know the difference between chastity itself and its reputation:

Thou Lorde knowest all folkes thoughts and eke intents
And thou arte the deliverer of all innocentes. (19)

She prays to be vindicated, like Susanna and Hester, and is indeed cleared by Tristram Trustie's testimony. In a spirit of Christian forgiveness, Custance tells Suresby "bicause to thy maister thou hast a true hart/And I know mine owne truth, I forgive thee for my part", and even manages to overcome her understandable aversion to Roister Doister when her friends, and Gawin, ask for him to be included in the celebrations.

Although Udall's achievement in portraying, in Custance, the observation of constancy by a thoroughly realistic, independent, authoritative, active, humorous but emotional and loving woman is the outstanding piece of female characterisation in the play, there is much more of interest. The maids are all portrayed as lively individuals, working, gossiping, looking forward to a break for some ale, and ever excited by the prospect of new clothes. Their all-consuming interest in fashion is presented as a likeable and amusing foible rather than an example of feminine vice and vanity, and Tibet's prediction of her stunning appearance in the finery she has been promised is disarming in its frank enthusiasm:

... we shall go in our frenche hoodes every day,
In our silke cassocks (I warrant you) freshe and gay,
In our tricke ferdegews and billiments of golde,
Brave in our sutes of change seven double folde,
Then shall ye see Tibet sirs, treade the mosse so trimme,
Nay, why sayd I treade? ye shall see hir glide and
swimme,
Not lumperdee clumperdee like our spaniell Rig. (20)

Even the humour at the expense of old Mage Mumblecrust is more gentle than most jokes about old women in either

mediaeval or classical tradition. Again, Udall has been careful to make her a realistic and plausible elderly woman amid a younger generation: she uses an archaic dialect, and habitually crosses herself when surprised, a gesture which, in a Protestant era, would suggest that she grew up with the religious customs of a much earlier age.

Udall's subtle and realistic presentation of women contrasts markedly with the conventional literary view of female nature as coy, fickle and easily won by extravagant wooing of which Merygreeke makes much use in his gulling of Ralph. Roister Doister is easy prey for such trickery, since he is already firmly convinced of the truth of those conventions of courtly love which confirm his high opinion of his own attractiveness. Obviously Custance must be in love with him, and her failure to announce it must be because "for wowyng thou knowest women are shamefast". Similarly, Ralph thinks that because "she looked on me twentie tymes yesternight/And laughed so", he can rank himself with such lovers as the poet of the Harley lyric Alysoun, in being able to say of his lady "heo on me loh", and takes it as another sign of concealed affection. Ralph remains completely impervious to all Custance's attempts to convey her own feelings until she phrases them so crudely that even he can no longer attribute her lack of enthusiasm to coyness, and before that goes through all the motions of courtly wooing; sending letters, rings and tokens, serenading and dying for love, only to revive to have another try. Udall may be presenting a straightforward burlesque of all the well-known processes of love; on the other hand, the comedy of Ralph's wooing may constitute a more serious criticism of the sort of love which is self-created and self-perpetuating, irrespective of the individual nature, feelings or marital state of the woman who is its object. The conventions of courtship are made ridiculous by being

adopted by a vain and deluded fool who hopes to impress a sensible woman with a keen sense of humour.

The characterisation of women in Ralph Roister Doister remained unmatched by any other British comedies on the classical model, even when plots concentrating on love and marriage began to make their appearance via Italian comedy. For some time, female characterisation in these plays remained very crude, as a result of the subordination of character to the trickery plot which is one of the problems of this type of play. For example, there is little hint of the potential for female characterisation this form of comedy could offer when it first makes its appearance on the British stage in Lewis Wager's translation of Grazzini's La Spiritata, called The Buggbears (1564). In this comedy set in Florence, young Formosus has been secretly married to Rosimunda for a year, and she is pregnant. He asks to marry her publicly, but his miserly father Amedeus insists on a dowry larger than her father, Brabantius, can afford. The plot is further complicated by another old man, Cantalupo, who is so obsessed with Rosimunda that he offers his own daughter Iphegenia to Amedeus as a suitable match for Formosus, simply to get rid of the young man as a rival. Iphegenia's love for Mantius counts for nothing in her father's plans. Eventually, Formosus manages to defeat the older generation by convincing his father that their house is haunted, and using this idea to conceal the theft of sufficient money for Rosimunda's dowry.

Although women are important in establishing the initial problem, they have no part to play in advancing the plot or helping with the deception. In accordance with classical convention Rosimunda, the pregnant heroine, does not appear at all, having been hurried away to a country retreat where "she doth nought but lie & muse in her dumpes on this matter, & consumeth a way". Iphegenia, while slightly more

active (she does at least undertake a journey to visit Rosimunda, to assure herself that Formosus' courtship is neither a malicious desertion of Rosimunda nor cruelty to Mantius) can only worry about her predicament, powerless to act to amend it. Even Tomasine, Rosimunda's nurse, who acts as a go-between, has only a very small role. Despite their importance to the plot, women in this play remain crude, functional types, who make no contribution to the achievement of a happy ending.

Some advance upon this state of characterisation can be seen only two years later, in George Gascoigne's Supposes, a translation of Ariosto's I Suppositi, which was performed at Gray's Inn in 1566. Although once again the women contribute little to the plot of disguise, mistaken identity and conjectures of varying accuracy the characters make about one another, we can see the same types gradually becoming more realistic and individual. Polynesta "the yong woman" does appear in person, and explains the first "suppose": that her lover, supposed to be Dulippo, a servant, is really his scholarly young master Erostrato, who has changed places with his manservant in order to be employed by her father, and constantly near her. Polynesta is revealed as a very daring and unconventional young woman, indulging in an affair in her father's own house, a degree of independence which reflects the play's origin as a novella, whose mood has a great deal in common with the stories of Boccaccio. The nurse, Balia, again appears as a go-between, but a far more active and complicated figure than her function in the play requires. She has made it possible for Polynesta and Dulippo to spend "many pleasant nightes together" but insists "I do it more than halfe agaynst my will, for I would rather you had settled your fansie in some noble familie". When Polynesta asks why, then, Balia pleaded so effectively in his behalf, the old nurse maintains "I haue thought it alwayes a deed of charitie to help the miserable yong men, whose tender youth

consumeth with the furious flames of loue", though not actively refuting Polynesta's charge that bribery had much to do with it.

Naturally Balia is relieved to hear that Dulippo is after all of a suitable social class to marry Polynesta, whether because of ambition for her mistress or guilt at having facilitated an affair with a social inferior. It may well be the latter, for her master Damon seems particularly inclined to believe the possibility of bribery. When he learns of his daughter's lover, he thinks Balia must be to blame "for we see by common prooffe, that these olde women be either peeuishe or pitifull: either easily enclined to euill, or quickly corrupted with bribes and rewards". Leo Salinger suggests a resemblance to Juliet's nurse, and there is certainly a similarity between the two characters, in their conflict of sympathy for young lovers and desire for security and social position for their charges.

As well as the deception plot with its usual characters, the play includes some discussion of Renaissance ideas about the upbringing of daughters. Damon, Polynesta's father, upon discovering she is unchaste, unexpectedly blames himself more than her. Although he reflects:

A costly iewell may I well accompte hir, that hath been my
cheefe comferte in youth, and is nowe become the corosuiue
of mine age. O Polynesta, full euill hast thou requited
the clemencie of thy carefull father, (21)

Damon is sure that her sin was a result of his own failure in the parental duty to give children adequate moral instruction, and

too banish them all ydle and wanton companie... to cut off
excesse the open gate of sinne, seldome or neuer to smile

on them vnlesse it be to their encouragement in vertue,
and finally, to provide them mariages in time couenient.

(22)

He reflects "fiue years are past since I might haue married hir, when by cōtinuall excuses I haue prolonged it to my owne perdition." This passage in which Damon blames himself for not providing a mate for Polynesta sooner does not appear in Ariosto's play, and seems to have been inserted by Gascoigne to introduce some moral import into a rather salacious play. The second, more light-hearted reference to educational theory originates in Ariosto's play. Pasiphilo, the servant, reflects that Polynesta was, to all appearances, an ideal maiden:

who wold haue beleued the contrary but that she had bin a virgin? aske the neighbours and you shall heare very good report of hir: marke hir behaiours & you would haue iudged hir very maydenly: seldome seene abroad but in place of prayer, and there very deuout, and no gaser at outwarde sightes, no blaser of hir beautie aboue in the windowes, no stale at the doore for the bypassers: you would haue thought hir a holy yong woman.

(23)

Whereas Gascoigne attributes Damon's failure to maintain his daughter's chastity to his failure to implement Vives' ideas sufficiently well, Ariosto allows Pasiphilo to suggest that it was not because the code was improperly implemented, but because it does not work anyway. Seclusion and modesty are outward attributes and can be faked easily: only a woman's personal inclinations can control her conduct. In a way, Pasiphilo's amazement is a tribute to the ingenuity of the lovers who have managed to subvert a moral code which equates female virtue with domestic seclusion, and censures visiting or even looking at the outside world. The clever lover's solution is simply to join the household.

The plot of love and deception, introduced through Italian comedy, was assimilated by British dramatists, along with

other aspects of classical drama, and eventually original British plays began to feature lovers plotting against the wishes of their elders. Possibly one of the earliest of these was A new Comodi of Iuli and Iulian (1570?) whose conditions of performance are unknown, but which was obviously intended to be acted by boys. As Giles Dawson remarks in his Foreword, the play is obviously an imitation of Roman comedy (in its use of the familiar classical plot of the clever servant conspiring to help his young master marry a social inferior) and is thoroughly anglicised, except for one detail.

The exception is the status of the three servants in the Chremes family who, though never so called, appear in fact to be slaves after the Roman model. Julian, the maidservant, is actually sold for cash, and the two male servants, Wilkin and Fenell, are moved to a vigorous prosecution of their conspiracy by the promise of obtaining their liberty. (24)

Once again, the main interest of the play is in the complexity of the plot. July is secretly in love with Julian, his mother's maid, and manages to woo and win her without being detected, with the help of his wily servant Wilkin. Then disaster strikes: his parents decide to sell Julian to a merchant. July and Wilkin trick the merchant by substituting another girl (a freewoman whom the merchant has no legal ability to own) and then, by disguising Julian as a wealthy heiress, trick Chremes into insisting that his son courts and marries her immediately.

However, despite the complicated story, the female characters are very vivid and individual. Julian is the one most affected by her origins in classical comedy, but even she has wit enough to be party to all the conspiracies, and to act convincingly in all the deceptions. The more interesting characters are Maud, July's mother and Nan, his sister, whose personalities and actions comment on the code of housewifely perfection set out by moral writers for

women to emulate, and now becoming more influential than ever with the advance of the Protestant ideal of domestic harmony and order. Maud is a nightmare caricature of the cult of domestic efficiency continued beyond all reason, and at the same time a personality familiar in every age, the obsessively perfectionistic housewife, whose house is so meticulously organised and clinically clean that no-one feels happy or relaxed in it for a moment. Maud's household is obviously like this, with everything in its proper place, and everybody in their proper places too, doing what she directs:

Iulye go writ yower letter yor father did byd yowe.
Wilkin wait on yr mr lest he ned yowe.
take yowe laisere, writ hit faire, hear ye?
... ffenel and Iulian in, make redye all things.
(25)

Instead of making life pleasant and smooth-running for those around her, Maud's organising ability makes it regimented and miserable.

Maud's attempts to beat respect for these values into her daughter Nan, however, have not been successful. Nan describes her mother's regime between sobs with evident hatred:

first we must be fine, tricke, hansome, & neat,
small midled, well mad, frolick and feat.
hed, ye, hand, hill, nor noight most be a wry.
for the lest of thes (I warrāt yu) der we must a by.
we must also locke vnto ye kichen and buttery,
and se that albe well, but specially all huswiffery, (26)

The effect of Maud's education of Nan has not been the passing on of her values, but the inspiration of such an aversion to them that her daughter is already planning a far more liberal household: "when I ā lady wenches shall haue more ease".

Even though in this comedy the study of character has remained very slight, there has been some degree of discussion of current ideas about women, their upbringing and their education. The same applies to Mother Bombie (1598), John Lyly's only comedy on the original classical model. Although the recognition-plot and all the names of characters are recognisably classical, the action takes place in Rochester and all the ideas voiced are obviously contemporary Renaissance concerns.

The plot concerns the conflict between the lovers Livia and Candius, and their fathers, Prisius the fuller and Sperantus the farmer, both of whom are determined to keep their children apart, so that they can arrange rich matches for them. The young lovers eventually prevail through a process which combines revelation of an existing truth (that the rich heirs their fathers favoured were both mentally defective) with deception (Candius and Livia eventually marry disguised as Silena and Accius, the rich naturals who were finally deemed fit only for one another, and their own fathers witness the wedding.) However, in this play the lovers' cause is not only won by deceit and ingenuity, but shown to be ideologically correct by wit and argument. Candius' and Livia's criticisms of arranged marriage impress their eavesdropping fathers as "learnedly and scolerlike" and "wittily" spoken, even though they enrage them. Candius complains of the materialism of parents, and how:

marriage among them is become a market, what will you giue with your daughter? What Ioynter will you make for your sonne? And many a match is broken off for a penie more or lesse, as though they could not afford their children at such a price, when none should cheapen such ware, but affection, and none buy it but loue. (27)

Livia is even more outspokenly critical of the idea of unquestioning filial obedience so essential to arranged

marriage, and argues that it makes a mockery of the obsession of parents with providing a proper upbringing:

in deed our parents take great care to make vs aske blessing and say grace when as we are lyttle ones, and growing to yeeres of iudgement they depriue vs of the great blessing, and the most gracious things of our mindes, the libertie of our mindes...

they studie twentie yeeres together to make vs grow as straight as a wand, and in the ende by bowing vs make vs crooked as a camocke...

I will measure my loue by min owne iudgement, not my fathers purse or his peeuishnes. Nature made me his child, not his slaue.

(28)

This unusually independent-minded heroine is also a subversive one. Her father Prisius has been keeping her at her sewing, hoping that it will keep her mind off Candius, but Livia, while giving the impression of dutiful obedience, has been embroidering a design of "flowers, fowles, beasts, fishes, trees, plants, stones and what not", all of which symbolise different aspects of her relationship with Candius. Her father realises, as he eavesdrops on the lovers, that his plan has not been effective:

I perceiue sowing is an idle exercise, and that euerie daie there come more thoughtes into thine head, than stiches into thy worke, Ile see whether you can spin a better mind than you have stiched.

(29)

Of course, his hopes are disappointed again. Prisius has no hope of finding a task sufficiently absorbing to keep his intelligent daughter from using her brain to achieve what she wants.

Sperantus, Candius' father, has been equally disillusioned, having thought that a scholarly existence would keep his son from thinking about Livia, only to find that Candius' skill in Latin had enabled him to read the Ars Amatoria and various romances, and to become an expert on the theory of love. Like Prisius, Sperantus thinks that a change of activity will result in a change of mind and decides

"seeing that booking is but idlenesse, Ile see whether threshing be anie occupation".

His attempts are slightly more successful than his neighbour's, since he does manage to force Candius to go courting Silena. At first Candius is determined that "it shall be so coldly, that she shall take as small delight in my wordes, as I do contentment in his commandement", but he is easily impressed by Silena's great beauty and is tempted to betray Livia, even though he tries to remind himself of her value:

Remēber that Livia is faithful, I, and let thine eyes
witness Silena is amiable, heere shall I please my father
and my selfe, I wyll learne to be obedient & come what
will. (30)

Candius' enthusiasm for filial duty is as short-lived as his belief that Silena is really "amiable". Even the shortest of conversations reveals that her beauty is not matched by her intellect, and Candius quickly reflects :

a fayre foole is lyke a fresh weed, pleasing leaves and
sowre iuyce... I am glad of this, nowe shall I haue
coulour to refuse the match, and my father reason to
accept of Livia, I will home, and hee shall perceiue there
is nothing so fulsome as a shee foole. (31)

Candius' temptation to be unfaithful to Livia was only momentary, lasting only as long as he was besotted with his first sight of Silena, and vanishing upon further knowledge. Once the truth is known, he has no hesitation in preferring a witty, poor girl like Livia to an idiot, even one who would bring with her beauty, wealth and parental approval.

Through the character of Silena, the Renaissance identification of seclusion and silence with female virtue is once again held up to ridicule. Instead of being an

advantage to the suitor, in guaranteeing him a pure wife, this practice makes it easy for Silena's father to trick young men into falling in love with her beauty as she sits chastely at her window, long before they can talk to her and discover her mental deficiency. Instead of producing an "honest" woman, the cult of seclusion helps to disguise the truth and therefore promotes dishonesty.

It is also interesting that the central character of the play, who knows the truth all the time, is a woman, Mother Bombie, who insists throughout that she is not a witch, but a "cunning woman". Although she does not affect the plot greatly, she dispenses cryptic oracular pronouncements to the lovers and gives them hope, and urges Vicinia to confess to exchanging the true heirs of the rich men with her own natural children years previously.

Mother Bombie's success as a comedy depends on its blending of classical plot elements with realistic characterisation and discussion of contemporary ideas. This process continued in many other plays, resulting in an accomplished English comedy drawing on both classical and native influences, and which made an excellent medium for the discussion of love and marriage, and the relations of parents and children. These are discussed in the main section of this chapter, Comedy of Love, Courtship and Marriage.

Although the story of trickery leading to marriage for love was clearly the most important contribution of classical comedy to the way in which women were presented, native influences on the portrayal of female characters who were subordinate to the plots of trickery and disguise resulted in some lively and sometimes remarkably perceptive characterisations.

One such play is William Stevenson's Gammar Gurton's Needle (1553), an excellent example of the classical concept of comedy as a carefully-controlled series of plots and errors. Although characterisation is of secondary importance to the complex plot, which requires only that the main characters, Gammar Gurton and Dame Chat, should be suspicious and aggressive, they are made more individual than the mere shrews that they might have been by the detailed and realistic domestic setting.

Similarly in Jacke Jugeler (1555), the female characters are far more vividly and subtly presented than their marginal importance to the plot requires. Even the maidservant Ales Trype-and-go merits a twenty line description giving a remarkably vivid impression of a malicious, pert, fashionably-clad city maidservant swanning around the London streets:

she simperith, she prankith and getteth with out faille
As a pecocke that hath spred and sheweth hir gaye taylle
Se mynceth, she bridelethe, she swimmith to and fro
Se tredith not one here a wrye, she tryppeth like a do
A brod in the stret going or cumming homward
She quaverith and warbelith like one in a galiard. (32)

Dame Coye, their employer, is at first described only as being "as all other weomen bee/a verie cursed shrew", but very soon after, there is a far more detailed description of what this "typical shrew" is really like:

a pretie gingerlie pice...
As denty and nice as an halpeny worthe of syluer spoons
But vengable melancolie in the aftir noons. (33)

Later, when Dame Coye actually appears, her "vengable melancolie" is explained further, and she appears far more sympathetic. Her husband, Boungrace, is dining out as he often does, and she was supposed to be taken to join him by Jenkin, who has been side-tracked by Jacke Jugeler. Dame Coye has no idea of this, and thinks that her husband is

enjoying himself so much with his friends that he has forgotten to send for her. Certainly her reaction is vengeful, but it has an unmistakably plaintive note:

I shall not suppe this night full well I see
For as yet noo bodie cumithe for to fet mee
But good ynough let me alone
I woll bee euen with theim euery chone
I saye nothyng, but I thinke sumwhat I wis
Sum ther bee that shall here of this
Of al vnkind & churlishe husbands this is y^e cast
To let ther wiues set at home and fast
While they bee forthe and make good cheare
Pastime, and sporte as now he doth there
But yf I wer a wise woman as I am a mome
I shold make my selfe as good chere at home
But if he haue thus unkindlye seruyde mee
I wol not forget it this monethis three
And if I weste y^e fault were in him I praie god I be dede
But he shoulde haue suche a kyrie ere he went too bede
As he neuer had before in all his lyfe
Nor any man ells haue had of his wife.

(34)

No wonder Dame Coye gets "vengable melancolie in the aftir noons" if she is alone in the house and has to rely on male servants to take her about the city, while her husband can go about freely, enjoying himself. The fear of social isolation is universal, but Dame Coye's wounded, defiant and eventually angry reaction to being forgotten is the experience of house-bound women in particular. For such a woman, the failure of a husband to break off from a social gathering to contact her is not merely a disappointment, but a serious blow to her self-esteem. No wonder Dame Coye is so relieved when it is revealed that Careaway's carelessness was to blame, not Boungrace's indifference to her. This much greater subtlety of insight is a far cry from the depiction of Dame Coye as a typical shrew earlier in the play, and illustrates how sensitive brief characterisation can be, even in plays whose main interest lies in elements other than character.

Another, later instance of this tendency to subtle portrayal of women characters of relatively minor importance to

the plot can be seen in Misogonus (1570), based on the theme familiar from classical comedy of the recognition of a long-lost child. The only person who knows what happened to the rightful heir is Alison, the wife of Codrus, a tenant farmer. When Philogonus asks Codrus to explain what happened, he offers instead to bring Alison to explain the story because she is more articulate:

Ile goe fetch our Alison & come straight way againe
she ha wit inoughe to tell yow hir capidossitye is better
then mine. (35)

Alison embarks on a very over-elaborate courtly address, but modifies her tone sufficiently to give a clear account of the complicated story of Eugonus. Codrus is caught between mockery of her high-flown style and admiration of her fluency, commenting:

Nay she is aligant in deed shewdd chaunt this extrupery a
hole day
I had rather then the best shepe I had my tounge
were but halfe so nembles. (36)

Codrus becomes so enthusiastic that he starts telling the story as well, only to provoke a fight with Alison who retorts "What, dost takh tale out of my mouth?" They quarrel bitterly on the spot, hurling insults at one another with great abandon, while Philogonus stands in suspense, and finally manages to reconcile them by bribing Codrus to let Alison finish the story. Once it is over, the couple forget their grievances very quickly, and their dialogue reveals the very affectionate married life underlying the squabbles. Codrus appeals:

I did but Jibe Alison I loue ye well inoughe wench for all
that
for the good disorder yt ye kepes ith thy tale I must neds
giue ye a busse. (37)

Practical Alison puts him off: "Away horeson I must aunswere my master nowe hers no tyme to chat" but is careful to add "when we are alone ith (in the) seller soone we may one another cusse".

It seems that the playwright has decided to expand the importance of these two characters far beyond their function in the plot in order to introduce some native domestic comedy into the less familiar classical model of comedy. The depiction of the working marriage of Codrus and Alison, in which a certain affection underlies the disagreements, and the husband respects his wife's skill with words and is quick to utilise it, is more obviously optimistic and affectionate than in any previous domestic comedy. Perhaps this is because the play appeared in a Protestant era, when it might have been felt that the earlier type of domestic comedy was too savage, and that drama should stress the enjoyment of married life rather than its miseries. Even elderly comic rustics were entitled to "mutual society, help and comfort".

These examples illustrate how the increasing complexity of female characterisation in native comedy appears in short episodes of classically-inspired plots. This, when synthesised with the plots of courtship and trickery, and discussion of current social issues, was to result in much of the interesting material concerning women found in later plays of love and marriage.

ROMANCE INFLUENCES ON COMEDY

Romance, as we have seen, offered the dramatist a wide range of opportunities, including active heroines freed from the constraints of contemporary social convention, imaginative licence and a rapidly-developing array of new types of female character, like women knights and healers. The genre's weaknesses, however, were its distance from reality and tendency to deal in types, sacrificing character to plot.

In fact, the romance genre often did transcend these limitations, continuing the movement begun in the testing plays towards freeing its heroines for action through circumstance and disguise, and producing some interesting additions to the debate about marriage and female nature. It also introduced new ideas and plot elements which were later to make a major contribution to later comedy.

All of these elements can be seen in one of the earliest surviving romance plays, Clyomon and Clamydes (1570). Its heroine, the princess Neronis, is based on the healer character of Arthurian romance, and falls in love with Clyomon, whom she finds shipwrecked, while nursing him back to health. Since he loves her too, but is too over-awed by her social status to tell her so, Neronis is forced to find a way around her "shamefastness and womanhood" which "bids us not seeke to men". She uses a metaphor to broach the subject and wins Clyomon, setting a precedent for women in several later romance plays.

Neronis is also one of the first heroines in English drama to adopt male disguise, dressing as a page in order to escape from a lustful kidnapper. The early date is reflected by Neronis' attitude to her attire. Instead of finding it liberating, like later transvestite heroines, Neronis is

ashamed of her "painfull Pages show" and feels that only her exceptional circumstances justify her behaviour. She finds her travels arduous ("Ah weary paces that I walke, with steps unsteddy still") and the work she undertakes, as a shepherd, physically taxing and degrading. Neronis describes how she has to endure "the painfull paths, the wearie wayes, the trauels and ill fare" and "dare not leaue this loathsome life, for feare of greater spight", but is still more aware of the injury to her dignity, asking herself:

... is this a seemly showe...
Is this an instrument for thee to guide a shepherds
flocke?
Thou art a Princes by thy birth, and borne of noble
stocke. (38)

Nevertheless, Neronis is glad of the security of employment, and Corin the shepherd who employs her is pleased to have this attractive 'boy' to share his man-to-man advice about the local wenches. He anticipates great popularity for his new employee; predicting that "Thou shalt haue al the varest wenches of our town in the veelds vor to play". Later he reports

how Ione Ienkin, and Gilian Giffrey loues my boy Iacke,...
.
All the maides in towne valls out for my boy, and the
yongmen know it
Thale be so ielisom ouer them, that cham in doubt
Ich shall not keepe Iack my boy till seuen yeares go
about. (39)

As Leo Salingar remarks, this is a crude but clear anticipation of the comic potential of the attractiveness to other women of disguised heroines, later used to great effect by Shakespeare.

Another element of Neronis' disguise was also to become important in later drama, that of the heroine's reversal of

convention by serving the man she loves for some time. Neronis meets a knight on her journey home and applies to be his page, not recognising that it is Clyomon because he is disguised in strange livery. Neronis becomes aware of her master's identity only when his name is called at a tournament, and her delight is such that rather than reveal her own identity at her own court, she decides to continue as Clyomon's servant and obeys his order to her to travel ahead of him to Denmark, to herald his arrival to his parents. It seems that the dramatist wanted Neronis to be seen consciously serving her lover, as well as acting as his page while unaware of his identity.

In this point, Neronis is contrasted with Juliana, the play's second and more conventional heroine, who is nearly duped into marrying an imposter instead of her knight, Clamydes, because he bears his armour and the spoils of the quest Juliana had set him, having stolen them. While Juliana, in her passive role at the court, accepts the name and the insignia as the man, Neronis, having come to know her lover while nursing him to health may be unaware of his identity, but is essentially right about his nature. Finding a kind and sympathetic master, she unwittingly befriends her lover. This episode is interesting for its implication that the seclusion thought proper for virtuous young women can be dangerous, since it precludes the gaining of knowledge through experience, and creates a state of helplessness which is open to exploitation. Furthermore, this is yet another theme whose dramatic possibilities were later developed by Shakespeare.

Upon her arrival at the court, Neronis takes Clyomon's mother into her confidence, and asks for her help in revealing her identity to Clyomon. When he arrives, the Queen presents him with a veiled lady as a suitable wife, but Clyomon steadfastly refuses to look at her, ignoring her comments that he is "straight lac'd" and "coy" until

she reveals that she is Neronis, and also his page. The play concludes with the double marriage of the four principal characters, which, since Clyomon and Juliana are brother and sister, unites them all in a single family group, so that the innate nobility which seemed to form an instant bond between Neronis and Clyomon's parents becomes a real relationship. Again, this idea of a family group drawn together by nobility as the satisfying outcome of the drama is familiar from Shakespeare's comedies, as is the final transformation of the 'boy' into the lady.

The later romance, Common Condictions (1576) is equally innovative in showing how a heroine of low social status sets out to win her more aristocratic lover. Sabia is the impoverished daughter of a doctor, in love with Nomides, who, as well as being a prince, is a confirmed misogynist. As well as using the device of a metaphor to hint at her love for him, Sabia goes even further, using a conventional academic disputation to try to show Nomides that his view of women is without logical foundation. He thinks that "suttel gyle" is a major feminine characteristic, and sets out to prove his case in the time-honoured way, by quoting exemplae:

First what loue I pray you bore Helena vnto her lorde and
kinge?
What constancy in Creseda did rest in euery thinge?
What loue, I pray you, beare Phedria vnto her Theseus
When in his absence she desiered his sonne Hippollitus?
What true loue eke beare Medea vnto Duke Iason hee?
Tush Lady in vaine it is to talke, they all deceitfull
bee,
And therefore lady you must yeeld to me in that respecte
Men still are iust though wemen must their plighted vows
neclect. (40)

The formula is familiar from most anti-feminist writings: the man quotes a number of cases from mythology to 'prove' feminine inconstancy. But Sabia, rather like Anne Elliot many years later, is motivated by her love to make a good case for female constancy, and refuses to be browbeaten by

Nomides' 'logic'. First, she gets him to define his terms of argument by asking if he thinks all women are congenitally faithless. No, Nomides replies, "Not I my selfe do say the same, but in auctors I it finde". Sabia catches on quickly:

In Auctors then you haue an aid for to dispute with mee?
But for all your aid in way of iest againe I will repay...
Then sir Knight how faithfull was Eneas to Didoes grace?
To whom he plighted faith by vowe no other to inbrace.
How faithfull was Duke Iason hee whom Medea did ayd?
When hee to win the goulden fleece by Otes was dismaid?
And Theseus I pray you also how faithfull did he bide
When that the vow he once had made to Ariadne he denide.
How faythfull was Deomedes one of the Greekishe crew
Though Troilus therein was iust yet was hee found untrew.
And so betweene those twaine, and fortunes luckles hap,
Shee was like Lazar faine to sit and beg with dish and
clap. (41)

Having made her case, Sabia mimics the more conventional anti-feminist writers by moving swiftly from individual instances to sweeping general statements:

Tush tush you see to trust to men whose fickle branes are
That at first sight of euery wight their plighted voves ^{so,}
And therefore you must wey in minde, though women ^{for go.}
Men will do so though to their wo it doth ensew I wisse. ^{sometimes misse}
(42)

Sabia's earlier statement that her rebuttal was "in way of jest" leaves the way open for Nomides to admit defeat in this particularly male form of argument without embarrassment, and he admits readily "in deede lady I must confesse that you the truth haue sayd". Even Sabia's reply "Then say that you were conquered in talking with a mayde" does not wound his pride, since she has already defined the context as one of joking exchange of wit. Sabia understands human nature, and wants not only Nomides' assent to her point of view but his love. She has sufficient sense and tact to use the idea of jesting to demolish Nomides'

mysogynistic ideas without wounding his pride and prejudicing her chances of winning his affection.

Even though after all this effort Nomides rejects her, Sabia's attitude is still practical and pragmatic. She reflects "perchance thou mayst liue thrise so long and neuer haue like offer", and although the play is incomplete, analogues suggest that Sabia will eventually go on to win Nomides' love, probably by using her medical skills, since we know that his sister and brother-in-law are poisoned in the last surviving pages of the play. Such an ending would emphasise the unusual strength of this heroine, unconventional because of her social inferiority, role and suitor and willingness to set her wits against those of the man she loves in order to reason away the prejudices which block his acceptance of her love. It would also create a link between Sabia and Helena in All's Well That Ends Well, another doctor's daughter who tries to earn the love of a misogynistic social superior.

Finally, an examination of the extensive use made by Robert Greene of the romance genre gives a clear indication of the opportunities it offered contemporary dramatists. His comedies frequently draw on romance-like incidents, such as the necromancy element in the Friar Bacon plays, the appearance of folk-tale characters like Oberon and Robin Hood and his merry men, exotic settings and extravagant special effects. Many of Greene's plots are drawn from romance, and the genre also helps him to create interesting and active heroines.

The Scottish History of James the Fourth (1590) is a particularly good example, since it is easy to show how far Green's portrayal of his heroine Dorothea depends on the developing traditions of the romance genre. Leo Salingar says that the play is based on Giraldi's story of Arenopia in a prose or stage version, which was itself based on the

early Miracles de Notre Dame of the European mediaeval stage. Many elements of Greene's play are familiar from these very early stage romances, such as the ordeal of wandering and eventual reconciliation with the husband, but the most dramatic parallels can be found in one particular Miracle de Notre Dame, Oton. Although this is more obviously an analogue of Cymbeline, many details tally with James IV: the heroine flees her home to avoid being put to death on her husband's instructions, she adopts the disguise of a squire, her father makes war on her husband to avenge her supposed death, and her timely re-appearance prevents a major war. Both in James IV and the novel Pandosto (1588), Greene decided to depart from mediaeval tradition in making the husband rather than the more conventional brother or mother-in-law his wife's persecutor. Leo Salinger attributes the trend for the husband as villain to "the desire of sixteenth century authors to rationalise the archetypal story and treat it as an exemplum of vice and virtue in marriage", and the influence of this tendency upon Greene was probably increased by personal experience. Greene was himself a husband who had every reason to hope that life might imitate art, and that his wife might eventually forgive the spendthrift who deserted her and his child, and accept his misdemeanours as the errors of youth. (43)

As well as finding in romance a plot structure which could easily be adapted to discuss the contemporary concern with female virtue within marriage, Greene drew heavily on earlier stage romances for the characters of his heroines. The two contrasting heroines, Dorothea's male disguise and attitude to it, Lady Anderson's passion for her and Ida's use of riddles to tell Eustace of her love all have earlier analogues in Clyomon and Clamydes and in Comon Condictions.

A brief survey of Greene's other works will indicate the many ways in which the romance genre encouraged interesting

female characterisation. In The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon (1587), the exotic setting allows him to create Iphigina, an Amazon warrior who prefers to meet her father's enemy Alphonsus in single combat rather than marry him to cement a truce. Corinus' explanation of her behaviour:

... I should account that maide
A wanton wench, vnconstant lewde and light
That yeelds the field, before she venture fight,
Especially vnto her mortall foe,
As you were then

(44)

shows that Greene is using the exotic setting to demonstrate the conventional test of female chastity in an unconventional way. He makes a further use of such a setting to depict brave and warlike women like the Queen of Amasia in The Tragical Raigne of Selimus (1592).

Orlando Furioso (1591), as the play in which Greene relies most strongly on an existing romance for this plot, illustrates most clearly the way in which he used the genre: as an inspiration for exciting and unconventional variations on the contemporary theme of the woman whose virtue is tested by the actions of misguided men. For his Orlando Furioso, Greene transforms Ariosto's beautiful but flighty healer Angelica, whose seduction of her comely young patient Medar precipitates Orlando's madness, into a more conventional 'chastity test' heroine.

Using the detail from Ariosto's account that Orlando's madness is caused by seeing their names carved together on trees in the forest, Greene also retains one of Orlando's first conjectures about them, that some enemy must have carved them in order to discredit Angelica. Perhaps he recognised the resemblance in this detail to the familiar story of the queen falsely accused of in chastity or adultery. But who should be the culprit? Traditionally,

such false accusations were made by the brother of the husband or lover, the mother-in-law or by a rejected suitor, and Ariosto's Angelica, being an attractive but haughty lady, had scores of rejected suitors, one of whom was called Sacripant. Thus Greene constructed a plot to cause Orlando's madness which would leave Angelica as the persecuted innocent, even confirming her virtue through the familiar means of the constancy test.

In the play, Sacripant approaches Angelica after she has announced her love for Orlando, and she rebukes him for his suggestions that she should leave Orlando and accept him. Piqued and jealous, Sacripant decides to revenge himself by spreading rumours linking Angelica and Medar and carving their names together in public places, hoping that when Orlando sees them, he will be struck with jealousy and "a madding mood will end his love". Greene also contrives to have Angelica exiled for her presumed inconstancy, so that she undergoes the ordeal of exile and wandering traditionally experienced by the persecuted queen in romance, and to have her reputation vindicated in the traditional way, by her estranged and disguised lover at a trial by combat.

A detailed analysis of Greene's adaptation shows that he missed very few details in re-modelling Angelica as a chaste and wronged heroine in the tradition of the early stage romances. This seems to confirm the view that Greene used romance mainly as a source of new and more varied ways of presenting the contemporary female virtues of chastity and constancy.

The potential of romance drama, then, was the opportunity it offered for the creation of more active heroines, and for the discussion of contemporary issues in a more exciting setting. Some surviving romances indicate, however, that sometimes female characterisation did fall foul of the genre's innate limitations, those of the tendency of

characterisation to suffer in relation to the complexity of the plot, and of the unreal setting to discourage or devalue social comment. One such example is George Peele's Old Wives Tale (1590) which, as its title indicates, is a fast-moving dramatised fairy tale whose characterisation never goes beyond one-dimensional types appropriate to such a story.

However, as we have seen, some dramatists did begin to make use of what the romance genre offered. Their heroines, once dislodged from the parental or marital home by false accusation and exile, kidnapping, the threat of revolution or assassination or paternal wrath against unwelcome lovers, fall in love, invent ways of courting the men of their choice while preserving their modesty, even ply their wits against them to remove their prejudices against women or love.

Perhaps only the complete imaginative scope offered by the romance genre could have produced the idea of the female knight and of the heroine's adoption of male disguise, themes which originated separately in Crusade literature and mediaeval religious drama, but which came to be closely associated, especially in later stage romances. The idea of the heroine in men's clothing, with its associated themes of her attractiveness to other women, her becoming a manservant to her love and her reaction to carrying weapons and possibly engaging in fights, although not developed in the early Elizabethan stage romances, had immense dramatic potential, which was later realised by Shakespeare. In his hands, the unusual plot elements of romance were to become the means by which some of the most striking insights into the nature of the sexes ever communicated through the dramatic medium were conveyed.

Finally despite its tendency to evade the issues of real life, romance did provide a more exciting medium for the

airing of ideas about women. Amid the fanciful plots, we find much implied criticism of prejudiced ideas about women, even direct attacks on certain areas of misogyny such as Sabia's debate with Nomides. Also, even though the romance convention of magic and mistaken identity allowed a certain amount of evasion of the issues it raised, the important dramatic theme of the conflict between love and arranged marriage comes to be a major interest in romance drama, receiving much discussion, whether direct or implied by the action. Comedy, though, was the most obvious medium for this form of social and moral comment, and I shall now turn to a discussion of the later comedies of the sixteenth century.

COMEDY OF LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Introduction

During the later half of the sixteenth century, drama, and comedy in particular, became increasingly concerned with the conflict between love and financial interest as motives for marriage. This happened for a number of reasons, financial, social and artistic. In the late 1570s, the first commercial theatres were opened in London, a development which freed dramatists from the constraints of writing to please aristocratic patrons, and at the same time placed their work under the different commercial necessity of entertaining large audiences consisting of many social classes. As Juliet Dusinberre observes, this change in the financing of drama brought with it changes in the type of play produced: in order to keep attracting the crowds, it was necessary for a dramatist to be topical, "to reflect controversy, to comment on it, to provoke it, to pioneer".(45)

The new public theatres were a perfect forum for debate on subjects of current interest, since they made drama, the only art form which crossed the literacy barrier and was thus intelligible to all, accessible to people of all social levels. One very important contemporary controversy was that of whether marriage should be made on the traditionally accepted grounds of financial gain for the family, or, as the dangerous young authors of poems and romances were suggesting, by personal inclination alone. Of course, this topic had been of interest for a long time, but its use in drama was limited as long as the playwrights were financed by the aristocracy, the very section of society with the greatest interest in maintaining the status quo where marriage was concerned, whether from motives of self-preservation or moral responsibility for setting a good example. Furthermore, plays which recommended

love-matches, and therefore filial disobedience, would have been seen by an upper class audience as a threat to the security of the state as well as that of the family. Parents and children were seen as one stage in the fixed hierarchy which extended to the state, the monarch and ultimately to God. Any dramatist suggesting that children should assert their individuality ran the risk of being interpreted as advocating insurrection in the state, a possibility to which the ruling classes were particularly sensitive. Plays questioning the wisdom of the existing system were discouraged by the necessity of patronage.

The new theatre audiences, composed of the working classes and the bourgeoisie, which, having limited wealth and power, had traditionally been less concerned about the preservation of arranged marriage, were far more open to debate on this topic, positively welcoming the controversial. Dramatists at last had a climate of intellectual freedom in which to use the classical comic plots, drawn into British drama via Italian comedies, in which young lovers deceive, and sometimes even ridicule and discredit, their elders in order to marry as they please. Under the earlier system of patronage, the dramatists might well have felt that this type of comedy in its more extreme form was too subversive to be used without causing offence.

As we have seen, some dramatists tended to take the part of young love against elderly prudence because of a basic incompatibility between the aims of drama and those of the real world in which it exists and upon which it comments. Whereas social morality is concerned with preserving the stability of society and perpetuating the existing hierarchy and structure of power, often at the expense of the individual, drama has entirely different priorities, tending to be concerned with change, conflict, action and learning, and to affirm the importance of the individual. Value placed on the idea of love as exclusive and personal

is a certain indication of value for individualism against a group ethic of social stability. Love, as it is portrayed in the drama, is usually no respecter of convenience, class, or existing alliances, but an unpredictable and anarchic force which threatens to disrupt the status quo, breaking established bonds and forming new ones as the younger generation are thrown together in their need to subvert the authority of their parents and of society in order to seize a chance of personal fulfilment. The debate about the proper motive for marriage offered the perfect subject for drama, combining respect for the individual against the establishment, conflict, and the added interest of a high degree of social relevance.

Of course, not all dramatists were committed propagandists for the love-match. Differences of time, circumstance and temperament caused them to offer different interpretations of the debate which dominated Elizabethan life and popular literature, and to offer a wide range of different solutions. While the more radical advocated complete freedom of choice for the young, others expressed confidence in the existing courtship and marriage customs, recommending only minor modifications to enable them to move with the times. Other dramatists offered no answers at all, but wrote plays which convey a feeling of unease about the social customs and modes of behaviour they depict. These plays, which articulate social problems, often very subtly, are those I shall discuss first.

A. ARTICULATING PROBLEMS

1. Can romantic love be a basis for marriage?

According to Lawrence Stone, while a few literary pioneers advocated romantic love,

the accepted wisdom of the age was that marriage based on personal selection, and thus inevitably influenced by such ephemeral factors as sexual attraction or romantic love, was if anything less likely to produce lasting happiness than one arranged by more prudent and more mature heads.

(46)

This scepticism about love as the motive for marriage must have been increased by the way in which love was conventionally described in literature. How, some pragmatic Elizabethans must have asked themselves, could the ardour, pangs, despairs and ecstasies, exaltation and self-abasement of this absorbing passion possibly settle down into a companionable working relationship, and a part in the economic life of some community? It seems to me that the author of The pleasaunt and fine conceited Comoedie of Two Italian Gentlemen (1584; also known as Fidele and Fortunio), thought by some to be Anthony Munday, poses the same question in his strange and problematic comedy.

Like Abraham Fraunce's earlier Latin comedy Victoria (1582; performed at Christ Church College, Oxford), Two Italian Gentlemen is adapted from Luigi Pasqualigo's Italian comedy Il Fedele (1579), whose basis in the novella accounts for the extreme complexity of the plot of passion and deception. The main difference between the three plays is that while Il Fedele and Victoria are concerned with adulterous love, Munday, while keeping the bulk of the plot unchanged, makes all the characters single and marriageable. Although it is probable that, as G. Bullough suggests, Munday made this change simply to raise the play's moral tone, it has

in fact the opposite effect, that of lowering the moral standing of most of the characters. Adulterous passion, although more immoral in conventional terms, always carries with it a sense of self-indulgent pretence and lack of serious intent or consequences, cushioned as it is from reality by the safety of existing marriages. The same sort of passion between single people is a more serious matter: since it may lead to marriage, higher standards should come into play. Behaviour between lovers which is comprehensible and excusable when viewed as playing to the rules of courtly love as an elaborate, escapist game becomes problematic and shocking when part of a relationship which might possibly lead back into the reality of marriage. I think that Munday was well aware of the effect his adaptation was having, and deliberately transformed the play from a comedy of adultery to a much darker comedy pointing out the unlikeliness of basing marriages on romantic love as the courtly tradition presented it. It is a strange play, in which things are seldom what they seem, and no value or institution is morally unambiguous.

The play's attitude to love and marriage is most clearly expressed by Medusa, the witch, whose function in the play is that of the only rational female character. She regards love as a mental aberration, a foolish over-refinement which gets in the way of the simple process of mating, remarking that "If wee could learne to seek to them, that vnto vs doo sue:/The match were made, and wee should haue no cause at all to rue." Personal preferences are irrelevant to the general need to wed, for which any suitor is as good as another, and this view is about to be vindicated by the fate of the four lovers, Victoria, Virginia, Fedele and Fortunio. From the very beginning, despite their insistence that the passion they profess is particular and exclusive, the similarity of their names advertises their interchangeability. The four are involved in a love-tangle: Victoria loves Fortunio; who also loves her, and

Virginia loves Fedele, a former lover of Victoria's, who still loves her despite her desertion. Various complicated schemes re-group the lovers, so that at the conclusion Fortunio has been tricked into wanting Virginia and each man can marry the women of his choice. Both women are forced to compromise with circumstances and to accept husbands not of their own choosing.

At odds with the comical picture of love and marriage as a light-hearted and non-committal round dance is the imagery of love used throughout the play by the lovers, all of whom describe their feelings in the extreme and conventional terms of courtly love, revealing a passion which is painful, irrational, careless in its choice of object but utterly compulsive. Victoria is conventionally love-struck by the beauty of Fortunio "whose loouely shape hath caught me by mine eyes", and talks of languishing and pining for him, and of being helplessly compelled to "looue against my will". Fedele, her former lover, fallen from favour during his absence on a voyage, seems to find love equally compulsive and painful. His courtly soliloquy

I serue a Mistres whiter than the snowe,
Straighter than Cedar, brighter than the Glasse:
Finer in trip and swifter then the Roe,
More pleasant than the Feeld of flowring Grasse

(47)

soon turns to a contemplation of the less pleasant aspects of his attachment to Victoria:

Yet is she curster than the Beare by kinde,
And harder harted then the aged Oke:
More glib than Oyle, more fickle then the winde,
Stiffer than Steele, no sooner bent than broke.
Loe thus my seruice is a lasting sore:
Yet will I serue although I dye therfore.

(48)

Later, trying to convince the lovesick Virginia that his attentions to her, which she had interpreted as loving,

were merely friendly, Fedele advises her to get rid of "Fancies lurking poyson" and to

... be not shipt in Seaes of raging loue.
Whose great companions are discorde and wrath,
Flattery, Deceit, Treason and Crueltie:
Heuinesse of minde, greef, penurie and scathe:
Unrest, suspicion, feare, and Jelousie,
Consuming hunger, and a endless thirste,
A liuing death, life dying with the firste. (49)

Although all the characters seem to be well aware of the unpleasantness of their passion, none is capable of breaking out of it. The madness of love seems not only to suspend freedom of choice, but to block out ordinary morality, causing the lovers to behave in a bizarre and obsessive manner, aware only of personal fulfilment and dead to every other moral claim. The following synopsis will show how the madness of love infects the lovers' actions, as well as their thoughts and language.

Originally, Fedele had courted Virginia, but then found Victoria more attractive and won her love, attempting to convince Virginia that his earlier attentions to her had been merely those appropriate to friendship. Despite Victoria's pleas, he undertook a long trip to Spain, and during his absence Victoria was struck with love by Fortunio's attractive appearance, and resolved to win his love. When Fedele returns, Victoria attempts to conceal her aversion to meeting him, but Fedele suspects that she has taken another lover and decides "sith I find her as she is, I will reuenge the wrong:/Or dye the death in the attempt, because I liue too long".

In fact, Fortunio is not yet Victoria's lover, but she is sufficiently desperate for his love to turn to necromancy to achieve it, casting a spell with the help of Medusa the witch in the full knowledge that the smallest slip in the ritual could cause Fortunio to die an agonizing death

rather than to become inflamed with lust for her. Fedele discovers Victoria's dabblings in the occult through one of the spies he has set to monitor her actions, and this proof of the lengths to which she is prepared to go in pursuit of her new love throws him into a mood of general misogyny. He rants at length about feminine vice:

Ah cursed dames, their loue is like a flame,
Quiuering in th¹ Ayre betweene too blastes of wynde,
Borne here and there, by either of the same.
Yet properly to none of both enclinde.
Hate and disdaine is painted in their eyes,
Deceit and treason in their bosome lies.
... True are they neuer founde but in untrueth,
Constant in naught, but in inconstancie,
The common foes of weale, and fluddes of rueth. (50)
Deuouring cankers of mans libertie.

He then meets Victoria, who is still pretending that nothing is wrong, and tells her that he knows everything, threatening:

I will not rest, before I bee reuenged of the same.
This to Fortunio presently I purpose shall be shown:
And open brute of thy reproche, throughout the Citie
blown.
All that in Naples dwell this day, shall wunder at this
deed.
And euery wounding tung shall make thine honor now to
bleed.
My selfe will help to teare the hart, out of thy body
quick,
And giue thy crimson coulered blood, vnto the dogs to
lick.
So liuely wil I blaze thee out, to euery gazers eye:
That though thy carcas rot and waste, thy shame shall
neuer dye. (51)

For a young gentleman to express to his former mistress his desire to publicly humiliate, murder and mutilate her is distasteful to the point of perversity. Fedele's idolatry has turned to misogyny and sadistic fantasies very quickly.

Having failed to convince Fortunio that Victoria practised necromancy in order to entrap him, Fedele resorts to

demonstrating her inconstancy by arranging for him to witness a 'gallant' leaving the house late at night, with effusive thanks for his mistress's accommodating nature. It is in fact a henchman who had induced Victoria's maid to admit him, but Fortunio is convinced of Victoria's inconstancy and reacts to the revelation very much as Fedele had done, crying "Out strumpet, I will make thee now a mirror to this towne/A pointing stocke to euery one that passeth up and downe".⁽⁵²⁾ He too wants to kill her (by poisoning) but is persuaded instead to "discredite her and put her house and kindred into shame". Having confronted Victoria, Fortunio leaves wondering why he failed to kill her on the spot, and vowing revenge at a later date. As an afterthought he arbitrarily decides to court Virginia, in the spirit of taking out an insurance policy against being left on the shelf:

But yet before reuenge my furie take,
I'le offer seruice to Virginia.
Least euery dame here after me forsake,
When it is knowen how I used Victoria. (53)

He hires Medusa to help him, and she suggests that he use a bed-trick to force Virginia, who still loves Fedele, to marry him. Medusa explains:

I'le tell her that I meane to bring Fedele to her bed,
When lightes are out, and sleepe is crept into her fathers
head.
When you are in and halfe vnbraste, a tumult will I make,
And call her father vp, you in her chamber there to take.
You know age will suspect the worst, and when he sees you
so,
Will force you then to marrie her, whether shee will or
no. (54)

Meanwhile Fedele has decided to stop revenging himself on Victoria, deeming her reputation sufficiently blackened, and because of a much belated moral perception that "as my selfe vniustly seru'd Virginia./So am I now iustly requited

by Victoria". He quickly orders his tutor "goe, and pardon of Virginia craue/And tell her that I will be hers".

Nevertheless, this change of heart is forestalled by Fortunio's plan. The hue and cry is raised, and Fedele and his tutor Pedante rush to help determine the cause. Old Ottavious, Virginia's father, assumes that his daughter has been deflowered and insists that Fortunio marries her at once ignoring her pitiful protests "Alas I neuer knew the man, he neuer toucht me yet,/I loue Fedele, and he alone is for Virginia fit". Fedele responds to this plea from the women he deserted and claims to love again with incredible brutality, stating sarcastically "Ile take no wife at second hand, thanks for your curtesie/Let him that hath possest your honor, weare the same for me". Only when thoroughly convinced that Fedele has forsaken her irrevocably does Virginia wearily consent to marry Fortunio, since no-one else will accept her in her discredited state. Once they are married, Medusa reveals the plot, and that Virginia is still intact. Fedele decides that the two men are quits, reveals his trickery in discrediting Victoria, and persuades her to "now forget Fortunio which is loste/And love Fedele, who for you, yet neuer spared coste". Victoria agrees, and the configuration of couples Medusa had hoped for is created, with equally arbitrary matches struck up between Attilia the maid and the miles gloriosus character Captain Crack-stone, and Medusa and Pedante the tutor. The stage directions suggest that the desired tone was one of cheer and harmony: "let the consort sound a cheerefull Galliard, and euery one taking handes together, departe singing."

Can we really believe that it is a happy ending for either couple? Victoria, having risked the life of her chosen lover by necromancy, has married a man she had planned to have murdered by proxy, and who spoke to her at some length of his desire to murder and mutilate her. Virginia's

plight is even worse, since she has been publicly humiliated and forced into marriage with a trickster, and rejected as soiled goods by the man she loved. What possible hope of married happiness is there for any of the lovers? When love is portrayed as such a selfish, savage, obsessive passion which obliterates all moral consciousness, the prospects for successful marriages among those who have been involved in this bizarre entanglement seem limited indeed. The implication is that those who marry pragmatically and dispassionately have better prospects of success, and Munday illustrates this by an ending which differs from his source: a match between Medusa and Pedante.

Throughout the play, while most of the characters were involved in the irrational blindness of love, they were balanced by a rational adviser of either sex, who commented on the madness of love and proposed solutions to the problems of lovers. The women were advised by Medusa the witch, who, as mentioned above, regards love as a tiresome obstacle to mating, and accordingly supplies spells and stratagems in an attempt to resolve the love-tangle. The male character opposed to love is Pedante, Fedele's tutor, who attempts to keep his former pupil out of amorous difficulties by the traditional method of countering courtly love with much age-old wisdom about the evils of womankind. He reminds Fedele that none of his problems would have arisen if he had paid better attention to his lessons as a boy:

Did I not teach you long agoe out of tragicall Seneca;
His golden saying, duo omnium malorum foemina?
Did I not cause you with your pen in the margent of your
book to marke that place;
. And yet will you be tooting on a beautifull face? (55)

Even at this stage, though, it seems that Pedante's proverbial wisdom is theoretical rather than drawn from personal

belief. He is not a misogynist, but a pedantic scholar with a quotation and a theory to fit every circumstance.

The final proof that Pedante's scholarly knowledge of misogyny is merely theoretical is the speed with which he marries a learned woman. Listening with admiration to Medusa's account of the plan she invented to marry Virginia to Fedele, Pedante is much impressed with her devious and resourceful intelligence, remarking "such a girle is worth golde in a deare yeere". When Fedele offers Medusa his tutor's hand in marriage as a fee for all her efforts, Pedante agrees most eagerly.

It is typical of this morally ambiguous play that this arbitrary, last-minute match should be the only one made by mutual consent between a couple similar in character and outlook. Although he is the one being given in marriage and is happy with the scheme, Pedante is careful to check with Medusa that she would really be happy with him and his academic way of life, explaining "I doe not thinke that thou canst be in loue with my lookes,/And all the riches I haue consists in my bookes". Medusa assures him that life with him would content her perfectly, and thus a match is made between two characters opposed to romantic love, and equally learned, albeit in the rather disparate disciplines of necromancy and Latin: "Like vnto like, and learning vnto skill", as Pedante comments. The play ends on a high note with his confident prediction of a happy married life of mutual work at a shared livelihood:

Giue me thy hand, I'le set vp a great Grammer schoole by
& by,
We shall thriue well ynough, it will tumble in roundly.
I'le teach boyes the Latin tongue, to write and to reade,
And thou little wenches, their needle and thred.
Wee'le be merry as Crickets, and loue without measure.

No other couple makes plans to work together: in fact, no-one else mentions the future at all. It is impossible to imagine the participants in so much passion and cruelty living together peaceably, let alone co-operating to earn a living. Despite the many morally ambiguous areas of the play, such as Medusa's casual attitude to love and marriage, and willingness to use necromancy and deceit, one idea emerges with the utmost clarity: romantic love, as described by the courtly tradition of literature, is no basis for married life, and even an arbitrary match, made on the basis of similar interests and mutual consent, has a better chance of success than one made between those who have been involved in the cruel, selfish, irrational and obsessive games of passionate love.

Several years later, in Every Man Out of his Humour (1599), Ben Jonson expresses a very similar idea about the incompatibility of romantic love and married life through his comic presentation of two husbands who insist on transposing courtly love to a domestic setting. The first of these comic troubadours is Sir Puntarvolo, who attempts to keep the courtly spirit alive by wooing his wife "as she were a stranger never encountered before" every evening when he returns home. As if stunned by the force of her beauty, Puntarvolo hails his lady in formal verse:

What more than heavenly pulchritude is this?
What magazine or treasury of bliss?
Dazzle, you organs to my optic sense,
To view a creature of such eminence:
Oh, I am planet-struck, and in yond sphere,
A brighter star than Venus doth appear!

(57)

Puntarvolo then introduces himself to his wife as "a poor knight errant" lost in the forest while hunting a hart, and requests food and shelter for the night which she grants, explaining:

albeit it be not usual with me, chiefly in the absence of
a husband, to admit any entrance to strangers, yet in the

true regard of those innated virtues and fair parts, which so strive to express themselves in you, I am resolved to entertain you to the best of my unworthy power, which I acknowledge to be nothing, valued with what so worthy a person may deserve. (58)

The stage spectators find the scene most amusing, as well they might: for a married couple to play at being strangers in order to preserve the courtly distance of errant knight and worshipped lady is ludicrous in the extreme.

The eavesdroppers also observe that although the courtly ritual is apparently flattering to the lady, in fact Puntarvolo has arranged the whole charade for his self-glorification. Most of the lines he has composed for his wife and for their maid to recite on cue are in praise of the lord of the castle, his handsome appearance and many virtues and accomplishments. Puntarvolo's scenario allows him to revel in being the gracious lord of the castle and the strange knight of irresistible charm, but while he enjoys his fantasy, the spectators are bored by this "tedious chapter of courtship after Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" and wonder why his lady puts up with it. "I mar'l in what dull cold nook he found this lady out, that, being a woman, she was blessed with no better copy of wit but to serve his humour thus?" The implications are clear: courtly love is not only impracticable in marriage, but degrading to the lady it apparently flatters. No woman of intelligence would consent to be idolised in such a way, obscuring her individuality, playing a role reciting a given set of responses to gratify her husband's narcissistic fantasy, in which she features only as the most crucial of a series of stage properties.

At least Puntarvolo derives some enjoyment from his insistence on creating an artificial image of his wife. Later in the play, Jonson introduces another romantically

inclined husband, whose persistence in treating his wife as a goddess is making his married life intolerable. Jonson describes this man, Deliro, as:

a good doting citizen... a fellow sincerely besotted on his own wife, and so rapt with a conceit of her perfections that he simply holds himself unworthy of her. And in that hoodwinked humour, lives more like a suitor than a husband; standing in as true dread of her displeasure, as when he first made love to her. (59)

Deliro's attentions to his wife, Fallace, run to praising her continually, perfuming her rooms, strewing her path with flowers, playing music, even to offering her pearls dissolved in wine to drink, if that will please her. He still regards her as an archetypal cruel mistress, thinking that her hardness to please is an indication of her high standards and of her value:

... I have such a wife!
So passing fair, so passing far unkind,
But of such worth, and right to be unkind,
Since no man can be worthy of her kindness.
... she knows so well
Her own deserts that...
She weighs the things I do with what she merits:
And, seeing my worth outweighed so in her graces,
She is so solemn, so precise, so froward
That no observance I can do to her
Can make her kind to me. (60)

Inevitably, such obsequiousness in the lover has bred despotism in the wife. Malicente perceptively tells Deliro that he is helping to shape his wife's behaviour, explaining "You are too amorous, too obsequious, / And make her too assured she may command you". He tries to make Deliro see the reality of his idol, that Fallace is no goddess, but a very undistinguished woman, so lacking in sense, taste and personal standards that she dotes on the effete, superficial courtier, Fastidious Brisk with whom she "only wants the face to be dishonest". Treating an admirable woman as a goddess is an insult to her intelligence; but a man who treats a silly and vain woman in this

way degrades himself, throws his common sense and even his sanity into doubt, and runs the risk of turning her into a petty tyrant and making his own life a misery. This is why Malicente counsels Deliro to adopt an attitude more fitting to the relation of husband and wife, to "be kind, not amorous; nor betraying kindness/As if love wrought it, but considerate duty". Blind love which worships and adores without taking into account individual natures and failings cannot co-exist with marriage without twisting and distorting its balance of power. If love can only take this extreme form, husbands and wives must build some other type of affection which admits realism and reason, to which concepts like duty and affection are approximations.

2. Is love a female delusion?

The comedies of William Haughton give an interesting insight into social attitudes to marriage at a half-way point. Although Haughton was worried by many aspects of arranged marriage, he seems not to have been convinced that marriage for love was a definite improvement. While admitting that the old system was open to abuse by despotic and greedy fathers, resulting in unhappy marriages in which love was driven underground into adultery, Haughton suspected that freedom of choice was also open to similar abuses, doubting that young people possessed either the practical or moral sense to select suitable partners for themselves without some degree of exploitation taking place. In the first of his comedies, English-Men For my Money or A pleasant Comedy called A Woman will haue her Will (1598), a classic comic plot of love and deception is complicated and darkened by the underlying awareness that harsh financial motives may be concealed even under the carefree frolics of young love.

At first we seem to be on the familiar ground of the traditional comedy of young love versus aged avarice, since all the standard elements of the plot are there. Pisaro, a Portugese usurer operating in London, is determined to marry his three young daughters to personal friends of his own age, three wealthy foreign merchants, while the girls are equally determined to marry their own lovers, all young and impecunious British nobles. As in most plays whose appeal depends largely on complexity of plot, the daughters, Laurentia, Marina and Mathea are treated as a group, without individual characteristics. In keeping with the proverbial sub-title, the main trait of all three is a determination to have their own way. They are rebellious, subversive, scornful of men they dislike and resourceful in their determination to marry as they please. The speed with which Anthony, their tutor, turns them against the study of moral philosophy by telling them that it is defeminizing, "a kind of art/the most contrary to your tender sexes" because it teaches sobriety of thought, demeanour and dress, and their much voiced fears of leading a nun's life, dying a maid or leading apes in hell indicate the nature of these sisters. Haughton is conveying a highly stereotyped view of young wenches as empty-headed, stubborn, self-willed, rebellious and obsessed with men, sex and marriage.

These three sisters set out to resist Pisaro's attempts to impose his will on them. A caricature of the authoritative Renaissance father, Pisaro regards his daughters not as free beings, but as his property, which he is at liberty to give to his friends if he decides. He urges his fellow merchants to take possession of them thus:

To them, friends, to them; they are none but yours,
For you I bred them, for you brought them vp:
For you I kept them, and you shall haue them,
I hate all others that resort to them:
Then rouse your bloods, be bold with what's your owne. (61)

Pisaro demands total submission from his "Impudent Villaine, and lasciuious Girles", assuring them:

Ile shortly pull your haughtie stomachs downe:
Ile teach you vrge your Father; make you runne
When I bid runne: and speake, when I bid speake:
What greater crosse can carefull parents haue
Then carelesse Children. (62)

While Pisaro is prepared to invoke his moral authority as parent when it is convenient, he is willing to achieve what he wants in a most immoral manner, by using a bed-trick to force his daughters to marry his friends. Hearing that the girls have planned an assignation with their young lovers, Pisaro arranges for his friends to arrive even earlier, and to bed them under cover of darkness, so that the girls will subsequently be forced to marry them. Far from having any qualms about the morality of duping his children in this way, Pisaro gloats:

I can but smile to see the simple Girles,
Hoping to haue their sweete-hearts here to night,
Tickled with extreame ioy, laugh in my face:
But when they finde, the Strangers in their steades,
Theyle change their note, and sing an other song.(63)

However, Anthony the tutor learns of the plan, and reveals it to the sisters, whose reaction is "Ile first leape out at window", and helps them construct a counter-plot to trick their father and his chosen suitors. Two of the foreigners are led on a wild-goose chase by Fico, a sympathetic servant, and a third is persuaded into being suspended in a basket outside the house. Pisaro can still insist that the marriages take place the next day, despite the failure of his plan, so Anthony devises a scheme by which all the lovers may be brought together before the morning. He gives Laurentia a suit of his clothes, so that she can escape from the house disguised as him and marry Ferdinand Heigham, and arranges for Mathea's lover, Ned Walgrave, to enter the house dressed as Susan Moore, a

neighbour's daughter who had previously arranged to stay with the girls that night.

This part of the plot has particularly comic consequences, since Pisaro, upon meeting "Mistris Susan", reflects

Now afore God she is a sweete smugge Girle,
One might doe good on her; the flesh is frayle,
Man hath infirmitie, and such a Bride,
Were able to change Age to hot desire (64)

and begins to court her. Comic episodes of senile wooing were a common feature imported from Italian comedy, but this is more than usually ironic in its revelation of Pisaro's hypocrisy. While ready to deny his daughters the pleasures of marriage with a young and attractive mate, he is quick to try to secure them for himself. Even more hypocritical is his attempt, when aroused by 'Susan's youthful beauty, to persuade 'her' of all the disadvantages of marrying someone young and attractive:

Young men are slipperly, fickle, wauering;
Constant abiding graceth none but Age:
Then Maydes should now waxe wise, and doe so,
As to chuse constant men, let fickle goe,
Youth's vnregarded, and vnhonoured:
An auncient Man doth make a Mayde a Matron:
And is not that an Honour, how say you? how say you?
.
... doe but thinke thereon
How Husbands, honored yeares, long card-for wealth,
Wise stayednesse, Experient gouernment,
Doth grace the Mayde, that thus is made a Wife,
And you will wish your selfe such, on my life. (65)

Just as Pisaro's authority as a father is undermined by his attempts to chase a girl his daughters' age, the authority of his speech in praise of the prudence and restraint of old age is lessened by the implication in Ned's asides that while delivering it, he has been making more unrestrained advances to 'Susan'. "Oh old lust will you neuer let me goe" Ned hisses despairingly, perhaps expressing the anger

and embarrassment experienced by women in such circumstances more vividly than convention would allow a 'real' women to: "Old Fornicator, had I my Dagger/Ide breake his Costard". Even more loaded with dramatic irony are Pisaro's parting words as he packs 'Susan' off to share a bed with Mathea, hoping to persuade 'her' to marry him: "Thinke but what ioy is neere your bed-fellow,/Such may be yours". Of course, Pisaro is referring to the joy of Mathea's forthcoming marriage. He has no idea that he is addressing his daughter's lover, or that they will be sharing a similar joy rather sooner than he anticipates.

The third lover, Harvie, feigns a mortal illness and a dying wish to leave all his property to Marina, a bequest which will be held up by legal wrangles unless she is his wife. Pisaro delightedly consents to his daughter's marriage with the doomed youth, envisaging a double return on Marina who, he thinks will quickly be widowed and able to marry an even wealthier husband. As soon as the ceremony is performed, though, Harvie makes a miraculous recovery, claiming that his unidentified ailment must have been unrequited love. Eventually Pisaro, finding himself outwitted on all sides, admits that "Doe what we can, Women will haue their Will", and gives his consent to the marriages.

So far, the play sounds like a standard comedy, in which children adopt various plots of disguise and trickery in order to marry for love, and fathers are outwitted and even discredited. However, just as A Woman will haue her Will is only one of the play's titles, the light-hearted trickery it implies is only one of the play's aspects. The other, hinted at in the other title Englishmen for my Money, is about money, property and race.

As a Portugese usurer operating in London and admitting "many Gentlemen/By my extortion comes to miserie", Pisaro

would not be a popular character with a London audience, but would inevitably be seen as a foreign parasite on the British. In his first soliloquy he reveals

Amongst the rest, three English Gentlemen,
Haue pawnde to mee their Liuings and their Lands:
Each seurall hoping, though their hopes are vaine,
By mariage of my Daughters, to possesse
Their Patrimonies and their Landes againe: (66)
But Gold is sweete, and they deceiue them-selues.

One might expect such a mercenary view from an old usurer, but, shockingly, it is shared by the three young men. Despite the apparent affection they show the sisters in their gifts, letters and visits, when they talk amongst themselves, it is to analyse their progress in these terms

This workes like waxe, now ere to morrow day,
If you two ply it but as well as I,
Weele worke our landes out of Pizaros Daughters:
And cansell all our bondes in their great Bellies, (67)
When the slaue knowes it, how the Roge will curse.

The romantic young noblemen are no less materialistic than old Pisaro: their 'love matches' are made with even more regard for property than his arranged matches. The usually straightforward struggle between parents and children becomes equivocal here, particularly in the savage confrontation which occurs when Pisaro catches the lovers together and tries to drive them apart. Walgrave shouts

Here is my wife, Sbloud touch her, if thou darst,
Hearst thou, Ile lie with her before thy face,
Against the Crosse in Cheape, here, any where, (68)
What you old craftie Fox you.

This is obviously not an intimation of Ned's healthy, guilt-free passion for Mathea defying social convention in its intensity. He and Pisaro are two men arguing about property and money. Since Ned is angry and is well aware that Pisaro has all the financial power, he retaliates by using the only power he has over his opponent's property,

his sexual power over Mathea. He gets even with his enemy by threatening to take his daughter before his eyes, in the market place if necessary: an act which would simultaneously appropriate her for himself, render her valueless for advantageous marriages and publicly humiliate her father. Can Ned really love Mathea, when he can use the idea of sex with her as a means of hostility towards her father? It seems that only the girls believe in love, which serves to blind them to the real significance of all that happens around them.

Such is the unpleasantness of the young men's behaviour that one wonders why they emerge as the winners with Haughton's apparent approval. Evidently, they are the ultimate victors simply because they are English. It is clear from this and other plays that Haughton had either a personal antipathy to foreigners, or wrote to pander to a similar prejudice in his audiences. All Pisaro's daughters insist that they take after their English mother rather than their foreign father, and declare themselves nauseated by the thought of marriage to "base, filthy foreigners". Any foreign language is dismissed as "gibberidge" or made the subject of coarse jokes: ("Pigges and French-men speake but one Language"), and the girls' detailed descriptions of the loathsome shortcomings of their suitors are obviously meant to be of racial rather than personal characteristics. Among such attitudes, the young men's nationality is enough to balance their vindictive and materialistic natures. One wishes that Haughton could have tackled his topics singly: as it is, the issues of race and money tend to cloud any firm conclusions which could be drawn about his attitude to marriage and the family.

What does emerge, though, is that Haughton feels a definite unease about arranged marriage and about free choice. Certainly heavy-handed paternalism is distasteful, especially in a greedy and unprincipled usurer like Pisaro, but

human nature being what it is, freedom of choice in marriage is also open to exploitation equally materialistic, calculating and immoral. Love finds a way in the end, but we are left with an awareness that love may be a mere illusion, by which silly girls may be blinded so that they may be more easily manipulated and used for their market value in the predatory world of money and property, which, in their obsession with romance, they have left to be comprehended and operated only by men.

3. The moral confusion of arranged marriage.

William Haughton's unease about existing customs and new ideas re-appears in his later comedy Grim the Collier of Croydon or The Devil and his Dame (1600), an enigmatically equivocal examination of some aspects of the marriage question. It is far more artistically satisfying and inventive than its predecessor, combining a lively variation on the traditional satirical tale about the devil and a wife with fantasy, comedy of manners and a return to Haughton's favourite themes of the bed-trick played by a father and of dislike of foreigners.

The play's fantasy element is cleverly introduced by using as a prologue the character of St. Dunstan, a saint well known in folklore for his encounters with the devil, and leading into the first scene, set in hell, by identifying it as the saint's dream. The scene takes the form of an infernal court of law, convened to question the ghost of Malbecco (from Spenser's Faerie Queene) in order to determine whether he was culpable for his suicide. Whereas Spenser reticently states that Malbecco and Hellenore his wife were merely an ill-matched couple, Haughton gives Malbecco the traditional catalogue of complaints of an unhappy husband:

To reckon up a thousand of her pranks,
Her pride, her wasteful spending, her unkindness,
Her false dissembling, seeming sanctity,
Her scolding, pouting, prating, meddling,
And twenty thousand more of the same stamp,
Were but to heap an endless catalogue
Of what the world is plagu'd with every day. (69)

Malbecco then briefly relates his fate in Spenser's epic: how Hellenore robbed him, ran away with Paridell and eventually elected to live with a band of libidinous satyrs rather than return to him, and how he despairingly committed suicide. The devils wonder how this can be true, "Is marriage now become so great a curse/That whilom was the comfort of the world?", and agree that marital discord seems to be a general trend since "plaints are brought before us every day/Of men made miserable by marriage". One of the devils suggests to Pluto that he should settle the matter by empirical investigation, and he orders the demon Belphegor to take human form and visit the earth, to marry for a year and then report his experiences. At this point St. Dunstan awakes and tells the audience to look out for the devil in human form in the subsequent 'real life' scenes.

The transition between spiritual and real life action is made very smooth by the appearance of Dunstan in the next scene, in which he attempts to cure Honorea, the beautiful daughter of the Earl of London, of her dumbness. Her father wants her to be cured, since he is reluctant to let her marry with such a disability, but Lacy, the elderly Earl of Kent, who has long been her suitor, is eager to marry her nevertheless, thinking that

Her beauty, with her other virtues join'd,
Are gifts sufficient, though she want a tongue;
And some will count it virtue in a woman
Still to be bound to unoffending silence;
Though I could wish with half of all my lands,

That she could speak: but since it may not be,
'Twere vain to imprison beauty with her speech. (70)

Other men who share this opinion of the attractiveness of a beautiful, silent woman are Musgrave, the young man Honorea herself favours, and Belphegor, in his human persona of Castiliano, a Spanish doctor. The latter arrives at the place appointed for the curing of Honorea, and after a brief duel setting his infernal powers against Dunstan's holy ones, gives a herbal draught to Honorea, with the words "Here, lady, drink the freedom of thy heart,/And may it teach thee long to call me love". But the freeing of Honorea's heart through speech has unexpected consequences which confirm that, as Belphegor's attendant Akercock/Robin guessed earlier, Honorea's reputation for being "so full of virtue and of modesty/That yet she never gave a man foul word" owed much to her inability to give a man any words at all. Having gained the power to express herself, Honorea does so with a vengeance, compensating for all her years of apparently obedient silence. Far from calling Belphegor/Castiliano her love, her first words are

Base alien! mercenary fugitive!
Presumptuous Spaniard! that with shameless pride
Dar'st ask an English lady for thy wife! (71)

Honorea then turns on her elderly but faithful and well-meaning suitor Lacy

... as for you, good Earl of Kent,
Methinks your lordship, being of these years,
Should be past dreaming of a second wife.
Fie, fie my lord! 'tis lust in dotting age:
I will not patronise so foul a sin.
An old man dote on youth? 'tis monstrous.
Go home, go home, and rest your weary head. (72)

Finally, Honorea even scolds her father for being so negligent in his duties as to let "two such grooms" court her, and storms out, telling him:

You may elect for me, but I'll dispose
And fit myself far better than both those.

(73)

She leaves behind a crowd of horrified men wondering how to cope with this unexpected contingency. Akercok/Robin comments "I think they wish she was dumb again", and his guess proves to be accurate: none of the men had bargained for Honorea's ability to speak revealing a strong will at odds with their own wishes.

How will the men cope with this outburst of strongly articulate rebellion from a formerly silent, and therefore apparently submissive young women? Eventually, her father, Morgan, deals with the subversion Honorea is now able to express by crushing it benignly and systematically, like an ideal, omniscient Renaissance father, whose superior wisdom allows him to know what is good for his children better than they do. Morgan has no intention of allowing Honorea to marry Musgrave whom she loves, since

Young girls must have their will restrain'd
For if the rule be theirs, all runs to naught.

(74)

He decides that "My Lord of Kent shall be my son", so that Honorea, rather than being put at risk by too much equality with a young husband, and by getting her own way in the choice of partner, may be reminded of paternal authority and handed over to a wise husband, who will know how to overrule her for her own good.

To achieve this marriage, Morgan makes use of a bed-trick, a device already familiar in the works of Houghton from Englishmen for my Money. In Morgan's hands, though, the scheme becomes a piece of double-dealing far more sophisticated and successful than Pisaro's plot. To get rid of Belphegor/Castiliano, Morgan persuades Marian, Honorea's maid, to sleep with him in the guise of Honorea. Morgan then tells Honorea of this plan, and convinces her

that he has acceded to her demand for freedom to choose her own husband, claiming that

that thou may'st perceive how I esteem thee
I make myself the guardian of thy love
That thine own fancy may make choice for thee. (75)

Morgan tells his daughter that her match with Musgrave has his approval, but that the number of her other suitors may pose problems. Therefore, to ensure that nothing will hinder her marriage to Musgrave, he will be brought to her bed that same night, and they will be publicly married the next morning. In fact, Morgan means Lacy to sleep with Honorea, so that she will be unable to escape from marrying him.

This distasteful piece of deception works very well for Morgan, and both the injured parties are understandably aggrieved when, in the light of morning, they discover how they have been deceived. Belphegor/Castiliano's loud objections are swiftly over-ruled by Marian's dogged determination to hold on to whatever spouse she has got, but Honorea's alarm, grief and indignation are only emphasised by this comic counterpart. Her misery, disbelief and resolution to try to maintain some vestige of free will are touching and justified. She cries out that she has been betrayed, hardly able to believe that Musgrave, far from having spent the night with her, is nowhere near to comfort her in her distress, and finally asks Lacy

Couldst thou thus cunningly deceive my hopes?
And could my father give consent thereto?
Well, neither he nor thou shalt force my love. (76)

Her body may have become Lacy's, but at least Honorea's affection is still her own to bestow or withhold.

Morgan, though, is determined to make Honorea's obedient in spirit as well as in person. Having forced the couples to marry by a trick, he calls upon the authority of the church to encourage them to be contented, in the person of St. Dunstan. The saint advises the unhappy and reluctant couples to make the best of the morally dubious trick played on them:

Marriage, no doubt, is ordain'd by providence;
Is sacred, not to be by vain affect
Turn'd to the idle humour of men's brains. (77)

Presumably fatherly providence, like divine providence, is accepted as moving in mysterious ways, and is thus not discredited when it moves in ways which are apparently devious and immoral. Even a marriage enforced by deception is more trustworthy, according to Dunstan, than one made by personal inclination, "vain affect... the idle humour of men's brains". Dunstan proceeds to remind Honorea of her duty to the father who has tricked her, and to the husband who was a party to the plot:

Your duty binds you to obey your father,
Who better knows what fits you than yourself;
And 'twere in you great folly to neglect
The earl's great love, whereof you are unworthy,
Should you but seem offended with the match.
Therefore submit yourself to make amends
For 'tis your fault. (78)

Morgan adds his explanation

... daughter, you must think what I have done
Was for your good, to wed you to the earl
Who will maintain and love you royally:
For what had Musgrave but his idle shape?
A shadow to the substance you must build on. (79)

How are we to interpret this amazing scene? It seems that either William Haughton was writing in an extremely reactionary mood, or was applying very heavy satire to the idea of arranged marriage, both to the father who claims moral

motives for the basically immoral act of forcing his child to marry against her will, and to the willingness of the religious establishment to condone such behaviour, even to sanction it by demanding that couples brought together against their will should work to make their marriage harmonious because such was their duty. If we accept the idea that this scene is satirical, then we should also accept the possibility that we are being warned that when marriage is arranged in such an arbitrary way, without consideration for love, adultery is inevitable. Akercok/Robin's remark on Morgan's last speech is:

She will build substance on him, I trow:
Who keeps a shrew against her will, had better let her go.
(80)

It seems that his prediction will soon be fulfilled, since Marian, Honorea's sympathetic maid, is soon encouraging Honorea and Musgrave to meet in her garden, especially since Musgrave confides in her his unhappiness at Honorea's apparent betrayal of his love. Having left them together in the arbour, Marian triumphantly reports

Now is my cousin master of his love,
The lady at one time reveng'd and pleas'd.
So speed they all that marry maids performe!
(81)

Although the idea that adultery was a just revenge for enforced marriage is familiar from Italian comedy, it does not happen here. Instead, there is a radical change of sympathy in favour of Lacy and Morgan, and the older generation and its morality win Honorea's obedience. However, this reversal is achieved only by another, more obviously devilish trick; this time the trickery which is to secure Honorea's fidelity to her husband is performed by the devil himself. He appears to Honorea in the form of Musgrave, and, to her horror, rejects her loving advances, enjoining her to

Go and bestow this hot love on the earl;
Let not these loose affects thus scandalise
Your fair report. Go home, and learn to live
As chaste as Lucrece, madam. (82)

While the devil impersonating Musgrave argues the evils of betraying an unwanted marriage, Honorea pleads with him not to betray their former affection,

... think'st thou thou shalt recall
Thy long-made love, which thou so oft hast sworn? (83)

and begs him not to reject her. When he has left though, she reflects

All this is but the blindness of my fancy.
Recall thyself: let not thy honour bleed
With the foul wounds of infamy and shame.
My proper home shall call me home again,
Where my dear lord bewails as much as I,
His too much love to her that loves not him. (84)

Having resolved to return to her husband, and believing herself deserted by her lover, Honorea reflects

Let none hereafter fix her maiden love
Too firm on any, lest she feel with me
Musgrave's revolt, and his inconstancy. (85)

When the real Musgrave eventually manages to meet Honorea, she has become so absorbed in her wifely duties as a result of her rejection by the false Musgrave that she has privately resolved

Now modest love hath banish'd wanton thoughts,
And alter'd me from that I was before,
To that chaste life I ought to entertain.
My heart is tied to that strict form of life,
That I joy only to be Lacy's wife. (86)

Honorea rejects the real Musgrave with all the moral censure with which the false Musgrave met all her pleas for

love, calling him a "child of fortune and inconstancy" and advising him

Reclaim these idle humours; know thyself;
Remember me, and think upon my lord;
And let these thoughts bring forth these chaste effects,
Which may declare thy change unto the world:
And this assure thee - whilst I breathe this air,
Earl Lacy's honour I will ne'er impair. (87)

Honorea sweeps out, leaving Musgrave in despair and bewilderment, wondering "do I conceive/This height of grief, and do no violence/Unto myself?" He is sufficiently convinced of Honorea's sincerity and firmness of purpose to decide

Hereafter never will I prosecute
This former motion, my unlawful suit,
But, since she is Earl Lacy's virtuous wife,
I'll lead a private, pensive, single life. (88)

Everyone seems convinced that this is a healthy return to the natural order of things, except Honorea's maid Marian, who is ruthlessly single-minded in her pursuit of true love for all, and who plans to have old Lacy poisoned to leave Honorea free again for Musgrave. She carries this out and congratulates her former mistress "Now Honorea, we are freed from blame/And both enriched with happy widows' name" but Honorea assures her "I shed some tears of perfect grief" and swoons with horror. However, Marian's husband Belphegor/Castiliano had substituted a sleeping potion for her poison, so that old Lacy awakes to see the proof of Honorea's love for him in her grief, and the play ends happily.

Happily for whom, though? It might seem that accepted morality has triumphed over temptation to sin: Morgan has the wise and wealthy protector he wanted for his daughter, old Lacy's devoted love has finally been appreciated, and Honorea has managed to find happiness in her wifely role and to become in conventional terms, a better woman. Now

she is chaste, modest, submissive and directed by duty and obedience rather than frank, outspoken, independent and directed by romantic love and her own will. This transformation might seem to justify Morgan's earlier opinion that "young girls must have their will restrained" and the idea which Dunstan shared, that he knew what was for her good far better than she.

However, although it is possible that Haughton intended this as a happy ending confirming the wisdom of conventional social morality, certain elements undermine this interpretation. Can a marriage enforced by trickery be regarded as binding? Can we agree with Morgan and Dunstan that the end justifies the means? Furthermore, Honorea's eventual turning to Lacy was effected only by her conviction that Musgrave had deserted her and wished her to live her life in a conventionally acceptable manner, which was brought about by a deception worked by the devil himself. Most of her reasons for rejecting the real Musgrave upon his return were based on her opinion of him as a turncoat. If this misunderstanding had not come between them, would Honorea and Musgrave have continued their relationship in defiance of the older generation who had tricked her into marriage? And would their conduct have been entirely unjustified? As it is, the ending of the play is shadowed by the knowledge that Musgrave, a young man in the prime of life and Honorea's natural mate, has resolved upon a life of solitude and celibacy, having been deprived of her by a trick, and believing himself unloved.

How are we to make sense of all the story's contradictory factors? In order to arrive at a balanced view, it is necessary to consider the sub-plot of Marian's marriage to Belphegor/Castiliano, and the third plot of Grim the Collier and his courtship of Joan, all of which contrast with and comment upon one another.

Marian is motivated by the hope of love and sexual satisfaction, whether for herself or for others. She consents to join in the bed-trick and to marry Belphegor/Castiliano only because Morgan has convinced her that the elimination of this suitor from the running will enable Honorea to marry Musgrave. Finding that Morgan has deceived them both, Marian encourages Honorea to repay her father and husband in kind, and does all she can to perpetuate the relationship between her mistress and Musgrave, suggesting that they meet at her house, and explaining to Musgrave that far from deserting him willingly, Honorea was "betray'd, poor soul, unto Earl Lacy's bed". Believing Honorea to be unhappy, Marian's thoughts are with her until the end, when, as has been mentioned, she is even willing to have Lacy poisoned to release Honorea from what she believes is still an unwanted marriage.

Marian's belief in living according to one's true feelings, and that duty unmotivated by love is null and void, also informs her own actions. Unlike Honorea, she never comes to feel that a loveless and unwanted marriage has any claims on her loyalty. Her philosophy is:

Why am I young, but to enjoy my years?
Why am I fair, but that I should be lov'd?
And why should I be lov'd, and not love others?
Tut, she is a fool that her affection smothers:
'Twas not for love I was the doctor's wife,
Nor did he love me when he first was mine.
Tush, tush, this wife is but an idle name!
I purpose now to try another game.

(89)

Marian's 'other game' is entertaining all her former sweet-hearts with impunity. She reflects happily that she has had many suitors in the past:

But I was coy and proud, as maids are wont,
Meaning to match beyond my mean estate:
Yet I have favour'd youths and youthful sports,
Although I durst not venture on the main;

But now it will not be so soon espied.
Maids cannot, but a wife a fault may hide. (90)

To the ruthlessly independent Marian, marriage actually offers more sexual freedom than a single life, since it gives her more freedom from suspicion, and a useful cover for accidental pregnancy. Thus resolved, she goes her own way, undeterred by Belphegor/Castiliano's jealous rages and threats of violence, repaying to his accusations that she is a whore and an 'insatiable monster' with open defiance:

In spite of you, whose else saith nay,
My friends are welcome, as they come this way:
If you mislike it, mend it as you may.
What, do you think to pin up Marian,
As you were wont to do your Spanish girls?
No, sir I'll be half mistress of myself;
The other half is yours, if you deserve it. (91)

Eventually even Marian begins to tire of arguing with 'Castiliano' and of beating the servant 'Robin', and plans to murder her husband. Leaving nothing to chance, she procures poison from one of her lovers and commissions another to stab him, but Belphegor returns to hell before either scheme can be affected. Nevertheless, the result is the same: Marian is rid of him and "enriched with happy widow's name".

Belphegor goes to report to the infernal court, where he relates all his experiences of marriage, starting with the bed-trick and proceeding to describe Marian's behaviour, which was of:

So loose demeanour, and dishonest life
That she was each man's whore, that was my wife.
No hours but gallants flock'd unto my house,
Such as she fancied for her loathsome lust,
With whom, before my face, she did not spare
To play the strumpet. (92)

Belphegor also describes her nagging ("no ears with patience would endure to hear her/Nor would she ever cease, till I submit(ted)"), and her plots to kill him, and Akercok adds that she frequently beat him.

Pluto concludes that Malbecco's story was true and absolves him of blame of his suicide "Since that thy first reports are justified/By afterproofs, and women's looseness known", and makes him "assume a light and fiery shape", unleashing him on the world as Jealousy, as happened in Spenser's poem. Surprisingly, Pluto does not conclude that Belphegor's report holds against "all women in general", since Belphegor himself was careful to assure him that:

... as 'mongst other creatures,
Under that sex are mingled good and bad.
There are some women virtuous, good and true;
And to all those the devil will give their due. (93)

It seems that most of Belphegor's evidence for this conclusion comes from the character of Joan. She is a country girl, courted by the local parson and the rich miller, Clack, but unwavering in her quiet affection for Grim the collier, and in her belief in his clumsily-articulated devotion to her. She is particularly admirable in her exchanges with Clack the miller, who leeringly informs her that "there be as good wenches as you be glad to pay me toll", and sneers at Grim's ill-paid and dirty trade "I perceive you mean to spend your life in a coal pit". Although Joan's pride prevents her from announcing her feelings too directly, since she has resolved

I will not blab unto the world, my love
I owe to him, and shall do, whilst I live, (94)

she nevertheless delivers a polite but spirited rebuff to Clack's prying and innuendoes:

What I intend, I am not bound to show
To thee, nor any other but my mother,
To whom in duty I submit myself:
Yet this I tell thee, though my birth be mean,
My honest virtuous life shall help to mend it;
And if I marry any in this life,
He shall say boldly he hath an honest wife. (95)

She answers Clack's slight upon Grim's trade with a defence couched in general terms to allow her to maintain her emotional privacy, but which clearly expresses her feelings:

Grim the collier may, if he is wise
Live even as merry as the day is long;
For in my judgement, in his mean estate
Consists as much content as in more wealth. (96)

Like her fore-runners in folk-drama and interlude, Joan refuses to become the object of fights and arguments, and, instead of regarding male rivalry as a glowing proof of how much she is loved, tries to use the men's professed affection for her to reconcile them when they come to blows:

Ye both have ofttimes sworn that ye love me;
Let me overrule you in this angry mood.
Neighbours and old acquaintance, and fall out! (97)

She is a bringer of domestic peace as well as social harmony. Towards the end of the play there is a scene in which Grim and Joan share "an hour's mirth" and "a mess of cream" by the fire while Joan's mother is safely asleep, which seems to presage a happy married life of good-natured companionship. During the evening, a knock at the door makes Grim suspicious that there may be "some lovers of Joan's sneaking hither now", and reluctant to let them in. Joan, though, assures him

You need not fear it; for there is none alive
Shall bear the least part of my heart from thee (98)

and Grim's reaction is prompt: "Say'st thou so? hold there still, and who'er he be, open door to him". Grim's trust in Joan's word is in direct contrast to the behaviour of the two other husbands in the play, who spy on their wives to check up on their behaviour, and whose fear of male visitors who might cuckold them verges on the paranoid.

It is little wonder that Akercock/Robin decides

I like this country-girl's condition well
She's faithful, and a lover but to one

(99)

and blesses their union in his persona of Robin Goodfellow.

Why, though, should Haughton decide to show a country girl as the most trustworthy partner? It may be that he was simply expressing the rather sentimental theory that innocence and goodness thrive best far from the corruption of modern life as lived in the cities, and that amusing rustics like Grim and Joan lead a purer life simply because their limited life ensures that they are simple-minded, close to the basic concerns of life and out of temptations's way. Meanwhile, out of Arcadia, the conditions of real life remain and cause problems, arranged marriage being one of these conditions. The best policy for a rebellious woman is to accept the authority of father, husband and God and to live a life of obedience, like Honorea. In such a reading of the play, Marian's self-will and free sexual life is wicked behaviour appropriate to the devil's dame, and Musgrave's desolation is merely an irrelevant casualty of a more important scheme of things.

Another, more complex interpretation could be suggested, though; one which gives Haughton more credit for intuitive analysis of the social conditions of his time. As a country girl with no money, power or property, accountable

to no-one but her mother, Joan is free to make her own choice of partner, and, having chosen Grim, to be faithful to him despite the more financially tempting offers made her by richer men. Aristocratic women, on the other hand, must be disposed of as money and rank or their fathers' idea of what is good for them dictate, and have to find ways of coming to terms with a life which must be spent married to a husband not of their own choosing. Such a woman could capitulate to the opposition, submit to her husband and admit her father's better judgement, and adopt a life of chastity, duty and obedience, like Honorea, or, like Marian, preserve her personal and sexual autonomy by rebelliousness, promiscuity and disregard for her husband and society. Both courses of action are hugely flawed: Honorea's involves a sacrifice of her individuality and of Musgrave's happiness to her new-found morality, and an independence achieved by adultery and attempted murder is obviously morally dubious.

Although Haughton brings his 'unusual tale to an ending which is compatible with orthodox morality, I think that during the play, he clearly conveys his sense of unease about the existing social structures and customs, particularly arranged marriage. Heavy-handed paternalism may eventually achieve a happy ending, but it will not be without emotional casualties, or without trickery such as the devil himself might employ.

4. What can a woman do in a joyless marriage?

Several years before William Haughton wrote his complicated and equivocal reflection on the morality of arranged marriage, George Chapman had made a similar, and in some respects, even more interesting survey of some aspects of this topic in A pleasant Comedy entituled: An Humerous dayes Myrth (1597). In this inventive and satisfying play,

Chapman uses the very original technique of exploring the ultimately serious predicament of a young woman trapped in an unhappy marriage through a character who at first seems a mere caricature, that of Florila the young Puritan.

At the outset, it seems that Florila is a mere figure of fun set up to mock Puritanism, reflecting a current view of the more extreme members of the sect as fanatical, unable to enjoy life and perpetually quibbling about the finer details of faith and doctrine. Florila first appears as a very stereotyped Puritan Woman, denying that any form of social or spiritual hierarchy exists, using egalitarian modes of address, attired plainly, "more like a milke maide than a Countesse, for all her youth and beauty" and very scornful of any form of finery, dismissing jewels as "vaine things" and the velvet hood her husband offers her as a "vaine divelish devise! a toy made with a superfluous flap, that being cut off my head, were still as warme." Florila's scrupulousness of conscience is so comically over-refined that her awareness of the moral implications of her every action leaves her virtually incapable of any decisive action at all. Even when she first appears, she is in a state of desperate spiritual struggle:

What haue I done? put on too many clothes, the day is hote, and I am hoter clad than might suffice health, my conscience telles me that I haue offended, and Ile put them off, that will aske time that might be better spent, one sin will draw another quickly so, see how the diuell tempts.

(100)

But Florila is far from being only a means by which Puritanism is ridiculed. She is also shown as a real woman, and the events of the comedy outline the essential pathos of her circumstances, and the narrowness of the options open to her. Although Florila's fanatical Puritanism generates a humourlessness which can be unattractive and ludicrous, its importance in her life soon becomes comprehensible. Married, presumably not by choice,

to Laberuele, an elderly and impotent aristocrat who jealously keeps her confined at home, longing for some company or diversion, and most of all for children to give her life some meaning, Florila clings determinedly to her own religion, which at once gives her a sense of her own separate identity, and encouragement in persevering with the duties of married life.

Laberuele views his wife's sectarianism with a mixture of complacency and distrust. He accepts happily the Puritan idea of wifely submission, which encourages Florila to accept the confined and solitary life he has ordained for her, but is perturbed by the implications of the Puritan movement's insistence that women have individual consciences independent of their husbands' beliefs, and the right to use reason to make up their own minds. He associates this aspect of Puritanism with the hysterical rumours about extremists like the Brownists or the Family of Love, which interpreted this freedom of conscience as meaning that a sectarian wife had no obligations to an unbelieving husband, and adds this fear to his existing anxieties about being cuckolded. Accordingly, Laberuele is seriously worried when Florila's independence of mind leads her to assess conventionally accepted behaviour in terms of its function, and thus to question and disregard it. When he suggests to her that her customary seclusion may be depressing her and causing her barrenness, Laberuele is taken aback by the prompt reasoning of her reply:

Sure my lord, If I thought I should be rid of this same banishment of barrenness, and use our marriage to the end it was made, which was for procreation, I should sinne, if by my keeping house I should neglect the lawful means to be a fruitful mother, & therefore if it please you Ile use resort.

(101)

Laberuele feels sure that such zeal for the right must surely mask impure desires, reflecting "who would have thought her purenesse would yeeld so soone to courses of

temptations?" He cannot understand the independence of conscience which disregards accepted social proofs of purity, such as seclusion. Laberuele hurriedly 'remembers' that 'lawful means is not abroad', and insists that Florila's seclusion must continue, persuading her that "if you should change the manner of your life, the world would think you changed religion too". Florila admits the logic of this, but confesses wistfully that she had a fancy for a little social life, which allows Laberuele to clinch his argument triumphantly "Indeed, fancies are not for judicial & religious women." Although he often sees Florila's Puritanism as a threat, Laberuele is adept at using it to ensure her obedience. Florila's only area of autonomy, her religion, can easily be used to restrict her actual freedom and independence.

Since she is virtually a prisoner in her husband's home, it is almost inevitable that the only young men Florila will meet will be rakish tricksters, experienced enough to be excited by the novelty of conquering a woman kept in such seclusion, and wily enough to devise a means of reaching her by false pretences. Such a one is Lemot, a witty, cynical and debauched courtier who with great difficulty manages to speak to Florila and to convince her that he shares her interest in matters of conscience. Adopting her terms of equality and mutual help, he announces "you know we ought to prove one another's constancy, and I am come in all chaste and honorable sort to prove your constancy." Although Florila at first finds Lemot's theory that constancy can be thoroughly tested only by exposure to temptation suspect and disturbing, she is reassured by the attention of the finer points of spiritual awareness demonstrated by his contention that "to flatter your self by affection of spirit, when it is not perfectly tried, is sin". He then proceeds to the substance of his argument:

howe can you conquer that, against which you neuer striue,
or striue against that which neuer incounters you To liue

idle in this walke, to inioy this companie, to weare this habite, and haue no more delights then those will affoorde you, is to make vertue an idle huswife, and to hide herselfe slouthfull cobwebbes that still should be adorned with actions of victorie: no Madam, if you wil vnworthilly prooue your constancie to your husband, you must put on rich apparrell, fare daintily, heare musique, reade Sonetes be continually courted, kisse, daunce, feast, reuell all night amongst gallants, then if you come to bed to your husband with a cleere minde, and a cleere body, then are your vertues ipsissima; then you haue passed the ful test of experiment. (102)

Old Laberuele is horrified by this "vanitie of vanities", but Florila is now convinced that "this is perfect tryall indeede", and is eager to put her virtue to the test. Although he is later persuaded that great acclaim will accrue to him for having chosen such a paragon if Florila passes the test, Laberuele plainly suspects, at this point, that Florila's eagerness for spiritual challenge springs from a physical attraction to Lemot. But here again, Chapman is subtle: we know that Laberuele is jealous by nature and may be over-reacting, and furthermore, as the next scene shows, at this stage Florila is only dimly aware of her own motivation.

Florila is next seen dressed up "in her best attyre" for the coming encounter, when her attempts to analyse why she has taken all this trouble lead her to an important insight about her way of life. Florila's automatic use of the expression "Now am I up and ready" leads her to wonder what her purpose is:

ready? why? because my cloathes once on, that call we ready: but readinesse I hope hath reference to some fit action for our seuerall state: for when I am attyred thus Countesse-like, tis not to worke, for that befittes me not, tis on some pleasure, whose chiefs obiect is one mans content, and hee my husband is, but what need I thus be attyred, for that he would be pleased with meaner weed?

(103)

On the surface, Florila has answered her question: all her adorning is for the test of constancy, which will give her husband pleasure, although the reminder that he does not mind how she dresses points to an awareness, unvoiced as yet, that she hopes her fine clothes will be attractive to Lemot. Meanwhile the mention of the concept of pleasure, one quite foreign to her usual system of values, takes Florila further still in her self-analysis, prompting her to wonder if her way of life contains any element of pleasure for herself. She concludes that with Laberuele:

I am content, because it is my duty to keep to him, and not to seeke no further: but if that pleasure be a thing that makes the time seeme short, if it laughter cause, if it procure the tongue but hartily to say, I thanke you, I haue no such thing, nor can the godliest of woman in the worlde, against her nature please her sense, or soule.

(104)

Florila has come to a crisis of awareness that she is trapped in a joyless marriage, and that her religion, though it gives her a sense of her identity and helps her to behave in accordance with society's wishes, can never provide actual happiness. The most godly and dutiful woman can only hope for "comfort in an other world, if she will stay till then".

At this psychological moment, Laberuele returns, now convinced that reason indicates that "perfite things are not the woorse for triall", and there is much suspense as they wait together for Florila's tester to arrive, and discuss the tactics she should use against him. Will Florila, now fully aware of the limitations of her way of life, decide to stick to the conventional choice of waiting until heaven for her chance of happiness, or make a desperate grab for earthly pleasure with Lemot, who is plainly unsuited to her in everything but age? We are kept guessing as she works out with Laberuele a system of sign-language, by which she promises to signal to him the progress of the testing while

she stands out of earshot, in deference to the realism of the trial.

As soon as the trial begins, though, there is no doubt of Florila's intentions. She accepts immediately the courtly advances she was supposed to rebuff with scorn, and eagerly consents to keep the assignation he suggests:

at Verones ordinarie... I wil prouide a faire and priuate
roome, where you shal be vnseene of any man, onely of me,
and of the King himselfe, whom I will cause to honour your
repaire with his high presence, and there with Musicke and
quicke reuellings you may reuiue your spirits so long time
dulled.

(105)

At the same time, Florila remembers to give all the pre-arranged signals to assure Laberuele that her virtue is triumphing over temptation, even turning one from a gesture of refutation to one of amorousness. Explaining to Lemot "then I must I seeme as if I woude heare no more and stoppe your vaine lips", she touches his lips as arranged, whispering "go cruell lippes, you haue bewicht me". Her astute double-dealing ensures that at the end of the encounter, Laberuele is completely satisfied that Florila has given laudable proof of her virtue, and crows at length at seeing the confident and glamorous courtier discomfited: "haue you not got a wrong sow by the eare... is not the edge of your steele wit rebated then against her Adamant?" Lemot replies, in a suitably reverent tone "my labor is not altogether lost, for now I find that which I neuer thought". To add the finishing touch to his triumph, Laberuele asks Florila to give Lemot a final sign of her unrelenting chastity, and she promptly suggests "hand him my handkercher to wipe his lips of their last disgrace", thus cleverly managing to give Lemot a love-token to consolidate their pact. Lemot accepts it before storming out in well-staged despair, claiming that "the diuell was neuer so dispited", leaving Laberuele beside himself with joy, congratulating himself and his wife:

Neuer was minion so disminioned, come constancie, come my
girle, Ile leaue thee loose to twentie of them, yfaith.

(106)

Excited by the prospect of an extra-marital fling in total secrecy, Florila keeps the assignation, but the security of the encounter so essential to her is unexpectedly disrupted when Countess Moren suspects her husband may be there, and raises a mob. Eventually the inn is besieged by the whole court and many of the citizenry, including Laberuele, demanding the 'harlots' who have tempted the King and his attendants away from their wives. Understandably Florila is terrified: her reputation and her very place in society are at stake, since her livelihood as a wife depends on the appearance of her chastity. She is in an unfamiliar place, among strangers, and her only hope of avoiding exposure is in Lemot. She has already committed her reputation to him by meeting him, and now finds herself forced by circumstances to rely on his love for her.

However, Florila finds to her horror that Lemot's reaction to the news is nothing like that of the conventional courtly lover, sworn to secrecy and to protect his lady's good name. On the contrary, he is clearly exhilarated by the prospect of an embarrassing scene in which everyone's true feelings will be brought out into the open. Lemot has high hopes that old Laberuele will go "to cal the constable, or to raise the streets", explaining:

I know what I do, I doe it of purpose, I long to see him
come and raile at you, to call you harlot, and to spurne
you too, O you'l loue me a greate deale the better, and
yet let him come, and if he touch but one thread of you,
Ile make that thread his poyson... haue I not reason that
loue you so dearly as I do, to make you hatefull in his
sight, that I might more freely enjoy you.

(107)

Unlike Lemot, Florila cannot risk such open defiance of social convention and desperately tries to persuade him to afford her the safety of secrecy, pleading "let vs be gone,

my kind Lemot, and not be wondered at in the open street". He seems to gratify her desire for protection with a speech of conventionally passionate devotion:

Ile go with you through fire, through death, through hell,
come giue me your owne hand, my owne deare heart, this
hand that I adore and reuerence, and loath to haue it
touch an olde mans bosome, O let me sweetely kisse it."

(108)

But instead of kissing Florila's hand, Lemot bites her finger. This small prank, which would mean very little to real lovers, sparks off a furious and apparently unreasonable exchange, which highlights the fundamental incompatibility of this couple. Florila flies into a rage, accusing Lemot of having a beastly and brutal nature, and of planning to make her "a mocking stocke of all the world." This response might seem to be irrational and out of proportion to a little nip, but is easy to see why, to Florila in her particular circumstances, it has such a frightening significance. Florila has entrusted her reputation to Lemot by meeting him, and the unexpected interruption forces her to rely on him completely. He has shown an alarming tendency not to take the danger seriously, but then he talks to her like a proper romantic lover; he will take care of her reputation, as a devoted lover should. Then he bites her; he is capable of joking about speeches and kisses, about love itself; he must regard her and her plight in an equally flippant manner. Of course, she cannot explain her anger and fear at not being taken seriously, but makes an issue of the bite itself, accusing him "Vilain, thou didst it in contempt of me."

Lemot's response to her rage is wry and relaxed; he merely replies "and you take it so, so be it." Clearly, he is beginning to tire of this conventional creature who takes everything so seriously, has no sense of humour and cannot enjoy taking risks, and wants to distance himself from her.

Amoral and reckless himself, Lemot despises Florila for her timidity, advising her:

harke you Madam, your wisest course is, euen to become puritaine againe, put off this vaine attire, and say, I haue despised all: thanks my God, good husband, I do loue thee in the Lord, and he (good man) will thinke all this you haue done, was but to shew thou couldest gouerne the world... my dainty wench, go go, what shall the flattering words of a vaine man make you forget your dutie to your husband? away, repent, amend your life, you haue discredited your religion for euer.

(109)

If Florila does not want freedom and free love enough to accept the risks they involve, let her go back to the security she wants, the stability of a tedious and sterile marriage. Such is Lemot's view of the situation, which is just as limited as Florila's. He mocks her for her conventional seriousness and lack of nerve, not considering the great risks she has already taken on his behalf. The entire scene is a masterly representation of the final quarrel of two would-be lovers brought together by nothing but physical attraction, and with so little in common that a single flippant gesture destroys their illusion of unity, and reveals how radically different their expectations of one another have been.

Florila does take Lemot's parting advice. When we see her again, she has reverted to her former style of dress, and is attempting to interpret her recent experiences in religious terms, as a fortunate escape from temptation, moralising thus:

Surely the world is full of vanitie, a woman must take heed she do not heare a lewd man speake, for euey woman cannot when shee is tempted, when the wicked fiend gets her into his snares escape like me, for graces measure is not so filled vp, nor so prest downe in euey one as me.

(110)

Her encounter with illicit love having proved too hazardous, Florila turns pragmatically back to the safety of

legal marriage: "well, Ile go seek my head, who shal take me in the gates of his kind armes vntoucht of any". Although Florila manages to allay her husband's suspicions and to convince him of her unimpeachable virtue, the apparently happy ending has some sombre implications. Whereas before her escapade, Florila was reasonably contented with her life of seclusion and devotion, her contact with Lemot, although unsatisfactory in itself, has made her aware of the limitations of her marriage. Florila is back where she started, but with a heightened consciousness of her circumstances. She is aware that arranged marriage has left her bored, lonely and frustrated, and that the only chance of love is through adultery, an option fraught with dangers, since few young men have the ability or inclination to bear the responsibility of protecting a married woman's reputation. Even Florila's religion, initially her only way of expressing her individuality while reconciling herself to the duties of marriage, cannot possibly be the same for her. No woman of such a highly developed conscience could fool herself that a sin of intention was not sin at all, or feel the same about her religious beliefs, knowing that she had been willing to reject them for the chance of illicit worldly pleasures.

Although it has been said of Chapman that he "adopts a handful of stereo-types by which to represent female character", perhaps this does not necessarily preclude feminist sympathies. Florila, at the outset, could hardly have been a more stereotypical figure, a sectarian Aunt Sally set up as a target for anti-Puritan gibes, yet her experiences in the play make her self-aware and ultimately human so that eventually, through her, Chapman articulates a problem which must have affected countless women during the Renaissance. What does a woman do when she realises that she has no chance of happiness within marriage, and that all the piety and duty in the world will not bring it?

Chapman treats other 'stereotypical' characters in a relatively sympathetic way. Even the jealous, abusive and violent Countess Moren, the stock figure of the older wife jealous of her young husband, is not a straightforward shrewish old hag. She has an impressive and forceful aspect, being easily capable of raising an angry mob and conducting a raid on the ordinarie where, she believes, her husband is philandering. Onlookers describe her as a Fury leading a troop of Maenads. Even her violence is lightened by its fallibility: when she suspects her husband is with another woman, the Countess's first thought is "I haue a knife within thats rasor sharp, and I will lay an yron in the fire, making it burning hot to mark the strumpet." Then deflating logic intervenes: "but t'will bee cold too ere I can come thither."

Chapman's feminist sympathies are most obvious in his depiction of the courtship of Martia and Dowsecer. At the beginning of the play, Martia, a lively, witty young woman, has to suffer the indignity of being chaperoned everywhere by the silly and conceited fop Labesha, her father's trusted friend and chosen suitor for her. Her father thinks this expedient because, he explains, "Ile trust my daughter with any man, but no man with my daughter". Martia suffers her minder's company with growing weariness, until the gallants at court, unable to stand his idiocy any longer, devise ways to get rid of him.

Although Martia is popular with the courtiers, widely admired for her beauty and coveted by the King himself, she finds her match in Dowsecer, Laberuele's son by a previous marriage. At first, he is well known as a malcontent, "rarely learned", who "hateth companie and worldly trash", and Laberuele, despairing of having any grandchildren, attempts to rouse him out of his melancholy and to bring him to an awareness of his marital responsibilities by the gift of a sword, codpiece and hose and a portrait of the

lady whom Laberuele wishes him to court. The plan is not entirely successful, since Dowsecer proceeds to analyse all the gifts in his usual way. He admits that the portrait is beautiful, but questions the worth normally accorded to female beauty. Dowsecer feels, like the Neo-Platonists, that women's beauty should be an indication of virtue, and that "if their beauteous deeds shoulde match with their heauenly looks... euen I would ioy in their society". He proceeds, more seriously, to criticise the attitude of his fellow-men, who insist on regarding women only as visual objects:

But to admire them as our gallants do, O what an eie she hath, O dainty hand, rare foote and legge, and leaue the minde respectles, this is a plague, that in both men and women make such pollution of our earthly beeing. (111)

Dowsecer's insistence on the importance of the intellect and personality contrasts with the beauty-obsession of the court around him, and it seems that much of Chapman's sympathy is with him. Even the King, himself a confirmed materialist and debauchee, rejects the courtiers' facile judgments that Dowsecer is lunatic and frenzied, insisting that his wisdom is superior to that of those who mock him. When Dowsecer's comments on the workings of society prompt Laberuele to wish that love may make him "more humane, and sotiable", the King corrects him "Nay, hees more humane than all we are."

Like many malcontents in comedies, Dowsecer lives to reconsider his rejection of all earthly things when he falls in love, but Chapman's sympathy ensures that he does so on his own terms. As he refuses to do anything so ridiculous as to choose a wife on the evidence of a portrait, he notices Martia listening to him with obvious interest, and, to the amusement of all, unconsciously begins to "make him fine". Martia's beauty is a factor in his interest, but differs in kind from that of the portrait: as he explains, it is only

an object, but in Martia "the excellent disposer of the mind shines in (her) beauty". Martia is equally taken with his serious cast of mind and intelligence. While the courtiers are busy ridiculing his words as evidence of frenzy or a peculiar humour, she reflects "O were al men such, men were no men but gods, this earth a heauen." They woo and wed quickly, and the gifts they receive in the concluding masque, a Caduceus and two serpents wrought in jewels, indicate the complementary nature of their personalities. Once again, Chapman seems to adopt stereotypical characters, but to endow them with individual traits and to allow them to develop as they learn from their experiences in the play. Although his opinions tend to be implied rather than voiced, A Humorous Day's Mirth indicates that Chapman has more sympathy for women and for the problems they encounter than he is usually given credit for.

B: SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS

1. Confidence in the status quo.

Although some dramatists, like those mentioned above, restricted themselves to revealing the dubious areas of current thinking about marriage, and to expressing unease about the options offered, many indicated more decided beliefs about the rights of parents and children where marriage was concerned. Although, for the reasons described in the introduction to this section, some dramatists tended to endorse the new ideology of marriage for love, this was by no means universal. Several more conservative playwrights used comedy to express their confidence in the ability of the traditional social customs to ensure the best chances of happiness in marriage, suggesting only minor modifications to help the old institutions move with the times. One such dramatist was Henry Porter, whose outstanding comedy The Pleasant Historie of the Two Angry Women of Abington (1588) seems to have achieved considerable popularity in its time. It was staged by the Admiral's Men, one of the leading companies of the time, a sequel to it was performed later, and Henslowe was willing to advance Porter a sum of forty shillings for yet another sequel, 'ij mery wemen of abenton'. Perhaps part of the play's popularity was due to its very reassuring nature. In it, instead of making pleas for social change, Porter gives an idealised picture of the status quo, showing how well the existing system could operate if administered with sense, humanity and humour.⁽¹¹²⁾

Henry Porter's Abington is a traditional and stable market-town community, in which the mediaeval system of kinship has dwindled but not quite died, leaving a delight in extending and connecting families, and in close friendships. Such a friendship exists between Barnes and Goursey, both

fairly wealthy middle-class fathers, and between their sons Phillip and Franke, all of whom are bound together by similar concerns and tastes. Above all, Barnes and Goursey are traditionalists. Both married wives chosen for them by their fathers, and regard their wives in the conventional Protestant manner, as lesser creatures lacking in reason, and needing patient treatment. Despite the inadequacies of their own marriages, which have convinced Franke that women are fickle and bad-tempered, and that "he that doth take a wife betakes himselfe/To all the cares and troubles of the world", both men wish to arrange marriages for their children. Goursey tries to persuade his reluctant son Franke to go along with an arranged match by telling him that at his age, he too had felt just the same:

When first thy mothers fame to me did come,
Thy Grandsire thus, then came to me his sonne:
And euen my words to thee, to me he sayd,
And as to me thou saist, to him I said,
But in a greater huffe, and hotter bloud...
... Sayes he (good-faith this was his very say)
When I was young, I was but reasons foole,
And went to wedding, as to wisdomes schoole:
It taught me much, and much I did forget,
But, beaten much by it, I got some wit. (113)

The school image is a telling one. Goursey's attitude is very like that of a father who insists on sending his son to a school he himself loathed, maintaining that it did him the world of good. Individual feelings are less important than tradition: Goursey concludes his argument "Thus said my father to thy father, sonne/And thou maist do this to, as I haue done."

Barnes decides to arrange a marriage for his daughter Mall with better motives, the intention to provide her with a legal sexual outlet before she has time to be tempted by illicit love, and with a secure and respectable social position. He is generous, too, resolving to stretch his resources to buy her the best possible match: "I will

straine my selfe/To make her dowrie equall with his land". Though Barnes is authoritative, his approach is far from autocratic: he makes sure that Mall is "disposed to marriage" before proceeding further, and consults his son Phillip as well, to ask his opinion. In the course of the play, it becomes apparent that both these fathers, although authoritative, are capable of accepting their sons' advice. Clearly, here the traditional family structure still applies, but it is tempered with consideration and kindness.

The harmonious friendships between the men of the two families are disrupted by a feud between Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Goursey, the two angry women of the title, which is sparked off by Mrs. Barnes' suspicion that her husband's friendly visits to Mrs. Goursey have a sexual motive. This suspicion comes to the surface in Porter's very skilful opening scene, in which Mrs. Barnes' comments to her departing lunch guests begin to reveal resentment underlying the social niceties. Replying to Mrs. Goursey's offer to return their hospitality, Mrs. Barnes stresses that her husband is sure to be pleased to call:

Why he will trouble you at home forsooth,
Often call in, and aske yee how yee doe:
And sit and chat with you all day till night,
And all night too, if he might haue his will.

(114)

Mr. Barnes quickly puts in a cheerful answer to defuse this potentially offensive remark, saying "she hath made me much good cheere passing that way", but Mrs. Barnes is even more piqued by this, and continues with her veiled insults:

Passing wel done of her, she is a kind wench,
I thanke yee Mistresse Goursey for my husband:
And if it hap your husband come our way
A hunting, or such ordinary sports,
Ile do as much for yours, as you for mine.

(115)

Even at this stage, Mrs. Goursey feels that something is amiss, aware that "she speaks it scornfully", but tells herself to dismiss it, that "things are well spoken, if they be well taken".

Later, during a game at tables, the veiled sparring continues. Here Porter makes a clever use of stage tradition: a game of chess had long been a symbol of seduction, and here a game at tables becomes a vehicle for sexual accusations. Mrs. Barnes is aware that Mrs. Goursey is beginning to guess what she is being accused of, and continues to needle her. Under the pretence of comment on the play, she taunts her assumed rival about the game she is playing, accuses her of "bearing one man (i.e. gaming piece) too many", and finally when one of her pieces is taken, lets her resentment come very close to the surface in her remark "but had I knowne/I would haue had my man stood nearer home." Mrs. Goursey, aware of being baited, and tired of it, decides to join in the word-game, and replies ambiguously:

Why had ye kept your man in his right place
I should not then haue hit him with an ase. (116)

An open quarrel breaks out, and the attempts of the husbands to restrain their wives leads to marital discord as well. Mr. Barnes' attempts to remind his wife of normal standards of behaviour,

Wife, go to, haue regard to what you say,
Let not your words passe foorth the veirge of reason
But keepe within the bounds of modestie...
... you know it is no honest part,
To entertaine such guests with iestes and wrongs,
What will the neighbring countrie vulgar say,
When as they heare that you fell out at dinner?
Forsooth they'l name it a pot quarrel straight,
The best they'l name it, is a womans iangling;
Go too, be rulde, be rulde", (117)

provokes an even worse outburst. Mrs. Barnes retorts

What, thinke ye I haue such a babies wit,
To haue a rods correction for my tongue?
Schoole infancie, I am of age to speake. (118)

She refuses to be reconciled, and storms out. Mrs. Goursey is more moderate and less demonstrative, but knows how to make her displeasure felt. Although she apologises to Mr. Barnes for their "woman's iarre", glossing over its significance, her gracious leave-taking is full of arch sarcasm directed at her husband:

I take my leaue sir, come kind harted man,
That speakes his wife so faire, I now and than,
I know you would not for an hundreth pound,
That I should heare your voyces churlish sound
I know you haue a farre more milder tune
Then peace, be quiet wife, but I haue done:
Will ye go home? the doore directs the way,
But if you will not, my dutie is to stay. (119)

Obviously Goursey's attempts to stop the quarrel will rankle for some time.

Nevertheless, the friendship between the sons and husbands remains unimpaired, and Goursey and Barnes commiserate with one another over having to cope with these "vntoward creatures", and part promising to try to talk their wives out of their enmity. Mr. Barnes explains that the problem is that women are simply incapable of having friendships like theirs because:

... the mettell of our minds,
Hauing the temper of true reason in them,
Affoorde a better edge of argument.
For the maintaine of our familiar loues,
Then the soft leaden wit of women can. (120)

Since Barnes, as a typical Renaissance paterfamilias subscribes to the common theory that women are weaker-minded than men, it follows that he should also believe that women

should be willing to accept their husbands' rational advice in order to remedy their own inability to reason. On this topic, the Homily on Marriage of 1562 states that a husband should remember that although his wife is "weaker vessell, of a frail heart, inconstant, and with a word soon stirred to wrath", he should not exercise his rights of mastery over her and punish her severely for her misdemeanours, but should try kindly and lovingly to bring her to see reason. (121)

Barnes' approach to his wife in Scene 3 might almost have been created as a practical demonstration of the ideals of the Homily. He opens the conversation with the quiet observation "me thought the rules of loue and neighbourhood/ Did not direct your thoughts", and when Mrs. Barnes appears annoyed by this, stresses that he is not scolding, and not even standing on the authority which is his by law:

Nay stay, I doe not chide but counsell wife,
And in the mildest manner that I may.
You neede not view me with a seruants eye,
Whose vassailes sences tremble at the looke
Of his displeased maister, O my wife,
You are my selfe, when selfe sees fault in selfe. (122)

These sentiments seem to owe much to the Puritan ideology of marriage, which abhorred authoritarianism, and attached much importance to the idea of mystical unity between man and wife. If Barnes and his wife really are one identity, obviously he cannot scold, only advise her.

However, even this most tactful and ideologically correct approach is not successful. Mrs. Barnes flies into a rage at the suggestion that she should be friendly to Mrs. Goursey, and eventually reveals the reason for her antipathy, accusing her husband of adultery with her. Barnes' attempts to protect Mrs. Goursey's reputation only confirms his wife's opinion:

Thou bearst with her, because she beares with thee:
Thou maist be ashamed to stand in her defence,
She is a strumpet, and thou art no honest man
To stand in her defence against thy wife:
If I catch her in my walke now by Cockes bones,
Ile scratch out both her eyes. (123)

Reason is useless in the face of such passion, and the behaviour of both the women throughout the play fits in well with the traditional view of women as irrational and easily incensed. Both are over-sensitive and lacking in any sense of humour or proportion, continue to quarrel with their husbands, and set their servants against those of their neighbours. The two women also attempt to ruin the match arranged between Mall and Franke, since, not surprisingly, neither thinks the other's child a fit match for her own. Eventually their obsession makes them forget the propriety with which they are normally concerned, and the end of the play finds them stumbling around the darkened common, trying to prevent their children from eloping, and hoping to burn one another with their torches. As Sir Ralph Smith, the local squire, remarks "Tis strange to see such women of accompt" behaving like this. The angry women's irrational and anti-social behaviour eventually begins to affect their husbands, when Mr. Goursey, hearing his wife repeatedly called a strumpet, begins to fear that there is no smoke without fire, and to share Mrs. Barnes' delusion. Only the intervention of Philip, who insists on a dispassionate examination of the facts of the case, saves the harmonious relationships of his elders.

Although both the angry women seem to conform to some of the worst stereotypes of Renaissance anti-feminism, it would be incorrect to attribute misogyny to Porter. Firstly, the character of the silly mother is something of a pre-requisite for comedy, since comedy is usually generated by characters trying to cope with difficulties and errors, usually of a social nature. A sensible, competent mother would rule out such disturbances with her smooth

management of household and family affairs, and therefore a stupid or absent mother allows for much more action. The truth of this can be seen in Two Angry Women of Abington: without the mothers' suspiciousness and willingness to bear a grudge, there would be no quarrel, no opposition to the wedding and no need for plotting and counter-plotting. Only the havoc wrought by the women's irrational behaviour upon the ordered, reasonable world of their husbands and children generates the drama.

Furthermore, the other female characters, Lady Jane Smith and Mall, are both pleasant and individual. Lady Jane appears only briefly, but shows that she has the independence of mind to try to convince her husband and his huntsmen of the immorality of blood-sports, and Mall is, in many respects, a truly startling heroine for drama of this time.

Mall's most obvious characteristics are her extreme frankness, and her eagerness for sexual experience, the second of which seems very surprising in an age in which aversion to sex was thought desirable in marriageable girls. Upon consideration, though, this is not as strange as it might seem. While great emphasis was laid on the necessity of cultivating complete purity of thought and deed in young women, the reason for this conviction was an underlying belief that women were naturally libidinous, and that only strict and careful training would counteract this inborn tendency. Although moral writers recommended ways in which absolute purity could be maintained, they were also apt to condemn fathers whose daughters went astray for over-taxing their frailty by failing to provide a suitable husband as a legal outlet for their sexual needs.

Mall's answer to her father's enquiry as to whether she wants to marry reflects this duality in the Renaissance view of female sexuality. She is well aware of this idea promoted by Vives that girls should be averse to marriage

in order to prove their love of chastity, and knows that she could easily counterfeit this sort of modesty:

... with true fac'te passion
Of modest maidenhead, I could adorne me,
And to your question, make a sober cursey,
And with close clipt ciuilitie be silent,
Or els say no forsooth, or I forsooth. (124)

But Mall finds that the observance of such niceties goes against her truthful nature, and she sets out to "speak trueth and shame the diuell". She confides in her father that she has been longing to marry ever since she was fourteen, and has been counting the years, wondering why no-one has asked for her. An unusually confident girl, Mall did not worry about any personal defects, but suspected a lack of taste on the part of suitors, thinking "Will no man marry me, haue men forsworne/Such beauty and such youth?" It was only when she began to despair of her prospects of marriage, Mall continues, that she allowed herself to abandon the purity of thought appropriate to girls and began to have sexual fantasies:

Why then I let restrained fancie loose
And bad it gaze for pleasure: then loue swore me
To do what ere my mother did before me. (125)

Her father agrees that this is indeed a dangerous tendency, "loue doth thee mightie wrong", but assures Mall that he does not disapprove of her frankness in telling him about it:

Beleeue me wench, I do not apprehend thee
But for this pleasant answere do commend thee. (126)

Barnes also agrees with the sense of her final plea:

If I shall haue a husband, get him quickly
For maides that weres Corke shooes, may step awrie (127)

and promises "I will see thee haue thy right ere long... I will goe write about it presently."

Here Porter has shown us picture of the ideal arranged marriage, one handled with humour, tolerance and consideration for the individual. Mr. Barnes sets out in a generous spirit to strain his resources to afford the best husband he can for Mall, and takes the trouble to sound out her feelings before proceeding. Mall's frankness and refusal to play along with social expectations win his approval rather than attracting blame, and he leaves her assured that the man he has in mind for her is young and her equal in wealth and intelligence. Again, this is a reflection of Barnes' consideration, for all these factors would concern a girl about to be married, especially in an age in which some fathers did not scruple to wed their daughters to infirm, feeble-minded or senile husbands. Furthermore, for a man living in such a paternalistic era, Barnes is unusually relaxed and cordial towards his children, even seeking advice from his son Phillip on Franke Goursey's character and suitability for Mall, and involving him with the making of the match. Surely this is Porter's view of how a marriage should be made: when a considerate and friendly father selects for his child a spouse he knows well to be suitable in years, social position and intelligence. In this case, judging by the existing friendships between the two families, the chosen husband is likely to have tastes and interests similar to those of his wife. It is arranged marriage, but with provision for advice and discussion.

Mall is certainly well pleased with the scheme, and falls to speculating on the social position she will enjoy as the mistress of a household. The authority she would hold appeals to her particularly:

O God me thinkes I should
Wife it as fine as any woman could:
I could carry a porte to be obeyde,

Carry a maistering eye vpon my maide,
With minion do your businesse or Ile make yee,
And to all house authoritie betake me. (128)

Marriage means more to Mall than an opportunity for sexual love: it will enable her to express her maturity and independence by giving her a new milieu in which she will hold a place of authority. As if to remind her where she stands in the hierarchy of her own home, her mother interrupts Mall's dreams with the curt enquiry "How now minion, wher haue you bin gadding?" Mrs. Barnes then cross-examines Mall about the conversation with her father and, having found out its subject, declares that Mall is far too young to be thinking about marriage, resolutely evading any questions about how old she was when she married. Of course, one would expect Mrs. Barnes to oppose Mall's wedding plans when it becomes known that her husband is to be Franke Goursey, but at this stage not even Mall is aware of this. Obviously, Mrs. Barnes has other reasons for trying to prevent her daughter from marrying, one of which seems to be sheer authoritarianism. Much more than her husband, Mrs. Barnes demands absolute respect and submission from her children, so much so that she interprets any unwelcome ideas they express as wilful insubordination and an insult to her dignity as a parent. When Phillip, driven out of patience by his mother's hysterical accusations and imperiousness to his reasonable argument that his father is not an adulterer but a loving husband, retorts that Barnes loves her much better than she deserves, Mrs. Barnes flies into a rage, invoking all her parental rights and standing:

O vnkinde, wicked and degenerate,
Hast thou the heart to say so of thy mother?
Well, God will plague thee fort, I warrant thee.
... Must I be subject to my cradle too? O God, O God,
amend it. (129)

Mrs. Barnes is adept at bolstering her petty tyranny with references to the divinely-ordained domestic hierarchy, and to the curse of God which awaits children disrespectful and

disobedient to their parents. Many of her words to Mall show that she wants to impede her marriage simply for the sake of re-asserting the power over her she will lose once she leaves the household: her insistence "do you heare daughter, you shall stave my leasure" and "I meane to make ye stay" has the ring of authority enforced for its own sake. Later, Mrs. Barnes is willing to go to the lengths of dragging Mall forcibly from her newly-betrothed husband, and of resorting to treating her like a piece of property which is being stolen, not like an independent person who has chosen to marry and leave home, as she raises the neighbours with a shout "Giue me my daughter, will yee rob me of her?/Helpe, Helpe, theil rob me heere, theil rob me heere."

Mrs. Barnes has another, less obvious motive for trying to prevent Mall's wedding from taking place, which she reveals in the final act. As she blunders around the dark common trying to catch Mall and prevent her from running off with Franke, Mrs. Barnes mutters darkly

O God, I would to God that I could find her
I woulde keepe her from her loues toys yet
.
What a vilde girle tis that would hau't so young. (130)

Unlike her husband, Mrs. Barnes cannot accept Mall's sexual nature. Now that she is herself a respected matron, whose sexual activities have been sanctioned by motherhood, Mrs. Barnes disapproves of sexual eagerness in other women, and is quick to condemn it in Mall, even to suspect it in her neighbour Mrs. Goursey. Mall is sure that the root of the problem is that "the Priest forgets that ere he was a Clarke", and tries to overcome her mother's deliberate inability to remember that she was ever young and eager: "When you were at my yeares, Ile hold my life/your mind was to change maidenhead for wife".

She also argues for early marriage in more general terms. Mall completely accepts the social customs of her time, but is also a realist: if society wants girls to be virgins when they marry, and to have a sensible and healthy attitude to sex within marriage, it must allow them to marry young. Since it is natural for girls to wish for experience, long delay will breed frustration and potentially harmful fantasies:

... there's no wrong
Like this, to let maides lye alone so long,
Lying alone they muse but in their beddes;
How they might loose their long kept maiden heads,
This is the cause there is so many scapes. (131)

Mall is unaware, though, that one of the obstacles to her early marriage has been, and still is, in her own nature. Apart from being unusually outspoken, confident and independent, she has a reputation for a waspish wit, which, her brother Phillip thinks, has been largely responsible for silencing would-be suitors. As he awaits the Goursey family's response to his father's proposal, Philip speculates on his sister's marriage prospects and recalls the effect of Mall's unrelenting wit on one unfortunate suitor, a rich farmer's son of much common sense but few words, who after a brief encounter "left his loue, she had so laste his lips/He could say nothing to her, but God be with yee." This revelation increases the drama, since it changes Franke's role from co-operation to exploit: it is no longer just a matter of claiming his bride, but of winning her approval by his performance in a battle of wits. Phillip explains the hazards ahead to Franke, who is at first justifiably reluctant to embark upon marriage, having observed his parents' relationship and concluded that:

... the shape of mariage,
Which I doe see in others, seeme so seuerer,
I dare not put my youngling libertie,

Vnder the awe of that instruction,
... I shall be sad,
And swaere, when I did marry I was mad. (132)

Insisting that the venture is similar to being sent into a lion's den, Franke has nevertheless obeyed his father, but first shows positive interest in his tasks when Phillip warns him that Mall

... will Francis thorowly trie your wit,
Sirra sheel bowe the mettall of your wits,
And if they cracke she will not hold ye currant,
Nay she will way your wit as men way angels,
And if it lacke a graine, she will not chaunge with ye,
I cannot speake it but in passion,
Shee is a wicked wench to make a iest,
Aye me how full of flouts and mockes she is. (133)

Franke, though, is not dismayed since, as Phillip has said, he is himself well versed in "quicke inuention, plausible discourse" and confident of his intellectual and verbal skills. He is also quick to question received judgements, and suggests that "perhappes shees opinions darling... wise in repute... perhaps such admiration winnes her wit". Phillip applauds his confidence, stressing that the coming encounter should be seen as a duel of wits:

I am glad to heare this bold prepare,
For this encounter, forward hardy Franke. (134)

By this time darkness has fallen, and Mall is preparing for bed when the two young men call her to her window. The promised battle of wits between Franke and Mall takes place. Mall, impressed with his 'pure wit', swiftly asks him to be her lover, but on hearing that she is talking to the husband chosen by her father, she seems to regret her over-obvious interest. Phillip, afraid that all his efforts as a go-between will be wasted, forces her to come to the point by the bluntest methods at his disposal. First, he tries a little brotherly blackmail:

Well, do you heare, you sister, mistresse would haue,
You that do long for somewhat, I know what.
My father tolde me, go to Ile tell all,
If ye be crosse, do ye heare me? I haue labord
A yeares worke in this afternoone for ye. (135)

Then Phillip turns to a technique he knows will rankle,
that of teasing Mall for being an old maid:

Come from your Cloyster, votarie, chase Nun,
Come downe and kisse Franke Gourseis mothers sonne...
Go to, stale maidenhead, come downe I say,
You seunteene and vpward, come come downe,
You'l stay till twentie else for your wedding gowne. (136)

This eventually has its effect. As Phillip remarks, Mall is really only too eager to marry Franke "and like a well lur'de hawke, she knowes her call". Mall rushes down and insists that they plight their troth immediately, but the scene is interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Barnes. Predictably, she is even more opposed to Mall's marriage once she discovers the identity of her future husband, and does all she can to separate the pair, declaring "ere that she shall wed/A strumpets sonne, and haue her so mislead/Ile marry her to a Carter". Mall's anger at being treated like a child knows no bounds and she demands:

Now I beseech yee for the loue of Christ,
To giue me leaue once to do what I list.
I am as you were when you were a maide,
Gesse by your selfe, how long you would haue staide,
Might you haue had your will . (137)

She re-iterates her earlier argument that early marriage prevents unhealthy frustration and temptation to illicit affairs, and assures her furious parent:

And mother do not mistrurst my age or power,
I am sufficient, I lacke neere an houre,
I had both wit to graunt when he did woe me,
And strength to beare what ere he can do to me. (138)

Mrs. Barnes is unconvinced, and calls for help in her struggles to haul Mall back indoors, rousing the Gourseys and several other neighbours. The two husbands, delighted that their children are so keen to marry, quietly advise them to run away to Oxford, where they will meet them the next day to finalise the legal side of the wedding agreements. Mall and Franke slip away, hoping to meet later, but miss one another in their attempts to escape the pursuit of their angry mothers.

Predictably, everyone gets lost while wandering about the fields in the gathering darkness. Assignations are missed, identities are mistaken, and everyone gets cold, wet, muddy, miserable and bad tempered. Even determined Mall gets lost and has to be taken home by Sir Ralph Smith, with whose hunting party the wanderers become confused in the darkness. Hodge, the Gourseys' manservant, amuses himself by leading people astray in the darkness, first mimicking Dick's voice and leading Mrs. Barnes off course, then impersonating his mistress and luring Dick into the pond. Meanwhile, the two angry women pursue one another, hoping to continue their feud, and when they do meet, they fight viciously, trying to burn one another with the torches they carry. As in Gammer Gurton's Needle, there is a feeling of madness about all this stumbling about in the darkness, mass insanity caused by a groundless delusion. As Phillip says to his father:

... I haue heard them say,
The dayes of ignorance are past and done,
But I am sure the nights of ignorance
Are not yet past, for this is one of them. (139)

Nothing could be further from the opening scenes of a civilised social visit in the bright light of early afternoon, with quiet walks in the orchard and games of bowls on the green. It is if the misapprehension of the two women has destroyed rational values, and is breaking up society, by

preventing a marriage and creating enmity and suspicion. Civilised values seem to be particularly under threat when the two husbands begin to be infected with the delusion as well. When the rest of the wanderers come upon the two women in bitter combat, Mr. Goursey is perturbed by their violence and says

I would know where this same rage should come,
Whers smoke, theres fier, and my heart misgiues.
My wiues intemperance hath got that name,
And mistresse Barnes, I doubt and shrowdly doubt,
And some great cause begets this doubt in me,
Your husband and my wife doth wrong vs both. (140)

He is beginning to accept Mrs. Barnes' warped view of events, even though such a belief threatens the friendship which is so important to his way of life.

Henry Porter has portrayed a traditional and conservative society, in which the older generation orders the lives of the younger, and commands a certain amount of respect. What happens, though, when the harmony of the powerful older generation is threatened? We have seen earlier that at least one of the parents, Mr. Barnes, is sufficiently flexible in his paternal role to accept advice from his children. In this case, Phillip offers his assistance and manages to make himself heard, insisting that the whole affair "comes still from womens malice". Anticipating opposition to his boldness in going against the grain of a relatively patriarchal society by offering advice to his elders, Philip admits that he knows

It is presumption in so young a man,
To teach where he might learne or be derect,
Where he hath had direction but in dutie,
He may perswade as long as his perswase,
Is backt with reason and a rightful sute. (141)

Having effectively countered any objection by stressing that he is trying to persuade rather than teach them,

Phillip urges his elders to apply the first rule of Physic to their problem, to "kill the effect by cutting off the cause". He points out that the cause of all the confusion is the enmity between the two women, and that Mrs. Barnes' accusations of adultery are based only on conjecture. Phillip persuades his mother to admit "that only suspect/ And no prooffe els, hathe fed my hate to her." Both Mr. Barnes and Mrs. Goursey swear their innocence, and the misunderstanding is over. Even the two angry women are eventually prevailed upon to become friends again, and to give their consent to the marriage. The play's ending, with the characters congratulating the newly-weds, making many bawdy jokes and wishing them plenty of children, signals the restoration of the earlier atmosphere of harmonious friendship, which now, through the marriage, has been consolidated into kinship.

There are only a few discordant elements in this affectionate and confident picture of the workings of a traditional society, such as the implications early on in the play, which do not appear to disturb any of the characters, that Franke Goursey has been visiting Nan Lawson, a local prostitute. What will happen to her? Will he continue to visit her once he is married? And what of Mrs. Barnes, so repressive of her children, and so pathologically jealous that a social call paid to a mutual friend makes her suspect adultery? Porter does not seem to wonder what makes her unable to trust or enjoy the friendships which surround her. It seems that Porter's perfect society may be a very unsatisfactory one for the unfortunate characters, particularly women, who, by circumstances or nature, are excluded from its systems of family and kinship.

In general, though, Henry Porter succeeds in painting an optimistic picture of the traditional workings of society, while intimating that certain changes should occur in order to allow happiness and self-expression for the individual

within the framework of the family and the community. If the present system is to continue, fathers must resist the temptation to exploit the absolute authority over their families offered them by the law and by the ideologies of the Protestant church, and carry out their duties with tolerance and humour. Misguided wives should be gently persuaded to see reason, rather than beaten or ordered to change their ways, as the law permitted, and children, far from being repressed and forced into a state of absolute submissiveness, should be treated with consideration and respect for their individuality. Henry Porter goes even further than this by suggesting that under certain circumstances, when the older generation is unable to cope with its own problems, children are qualified to advise and help their parents, and that when a parent's opinion is wrong or unjustified, outright defiance on the part of the child is not culpable. Only such a relaxed and tolerant family structure could accommodate the outspoken independence and sexuality of a heroine like Mall, whose conduct is completely at odds with contemporary ideals.

A similar suggestion of the importance of more understanding, tolerance and humour in the existing structures of society may be seen in the anonymous Taming of a Shrew (1589). In this comedy, Ferando's taming of Kate by the belated breaking of her will is deeply rooted in conventional ideas about authority in the family, but is made human and credible by the role of humour in the development of their relationship. During the early scenes of the play, Kate is the butt of every joke: an easy target for jibes because of her angry isolation, she never makes jokes herself or shares in the laughter. Indeed, Kate reacts to jokes which rely on sexual innuendo with a degree of physical violence which suggests a pathetic awkwardness and lack of the sexual confidence which might allow her to cope with such jests calmly. Ferando seems to be aware of the

loneliness which underlies her conventionally shrewish behaviour, and it is interesting to note that he teaches her about the pleasures of co-operation by making her a confederate in a joke played on someone else, the Duke, whom they both pretend to perceive as a young woman. For the first time, Kate is no longer in the isolated position of being the butt of other people's humour, but has the experience of sharing a joke with someone else. The significance of this development in their marriage is signalled by Ferando's gratitude:

Why so Kate this was friendly done of thee
And kindly too: why thus must we two liue
One minde, one heart, and one content for both. (142)

To be able to see a joke is to be part of society; to share a joke becomes a sign of well-being within a union of personalities. The author of this highly conventional and potentially cold and cruel play cleverly uses humour as an indication of the flexibility and understanding required to make the traditional male-dominated marriage work in human terms.

A similar conviction of the importance of tolerance and consideration in husbands and fathers can be seen in the comedies of Robert Greene and his contemporaries. In Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, (1589), Margaret's father does not interfere with her choice of husband, and attempts to dissuade her from taking actions of which he disapproves rather than giving orders. Similarly, in the anonymous play Faire Em (1590), Sir Thomas Godard, although an aristocrat and an authoritative character, gives his daughter Em much serious advice to be cautious about her relationship with Manuile, but ultimately leaves her a great deal of freedom, and is kind and supportive when this proves to have been the freedom to make her own mistakes and learn from them.

Robert Greene's plays also depict less enlightened fathers who insist on absolute obedience from their daughters, and whose heavy-handed paternalism inevitably inspires opposition, Iphiginia's reaction to her father's plan of arranged marriage for her, of running away to join the Amazon army, has already been described, and other authoritarian fathers encounter similarly spirited opposition from their daughters. In George-a-Green, the Pinner of Wakefield (1590) Grime, who locks up his daughter Bettris to try to force her to accept a rich suitor rather than George-a-Green, is outwitted in an embarrassing way. One of George's men, Wily, gains access to her disguised as a seamstress taking some needlework to the captive to keep her occupied. Grime's initial suspicions are forgotten when the 'seamstress' reveals her face; indeed, he is so 'smitten with the 'pretty wench of smiling countenance' that he even admits "had she brought some forty pounds to town/I could be content to make her my wife". Even in the throes of passion, Grime has a great respect for money, unaware that his chances of a rich son-in-law are receding. Once in her room, Wily exchanges clothes with Bettris, who manages to avoid the advances of her father and to escape to join George, while Wily makes his way out of the window. At the end of the play, Grime still remembers this brief encounter, so much so that when he spots a familiar face among George's company, he throws consideration of money to the winds and says that he will consent to allow George to marry Bettris, as long as he will allow him to marry "this lovely lass". When the truth is revealed Grime is embarrassed, but is sufficiently good-natured to keep his promise.

In this comedy, Grime is not just outwitted, but his authority as an agent of hard-headed prudence and an opponent of romantic love is undermined. Both of these fates are traditionally reserved for the authoritarian father who

opposes the love match, as the following plays advocating marriage for love will demonstrate.

2. Freedom of choice

Since complete freedom to choose one's spouse did not exist in contemporary society, it is understandable that many dramatists who wanted to include love-matches in their plays chose for them settings which would avoid the limitations of realism. Accordingly, love matches make their first appearance in drama in romance or comedies with a strong romance element. An early example is Anthony Munday's Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune (1582), in which Munday combines a romance plot with the abstract characters and cosmic impact of the morality play. He presents the romance story as a play within a play, showing the human characters and their fate in the hands of the gods. In the opening scene, Tisiphone stirs up rivalry between the goddesses Venus and Fortune and urges them to prove who is the more powerful by influencing earthly events, suggesting as the guinea-pig for their experiment, "a Prince beloved of his love." The character of the prince's love, Fidelia, is entirely determined by her function in this scheme which, as her name suggests, is to be faithful in love in defiance of all the vagaries of Fortune. Her constancy takes the form of willingness to disregard her father's wishes and her own rank in order to preserve her faith to a lover of (apparently) low degree, whose natural nobility she recognises and defends.

Feminine constancy in love continues to be an important element in Munday's later romance play John a Kent and John a Cumber (1589), whose plot concerns the attempts of the younger generation to evade the matches arranged for them by their elders and to marry for love. John a Kent, a benevolent magician, pledges his help to Sir Griffin and Sir

Powesse who love Sidanen and Marian, while the approved suitors chosen by the girls' fathers, Moorton and Pembroke, engage John a Cumber to counter their plans.

John a Kent also turns out to be an exponent of individual freedom, and therefore of the principle of marriage for love, not property. He transports the girls to meet and elope with their lovers at 'st winifrides fayre spring': a significant place, since St. Winifride was a virgin who chose to be beheaded rather than accept a suitor she disliked. However, Sidanen is stricken with guilt, feeling the responsibilities she will be betraying if she evades the arranged match. Family honour would be damaged by her failure to marry Moorton, because her father "is a Prince, and he hath promisde it". John a Kent is swift to remind her that there is also such a thing as personal honour, replying "you are a Princesse, and haue promisde no". John helps Sidanen to overcome her indecision about elopement with Sir Griffin with a direct question "would you go with him, if he were heere?", to which she replies fervently

would I desyre to be accounted chaste?
reuerentst for virtue, as for natrall giftes?
... would I shun feare? would I require content?
or wishe the endlesse happines of heauen?
If these I would, then that as much I would.
for what is fame, health, ioy or ought to me,
except with him that giues them all to me? (143)

All these other pleasures or virtues would be unattainable or robbed of meaning without the freedom to choose the man she loves. Having helped Sidanen to this self-awareness, John puts the case of the lovers to the angry Countess, Marian's mother, who has discovered the tryst. Eventually she concedes:

... quèstionlesse, this hapte by your consent,
And well I wot, these noble Gentlemen,
Are honored in your hartes before the other,

Sith your endeouours then so happy prooue.
Neuer let me be hinderer of true looue.

(144)

John applauds her words "Madame, now speake ye like a loouing mother,/And lyke Sydanens honorable Aunte", and encourages her in her difficult decision to support her daughter's wishes against those of her husband. Eventually, the cause of true love is upheld in fact as well as in principle, through various plots involving disguise and sorcery.

Two further romance comedies show the growing importance of the love-match in this type of play, and reflect attitudes to the topic very different from these prevailing in real life. In the lost play The Dead Man's Fortune (1590), of which only the plot sheet has survived, the materialistic fathers who insist on arranging marriages of their daughters are portrayed as unambiguously wicked to the point of complete villainy. When their daughters Allcyone and Statyra refuse to renounce the men they love and to marry suitors chosen by their fathers, they have them thrown into prison and drugged, plotting to marry them to the rich suitors while they are unconscious. True love triumphs with the help of a magician named Urgando, while the fathers are punished when their plan misfires and leads to their arrest and trial for attempting to murder their daughters by poisoning, for which they narrowly escape the gallows. It would be difficult to imagine any romance plot less ambiguous in its moral import than this near-melodrama of love and avarice.

Another play of the same year, A Most Pleasant Comedie of Mucedorus (1590) shows a similar bias towards marriage for love through the actions of the heroine, Princess Amadine. While out walking with her suitor the nobleman Segasto, Amadine is attacked by a bear, and Segasto deserts her, eager to secure his own safety. Amadine is rescued by

Mucedorus, whom she believes to be a shepherd, although he is actually a prince who has adopted this humble disguise in order to absent himself from his own court in order to meet Amadine. Showing little concern for social protocol, Amadine insists that Mucedorus accompany her to the court where her jealous suitor Segasto engineers a plot which results in Mucedorus' banishment. Amadine, hearing of this, suggests to Mucedorus "With thee in exile also let me live/On this condition. shepherd, thou canst love", later explaining her decision:

What is it which true love dares not attempt?
My father he may make, but I must match;
Segasto loves; but Amadine must like
Where likes her best; compulsion is a thrall. (145)

Amadine abides by her decision to stay with Mucedorus despite his warnings about the hardships of life as a shepherd's wife, and the social degradation involved in such a match. Amadine replies confidently that all she has will be his and that she will elevate her husband to the status of a king. After this test of Amadine's constancy; Mucedorus reveals that he is a prince in his own right, and the tale ends happily.

This play is an interesting illustration of the way in which the theme of love marriage tends to be handled in romance. Certainly Amadine is an unusually independent heroine, in that she defies her father's wishes, leaves home and trusts her own feelings to the extent of committing herself to a social inferior, but in the fairy-tale ethos in which shepherds turn out to be princes, there is ultimately no need for her to have the courage of her convictions. Her intuitive recognition of natural nobility has won her the triple prize of romantic love, material wealth and parental and social approval. The unreal world of romance plays allows the dramatist to endorse the idea of marriage for love, introduced by his more daring

contemporaries, while playing safe by avoiding the problems the idea created in the real world.

Thomas Dekker's unusual moral romance The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus (1599) adds to the debate on the effect of materialism in an atypical way. Instead of a story of love, it is a cyclic allegory illustrating the fickleness of Fortune, personified throughout the play as a strumpet, and the power of human avarice. Fortune tempts old Fortunatus to rely on her, and gives him a magic purse with an inexhaustible supply of gold and a wishing hat, which has the power to render its wearer invisible and to transport him wherever he wishes. Dekker uses these fairy-tale commonplaces to demonstrate that complete wealth corrupts completely, and that faith fixed on Fortune is always misplaced. This most telling illustration of the corrupting influence of unlimited wealth and power is his depiction of the loveless, mutually exploitative relationship they produce between Andelocia, the heir to Fortune's gifts, and Agripyne, the princess of Britain.

Agripyne, though beautiful and desired by many, is not a sympathetic character, her attitude to men a mixture of cruelty, manipulation and mockery. She deliberately teases the many men in the court who love her, while ridiculing their attempts to make themselves attractive to her. To court this discerning princess comes the former peasant Andelocia, fired by accounts of her beauty. Armed with his unending supply of money, he has complete confidence in his attractiveness to women of any social rank, and assures himself "Tush, man, be bold, /Were she a Saint, shee may be wonne with gold". Andelocia's acquisition of wealth has led him to believe that a proud princess can be bought like a prostitute. What should be a twisted delusion is shown to be true. That very night the King plots to have his guest tortured to reveal the source of his wealth, but his

idea is anticipated by Agripyne, who has already seduced Andelocia, lulled him to sleep and stolen his purse.

Each of the loveless lovers is equally materialistic and lacking in human values, and each is the other's punishment. Andelocia awakes, realises that he has been deceived, and gives vent to the general misogyny familiar in men in drama after a single betrayal:

O women, wherefore are you borne mens woe,
Why are your faces form'd Angelicall?
Your hearts of sponges, soft and smooth in shew
But toucht, with poyson they doe ouer-flow. (146)

Using the wishing hat, he abducts Agripyne to the desert, and upbraids her for being more like a whore than he expected her to be:

Ist not a shame that a kings daughter, a faire Lady, a
Lady not for Lords, but for Monarches, should for gold
sell her loue, and when shee has her owne asking, and that
there stands nothing betweene, then to cheate yor sweete-
heart? O fie, fie, a shee cony-catcher? (147)

Andelocia then exults in his power over his captive, taking a sadistic pleasure in frightening her with threats of rape and gibes at her social position: "I could get a young king or two, or three of you, and then send you home and bid their grand-sire King nurse them". Agripyne is saved, through, when Andelocia becomes enmeshed in the Pageant of Vice, a process which started for him, Fortune tells him:

... when thy lickerish eye
Fed on the beautie of faire Agripyne,
Because th'adst gold, thou thoughtst al women thine. (148)

Agripyne has been at fault for behaving like a thieving prostitute, but Andelocia has been equally culpable for regarding women as commodities to be purchased. Their exploitative relationship is coldly materialistic and

unpleasantly obsessed with power: Agripyne behaves like a whore with a gullible client, while Andelocia revels in his temporary power of moral authority and ability to rape a woman whose social position normally gives her power over him.

Amid all the fairy-tale mechanics of the story, Dekker has succeeded in establishing the image of sexual relations corrupted and coarsened by materialism, which articulates more strongly the revulsion against motives of money or power for marriage or courtship implied by other plays concerned with love matches.

As we have seen, the exotic or historical settings of the romance genre enabled many playwrights to avoid the difficulty involved in presenting marriage for love in a more realistic setting. This challenge was met by Thomas Dekker in his outstanding comedy The Shoemakers' Holiday (1599), a comedy of love which also depicts a broad section of London society, and allows comparison between the ways of life of several different women, all townswomen of varying degree.

Highest on the social scale is Rose, the daughter of Sir Roger Otley, the Mayor of London, whose social position and the attitudes which surround it are made clear in the opening scene, in which he joins forces with the Earl of Lincoln, Lacy's uncle, to put an end to Rose's attachment to Lacy. Otley feigns modesty to conceal the true cause of his opposition to the match, demurring "Too meane is my poore girle for his high birth". His real objection is to Lacy because he is a courtier: as a successful bourgeois, Otley regards the court as profligate and parasitic, feeling that

Poore Citizens must not with Courtiers wed
Who will in silkes and gay apparell spend
More in one yeare, then I am worth by farre. (149)

Similarly Lincolne, while pretending to Otley an interest in Rose's welfare and to Lacy some degree of support for the match, really looks down on Rose's social position and despises his nephew for undertaking "so meane a proiect, as the loue/Of a gay wanton painted cittizen."

Ironically, Lincolne is very much mistaken. The freedom and gaudiness which he, along with popular opinion, considers to be the prerogative of every city women are denied to Rose. As the daughter of a rich and important citizen, she leads a life without labour, but also without freedom, since her idleness and seclusion are important signs of her father's status. Rose certainly has leisure; we see her making flowery garlands as she walks in her walled garden, but, as she comments:

Here as a theefe am I imprisoned
(For my deere Lacies sake) within these walles,
Which by my fathers cost were builded vp
For better purposes: here must I languish. (150)

Rose's 'privelege' as a rich woman is to be made a prisoner in her own home. For contact with the outside world she has to rely on Sybil, her maid, who as a woman of no financial importance is free to go where she likes. Sybil's blatant interest in finery and unrefined attitude to sex are other indications of her freedom; only the most scrupulous parents would worry if a servant displays vanity or sings bawdy songs.

Otley's motive in imposing this confinement upon his daughter is to persuade her to marry the type of man he deems a suitable husband, like Hammon, who is "a proper gentleman/A citizen by birth, finely allied"; in other words, rich but not a courtier. Money is Otley's chief

consideration, and he assumes that it should be Rose's too, so much so that he seems to be baffled with impotent rage when he announces:

I would bestow vpon that peeuish girle
A thousand Marks more then I meane to giue her
Upon condition sheed be rulde by me. (151)
The Ape still crosseth me.

Otley's disgust when he believes that Rose has run away with a common shoemaker is so extreme that he disowns her, claiming that she has not appreciated all her advantages:

Will she forget her birth? requite my care
With such ingratitude?...
Wel let her flie, Ile not flie after her,
Let her starue if she wil, shees none of mine. (152)

In contrast to Otley and Lincolne, Simon Eyre and Margery help the lovers to marry, and their disregard for class distinction is eventually supported by the King himself. Having told these who oppose the match "Dost thou not know, that loue respects no bloud?/Cares not for difference of birth or state?", he over-rules all objections by knighting Lacy and giving the wedding his blessing.

Rose herself is the conventional heroine in several respects, but is individualised to some degree. She is beautiful, but her beauty is humanised by the universality of its appeal: even Eyre's employee Firke reflects "O heart, my codpeece point is readie to flie in peeces euery time I thinke upon mistris Rose, but let that passe." She is no remote, ethereal goddess, but an attractive young woman. Also, although her part in the plot is necessarily limited to waiting to fall in with Lacy's stratagems rather than formulating her own plans of action, Rose does show a great deal of courage and firm-mindedness in her determined resistance to her father's authority and to Hammon's courtship. She stresses that her actions have been difficult

and have required extra reserves of strength when she tells Lacy "Loue which gaue strength to beare my fathers hate/ Shall now add wings to further our escape." Although Rose's circumstances are more interesting than her personality, Dekker seems to have succeeded in creating a heroine who is attractive, determined and credible.

Further down the social scale is Margery, who enjoys a certain degree of privilege as the wife of a master tradesman even before his social mobility enables her to become the Mayoress of London. In his portrayal of Margery and her relationship with Simon Eyre, Dekker gives a vivid picture of a townswoman and of the possibilities of a working marriage with such a person. Margery is far from being an ideal character: she is given to grumbling about the early rising necessary for the wife of a tradesman, and is disposed to be quarrelsome, nearly causing a mass walk-out of Simon's workmen on one occasion. But Margery is in many ways an amusing and likeable person, bawdy in her conversation, fond of catch-phrases, and often uninhibited in her enjoyment of life; the sight of the finery her new social position as Mayoress entails is sufficient for her to be overwhelmed by a naive delight. Most important of all, she is truly sympathetic at moments of crisis. Margery is truly concerned when Rafe is press-ganged, as her attempts to persuade the recruiting party to spare him prove, and her commiseration with him when he returns injured is equally genuine, even though, on both occasions, she cannot resist a series of bawdy innuendoes inspired by the crisis. Like Simon, who hides his charitable nature under a continuous hail of bombast and name-calling, Margery is likely to be at her most rude when her feelings are touched.

Basic likenesses like this seem to characterise the relationship between Margery and Simon, who on the surface of things seem to be continually at cross-purposes. Simon's mode of address to Margery is usually rude rather

than respectful, he orders her about in much the same way as he does his employees, and the couple seem to be eternally wrangling and have differing opinions about very important things; whether, for instance, Simon's employees should be regarded as Margery's servants too, or whether their conditions of employment are completely independent of the domestic side of the business. Yet Margery and Simon are kept together by several factors. Firstly, they are essentially similar in character: extrovert, authoritative humorists, playing up to any audience they can find. The only difference between Simon's long passage of bombast and Margery's quick barbed or bawdy comments, characterised by her favourite disclaimer "let that pass" is one of degree: the effect of "let that pass" is always to call attention to Margery's words, not, as it might seem, to deny their importance. Apart from this similarity of nature, the Eyres' marriage seems to be characterised by a sustained sexual interest which underlies all their disagreements. Simon Eyre tells the King with evident satisfaction that he and Margery have been married for thirty-six years, and that he still hopes for "two or three yong Lorde Maiors". Margery's feelings for Simon are evident throughout the play in her supposedly unobtrusive comments, and most obvious of all when he first becomes an alderman and tries on his new robes of office. Margery is thoroughly taken with his new appearance, commenting:

By my troth I neuer I likte thee so well in my life,
sweete heart. But let that passe, I warrant thee there be
many women in the citie haue not such handsome husbands
but only for their apparell, but let that passe too.

(153)

It is an indication of Dekker's skill and originality that he could portray someone like Margery, who is far from young or sweet-tempered, as a loving and lovable woman. In the atmosphere of robust familiarity he creates for the

Eyre household, even Simon's most extreme names for her come across as terms of endearment rather than insults.

Next on the social scale is Jane Davenport, the wife of Rafe, Eyre's journeyman. Apparently, Jane has not been accustomed to manual work, but when Rafe is pressed into military service, Simon Eyre gives her advice which, characteristically, is bluff but constructive:

Let me see thy hand Iane, this fine hand, this white hand,
these prettie fingers must spin, must card, must worke,
worke you bombast cotton-candle-queeane, worke for your
liuing. (154)

Jane takes Simon's advice, and sets up a shop as a seamstress. Thereafter, her story is very much like a more realistic version of the archetypal constancy testing story. Hammon, the rich city gentleman earlier rejected by Rose, haunts the street outside her shop, watching her at work, and eventually courts her. He protests that he feels "a true chaste loue" and wishes to marry her and, convinced of his sincerity, Jane gives an equally direct and serious answer, assuring him

I could be coy, as many women be,
Feede you with sunne-shine smiles, and wanton lookes
But I detest witchcraft. (155)

Jane explains to Hammon that she believes him, and that although she has had no news from Rafe, whom she believes is in France, she hopes that he is still alive and will return safely. She concludes

I haue but one heart, and that hearts his due
How can I then bestow the same on you?
Whilst he liues, his I liue, be it nere so poore,
And rather be his wife, than a kings whore. (156)

This conventional stance, familiar from the 'testing' plays, is humanised by the contemporary setting, Jane's

recognisable place in society and the sympathy she gives Hammon, while maintaining her principles.

Hammon can persuade Jane to give him a hopeful answer only by giving her evidence of Ralph's death, and even then her eagerness to get rid of him to be alone with her grief is a major factor in her acquiescence. When, on the day of her wedding to Hammon, Jane finds that Rafe is alive and well, and is invited to "chuse her own", she shows no hesitation at all, regardless of Hammon's wealth and nobility:

... whom should my thoughts affect
But him whom heauen hath made to be my loue?
Thou art my husband, and these humble weeds,
Makes thee more beautiful than all his wealth. (157)

In the story of Jane and Rafe, the familiar theme of the constant wife is reworked and made credible.

The whole comedy is a lively celebration of the possibilities of the customs and values of the rising middle classes, and of the potential for happy marriages if more provision were made for free choice among the upper classes. It is apparent, though, that Dekker thought that the success of marriage depended less on general social factors than on the individual couple, and their ability to arrive at a working relationship with tolerance and good humour. His reworking of the old story of Patient Grissill (1600) clearly condemns certain types of marriage, holding out little hope for husbands and wives locked in a humourless struggle for power, or for those who blindly conform to the idea of the domestic hierarchy in which the husband wields the authority of God in his own household. The conclusion's implication was that if marriage had to be as it was represented in the play, it was better avoided. In The Shoemakers' Holiday, however, Dekker wholeheartedly expresses his confidence in the possibilities of loving and companionable marriage, while endorsing the plea of many of

his contemporaries for more freedom of choice for young people of all social levels.

Dekker's play deals with the potentially romantic theme of the love-match as an exploit in a realistic way, by surrounding the most implausible element, the young noble winning the lady while disguised as a shoemaker, with the recognisable details of contemporary London life, thus bringing the story to life in a familiar world. Many playwrights, though, preferred to present plots concerning love-matches in foreign or exotic settings, so that they would blend in with the general atmosphere of unreality. One such play is The Wisdome of Dr Dodypoll (1599), whose sub-plot returns to the theme explored in earlier comedies, of discrediting the father who threatens a love-match by showing that he is himself susceptible. In this play, the father is also identified with the rival of high degree who threatens the couple in the testing plays. Hyanthe the heroine and Alberdure her lover are threatened by Alberdure's own father, Alphonso, Duke of Saxony, whose lust for Hyanthe is leading him to neglect his long-contracted betrothal to Duchess Katherine. Since Alphonso holds the authority of father and monarch over the lovers, the threat he presents is immense; in fact, the play could be regarded as a demonstration of the disaster which might ensue when a father or ruler holds power over his family or subjects without feeling a corresponding moral responsibility for their welfare.

Alphonso certainly shows no consideration either for Katherine or for the welfare of his state, which is endangered by his treatment of this important political marriage, and little more responsibility as a father. Unlike his predecessor Count Ferneze in The Case is Altered, far from feeling uneasy at trying to deprive his son of the woman he loves, he is only too ready to accept Alberdure's supposed death and to use it as an excuse to imprison

Hyanthe. He has no hesitation in using his considerable authority to get what he wants, accusing his son of treason and of conspiracy to cheat him of Hyanthe, and extending the same charge to anyone who dares to challenge his behaviour. Alphonsus justifies his actions with an argument which was the traditional rationale for paternal authority, that of the reasoning capacity of age against the folly of youth:

Thou shalt not haue thy will,
Nor he his Loue.
Neither of both know what is fit for you.
I loue with iudgement, and vpon cold bloud,
He with youths furie, without reasons stay:
And this shall time, and my kinde vsage of thee
Make thee discerne. (158)

However, Alphonsus, despite his terrifying degree of power over the lovers, is rapidly brought to heel by the arrival of Duchess Katherine, to whom he is betrothed. Her dry and shrewd questioning exposes his aberrant behaviour for what it is, and forces him to grant Hyanthe to his son. Katherine, while not fooled for a moment by Alphonsus' weak excuses for his recent neglect of her, is willing to go along with them in order to keep the peace and have her long-delayed political marriage to Alphonsus made up. She also features prominently in the play's main plot, when she advises Lucillia, a deserted wife faithfully pursuing her errant husband, "You wearie him with too much curtesie:/ Leave him a little and heele follow you." This proves effective in recalling him to his senses.

Commonplace as Katherine's advice seems nowadays, the idea that wifely devotion in the face of cruelty could be cloying and futile rather than virtuous is very unusual for its time. The Renaissance wife was seldom if ever warned that too much submissive adoration would lead to her being treated like a doormat, far less advised that a strategic absence might make her better appreciated. Katherine is an

unusual figure in the drama of this time, a clever older woman whose experience and sense of humour undermine the authority of misguided husbands and fathers in order to preserve existing marriages and make up new ones.

While many dramatists were showing their support for the idea of marriage for love by portraying the struggles of young love against aged greed and prudence in a sympathetic way, several preferred to treat it as a fait accompli, not because of any complacency about existing social attitudes, but because of an awareness that the acceptance of the right of the young to choose their own spouses was only the beginning of a new range of moral problems and dramatic possibilities. These dramatists were aware that freedom of choice, far from being a reform which would automatically ensure happy and loving marriages for all, was simply a transference of the responsibility for making a morally correct choice from the older to the younger generation, and, as William Haughton had already indicated, inevitably the young were just as likely to be influenced by corrupt and greedy motives as their elders. Once freedom is gained, the question of the correct uses of freedom arises; a question which is explored in the anonymous comedy Iacke Drums Entertainment; or The Comedie of Pasquil and Katherine (1600). The plot is concerned with the moral choices made by Cornelia and Katherine, the two daughters of Sir Edward Fortune, a widower and firm believer in marriage for love, who instructs them:

... be free, my daughters, in election.
Oh; how my soule abhors inforced yokes,
Chiefly in loue, where the affections bent
Should wholly sway the fathers kind consent. (159)

Katherine, the younger daughter, uses her freedom to refuse to marry Mammon, a rich usurer to whom she feels so averse that she thinks "I shal sooner hate myself/Than loue him", and to choose Pasquil and abide by her decision. In the

amusing morning serenade scene, Katherine wittily rebuffs the advances of Mammon, who sings a song accompanied by the "chunk, chunk" of his money bags, and of Sir Puffe the effete courtier. When Pasquil appears, Katherine runs down to meet him, and they discuss their mutual happiness in being free to love one another, and their disapproval of greed and materialism. Pasquil does not envy rich speculators or usurers their good fortune:

Let clumsie judgements, chilblain'd goutie wits
Bury up their chief content within the houpe
Of a stuft drie-Fatt, and repose their hopes
Of happinesse, and hearts tranquillitie
Upon increase of durt: but let me live
Clipt in the cinture of a faithfull arme,
Luld in contented joy. (160)

Katherine is equally heated in her condemnation of women who choose to marry for material comforts rather than for love:

Let the unsanctified spirit of ambition
Entice the choice of muddie-minded dames
To yoke themselues vnto swine, and, for vaine hope
Of gay rich trappings, be still spurd and prickt
With pining discontent for nuptiall sweets;
But let me liue lou'd in my husbands eyes,
Whose thoughts with mine, may sweetly simpathise. (161)

Their contented love is disrupted, though, by a representative of the materialism they both reject. Mammon the usurer, realising that his wealth holds no attraction for Katherine, jealously hires an assassin to kill Pasquil, who is believed dead for some time. Then, in a fit of rage, Mammon becomes determined that if he cannot enjoy Katherine's beauty, no-one will, and disfigures her by throwing poison in her face. It is in keeping with Mammon's system of values that he should regard Katherine primarily as a visual object he wants to possess, and can deface to prevent others from enjoying her beauty.

Mammon's action leads to its own punishment though. Pasquil becomes temporarily insane after the attack on Katherine, and in his frenzy he tears up all Mammon's bonds and papers, which drives the usurer permanently demented. This apparently glib comic incident is full of significance, showing that the real object of Mammon's love was his wealth, since its defacement caused his insanity, just as Katherine's caused Pasquil's. More significantly, Pasquil's madness is only temporary. Katherine eventually recovers from her injuries with the help of a local herbalist, and the restoration of her health and normal appearance restores Pasquil's sanity. Mammon's dementia, however, is incurable. Happiness placed on human love can be restored, since physical and mental scars have the property of healing in time, but material goods, once destroyed or lost, are gone for ever, and love for them is hopelessly misplaced.

The theme of love against materialism is equally important in the courtships of Katherine's elder sister Cornelia. Whereas Katherine has elected to use the complete freedom of choice granted her father to select the most compatible mate, independent of material concerns, and to be faithful to him, Cornelia's choice is dominated by ambition and vanity. Since the financial prospects of all her suitors can be seen differently depending on the way in which they are described, Cornelia is very undecided, and her fickleness is exploited by Winifride, her unscrupulous maid, who pleads loudest for the suitor who bribed her most recently or most fulsomely.

At the outset, Cornelia has been encouraging the advances of Brabant, a young nobleman and "a good, sweet youth", but it is apparent that his days in favour are numbered. Winifride puts Cornelia off with the revelation that "he is a younger brother" ("o intolerable!"), and then begins to incline her to a more recent suitor, John Ellis, a rich

yeoman farmer, whom Cornelia, with reason, considers a fool. Winifride agrees with her mistress's estimate of Ellis' intelligence, but quickly explains all the advantages of having a doltish husband:

Pish! by my maiden head, were I to match
I would elect a worthie foole 'fore all.
Then may one hurrie in her chariot.
Shine in rich purpled Tissue, haue a hundred loues
Rule all, pay all, take all, without checke or snib:
When being married to a wise man (O the Lord!)
You are made a foole, a ward, curb'd and controll'd. (162)

Cornelia is convinced that she would enjoy more power and independence as the wife of a rich and foolish man, and, her only objection to Ellis having been transformed into a point in his favour, she cruelly scolds Brabant for presuming to visit her, and welcomes John Ellis with ostentatious hospitality.

Brabant and Cornelia next meet when he is out walking with his cynical but good-natured friend Planet, and notices her "sweetly in the shade lie dallying" with his new rival. Cornelia engages Brabant in conversation, and crudely tells her former love:

Sir, it were good you got a benefice
Some Euermuch'd Vicaridge, or some Fellowship
To prop up your weake yonger brothership.
Match with your equalls, dare not to aspire
My seate of loue: I wisse, Sir, I look higher. (163)

Justly indignant, Brabant tells Cornelia that "loue should make a marriage", not material considerations, but his friend Planet dissuades him from making an argument in support of this, advising "Woo her no more Brabant: thou'lt make her proud". Even so, Planet is enraged by Cornelia's insulting attitude to his friend, and proceeds to give her a scolding which could not possibly be misconstrued as courtship:

... why should you look higher?
His birth's as good as yours, and so's his face
.

Put off your clothes, and you are like a Barbey cheese
Nothing but parings: Why should you be proud
And look on none but Weather-cocks, forsooth? (164)

Planet then pours scorn on the materialistic values by which Cornelia assesses her suitors, and on her motives for marriage:

O, you shall haue a thousand pound a yeere!
B'or Ladie, that's a bumming sound. But, harke!
Wilt therefore be a slaue, vnto a slaue,
One that's a bound Rogue vnto Ignorance?
Well, thou'llt serue to make him gellide broaths,
And scratch his head, and may be, now and then
Heele slauer thee a kisse. Plague on such marriages!
(165)

Not contented with verbal criticism, Planet is determined to teach Cornelia a lesson and to avenge her insult to his friend Brabant. He bribes Winifride to put him forward as a new suitor, and Cornelia is swiftly persuaded that since she is really rich enough to marry a husband chosen for his intelligence, she should not even consider John Ellis:

... will you, hauing so huge a Rock
Of heap'd up fortunes, goe and chaine your selfe
To a dull post, whose verie eyes will blaze
His base-bred spirit, where so e're he comes
And shame you with the verie name of wife? (166)

Winifride has no difficulty in persuading Cornelia of the supreme desirability of an intelligent husband, Planet is suggested as a suitable intellectual, and Cornelia is instantly "Planet stricken". Poor John Ellis is crudely informed of his fall from favour just as he has submitted a carefully compiled inventory of all his money, property and prospects to Sir Edward to ask his approval. Cornelia meets her father's news that he gives his consent to the

match "Marie, phooh! Will you match me to a foole?", and Ellis is despatched as callously as his predecessor.

Almost immediately afterwards, Planet rejects Cornelia in order to punish her and to make her aware of how hurtful it is to be cast off. Terrified of being left without a suitor, Cornelia clings and fawns on him, pleading:

Shee that with all the vehemence of speech
Hath been pursued, and kneeled to for loue,
Prostrates her selfe, and kiss her choicest hopes
As lowe as to thy feet. Disdaine me not!
To scorne a Virgin is mans odious blot. (167)

Planet replies sharply that it works both ways, "To scorne a man is Virgins odious blot". He later explains to the audience

I am the scourge of light inconstancie
Thus my deare Brabant, am I thy reuenge
And whip her for the peeuish scorne she bare
To thy weake yonger birth. (168)

Lest the audience should misinterpret his motivation, Planet assures them that he is not a misogynist; on the contrary, he says,

I doe adore, with infinite respect,
Women whose merit issues form their worth
Of inward graces; but these rotten posts
That are but gilt with outward garnishment,
O, hov my soule abhorres them! (169)

In fact, Cornelia's own materialism and lack of sensitivity, as well as Planet's intervention, have helped to shape her punishment. At the end of the play, eager to be married before her sister, she offers to wed either Brabant or Ellis. Not surprisingly, neither is particularly keen to marry her, and Cornelia is reduced to offering desperately "faith, I'le haue any!" But, as her father

remarks ruefully, "no body will haue thee/This is the plague of light inconstancie."

This comedy is unusually unambiguous in comparison with many contemporary comedies. The audience was obviously meant to conclude that it is important to embark upon marriage with the correct values of love and similarity of character, and that blatant opportunism and concern with material gain are reprehensible and unlikely to bring satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the comedy of the late sixteenth century provided for challenging and detailed discussion of the topic of marriage, particularly of the question of whether it should be by free choice or arranged, for love or for political and material considerations.

Several influences came together to make such discussion possible at this time, including the setting-up of independent theatres, patronised by the more free-thinking bourgeoisie, and the arrival of the plots in which fathers are tricked in order to achieve love matches from the classical comedy.

The plays I have discussed indicate both the breadth of the spectrum of opinion about marriage in the drama of the time, and the subtlety and detail in which the question was dealt with in individual plays. Only the most radical of dramatists committed themselves to advocating the love match: others demonstrated their confidence that parental choice was best, while the less decided used the drama to explore the problems inherent in courtly love, arranged marriage, or using a romantic veneer to gloss over financial motives. There is no doubt that the topic of marriage was receiving the serious attention it deserved.

The same, however, cannot be said of the characterisation of women in the plays. The dearth of outstanding heroines becomes obvious when one considers that Much Ado About Nothing and As You Like It were roughly contemporary with the plays examined here. None of these more minor plays has a heroine whose stature approaches that of Beatrice or Rosalind.

The reason for this seems to be that, like the classical comedies and romance plays that contribute to it, the later comedy of love and marriage had an inherent element that, while it seemed to invite interesting discussion and portrayals of women, also worked to inhibit it. This element is that the plays are primarily concerned with the morality of love and marriage, rather than how individual people grow and learn through the process of these relationships.

Accordingly, the chief importance of women characters to the plays is the way in which they illustrate the author's point of view. Whether they are good or bad depends entirely upon the moral context in which we find them. Hence most of the women we see in the plays - like Honorea, Florila and the Angry Women of Abington - can be viewed as unfortunate creatures trying to make the best of a flawed social system, or as prime examples of female frailty, hypocrisy and wickedness, depending on the audience's point of view. They are important only because they advance the plays' arguments, but they convey no ethical authority in their own right, as Beatrice and Rosalind do.

Furthermore, since we are dealing with plays concerned largely with illustrating what characteristics are or are not desirable in a prospective wife, this limits female characterisation again. The good women who feature in the plays are, in effect, there because the male characters have 'voted them in' - selected them because they are the sort of women they like and wish to court. They will be flighty and defiant of their fathers, or passive and obedient depending on the way in which the author views marriage. Similarly, the bad women will be faithless and materialistic or froward and shrewish.

Even the most interesting discussion of attitudes to women in the plays, like Dowsecer's condemnation of men who regard women as visual objects, and Planet's outspoken

criticism of women whose greed can prompt them to become "a slave to a slave" come from philosophically inclined men, whose education makes them ask more of men and of women. Little or none of this questioning is advanced by the female characters themselves.

There are a few comedies in which the younger generation makes a love match against the wishes of their parents, usually by elaborate deception, and finally wins parental approval, and in which women are shown as possessing the courage and commitment they need to seek personal happiness in this way. However, the tragic treatment of the same theme raises far more interesting issues. Characters such as Juliet and Gismond are especially exciting, since both decide to defy their parents and risk their place in society for self-expression through love, and both decide to die rather than go back and compromise with the families and societies from which their love has isolated them. To present women as complete human beings with the full range of human emotions and capabilities, prepared to incur ostracism and death for a brief period of freedom and fulfilment, is as far away as possible from the current social morality, and perhaps far more exciting than any previous type of characterisation. The exploration of this theme in tragedy will be included in the next chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 181.
2. Leo Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 105-111.
3. Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, 199-201.
4. Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, pp. 32-33.
5. Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, pp. 39-59.
6. Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (London, 1965), p. 214.
7. Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, pp. 122-28.
8. G. Scheurweghs, Introduction and Notes to Nicholas Udall's Roister Doister, edited by G. Scheurweghs and H. de Vocht, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, Band 16 (Louvain, 1939), pp. lxi-lxxv.
9. Geoffrey Hindley, London in the Age of Caxton (London, 1979), p. 153.
10. Nicholas Udall, Ralph Roister Doister, edited by Ewald Flugel in Representative English Comedies, edited by C.M. Gayleys (London, 1903), Volume I, p. 130.
11. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 138.
12. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 159.
13. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 161.
14. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 163. (Coyle: beat.)
15. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 167.
16. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 176. (Matte: mass, mankine: fierce as a man.)
17. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 179.
18. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 179.
19. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 179.
20. Udall, Roister Doister, p. 135.

21. George Gascoigne, Supposes in Early Plays from the Italian, edited by R. Warwick Bond (Oxford, 1911), p. 41.
22. Gascoigne, Supposes, p. 41.
23. Gascoigne, Supposes, p. 43.
24. Giles Dawson, Introduction to July and Julian, edited by Giles Dawson and F.P. Wilson, Malone Society (Oxford, 1955), p. xv.
25. July and Julian, p. 16.
26. July and Julian, p. 10.
27. John Lyly, Mother Bombie, edited by Kathleen M. Lea and D. Nichol Smith, Malone Society (Oxford, 1939 (1948)), line 296.
28. Lyly, Mother Bombie, line 307.
29. Lyly, Mother Bombie, line 405.
30. Lyly, Mother Bombie, line 669.
31. Lyly, Mother Bombie, line 731.
32. Jacke Jugeler, edited by W.W. Greg and E.L. Smart, Malone Society (Oxford, 1933), line 229.
33. Jacke Jugeler, line 220 (reading as second edition).
34. Jacke Jugeler, line 728. (Mome: blockhead, ^ey: the.)
35. Misogonus in Early Plays from the Italian, edited by R. Warwick Bond (Oxford, 1911), p. 225.
36. Misogonus, p. 227.
37. Misogonus, p. 231. (Yt: that, ith: in the.)
38. Clyomon and Clamydes, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1913), line 1520.
39. Clyomon and Clamydes, line 1405.
40. Common Condictions, edited by C.F.T. Brooke, Yale Elizabethan Club (Yale, 1915), line 800.
41. Common Condictions, line 811.
42. Common Condictions, line 824.
43. Salinger, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, pp. 40-55.

44. Robert Greene, The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1926), line 1767.
45. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975), pp. 12-19.
46. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 128.
47. Fidele and Fortunio: The Two Italian Gentlemen, edited by P. Simpson and W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1910), line 224.
48. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 236.
49. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 910.
50. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 681.
51. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 706.
52. This is the scene quoted by G. Bullough as an analogue to the plot to discredit Hero in Much Ado About Nothing.
53. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 1238.
54. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 1295.
55. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 152.
56. Two Italian Gentlemen, line 1797.
57. Ben Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour in The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, edited by G.A. Wilkes (Oxford, 1981), p. 371.
58. Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour, p. 318.
59. Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour, p. 282.
60. Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour, p. 325.
61. William Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1913), line 1011.
62. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 792.
63. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 1327.
64. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 2263.
65. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 2290.
66. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 23.

67. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 1919.
68. Haughton, Englishmen for my Money, line 1953.
69. William Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon; or, The Devil and his Dame in Dodsley's Old English Plays, edited by W.C. Hazlitt (London, 1874), Volume VIII, p. 394.
70. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 398.
71. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 406.
72. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 406.
73. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 407.
74. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 414.
75. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 413.
76. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 419.
77. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 421.
78. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 421.
79. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 421.
80. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 421.
81. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 428.
82. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 430.
83. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 430.
84. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 431.
85. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 431.
86. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 450.
87. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 451.
88. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 452.
89. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 432.
90. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 432.
91. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 441.
92. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 468.
93. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 469.

94. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 418.
95. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 416.
96. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 415.
97. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 445.
98. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 458.
99. Haughton, Grim the Collier of Croydon, p. 458.
100. George Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, edited by
W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1937),
line 197.
101. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 245.
102. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 375.
103. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 640.
104. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 648.
105. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 747.
106. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 763.
107. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 1413.
108. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 1426.
109. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 1447.
110. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 1769.
111. Chapman, A Humorous Day's Mirth, line 909.
112. W.W. Greg, Introductory Notes to The Two Angry Women
of Abington, Malone Society (Oxford, 1912),
pp. vi-vii.
113. Henry Porter, The Two Angry Women of Abington, edited
by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1912),
line 1150.
114. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 44.
115. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 50.
116. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 178.
117. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 192.
118. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 205.
119. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 240.

120. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 252.
121. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 138.
122. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 516.
123. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 575.
124. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 638.
125. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 670.
126. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 677.
127. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 675.
128. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 685.
129. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 765.
130. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1957.
131. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 714.
132. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1138.
133. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1470.
134. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1489.
135. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1545.
136. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1553.
137. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1652.
138. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 1662.
139. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 2495.
140. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 2764.
141. Porter, Two Angry Women of Abington, line 2800.
142. The Taming of a Shrew in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, edited by G. Bullough (London, 1958), Volume I, p. 100.
143. John a Kent and John a Cumber, edited by Muriel St. Clare Byrne and W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1923), line 444.
144. John a Kent and John a Cumber, line 496.
145. Greene, Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, line 1767.

146. Thomas Dekker, The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953), Volume I, p. 167.
147. Dekker, The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus, p. 170.
148. Dekker, The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus, p. 174.
149. Thomas Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953), Volume I, p. 23.
150. Dekker, The Shoemaker's Holiday, p. 30.
151. Dekker, The Shoemaker's Holiday, p. 55.
152. Dekker, The Shoemaker's Holiday, p. 69.
153. Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, p. 43.
154. Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, p. 29.
155. Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, p. 59.
156. Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, p. 59.
157. Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, p. 76.
158. The Wisdom of Dr Dodypoll, edited by Arthur Brown, Malone Society (Oxford, 1965), line 1652.
159. Iacke Drums Entertainment; or The Comedie of Pasquil and Katherine, edited by Richard Simpson, The School of Shakespeare (New York, 1878), Volume II, p. 141.
160. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 156.
161. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 156.
162. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 144.
163. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 172.
164. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 172.
165. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 172.
166. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 186.
167. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 191.
168. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 193.

169. Iacke Drums Entertainment, p. 193.

Chapter 4

WOMEN IN TRAGEDY

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, dramatists began to diverge from orthodox morality in their portrayal of women, particularly in issues such as obedience to parental wishes about marriage. This rift came about as the increasing interest in the idea of romantic love highlighted the fundamental incompatibility between the aims of drama, which affirms the importance of conflict and of the individual, and of society, which favours stability and conformity.

Tragedy as a genre obviously had considerable potential for depicting the individual thrown into conflict with society by his or her desire for romantic love. Unlike comedy, which must work towards some happy resolution of these conflicting needs, tragedy could show men and women defying their parents and risking their place in society for self-expression through love, and even choosing to die rather than go back and compromise. Such a theme would offer immense dramatic possibilities, and an exciting view of women which would be far away from the social morality which prevailed in the real world.

However, the potential offered by tragedy for interesting views of women was inhibited by the very factor which brought this genre to the forefront of drama in the mid-sixteenth century - the influence of classical tragedy.

In the 1550s and 1560s, there was a rapid upsurge of interest in classical tragedy, both in the original and in

translation, whose influence on British drama was to be very far-reaching.

The staging of classical tragedies originated in private college performance at the universities. F. Boas produces evidence that influential plays such as the Troas (1552), Oedipus (1559), Hecuba (1559) and Medea (1560) were seen at Cambridge long before translations were widely available, and that new plays composed by academics in Latin and Greek were being acted as early as 1540. These plays, often on biblical themes, give an interesting insight into the way in which academic writers treated women as dramatic characters. In the anonymous Archipropheta (Oxford 1547) the story of Herod and Herodias is treated as a tale of romantic love, and Herodias is portrayed in a fairly sympathetic manner; motivated by love for Herod, friendly with her daughter, subject to the Fool's raillery and as conscience-stricken as Herod after the Baptist's execution. Similarly, in John Christopherson's Jepthah (Cambridge 1543), a woman insignificant in the Biblical source is elevated into a major character.⁽¹⁾

Later, new plays written in Latin and Greek were to show how strong the influence of their classical models had been. As late as 1583/4, William Gager was to present his own Latin versions of Dido and Oedipus at Christ Church, Oxford. Even a Latin play based on English history such as Thomas Legge's Richardus Tertius (St. John's College, Cambridge, 1580), uses Phaedra and Andromache as bases for the character of the Queen. Her confusion and distress at the uncertainty of her predicament is described by a maid, using the speech detailing Phaedra's distraction in Hippolytus, and the speech in which she pleads to keep her son is borrowed from the Troades, where it is spoken by Andromache in similar circumstances. Even an original work

like this, based on English historical material, is re-told in terms of classical tragedy.

Classical tragedy influenced the English stage through the growing popularity of translating Greek and Latin plays . The growing opportunities for education in the sixteenth century meant that the ability to do this was not restricted to academics; even a young provincial noblewoman like Lady Jane Lumley was able to produce her own free translation of Iphegenia in 1558, and Elizabeth herself translated Hercules Oetaies (1561). It was this personal interest in classical drama that prompted her former page, Jasper Heywood, to dedicate to the Queen the first edition of his translation of the Troas in 1559. This venture's great success indicates that Heywood had gauged the intellectual climate well: the Troas went through three editions in the next two years, and further translations of Thyestes (1560) and Hercules Furens (1561) followed.

Although De Vocht argues that Heywood's plays were never intended for dramatic performance, and "as literary works ... can hardly have a claim on our attention", these translations are highly important because of their wide influence. Their success inspired a wave of Seneca translation in the universities by John Studley, Thomas Nuce and Alexander Neville, so that by 1561, Thomas Newton, the translator of Thebais, was able to gather together the existing translations of the individual plays in order to publish his famous edition of Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies, which introduced a wider audience to the character of classical tragedy. Classical tragedy rapidly became a strong influence on the British stage, inspiring a number of performances of classical originals in translation and of neo-classical tragedies, new plays drawing heavily on classical plots, themes and language.(2)

Neo-classical tragedy disappeared from the English stage after a relatively short period of time, to be replaced by tragedies with contemporary themes and settings, and by more modern treatments of classical subjects, such as Marlowe's Dido. Few have ever been revived, and a number of factors make them unlikely to be staged again. Most of these dramatic problems arise because this form of tragedy is derived from that of another time and culture, and inherits its problems of form, language and characterisation.

One of the most basic differences between classical and Renaissance dramatic theory was what was asked of tragedy. Whereas the Greek and Roman audience seems to have required little more than the state of catharsis induced by the contemplation of overwhelming horror, the Renaissance concept of tragedy was more diverse, encompassing not only the mediaeval idea of tragedy as the fall from prosperity to misery, but the idea that some important character should, by his decisions or actions, be able to avoid such a fall, or precipitate himself into it. The idea of the tragedy of some individual person with a measure of free will was coming into existence, with its emphasis on choice, decisions and action, and the elements of suspense and excitement. The classical drama, with its deterministic ethos in which the characters' actions are futile in the face of the gods or of fate, and stage conventions such as the declamatory structure, and action taking place off the stage and being reported by messengers would have satisfied a classical audience's expectations. However, it probably would not have supplied the uncertainty and excitement Renaissance audiences were coming to expect.

The dramatic impact of neo-classical tragedy was also weakened and restricted by the language used in the plays, which has little in common with normal speech and must have been very difficult to comprehend. The language of the plays is based on that of the translations of classical

drama which began to appear in the early 1560's, and embodies their idiosyncrasies. The translators tended to aim at a word-for-word transcript rather than a natural-sounding, intelligible version, including translations of Latin phrases which were too literal to make sense in English, and sometimes adopting a Latin word order. Adding these conventions to an existing dramatic diction already hampered by short lines, heavy alliteration and end-rhyming produced an even more unnatural syntax. The result was a cumbersome, repetitive language whose distorted word-order needed to be unravelled before its meaning could be gleaned.

In adopting this type of language from written translation, the live drama fell between two stools. Whereas on paper, such pedantic language can be re-read and searched for meaning and recurring themes, it certainly could not have been easy to understand when heard only once. An audience might have grasped as much of the plot as was emphasised by action, and perhaps gained an impression of a crowd of horrific images amid much ranting.

The unnatural language of the plays limits not only comprehension of the plot, but sympathy with the characters. As a reader rather than hearer of this odd diction, I found that any sympathy I felt for the characters came from imagining my own feelings in similar circumstances, or from imagining the scene in a naturalistic way, not in response to the play. It seems unlikely that plays which needed such an effort of the imagination would have had a great intellectual or emotional impact in performance. On the contrary, surviving records seem to indicate that neo-classical tragedy was enjoyed by audiences primarily as a spectacle, since lavish sets and costumes, dumb shows, pageantry and special effects dominate most accounts of performances. It is clear from this that these plays did not stand up on their artistic merits alone, and that, once

out of the small circles of university intellectuals who understood them because of prolonged study, they needed considerable bolstering in order to appeal to an audience.

However, neo-classical tragedy's most significant problem as far as the presentation of women is concerned is similar to the one we have already seen in neo-classical comedy. Both inherited a very limited model for women characters from their classical sources. A general consideration of Latin and Greek drama (however boldly oversimplified) is helpful in suggesting the reason for these limitations.

Most classical tragedies are dramatised legends or mythicised history and since, with very few exceptions, classical poets and historians were all men, they represent a male interpretation of female nature and psychology. Even the Olympic deities are obviously ordinary women as ordinary men saw them, in terms of their different social functions: Venus, the beautiful, sensuous courtesan, Diana, the chaste, marriageable daughter, Vesta, the ideal housewife, keeping the hearth eternally warm, and Juno, the realistic wife, impressive but jealous of her husband's love and ruthless in persecuting the objects of his wandering fancy.

More significantly, the men who invented the myths and wrote the plays about women were consciously describing the behaviour of a different and inferior species. It was classical philosophers such as Aristotle who first produced the theory that women were defective men, weakened and deformed by some accident at conception, and who deduced that their weaker physique indicated a corresponding feebleness of intellect. This view had very far-reaching consequences for women. Firstly, although they were considered useful for running households, and were even revered for producing heirs and accordingly valued for chastity and obedience, women were considered unworthy of

full education and therefore, since they were prevented from becoming men's intellectual equals, unworthy of their love. It was considered degrading for a man to love his inferior, since a lesser creature was incapable of true love innocent of motives of gain or jealousy. Secondly, the idea that women were intellectually inferior to men produced the same result as a similar belief in the Renaissance, that as less reasonable creatures than men, women were naturally more prone to malice, lust and mental instability, and that this tendency could be counteracted only by a much stricter code of conduct than that recommended to men. If female nature is inclined to evil, then the less a woman actually does, the less dangerous she will be. In classical tragedy feminine virtue, indeed, femininity itself, is strongly identified with inactivity and passiveness.

Accordingly, good women in classical tragedy are virtuous in this passive way, usually appearing as helpless victims of disaster, and bad women are treated in an equally limited manner. They are seen as having an innate disposition to evil, which they can draw on when aroused by an uncontrollable passion, usually lust or jealousy. In this state, they are driven to commit adultery, incest and infanticide, in defiance of natural law.

This view of women as good, passive and suffering or active and wicked spreads into neo-classical tragedy, where it is compounded with some of the more extreme views of the Renaissance moralists, which also identify feminine virtue with seclusion and long-suffering patience.

The resemblance between classical and Renaissance views of women explains why women in later political and historical tragedies tend to conform to the same types. As Juliet Dusinberre points out, John Knox's view of women in the political world is remarkably similar to Seneca's and

Tertullian's: that women's physical weakness indicates moral weakness too. In a political world of rough action and tough decisions, it is for men to act and women to endure. A woman who takes action is going against her nature, and therefore monstrous. Accordingly, women in historical and political tragedies tend to be virtuous sufferers or wicked activists, just like their classical forebears.(3)

Eventually, the influence of native drama helps the tragic genre to transcend the limitations of its classical ethos, and more interesting views of women begin to emerge. The way in which women are presented in these later tragedies is largely determined by the social and moral setting of the play, and by the influence of dramatic convention.

These later tragic heroines give a particularly good illustration, both of the way in which character tended to be dictated by moral context, and of how the tragic genre began to deliver the more exciting views of women it had promised. All three are victims of the dangers women encounter in love, marriage and politics - Chaste Matilda, Jane Shore and Ghismunda - and will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter.

WOMEN IN NEO-CLASSICAL TRAGEDY

The classical view of female nature as inferior and potentially wicked is at the root of the tendency of women in neo-classical tragedies to be passive and good, or active and bad.

Good women in classical tragedy are notable for their passiveness, and often appear as helpless victims of disaster brought upon them by action in the male world of politics and war. Sometimes they are obviously emblematic, like Megara in Hercules Furens (1561), who simply represents, in her selfless devotion to duty and flawless chastity, all that was expected of a perfect wife. We never see her as a complete person, only as an exemplary being totally undeserving of the terrible fate she suffers. The author is concerned with the tragedy of Hercules, his double horror not only at the loss of such an incomparable wife, but at realising that he has unwittingly destroyed her, and his conflict in choosing between despair and suicide, and a long period of expiation and life. Megara's death is pathetic, not tragic: a small incident in a larger scheme.

The most extreme example of the identification of female virtue with inactivity and helpless suffering is the Troas (1559), in which the entire plot consists of the Trojan women's helpless acceptance of war atrocities committed by the Greeks. Although all their own men are dead, and the only remaining ones are Greek enemies, the women's lives are still orientated towards obedience and respect for male authority. All their energy is directed towards lamenting and disfiguring themselves in honour of their dead menfolk, and their obedience to the brutal demands of their captors is absolute: even when the ghost of the dead Achilles demands to marry Polyxene, she must be killed so that his command is obeyed. Escape or resistance is not even

contemplated. The only woman in the Troas to suggest positive action is Andromache, when forced by Ulysses to choose between the despoilation of her late husband Hector's tomb, and the slaughter of her son Astyanax. She describes herself to Ulysses as an Amazon avenger, ready to risk her life in defence of the tomb. But in fact, she does nothing because she cannot decide between the equally pressing duties she owes to husband and son, and by her indecision precipitates the loss of both. Her very virtuousness as a wife and mother has her paralysed.

The issue of forced concubinage in the play is a particular indication of these women's dependence and lack of autonomy. Far from deploring the indignity of being appropriated as booty, Hecuba laments that although:

Some men desyres Helenus spouse
some would Antenors haue
And in the grekes there wantes not some
that would Cassandra craue.
But J alas most wofull wight
whom no man sekcs to chuse
J am the only refūge left,
And they me cleane refuse.

(4)

Hecuba describes forced concubinage as if it were a beauty contest she has lost, in which, for being old and unattractive, she has forfeited the very small chance of protection the others might hope for as slave-prostitutes to the men who have killed their husbands and are about to kill their remaining children. Even her much-voiced loyalty to her dead husband might be expected to preclude such an attitude of acceptance and compromise, let alone the sense of personal integrity and dignity one might expect to find in an elderly queen, but all the Trojan women view their fate in this way, without any suggestion that they would rather cope without the humiliating and unreliable protection of their enemies.

This seems to be the crux of the problem with female characterisation. The Trojan women, like many virtuous female characters in classical tragedy, seem to be somehow less than human, with a smaller emotional range, no control over their fate, no personal volition, and no sense of their own identity. Since they do not possess the full range of human feelings and capabilities, the fate of these women affects the reader not as the tragedy of fellow human beings, but as the classical playwright must have envisaged it, the essentially pathetic sufferings of lesser creatures. It is impossible to identify or sympathise with these women who, upon examination, turn out not to be women at all: they cannot affect us as real people, since they were not designed as such.

Wicked women are treated in an equally limited way. Generally, women in classical tragedy seem to be considered to be predisposed to evil by the innate weak-mindedness and irrationality of their sex. Although Studley's Hippolytus is a mysogynist, many women in classical tragedy fit in with his view that:

womankinde in mischiefe is ringleader of the reast
 The instrument of wickedness enkindling first desire,
 Whose vile uncestuous whoredome set so many Townes on
fire,
 So many Nations fall to warre, eake Kingdomes overthrowne,
 And raysed from the ground, to crush so many people downe.
 Let other passe: by Jasons Wyfe Medea may wee finde
 By her alone, that women are a plaguy crabbed kinde.

 I hate, detest, abhore, I loath, I curse them from my
heart. (5)

This potential for evil, normally kept in check by virtuous passiveness, can be unleashed when women are in the grip of a passion such as jealousy or revenge, or the insane sexual passion to which classical women, as inferior beings incapable of real love, were supposed to be prone. C.S. Lewis describes this as:

a tragic madness, an $\alpha\tau\eta$ which plunges otherwise sane people (usually women) into crime and disgrace. Such is the love of Medea, of Phaedra, of Dido; and such is the love from which maidens pray that the gods may protect them.

(6)

Women thus affected were capable of almost anything: "What mischief unattempt escapes/a Woman's witlesse rage?" asks the Chorus in Hippolytus.

However, women in classical tragedy do not plunge single-mindedly into their tragic madness, but are portrayed as undergoing a very intense form of the *dianoia*, "the conflict of passion, temper or appetite with the external duties" which T.S. Eliot thought characteristic of the drama of Seneca.⁽⁷⁾ Women's experience of this conflict seems to be even stronger than men's, because of the ties that bind them to the people to whom they owe duties are highly physical and concrete, like sex, marriage and motherhood, and are felt to be indissoluble. While male characters in the plays experience conflict between personal desire and civic duty or the dictates of the law, women are shown as being driven to go against law, social convention, their own womanly nature and the concept of 'natural law', a very important one in these plays. This causes acute conflict: even the apparently unambiguously evil Clytemnestra undergoes a prolonged struggle between her desire, to kill Agamemnon and continue to rule with Aegisthus, and her duty, to welcome her husband, beg his forgiveness and return to a virtuous life. She even admits this to the Nurse or confidante character, whose function is to advance the view of correct womanly behaviour. The strong mental conflict between desire and duty, and even 'natural law' is portrayed, often in great detail, through soliloquies and discussions, usually using the device of a nurse or confidante character to whom the woman can explain her feelings, and who can give conventionally virtuous advice in return. This approach seems to have been pioneered by Seneca, as one of his techniques of discussing the

action of a play from many points of view. One of the most extensive and successful uses of this technique is in John Studley's Medea (1566), and Joel Altman gives a detailed analysis of the continually changing moral perspectives which result in The Tudor Play of Mind.

Joel Altman describes the way in which our sympathy for Medea varies as she is viewed in different ways from scene to scene, from terror in the episodes in which she appears as the incarnation of evil, to sympathy when she reveals her enduring love for Jason by attempting to absolve him of blame for deserting her by fixing on Creon as the culprit, deceiving herself in order to preserve her illusion that Jason still loves her. Our sympathy for her is also influenced by the changing view of Jason's character, which is at first unfavourable when we hear of his desertion, then improves as we hear that he has mediated with Creon to spare Medea's life, and that his compromise with circumstance was motivated by concern for his children. However, his character is finally blackened by his dismissal of Medea's suggestion that since he has profited from the atrocities she has committed on his behalf, he is her partner in crime and shares her guilt. Jason's off-hand "when al is done what canst thou say/my gylytnes to stayne?", which echoes Creon's opinion that "his gentle hands were neuer stainde/wyth gore of anye blood" reveals an immoral and hypocritical reluctance to share moral responsibility. Once more, our sympathy shifts towards Medea and her righteous indignation that while she is being divorced, deprived of her children and exiled for her criminal past, the husband for whom she did all the dirty work is rewarded for the same exploits by marriage to Creon's daughter. Our sympathy is increased by the closeness with which Medea's soliloquies allow us to follow her reasoning and understand her motives.(8)

It seems that Studley's translation introduced further reasons for sympathy for Medea. In the Senecan original, the first act, in which Medea pours out her rage in an incoherent manner, is succeeded by the Chorus, a glowing epithalamium in praise of Jason and Creusa, celebrating light, beauty and harmony. Its effect is that of a restoration of civilised values and order after the chaotic horror of Medea's ravings, and it engages the sympathies of the audience on behalf of the royal couple. Studley's "Chorus altered by the Translatour" has an entirely different effect. It is a reflection of the falseness of pleasant appearance, and how "Medea so by prooffe the same hath founde" by falling in love with Jason's deceptive beauty. Jason is described as the snake in the grass, while Medea is the fly attracted and burned by a candle, the fish finding the hook concealed in the bait, and most pathetically, "the selye byrde, brought to the lymed snare" by the sweet song of the fowler. After considering the "Fayth in fayre face hath sildome yet ben seene", Studley gives a very sympathetic account of Medea's grievances. He describes the futility of all that Medea has done for Jason, and concludes with heavy irony:

Beholde the meede of this thy good desarte
The recompence that he to thee doth gyue.
For pleasure, payne, for ioy, most eger smarte,
With clogging cares in banyshment to lyue.
Thou, and thy babes, are lyke to begge and starue,
In Nacion straunge, (o miserable lyfe),
Whyle Iason from hys promyses doe swarue,
And takes delyght in hys new wedded wyfe. (9)

This new Chorus wins our sympathy for Medea and changes our reaction to the succeeding scene in which Medea explains her grievances and desire for revenge to her Nurse, who counsels moderation. Having understood Medea's view of her circumstances, we can understand her desire for revenge.

Apart from the process of debate and balance, one of the most interesting aspects of Medea is the way in which

Seneca develops the theme of mental conflict between personal desire and the duties caused by indissoluble relationships. Medea's problem is complex: she has to decide between her desire for revenge on her husband Jason, a very personal and unnatural urge, and her love for her children, which is natural and a physical reality, and the attempts to subjugate her nature and instincts to her will.

An examination of the soliloquy in which she considers her course of action shows the extreme nature of her mental conflict. Intent on revenge, Medea initially voices the wish "O that my foe hadd gotten of/his harlots bodie seede", and rapidly makes the rationalising comment that since her own children have been taken from her and adopted by Jason and Creusa, she can "suppose the same/To be Creusa's babes of them/let her enjoy the name" and can exult for a few moments over the fate of the "lytell selie fooles/that erst my children were". By denying that the children are really hers, Medea can momentarily blot out the obstacle kinship presents to her desired revenge, but she cannot deny reality for long. Her will can contemplate infanticide, but her physical nature revolts against it, and she is suddenly aware that:

... horroure huge with sodeyne stroke
my hart doth ouercom:
with ysie dullynge cold conieald
My members all benum
My shiuerying lims appauled sore
for gastly feare do quake.

(10)

In other words, "piteous mothers mercy mild/restoreth natures face". Medea's instinctive feelings battle against an unnatural impulse. Her physical revulsion leads to more reasoned consideration of the enormity of the crime she is contemplating, and Medea wonders whether she can kill anything that is a part of nature and of her self:

... shall I the frame unfold
of that whiche louing natures hande
hath wrought in me her mould?

(11)

Medea's dianoia reasserts itself in the speed with which she rushes from one extreme to another, denying and re-affirming the close kinship which blocks her means of revenge as abruptly as this:

Tush let them frankly go to wracke
no kith and kyn to me
They ar: dispatch them out of hand
hould, hould. my babes they be.

(12)

Although Medea eventually kills her children, her conflict is far from resolution, since her admission that "the pryckes of sorow twitch my harte/attaynt wyth blushing shame" undermines her claim that she has returned to crime with zest and feels that her true nature and integrity has been regained. Similarly, although the reader or audience is appalled by her crime, there is no doubt that her words to the tardily repentant Jason:

Auaunt, now hence thou pesant prowd
employe thy busye payne,
To reape the fruits of virgins bed,
and cast them of agayne
whē mothers they are made

(13)

are very exhilarating. Seneca has created these complex and paradoxical reactions by following in detail the struggle between personal desires and external duties, further complicated by close relationships and the concept of natural law.

There is no doubt that Seneca does succeed in showing Medea as torn by equally strong impulses, rather than as an evil person. To show her crime in terms of desire for revenge over-riding the natural, desirable maternal instinct seems to be an intelligent, if predictable dramatic treatment of

the myth and to present few problems, until we ask ourselves why, in a civilisation in which it was not uncommon for women to be told to expose or abandon unwanted children, weaklings and girls in particular, Medea's infanticide was regarded as being so wicked and so unusual that the story became a myth. It is difficult to determine where the essential difference between Medea's infanticide and socially acceptable infanticide lies. Was Medea wicked because she actively killed her children rather than simply letting them die, or because she killed them against her husband's wishes? Or, most likely, perhaps because they were boys and she set out to deprive Jason of his lineage just as it had been made royal? It seems unlikely that infanticide itself was the only component of her crime. The concept of 'natural law' in the plays is not, in fact, the simple law of the dictates of female instinct that we might assume.

The idea of 'natural law' is again invoked within the discussion framework in Studley's Hippolytus, when the Nurse urges Phaedra to think of her long-absent husband, Theseus, and to quell her passion for his son, which defies not only the laws of marriage and duty, but of nature itself.

Asswage the boyling flames of this thy lewde ungratious
love,
Such monstrous mischiefe horrible from modest minde remove
.
... thy mother have in mynd
And feare this forrayne venery, so straunge agaynst thy
kind:
The fathers wedlocke with the sonnes thou seekst to be
defylde,
And to conceive in wicked womb a Bastard Mungrell Child:
Go too, and turn thy Nature to the flame of burning
breast.
Why yet do Monsters cease? why is thy Brothers cave in
reast.
That Mynotaurus hideous hole and ugly couching den
Without an other greedy fyend to mounch up flesh of men?
Mishapen, lothly monsters borne so oft the world shall
heare,

So oft rebels agaynst her selfe confused Nature deare, (14)
As love entangles Nimphes of Crete.

The nurse warns Phaedra that her passion for her attractive, if unusually misogynistic son-in-law is as monstrous as that of Pasiphea, whose unnatural coupling with a bull led her to give birth to the Minotaur. Hippolytus, however, is not a blood relation of hers and therefore her love is not 'unnatural' in the sense of breaking an incest taboo, but simply adulterous. Theseus' numerous infidelities, however, are not described as unnatural, and neither is his present prolonged absence in the underworld attempting to abduct Proserpina. Clearly adultery is a violation of female nature, but not male nature, an attitude which was not merely literary, but is reflected in Roman Law. Cato the Elder, an early defendant of the rights of husbands before they were once again given state support under the Julian Law, 'maintained that husbands had the natural right to kill wives taken in adultery without trial, while if the husband himself commits adultery, his wife "must not presume to lay a finger on you, nor does the law permit it".' The idea of the 'unnaturalness' of adultery for women was simply an emotive embroidery on the existing law, which was designed to safeguard property. It had nothing to do with female instinct.⁽¹⁵⁾

These instances point to the conclusion that the value of 'natural law', frequently invoked in the discussion sequences of the plays as governing the actions of women, is not in fact a simple law of female instinct. It is a code which teaches that adultery is horribly unnatural in women but should be condoned in men, and that infanticide is wicked only under certain circumstances. It is, in fact, a method used in literature and drama, of reinforcing the existing civil law by inducing women to internalise its precepts, by identifying them with the idea of womanly nature. So although classical tragedy offers the device of detailed discussion of inner conflict as a means of

examining the motivation of female characters, the standard of judging feminine behaviour most frequently used in these discussions is unreliable and biased. Furthermore, the discussion technique itself was not always employed as successfully as it was in Medea. Elsewhere, it often happens that only the impression of psychological refinement is given by the technique, since the actual content of the soliloquies and discussions can often be very crude, stylised and unimaginative. For example, Clytemnestra in Studley's translation of Seneca's Agamemnon, trying to think of a plot to kill her long-absent husband, tells herself to:

... search out and learne to fynd
The wylie traynes and craftye guyles
of wicked women kynd:
What anye dyuelyshe trayterous dame
durst do in workyng woe
Or anye wounded in her wittes
by shott of Cupids bowe.

(16)

Instead of imagining how Clytemnestra might urge herself to a violent action she believed, however temporarily, to be justified, the author simply puts into her mouth an outside observer's account of feminine wickedness and its motivation. Passages such as this which appear to give insight into a character's thoughts but actually give a very partial and biased view could only lead to flat, unconvincing characterisation.

The plays discussed so far have all been English translations of Latin originals. A study of the first neo-classical plays originally written in English shows how the discussion technique, and the concept of 'natural law' as a standard of assessing feminine behaviour were transferred to the British stage.

One such play is Jocasta, one of the Inns of Court tragedies, and one of the first Senecan-influenced plays of

whose performance we have proof. Gascoigne and Kinwelmershe adapted it from the Italian Giocasta of Lodovico Dolce, and it was acted at Gray's Inn in 1566.

Jocasta, "the wife, the mother and the concubine", has offended 'natural law' and is punished and destroyed by the conflicting emotional ties and duties her offence has created. Jocasta frequently mentions the extent to which her life has defied natural law: she claims that when Laius exposed their son, he was "forgetting lawes of natures loue", narrates her monstrous marriage and how it led to Oedipus' unnatural act of self-mutilation, and concludes that it is only fitting that the "vnnnaturall fruite" of their affection should be devoid of normal familial affection. Having described her past griefs to the servant "Because I know, that pitie will compell/Thy tender hart, more than my naturall childe", Jocasta describes her present predicament. Her sons Polynices and Eteocles have imprisoned Oedipus her son/husband and are fighting for control of the state. Jocasta is torn by conflicting loyalties, "seing my fleshe and bloude/Against it selfe to levie threatning armes", and is well aware that whatever the outcome, she will be hurt in some way:

For, of my sonnes, who euer doe preuaile,
The victorie will turne unto my grieffe. (17)

She has been pleading them to cease fighting:

... as a pitiful mother
Whom nature binds to loue hir louing sonnes
And to prouide the best for their auaile. (18)

Jocasta attempts to explain this to the rival siblings:

... knowe deare chylde, the harme of all missehap
That happes twixt you, must happe likewise to mee:
Ne can the cruel sworde so slightly touche

Your tender fleshe, but that the selfe same wounde
Shall deeply bruse this aged brest of mine. (19)

They refuse to listen, and Jocasta's idea of being injured by proxy, as flesh of her flesh kills itself, gradually develops into the idea of self-sacrifice to save her sons from one another. She urges them:

... before you touche eache others flesh
With doubled blowes come perce this brest of mine (20)

and when they do fight, Jocasta rushes to the scene, with the genuine intention:

I atwixt them both will throw my selfe
And this my brest shal beare the deadly blowes
What otherwise should light upon my sonnes! (21)

The Chorus comments that no grief outweighs that of a mother, and reiterates the theme of natural law:

Alas for ruth, that thus two brethren shoulde,
Enforce themselues to shed each others bloud.
Where are the laws of nature nowe become?
Can fleshe of fleshe, alas can bloud of bloud,
So far forget it selfe, as slay it selfe? (22)

Despite her resolution, Jocasta arrives too late to save her sons by her death, and inflicts it on herself even when it can no longer do any good. The description of Jocasta's death:

Falling betweene hir sonnes:
Then with hir feebled armes, she doth enfolde
Their bodies both as if for company (23)

is a stark reminder of the results of conflicting loyalties. When two loved ones fight, a woman who is related to both will suffer, whatever the outcome.

Perhaps this is why, in Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex (1561), another Inns of Court play, Videna attempts to simplify the conflict. Like Jocasta, Videna has two sons who are at war for the throne, but her position is less complicated from the outset. We learn in the first scene that her loyalties are entirely with Ferrex, her elder son. When Porrex kills him, she attempts to simplify her conflicting responsibilities even further. Reasoning that since Porrex' crime is both inhuman and sub-human, Videna announces her conclusion in unusually direct language:

Shall I still thinke that fro this wombe thou sprong?
That I thee bare? or take thee for my sonne?
No, traitour, no: I thee refuse for mine,
Murderer I thee renounce, thou art not mine.
Neuer, O wretch, this wombe conceiued thee,
Nor neuer bode I painfull throwes for thee.
Changeling to me thou art, and not my childe,
Nor to no wight, that sparke of pitie knew. (24)

Like Medea in the earlier play, Videna tries to convince herself that a relationship which hinders vengeance does not exist, but unlike her predecessor, she succeeds in denying her ties. By the end of the soliloquy, she sees herself only as the vengeful mother of a murdered son, not as a would-be infanticide as she asks the absent Porrex:

... canst thou hope to scape my iust reuenge?
Or that these handes will not be wrooke on thee?
Doest thou not know that Ferrex mother liues
That loued more dearly than her selfe?
And doth she liue, and is not venged on thee? (25)

Videna's twisted logic and moral vision which blinds her to the unnaturalness of her own revenge on the son she describes as a "monster of natures worke" is quickly revealed by Marcella's lament in the following scene, as is the futility of her attempt to cancel out her kinship with Porrex. Everyone else regards the crime as heinous, and Marcella's laments and description of Porrex's death show

several ways in which the Queen has violated nature. She repeatedly voices horror at the unnaturalness of the crime, reinforcing this with a detailed description of how, after Videna had stabbed him in his sleep, Porrex did the most normal, instinctive thing possible when waking suddenly in pain and terror:

The noble prince, pearst with the sodaine wound,
Out of his wretched slumber hastely start,
Whose strength now fayling straight he ouerthrew
When in the fall his eyes euen new vnclosed
Behelde the Queen, and cryed to her for helpe. (26)

Porrex is a fratricide, but he is still Videna's son and instinctively looks to her for benevolent help. Marcella's description of how all present wept at the irony of:

... hearing him oft call the wretched name
Of mother, and to crye to her for aide,
Whose direfull hand gaue him the mortall wound (27)

emphasises the sickening horror of the contrast between normal instinct and perverse reality.

Marcella goes on to imply that Videna must have gone against not only maternal but feminine instincts in killing Porrex, not for the usual reason that murder is unfeminine, but because his lovely appearance "would haue wrapt a sillie womans thought" and would have caused:

... that most cruell hand the wretched weapon
Euen to let fall, and kiste him in the face
With teares for ruthe to reauce such one by death. (28)

She has already expressed her outrage at this double perversion of nature in general terms:

Oh where is ruth? or where is pitie now?
Whether is gentle hart and mercy fled?
Are they exiled out of our stony brestes,
Neuer to make returne? is all the worlde
Drowned in bloud, and soncke in crueltie?

If not in women mercy may be found,
If not (alas) within the mothers brest,
To her owne childe, to her owne fleshe and bloud,
If ruthe be banished thence, if pitie there
May haue no place, if there no gentle hart
Do liue and dwell, where should we seeke it then? (29)

Marcella's later speeches answer this question, since they reveal that in her concern for these human values which she regards as particularly appropriate to women (and therefore all the more shocking in their absence), she is herself an agent of pity and love, values uncommon elsewhere in the political violence that dominates the play.

The theme of natural law and conflict recurs in John Pickeryng's homiletic tragedy A Newe Enterlude of Vice Conteyning the Historye of Horestes (1567). Horestes has to consider the types of loyalty which would prevent him avenging this father's murder upon his mother. As he ponders on his course of action, Horestes admits that:

... dame nature teles me that, I must with willing mind
Forgiue the faute and to pytie, some what to be inclined (30)

but quite logically wonders:

O paterne loue why douste thou so, of pytey me request,
Syth thou to me wast quight denyed, my mother being prest:
When tender yeres this corps of mine, did hould alas for
Whẽ frend my mother shuld haue bin thẽ was she chefe my
fo. (31)

Later, the debate is continued in a traditional morality manner, as "dame Nature" herself appears and argues with Horestes that despite their present enmity, Horestes should spare his mother because of their close kinship, asking:

Canst thou a lacke vnhappy wight, consent reuenged to be,
On her whose pappes before this time, hath giuen foud to
the

In whom I nature formyd the, as best I thought it good,
Oh now requight her for her pain, wdraw thy hãds frõ
bloud. (32)

Her argument for clemency recalls Medea's case against infanticide:

... shall I the frame unfold
Of that which louing natures honde
hath wrought in me her mould? (33)

Although Nature has claimed mercy in respect of this closest of all human bonds, Horestes clings to his right to kill his mother "as law of gods & mā doth wil". Nature continues to argue for her own law against the artificial demands of civil law, claiming that matricide cannot be right or normal since:

the cruel beasts y raug in feldes whose iause to blod ar
Do not consent their mothers paunch, in cruell wise to
The tyger fierse doth not desiare, the ruine of his kinde,
And shall dame nature now in the, such tyranny once finde.
As not the cruell bestes voutsafe, to do in aney case,
Leue now I say Horestes myne, & to my wordes giue place.
(34)

Horestes continues to argue for retributive justice and the necessity of punishing crime in the name of "the lawe of godes and lawe of man", until Nature finally deserts him, lamenting:

A lacke a lacke that once my chylde, shold now consent
His mothers death wherefore farewell, I can no longer
vnto:
stey. (35)

By his preoccupation with retributive justice in his idea that "bloud for bloud by fathers deth doth craue", Horestes has forfeited his status as a child of Nature. Like Videna in Gorboduc, she has decided that his perverse intentions prove that he can be no son of hers; in turning against his

real mother, he has forced Mother Nature to disown him. After this, it is obvious that Clytemnestra's pleas for mercy "Yf any sparke of mothers blood remayned within thy breste", or for him to "consider that in me thou hadest, thy hewmayne shape cōposid" will fall on deaf ears.

The discussion goes further, though, since Clytemnestra's brother Menelaus complains to the King Idumeus, and Horestes has to defend his action, claiming that he was ordered by the gods to seek revenge. The king agrees that Horestes was right to obey "the iudgement of god", and Nestor confirms that:

It was the parte of such a knyght, reuenged for to be
Should Horestes content him selfe, his father slayne to
No, no, a ryghtuous facte I thinke, the same to be in dede,
Syeth that it was accomplysht so, as godes before decrede.
se,
(36)

Menelaus agrees with the retributive principle, but with reservations:

In dede I must confesse that I, reuengyd should haue be,
If that my father had byn slayne, with such great cruelte.
But yet I would for natures sake, haue spared my mothers
lyfe. (37)

The final judgement is in favour of Horestes and the "law of gods & mā", and Idumeus salves any remaining ill-feeling between Horestes and his uncle by marrying him to his cousin Hermione. At the end of the play, Revenge is reduced to beggary because the joy and prosperity of Horestes' reign have made him unnecessary, not because the idea of revenge has been discredited in any way. However, the discussion in the play continued and confirmed the importance of the idea of 'natural law' to the mother/son relationship in tragedy.

Similarly, a later Inns of Court play, Thomas Hughes' Misfortunes of Arthur (1588) shows that the use of the discussion format, to illustrate a woman's conflicting impulses to duty and desire, was continuing. For this neo-Senecan tragedy based on the Morte D'Arthur, the story has been altered to facilitate classical interpretation. The downfall of Arthur is seen as retribution invoked by Gorlois' ghost for the adultery of Arthur's father with Gorlois' wife, and for Arthur's incest with his sister Anne, a union which resulted in the birth of Mordred. Also, Arthur's relation to Mordred and Gueneuora is based on the Agamemnon, in which Agamemnon returns home after a ten-year absence at the Trojan War, to find Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus ruling Greece. Arthur returns to Britain after nine years at the wars, to find that Gueneuora is consorting with Mordred, his bastard son.

Very little of the play can be said to be original, since it consists almost entirely of extracts from Latin tragedies. However, as Joel Altman argues, it deserves consideration because of its extensive use of debate and discussion. He finds the scenes in which Gueneuora contemplates entering a convent most worthy of note, claiming that:

Hughes makes a significant advance on his predecessors, for he utilizes the debate mechanism to express the progressive dianoia of character in a dramatic situation. It is as yet stilted speech, with clumsy translations, but in its shiftings from one issue to another it successfully mirrors a mind coming to grips with a complex problem. (38)

Gueneuora's problem is the familiar one of choosing between the claims of desire and duty. The language, of course, is not original, but it is interesting to look at the way in which Hughes uses his fragments to indicate a stream of thought. In Act I Scene ii, Gueneuora discusses her feelings with Fronia, the confidante or Nurse charac-

ter. At first she is angry and terrified at the thought of Arthur's return and plans to

... let bridle goe:
Frame out some trap beyonde all vulgar guile,
Beyonde Medea's wiles: attempt some fact,
That any wight unwildie of her selfe,
That any spowse vnfaithfull to her phere,
Durst euer attempt in most dispaire of weale (39)

But Gueneuora is surprised to find within herself an opposite tendency:

What's this? my mind recoyls, and yrkes these threats:
Anger delayes, my grief gynnes to asswage,
My furie faintes, and scared wedlockes faith
Presents it selfe. (40)

"Sacred wedlockes faith" is as deeply rooted in Gueneuora as the love for Mordred and "desire to ioy him still" which "workes so deepe". One can feel a certain amount of sympathy with her grievance and anger as she says of Arthur "seems it light to want him nine year space?/Then to be spoiled of one I hold more deare?" Gueneuora tries to dismiss her doubts and invokes "spitefull fiends" and "heapes of furies fell" to "preserue me to this venge", while Fronia attempts to explain that anger is inappropriate to women and

How better, tho, wert to repress your yre?
A Ladies best reuenge is to forgiue. (41)

Gueneuora persists in her intent until Fronia objects that vengeful murder is not just indecorous, but physically impossible for a women, that "Nature affords not to your sexe such strength." Gueneuora replies that her feelings transcend the limitations of physique, that "loue, anguish, wrath will soon afford enough". However, Fronia's arguments of the loss of reputation eventually subdue Gueneuora, who agrees to respect her "sage advise":

.
Seeke out some lingering death, whereby, thy corse
May neither touch the dead, nor ioy the quicke. (45)
Dye: but no common death: passe Natures boundes.

Gueneuora determines to enter the convent, since this is

... such a death, as standes with iust remorse:
Death, to the worlde, and to her slipperie ioyes:
A full deuorce from all this Courtly pompe.
Where dayly pennance done for each offence, (46)
May render due reuenge for euery wrong.

Her resolution is sufficiently firm to allow her to face Mordred and advise him to repent also.

Although 'natural law' gave a restricted framework for discussing the inner conflicts experienced by women, its influence as a theme in neo-classical drama was considerable. Jocasta, Videna, Gueneuora and Fronia all define their moral standards in the terms of this early code of behaviour, and of the idea of the choice between desire and duty. They are clearly created in the mould of their classical predecessors, embodying the early view of women as prone to evil and thus dangerous when aroused by passion. The way in which this view cohered with the idea of some of the more extreme Renaissance moralists meant that classical tragedy lent itself easily to homiletic purposes. The idea that meticulous education and upbringing were necessary to counteract the innate frailty and licentiousness of women, which underlies the Renaissance obsession with inculcating and testing feminine virtue, was, after all, not far from the ideas we have seen in classical tragedy. Classical plots could therefore easily be converted to illustrate current morality.

A good example of this process can be found in Jocasta by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe, especially since, as it is not a direct translation from Latin, but an

adaptation of Lodovico Dolce's Giocasta, it had been steeped in Renaissance influence far longer than most plays, with obvious effects on the characterisation of Antigone.

The Renaissance translators emphasise Antigone's virtue, concern for her reputation and sense of filial duty, making her an example of these virtues with homilies in the text and marginal comments. When Antigone first appears, she is greeted by the Bailo (Italian for tutor, a survival from Dolce's version), who enquires:

... what cause hath moe'd nowe
So chaste a maide to set hir daintie foote
Ouer the thresholde of hir secrete lodge? (47)

and having praised her excellent motives of concern for her brothers, advises her that it:

... besemeth not a maide
To show hir selfe in such vnseemly place,
Whereas among such young and lustie troupes
Of hairbrainde souldiers marching to and fro,
Both honest name and honour is empairde. (48)

Before he departs, the Bailo advises Antigone to go indoors again, and delivers a homily on the great importance to young women of never giving any grounds for suspicion, which I shall quote in full since it gives such a complete view of Renaissance ideas on the subject.

It standes not with the honor of your state
Thus to be seene suspiciously abrode:
For vulgar tongues are armed euermore
With slanderous brute to bleamishe the renoume
Of vertues dames, which though at first it spring
Of slender cause, yet doth it swell so fast,
As in short space it filleth euerie eare
With swift reporte of vnderdeserued blame:
You cannot be to courious of your name:
Fond shewe of euill (though still the minde be chast)
Decayes the credit oft, that Ladies had,
Sometimes the place presumes a wanton mynde:
Repayre sometymes of some, doth hurt their honor:

Sometimes the light and garish proude attire
Persuades a yelding bent of pleasing youthes.
The voyce that goeth of your vnspotted fame,
Is like a tender floure, that with the blast
Of euerie little winde doth fade away. (49)

Compare the passage with these ideas of Vives:

A woman shoulde be kept close, nor be known of many, for it is a token of no great chastity or good name, to be known of many... Nothing is more fragile than the fame and reputation of a woman, nothing in more danger of injury, because people require perfection of her and at the same time are suspicious and ready to slander her. Once uttered, a slander is practically everlasting. (50)

Lest its instructive nature should be overlooked, the passage from the play is glossed "A glasse for yong women."

As well as chastity, the equally important virtue of devotion to family duty is emphasised. Early in the play, the Bailo informs Antigone that "the tender care thou takste/Of thy deare brother, deserueth double praise" and later her determination to give Polinice a fitting burial even though it means sacrificing a highly advantageous marriage, is praised by the marginal gloss "she sheweth ye frutes of true kyndly love". The most important duty of a young woman, though, is devotion to her parents, of which this play provides several examples. The care of Manto for her blind father Tiresias wins the praise of Creon:

... rest thou therewithall
Thy virgins hands, that in sustayning him
Doest well acquite the duetie of a childe.
For crooked age and hory siluer heares
Still craueth helpe of lustie youthful yeares. (51)

This relationship foreshadows that of Antigone and Oedipus at the end of the play, when, against his advice to her to marry Haemon and "be merrie while thou maiest", she persists in determination to accompany him into exile as his

guide. The gloss applauds her action, as "The duty of a childe truly perfourmed".

The virtues of heroines in classical tragedy, then, can easily be used to point a contemporary moral, because of their resemblance to the qualities felt to be desirable in Renaissance women - quietness, chastity and filial obedience.

This transition is especially interesting in the case of one particular type of heroine, the sacrificial virgin. Although the concept of virgin sacrifice would have been a foreign one to Renaissance audiences, the underlying assumptions of the idea have more in common with the practices of Renaissance society than is at first apparent. In classical literature, the virgin sacrifice is propitiatory rather than expiatory. Unlike the Judaic and later Christian idea of sacrifice, which is made to expiate the guilt of an individual or society in failing to observe God's standards, it is made to avert the anger of a god or man.

The rationale behind propitiatory sacrifice is the idea, common in primitive societies, that it is possible to reduce a man's violent aspects by encouraging sexual and emotional tendencies, perhaps one deduced from observing the very dramatic way in which animals use sexual signs to neutralise aggression. Sending a virgin to an enemy might at least be expected to divert his attention from warfare for a while, and might even lead to a lasting attachment and the more positive gain of a pact of non-aggression or alliance between tribes. It is easy to imagine that the monsters of British legend, with their perennial demands for virgins to eat, were really rival tribesmen, whose

hunger for land and power could temporarily be appeased by the present of a young woman.(52)

A civilisation which endowed its gods with human nature, and particularly human lusts, would probably reason that since the offer of a virgin appeased human enemies, it was also likely to propitiate an angry god. Such a rationale explains the high incidence of virgin sacrifice in classical myth, in which all the gods are extremely anthropomorphic. It also explains the frequent association of the idea of marriage with virgin sacrifice, which can be seen as a type of strategic marriage made, with a god, for the good of one's society.

This association of marriage with sacrifice is present in the very first emergence of the theme in English drama, in Lady Jane Lumley's translation of Iphegenia (1558), a very literal version of the play. Iphegenia is persuaded to the altar by a rumour that she is to be married to Achilles, and although at first he is incensed that his name should be used for a plot, her goodness and bravery makes him wish to marry her in earnest, or at least to champion her cause. Also, after an initial period of reluctance, Iphegenia offers herself to be sacrificed, for the good of her country, despite the tears of her father. These themes recur in many later descriptions, of other virgins meeting their deaths.

The episode of Polyxene in Jasper Heywood's translation of the Troas (1559), makes the ideas underlying virgin sacrifice very clear. She is sacrificed to propitiate the ghost of Achilles, who demands her in marriage:

Unto my ashes Polyxene
spoused shal here be slaine.

(53)

She has no option but to accede to his wish, and her bravery in preparing for her death is praised at length:

Beholde loe, how her noble minde
of death doth gladly heare,
She decks her selfe: her regall weede,
in semely wise to weare,
And to her hed she setttes her hande,
the broyded heare to lay,
To wed she thought it death: to dye
she thinkes a wedding day.

(54)

The imagery combining death with marriage may also serve to emphasise the girl's perfect purity. Several of the plays say of a girl about to be sacrificed "to wed she thought it death", in order to indicate that she was so averse to the idea of the loss of her virginity that even the thought of marriage was unpleasant to her. The marriage imagery is sustained in succeeding scenes, in which there is a long description of the procession to the scene of the sacrifice "when fyrste proseedyd torches bryght/as guise of wedlock is". The beauty and modesty of the "bride" is praised as the narrator describes how:

... Polyxene
her bashefull looke downe cast
And more than erste her glytteryng eyes
and beauty shynede at last.

(55)

The spectators are moved to tears by her beauty and particularly by "her valiant mind", "So strong, so stout, so ready of heart/and well prepared to dye". Even the notoriously vicious Pyrrhus hesitates to kill this "manly mayde".

Later, John Studley again uses the imagery of marriage in his translation of the Agamemnon (1556), in describing the death of "the good Cassandra", whom he characterises as "a noble vyrgyn". Cassandra goes cheerfully to her death:

As though she had not thyther come
to leue her lothsome lyfe,
As though she had not come to taste
the stroke of fatall knyfe.
But euen as if in brydale bed
her iurney were to meet
Corebus dear, not hauyng mynd
of death, nor wyndyng sheete.

(56)

Once again, the onlookers are reduced to tears:

From vapourd eyes of yonge and old
the tryclyng tears do fall.
The Grekes them selues to greefe are moued
to see this heuy sight,

(57)

and again, the executioner hesitates:

So pytie pearest the headmans hart
that thryse aboute to smyte
He staide the smot.

(58)

These classical formulae for describing the deaths of good women are carried over into plays more British in character. In John Christopherson's Greek play Jepthah, we can see their application to Jepthah's daughter, whose predicament is very similar to that of Iphegenia. She too has been promised by her father as a sacrifice, for the good of her country, and asks, with unconscious irony, if she may take a part in the holy rite. Once aware of her fate, the girl agrees to die for her country, after a period of mourning, which unlike Iphegenia's grief, is private and controlled: she waits until her father has gone before she voices her regrets that she must die childless. Several modern concerns are introduced, largely those of filial duty and obedience: the girl's main regret is that Jepthah will be deprived of the support she could have afforded him in his old age.⁽⁵⁹⁾

The final description of the execution seems to have been very much influenced by the classical formulaic descriptions. Boas glosses the Greek account thus:

Even beside the sacrificial altar her constancy had not wavered; she had gloried in being offered up for Israel, and had bidden her father strike. Again and again and reluctant executioner had lifted the knife in vain... But at last, urged on by those around him, Jephthah had struck the fatal blow.

(60)

The messenger praises the maiden's bravery and obedience, then departs.

How would early Renaissance audiences have regarded the virgin sacrifice, which was culturally so alien to them? Its appeal during its brief appearance on the stage must have been due to its relevance to current ideas of female virtue, particularly obedience to paternal authority. The imagery identifying marriage with death could easily be transferred to the Renaissance stage, since it was well known, from the works of moral writers, that a virtuous girl should be like Polyxene and her contemporaries in being averse to the idea of marriage until she submitted to it at her parents' command. That such obedience extended to the unquestioning acceptance of death was hardly surprising. An original English example of this double obedience can be seen in the testing play Apus and Virginia, in which Virginia assures her parents that her reluctance to marry will be overcome only by their command, and later tells her father that she will willingly die rather than blemish the family's honour "if it be thy pleasure". The dutiful daughter's obedience is shown to go beyond the acceptance of an unwanted suitor, to the acceptance of an undeserved death.

The importance of the virgin sacrifice extends beyond the authority of the family unit, since the reinforcement of patriarchy which gave fathers such power was itself a

reflection of a growing authoritarianism in the state, as well as a product of religious change. The state itself was often described as a family, with the king "the politic father of his people", claiming his natural right to the obedience of his subjects. The sacrifice plot, in which the girl accepts death in obedience to the wishes of her father and the state, might well have been regarded as an important moral example. (61)

Despite its degree of current applicability, the theme of virgin sacrifice faded from drama relatively quickly. Several reasons can be suggested for this. Most obviously, the theme was appropriate only to plays with a classical setting and plot, and as plays whose contemporary setting allowed for discussion of more topical concerns became popular, there was simply no place for it. Furthermore, such episodes probably did not make good drama. By the nature of her role, the sacrificial virgin was emblematic rather than realistic and pathetic rather than tragic, partly because of the predictable outcome of her dilemma, and partly because of the deterministic ethos of classical drama. Renaissance dramatists were becoming more interested in the thoughts and actions of characters who could choose and create their own happiness or downfall. The figure of the duty-bound maiden whose chief virtue is stoic acceptance would not have interested them greatly.

However, the ideas about female virtue inherent in the convention continued in full force, the only change being that marriage completely replaced death as the means of demonstrating virtue. Political and property marriage were still important in Renaissance Europe, and drama accordingly reflects the importance of the offer of a young wife in propitiating an enemy, or, more often, healing a feud. Sympathetic characters such as Friar Lawrence in Romeo and Juliet often help to make a match, hoping to put an end to a quarrel between families, but such schemes do not always

meet with approval, even when planned with the best of intentions. More often, contemporary virgins appear as redemptive rather than propitiatory characters, like Margaret and Fair Em who, by their faithful endurance, are instrumental in recalling young rulers to their duty, and thereby restore well-being to the state. Young women could help their country by living their lives in an upright way, rather than by being willing to die.

Most significantly, though, the proof of female virtue previously shown in actual sacrifice is replaced by its demonstration by the perfect wife's self-sacrifice in marriage, in the testing plays. The most striking example of this quality is Philip's Patient Grissill, who not only undergoes great psychological suffering inflicted by her husband, but willingly offers to "let bloody stroak of thousand knyves/take Grissills life away" if this will improve his lot and the stability of his estate. This change of emphasis was probably partly due to the growing influence of the Protestant idea that Christian virtue, and womanly virtue in particular, was better demonstrated in holy matrimony rather than by celibacy or martyrdom, and such a view is practically sound, as well as being in line with current morality. Although the sacrificial maiden had to be pure, virtuous and courageous, she needed only to show these qualities for a brief period of concentrated effort. Her death would ensure that she would always be remembered just as she was, and that all her virtues would be preserved in memory for ever. The maiden who became a wife, however, would have to be ready to prove her goodness through continual testing for all of her married life, in the knowledge that one slip might blemish her reputation and ruin her chances of happiness. The virgin's trial and sacrifice might last a day, but the wife's testing and self-sacrifice would last a lifetime, and therefore presented a far more stringent test of womanly virtue, whose

dramatic potential was exploited in the many plays of testing.

Several themes of classical tragedy, then, were reinforced by their coherence with contemporary patriarchal ideas of feminine morality, particularly those concerned with seclusion, chastity and willingness to obey without question the wishes of parents or of the state.

How strongly female characterisation in later tragedy was influenced by neo-classicism is determined by how far the contemporary ideas of the play cohere with the ethos of the classical world. Thus we see a tendency for women in plays whose main interest is historical and political to be portrayed in a very similar way to those in classical tragedy, whereas in dramas concerned with romantic love, more exciting characterisation begins to emerge.

WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL TRAGEDY

The presentation of women in political and historical tragedy resembles that in classical tragedy because the values at stake are those that lead us back to an earlier stage of civilisation. History plays revolve around the threat of war and the wielding of power, both areas in which some contemporary writers like John Knox agreed with their classical forebears that women were not qualified to act. As Juliet Dusinberre points out, Knox made the same assumption as Aristotle before him:

Knox... equated physical and mental strength. Finding women deficient in one, he assumed their deficiency in the other. He quoted Tertullian to prove that 'he that judgeth it a monstre in nature that a woman shall exercise weapons, must judge it to be a monstre of monstres that a woman shalbe exalted above a hole realme and nation. (62)

Juliet Dusinberre shows how Shakespeare's portrayal of women in the political sphere exposes the shortcomings of such a view, by demonstrating the inhumanity of the political process without the values which are regarded by tough men as being effeminate. This more enlightened view, Dusinberre argues, leads to the conclusion that a woman ruler, rather than being a monster, is a positive sign that civilisation has advanced beyond 'the primitive struggle of brute strength'.

However, many dramatists lacked Shakespeare's particular insight into the nature of the sexes. Accordingly, many of the female characters in their historical tragedies remain within the double-bind familiar to us from classical tragedy, which identifies power and action with masculinity. Feminine virtues are passive ones which do not involve the exercise of political power, and women can become active in the world of war and politics only at the expense of their womanly virtue. Thus the only powerful, active women in political or historical tragedy are the

wicked ones: the good women maintain their virtue to no effect, unable to influence the events which overtake them.

One telling example of this tendency is the characterisation of Regan and Gonorill in the early anonymous King Leir (1590). The ease with which they break their obligation of love and obedience to their father presages their later rejection of obedient wifedom and attempt to seize the mastery, in the state as well as in their marriages. Regan's words illustrate the inversion of accepted moral values this entails:

O God that I had bin but made a man:
Or that my strength were equall with my will!
These foolish men are nothing but mere pity
And melt as butter doth against the Sunne.
Why should they have preeminence over us
Since we are creatures of more brave resolye?

(63)

Regan rejects the pity traditionally supposed to be appropriate to women, claiming instead a greater force of will than the men who are supposed to rule over her. However, lacking the physical strength to carry through the dictates of her will, Regan has to rely on working through men instead.

Similarly, the apparently masculine political manoeuvrings in The Troublesome Raigne of King John (1588) are seen as a power-struggle between two ambitious women using men to further their aims. The uninhibited slanging-match between Queen Elinor and Constance indicates that each recognises the other as her true opponent, irrespective of the men who seem to be prompting the action. Constance knows that her real enemy is Elinor, who has succeeded in setting up a man to act on her behalf, while Elinor accuses Constance of risking Arthur's life in order to further her own political ambitions:

Her pride wee know, and know her for a Dame
That will not sticke to bring him to his end
So she may bring her selfe to a realme.

(64)

However, the most extreme example of the woman who uses men to achieve her political ambitions is Catherine de Medici, the Queen Mother, who is seen as a prime mover in causing the Massacre of the Huguenots in Christopher Marlowe's Massacre at Paris (1593). She is the epitome of the feminine political intriguer Juliet Dusinberre describes, setting up men whom she can influence, and getting them to commit the violence her schemes require.

Catherine is motivated by lust for power, which as a woman she cannot acquire directly, and enthusiasm for religious orthodoxy. These twin obsessions blot out any feelings for her family: she resolves from the outset to destroy her daughter's marriage to Navarre "with blood and cruelty". Her feelings for her sons depend entirely on the success with which she can manipulate them. As soon as she senses that Charles is repenting for having ordered the Massacre, she plans to have him poisoned and to replace him with Henry, whom she feels she can control with ease:

As I do live, so surely shall he die
And Henry then shall wear the diadem.
And if he grudge or cross his mothers' will
I'll disinherit him and all the rest.
For I'll rule France, but they shall wear the crown,
And if they storm, I then may pull them down. (65)

The mother's power over her sons can be used to counteract the woman's disqualification from political power.

Viewing her sons only as pawns to be manipulated, Catherine's only genuine emotional tie is with John the Duke of Guise, the man through whom she acts. In contrast with the formal scene of Charles' death in which, as in Gorboduc, the mother comforts the son she has in all

probability poisoned, Catherine's grief after the Duke of Guise is murdered is all-consuming. She has lost not just her catspaw, but her only real ally and confidant:

To whom shall I bewray my secrets now
Or who will help to build religion? (66)

She accuses her son Henry, whom she suspects of ordering the murder, of being a changeling and a traitor:

... When thou wast borne
I would that I had murder'd thee, my son.
My son? Thou art a changeling, not my son.
I curse thee and exclaim thee miscreant,
Traitor to God, and to the realm of France. (67)

Once again, the echoes of Videna in Gorboduc are very strong, and so is the feeling of inversion of contemporary female virtues. Catherine cares for her sons only as long as they fulfil her political ends, and the affection which should be their due is channelled instead to the intriguing Duke of Guise.

Bad women in historical tragedy, then, use men in order to achieve their ends in a setting in which their sex deprives them of power. Good women tend to remain powerless, not only to act but to influence. The type of virtues thought appropriate to women - submissiveness, obedience, domesticity - have no place in political life, and even the more positive types of virtue are likely to be dismissed as irrelevant in a sphere in which, in the end, everything depends on military strength and on the disposition to use it ruthlessly and dispassionately.

"Ffaire Ann a Beame", the Queen in Richard II or Thomas of Woodstocke (1592), is the epitome of the virtuous woman in political drama. Her husband King Richard imposes an unfairly high level of taxation on the poor in order to finance lavish spectacles at court, a severe error of

judgement which only his independent-minded uncle Thomas of Woodstock dares to oppose. At first Ann has little to do with this issue, her only influence being in the area of feminine modesty, for which Woodstock assures her:

all the weomen that this Ile contaynes
shall sing in praise of this you memorye
& keepe records of vertious Ann a Beame
whose disseplyne hath taught them woman hood
what erst seemed well by custome, now lookes Rude
or weomen till yor comeing fairest cussen
did use like men to straddle when they ryde
but you haue taught them now to sitt a syde. (68)

Ann sits aside from more important matters. Far from joining forces with Woodstock to persuade Richard to abandon his unjust policy, Ann is restricted by her conventional virtue to trying to excuse her husband to Woodstock in terms which recall Dorothea's pleading for her husband in Greene's James the Fourth:

pittye King Richards youth most reuerent uncles
& in yor hye proceedings gently use hime
thinke of his tender yeares, whats now amiss
his riper Iudgement shall make good and perfitt. (69)

When Ann does become concerned about the country's social conditions and decides to remedy them, the action she takes reflects the essentially domestic nature of contemporary codes of female virtue. The wasteful spending of Richard and his flatterers has drained the country's poor, leaving 17,000 people destitute in the south of England alone. Out of concern for them and for Richard, since she fears reprisals, Ann explains:

my Iewels & my plaite are turned to coyne
& shard among them...
the wealth I shalbe the poores reuene
as sure as twere confirmd by parlament. (70)

Apart from selling her jewellery, Ann spends all her spare time sewing "shirts & bands & other lynning" for

distribution to the poor, even though she is aware of the inequality between her husband's taxation and her charity:

... would twere more
to satisfye my feares, or pay those Sumes
my wanton lord hath forst from needy subiects. (71)

Ann's benevolence exposes the futility of the current code of wifely virtue. Obviously, if Richard had any regard for her, Ann could achieve more of an improvement in social conditions with a few well-placed words than with years of sewing, but this is not the case. Richard has no idea of Ann's views, and regards her attempts to allay the effects of his disastrous policy as nothing more than an amusing feminine pastime. Persuading Ann to leave her work, he comments patronisingly to one of his men "tis straunge to take hir from hir Semsterye/she and hir maydes are all for huswifry". Ignoring her attempts to persuade him to revoke his dismissal of Thomas Woodstock, and her reminder "twill tyre yor revenues/to keepe this festivall", he whisks her off to yet another sumptuous banquet, financed by the taxation whose crippling effects she is attempting to remedy.

Ann's lack of influence holds up contemporary ideas of womanly duty to scrutiny, exposing the ineffectual nature of the virtue they recommended for women. Although obedience and industriousness were equally prized in the wife, the idea of a queen frantically sewing to compensate the country for her husband's taxation is a ludicrous one: the left hand labouring to replace what the right takes away. To be a potent influence for good, Ann would need the ability to advise her husband, which mediaeval writers and the educationalists of the More circle would have wished her to have, but which the current ideas restricting women's education to religious and domestic concerns would deny her. The good wife may be able to save her own reputation and

soul through domestic virtues, but a good queen cannot save her people, unless her husband respects her views.

Female characterisation in historical tragedies resembles the types inherited from classical tragedy because the view of women implicit in their world of political intrigue and military might is much the same as the classical view of women as physically and morally weaker, and an irrelevance in the masculine world of action.

Renaissance tragedy moves furthest away from the limited classical view of women when it deals with contemporary ideas which, unlike those of the field of war, cannot work in conjunction with the old idea that women are inferior beings, weaker in build and shallower in emotional scale than men, and therefore are pathetic rather than tragic .

One such influence is that of the Christian religion. Although the Church adapted the ideas of classical philosophers regarding women's inferior nature, it did, after due deliberation, endow women with individual souls which they could lose or gain. As we have seen in the testing plays, the Church ordained that women should earn their place in heaven by the same submissiveness and obedience which earned them their place in marriage and in society. But at the same time, plays like Susanna indicate the growing tragic potential of the choice a woman might have to make between society's requirements and the dictates of her conscience. If souls are equal before God, a woman as well as a man may need to make the choice between gaining the world and losing her soul. The ability to make moral choices and the risk of immense loss is essential if a character is to be shown as tragic rather than pathetic.

The other contemporary influence instrumental in breaking away from the earlier view of women in tragedy is that of

romantic love. Like the dictates of religious beliefs and conscience, the determination to express the self through romantic love could make women risk their places in society and life itself. Once again, this idea, when followed in the drama, makes us very strongly aware of female characters as individual people, demanding the rights of individuals in a society whose stability depends on the suppression of such desires.

Love tragedies, and their heroines, could not have existed in a neo-classical ethos, since love is the value which sets women apart from their kin and society, and only an early modern sensibility could regard a woman's love as a true and potentially noble emotion. Such a view would be impossible in the classical ethos which regarded a woman's love for a man as a mental aberration, the insane and unhealthy longing of the inferior being for the superior. The tragedy of women in love was a new phenomenon, and dramatists had to find new images of women in order to describe it.

Christopher Marlowe's Dido Queen of Carthage (1587) illustrates the way in which the new idea of romantic love led away from neo-classical tradition. Its classical plot and relatively early date, which means that it was performed only three years after the original Latin Dido was staged at Oxford, would lead us to expect characterisation on the neo-classical model, with Dido in the grip of an insane passion. Instead, Marlowe shows us that Dido loves, not as a pathetic inferior being, but in the same way that a man does. To reinforce the point he shows her as a lover, giving her the exquisite poetry of wooing which is spoken only by men in most of his other plays.

Dido loves like a man, but to Aeneas, love is effeminate, and the only a fitting occupation for a man is warfare. As in Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra, one of the play's

main themes is that of the contrast between the sensuous and poetic descriptions of Dido and her world, and the stark, masculine world of conquest and combat. As in Marlowe's other plays, the reader is allured by the poetry, while aware of the harsher appeal of duty, as Aeneas is. His adviser rallies him

Banish that ticing dame from forth your mouth,
And follow your fore-seeing stars inall:
This is no life for men-at-arms to live,
Where dalliance doth consume a soldier's strength,
And wanton motions of alluring eyes
Effeminate our minds, inur'd to war. (72)

However, Aeneas' language shows that he is aware of both points of view. When with his men, he says that the idea of leaving is impeded because

Dido casts her eyes, like anchors, out
To stay my fleet from loosing forth the bay. (73)

He describes her as a mere hindrance in bare nautical terms. But in soliloquy, while still envisaging her as clinging, he acknowledges the beauty of the restraint:

Her silver arms will coil me round about,
And tears of pearl cry "Stay, Aeneas, stay!"
Each word she says will then contain a crown,
And every speech be ended with a kiss:
I may not dure this female drudgery:
To sea, Aeneas! (74)

This interpretation of a classical plot, in which the old identification of courage with masculinity is balanced by giving the poetry to the non-martial female, and in which the woman in love who, in a typical Senecan tragedy, would have been depicted as temporarily insane, becomes the mouthpiece for Marlowe's sensuous poetry of wooing and of immortality, reflects how far Marlowe rejected

neo-classical conventions concerning women in favour of a more modern, imaginative approach.

As the essentially dramatic theme of romantic love became more popular in tragedy, the influence of neo-classical drama decreased rapidly. The newer tragedies were more likely to focus on a woman's choice between social approval and another over-riding value, usually love or religion, thus giving her moral autonomy, and thus the element of choice essential to a truly tragic character.

Three heroines of later tragedies offer a particularly telling illustration of the way in which female characterisation was developing: Chaste Matilda, Jane Shore and Gismond. Although they appear in plays whose moral bases are very different, they share certain characteristics: all three are ensnared in problems involving love, marriage and political power, and all set themselves at odds with their own society. Matilda, like the earlier testing plays heroines, is pursued by a lustful king, but in her case, the pursuit leads to a death which she accepts rather than compromise with a society which she sees as imbued with his corruption. Jane Shore fails the archetypal chastity test, and having been seduced by one king, is destroyed by another, but becomes a touchstone for moral values which discredits the society he has created. Gismond kills herself rather than go back and compromise with the king/father who denied her the right to the fulfillment of romantic love. All three have a moral authority which ensures that although they are at odds with their society, our sympathy remains with them. Love, religious faith and moral authority were not possible for female characters until they could be seen, as the Renaissance eventually began to see them, as complete human beings, capable of the entire range of human experience, religious, sexual and moral. It is only when women characters gain these dimensions that they start to emerge as heroines.

WOMEN IN LATER POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL TRAGEDY

1. Chaste Matilda

In many ways, Anthony Munday's Death of Robert of Huntingdon (1598) is simply a chastity testing play with a tragic ending. It is basically a homiletic play, in which the character of Matilda differs little from her chaste predecessors, but Munday's elaborations on the story give it a dimension of psychological credibility which is lacking in many of the earlier testing comedies.

As A.B. Dobson and J. Taylor explain in their book Rymes of Robin Hood, Anthony Munday was the first author to identify Robin Hood with the Earl of Huntingdon, and was thus largely responsible for our idea of him as a dispossessed nobleman. Similarly, Munday merged the character of Maid Marian, who originates in folklore as the peasant mistress of Friar Tuck, with that of the aristocratic heroine of Michael Drayton's poem Matilda, the Faire and Chaste Daughter of Lord R. Fitzwater (1598). The poem narrates a highly conventional chastity testing story of Matilda's attempts to escape the lust of bad King John, who pursues her when she leaves the court, besieges her father's home and banishes him to France, and eventually drives Matilda to an abbey where she seeks sanctuary, sending a poisoner to make her choose between submission and death. Matilda's choice of death rather than dishonour brings about John's repentance, and he vows to undertake a yearly penance at her tomb.

Many elements in the poem recall the chastity testing plays: the royal seducer, the image of the besieged castle, the death-or-dishonour choice, and the woman's virtue being instrumental to recalling the king to his duties. Munday, aware of the dramatic possibilities,

incorporated the tale into his Robin Hood story by presenting it as Marian/Matilda's life after Robin's murder.

Munday's most obvious innovation in re-working the chastity test theme is that, unlike any dramatist before him, he uses it as a means of indicating the moral worth of characters of both sexes. In the first of the two plays, The Downfall of Robert of Huntingdon, Matilda and Robert are betrothed, and are threatened by the jealousy of Prince John, who desires Matilda, and of Queen Eleanor, who pursues Robert. Both of them engineer Robert's downfall and exile in order to separate the couple, since they know that Robert cannot marry Matilda as long as he is an outlaw. When she follows him into exile, John tries to blackmail her father into bringing her back to the court with the idea that because the pair are beyond the reach of the law, Matilda must be living "a loath'd adult'rous beggers life".

In fact, however, Fitzwater has already visited his daughter in the forest and been assured by Robin that:

... she is cold maid Marian, honest friend
Because she liues a spotlesse maiden life
And shall, til Robin's outlawe life haue ende
That he may lawfully take her to wife. (75)

Matilda has left the socially sanctioned appearance of chastity, which would not be proof against John's lust, for greater safety. As soon as he and his outlaws arrive in the forest, Robert, assuming his new identity as Robin Hood, announces a list of rules all his band must consent to keep. These include a stipulation that:

... no yeoman following Robin Hoode
In Sherewod, shall use widowe, wife or maid
But by true labour, lustfull thoughts expell (76)

and an injunction to help maidens, widows and orphans in distress. The oath of chastity taken by the outlaws

symbolises one of the plays's main themes: that civilised values have moved to the forest with Robin and Matilda, while back at court, the law of the jungle prevails.

Munday makes this point particularly clearly by contrasting Robin's five years of chastity in Sherwood with the debauchery of his enemy and eventual murderer Doncaster, who as well as being a traitor and jail-breaker is a notorious rapist and sadist. Significantly, we learn that one of his most savage crimes, the rape and mutilation of a young nun, took place when he was passing through a wood.

Munday's decision to show chastity as emblematic of civilised values, and desirable in a tough hero, and to show sexual excess as throwing doubt on a man's general honesty in other areas is a very unusual one. It may, of course, have been dictated by the necessity of preserving his heroine's chastity during her years in the forest, but if this is the case, Munday succeeds in making a virtue of necessity. Away from the artificial mechanisms society uses for perpetuating a double standard of sexual morality, chastity must be a value observed by both sexes equally, or not at all.

The second play, The Death of Robert of Huntingdon, returns to the more familiar idea of chastity as a symbol of feminine virtue, since, despite the title, it concentrates completely on Matilda's fate after Robert's murder. Just as the Downfall play started with Robert and Matilda's betrothal, the second play begins with their wedding feast, during which Robin is poisoned by the treacherous Doncaster. The timing is very significant: it evokes pathos that after their five-year period of mutual chastity, Robert is killed on the very verge of their marriage, but it also closely associates Matilda's chastity with the more contemporary virtue of married fidelity. Her determination to die a virgin springs from her wish to die

like Robert, upholding the moral values they shared, as well as to abide by her own concept of honour and retain her reputation.

The events of the plot follow Drayton's poem closely, but Munday constantly elaborates upon the conventional narrative. It seems at first that King John, having promised the dying Robert to protect Matilda, and having married Isabella, will overcome his temptation and become a better monarch. On hearing Matilda is leaving the court, he reflects:

Well, let her goe: I must yfaith, I must,
And so I will: Kings thoughts should be divine
So are Matildaes, so henceforth shall be mine. (77)

Salisbury congratulates him, sounding the familiar 'self-mastery' theme:

Your people will wax proude of such a King,
That of himself is King, Lord of his thoughts:
Which by affection of Philosophers
Is held to be the greatest Empery. (78)

But like Kyd's Soliman, John lapses from his resolution and, in a scene originated by Munday, infiltrates a feast given by Matilda's father disguised as a masker, in the hope that this may induce Matilda to yield to him in secrecy.

Here, despite Matilda's necessarily static degree of virtue as a constant heroine, Munday gives us an unusually subjective insight into the way in which she is affected by John's relentless pursuit. He sets the scene by giving us a detailed knowledge of Matilda's mood and state of mind. We see her persuaded by her father to leave off her mourning and to join the festivities, since this is her duty as the daughter of the house. Suitors come to the feast, and although she has no intention of taking them

courtship in little battles of wit, and even overcoming her aversion to dancing. Clearly, she is learning to relax and enjoy herself for the first time since her bereavement. Fitzwater is delighted, explaining:

For till this hower...
Since the too timely death of Huntingdon,
Not a blithe word had passage through her lips. (79)

Then one of the masked dancers approaches to ask Matilda to dance, but some instinct makes her hesitate. Her father, however, reminds her of her social duties and insists that she accept:

This is no courtship daughter be not nice,
You both abuse him and disparage us...
... I pray you rise
Or by my faith, I say you doe vs wrong. (80)

Matilda complies and steps out with her masked partner, only to recognise him as the King. Steeling herself to keep up appearances, she continues dancing until he makes a barely-veiled allusion to rape, when she breaks away from him, only to have her behaviour misconstrued as false modesty by her father:

Y'are too forgetfull: dance or by my troth
You'l move my patience more than I wil speake. (81)

Fitzwater suspects that something is amiss only when John roughly drags Matilda back.

This scene seems to me to have a realism which goes far beyond the usual conventional approach to the chastity test theme. It has a remarkably evocative, nightmarish quality. John's use of social appearances, the cover of the mask and also the cover of an innocuous social custom to conceal his intentions conveys the insidious and unprincipled nature of his desire to get at Matilda in any way he can. At the

same time, it suggests how Matilda must feel as the object of pursuit, as a scene of absolute security - a party at her own home, with her father present - turns out to harbour the man she dreads, and her own father, because of his hospitable nature, unwittingly becomes John's pandar. The all-pervasive power of John's lust could hardly be portrayed more vividly.

For the central scenes of the play, Munday sticks closely to his source, and to the conventions of the testing genre, but he brings his imaginative subtlety to bear on the climactic scenes at Dunmow Abbey. Fitzwater has been exiled by John, but is secure in the knowledge that Matilda has become a nun. Immediately she enters the abbey, though, the atmosphere of the feast scene re-asserts itself. The piety and safety of the Abbey are only appearances, and thus are open to John's manipulation. He quickly identifies the weak link - the corrupt monk who is the Abbess's lover - and exploits it. The two strike a bargain in the crudely materialistic cant of the pimp and his client:

K. Short Shrift to make, good honest confessor
I love a faire Nunne, now in Dunmow Abbey.
The Abbess loves you, and you pleasure her.
Now if, betweene you two, this prettie Ladie
Could be persuaded to affect a King,
Your sute is granted: and on Dunmow Abbey
I will bestow a hundred marks a yeare.

Mon. A holy Nunne, a yong Nunne and a lady.
Deare ware my Lord; yet bid you well as may be. (82)
Strike hands, a bargaine, she shall be your owne.

Munday cleverly retains the tension until the last minute: the Monk's first line could well be a prelude to an outburst of rage at John's sacrilege, but turns out instead to be the pimp's enumeration of the saleable points of the woman in his power. The sinister shifting of appearances

goes on: we know now that the Abbey is no safer than a nunnery/brothel.

As well as bribing the Monk, John has despatched Brand the murderer to poison Matilda if she refuses him. Earlier in the play, Brand carried out John's instructions to starve Lady Bruse and her son to death. Although a rough churl further brutalised by his occupation, Brand did experience a passing twinge of sympathy for his victims, reflecting that "a miserable death is famishment", before rationalising his guilt: "But what care I: the King commanded me". This time, though, Brand's heart is in his task, since he has a certain fellow-feeling with John's motives. Waiting for Matilda, he reflects:

What would she have the whole world quite undone:
Weele meete her for that trick. What, not a king:
Hanging's too good for her: I am but a plaine knave,
And yet should any of these no forsooths,
These pray awayes, these trip and goes, these tits,
Deny mee: now by these:
A plague upon this bottle and this cup:
I cannot act mine oath: but too't againe.
By these ten ends of flesh and blood, I sweare:
First with this hand, wound thus about her haire,
And with this dagger lustilie lambackt:
I would yfaith, I, by my villany,
I would: but here, but here she comes. (83)

Munday conveys a great deal in this speech, whose tension he emphasises by interrupting it at its climax with Matilda's entrance. He explains why Brand sympathises with the King, and in doing so, throws light on John's motive for persecuting Matilda. Brand, who admits himself that he is only a plain knave, is nevertheless a man and feels superior to women, whom he regards as "trip and goes" and "tits", both of which are belittling terms of sexual appraisal. To him, women are trivial creatures whose only purpose is sexual, and who should be co-operative when men desire them. He cannot conceive of their having personal or religious scruples: women who are displeased by sexual

advances are "no forsooths", or "pray awayes"; perversely coy, or hypocrites. If one of the women he simultaneously desires and despises were to reject him, Brand feels that only murder would relieve his feelings. Why should he feel so murderous at the prospect of being turned down? Because, briefly, if Brand tried to make love to a woman, he would feel that she was his by right - because her function is to please men and he is one - and also that he was degrading himself by asking favours of an inferior being. A man who thinks like this is bound to see sexual rejection as an insult, and, if naturally prone to violence, may well resort to it to avenge what he construes as an attack on his masculine pride and privilege.

Brand sympathises with John as a rejected man, and with his plan for revenge on Matilda. He is particularly annoyed at her insolence in stepping out of the role of sexual availability Brand's view of the world allots her. "What would she have the whole world quite undone? ... What, not a king?" If women are going to start rejecting kings, what hope is there for a plain knave like Brand? The note of solidarity is unmistakable when he concludes "Weele meete her for that tricke."

Munday's use of this association of Brand with John is very subtle. John has ordered Matilda's murder with no more explanation of his motives than:

I will not be disdeigned; I vowe to see
Quick vengeance on this girle, for scorning me.

(84)

But although John is an evil character, he is still the King, and needs to be seen to retain his innate nobility. Elements which support this are the unshakable loyalty of some of this courtiers, and the moral drawn at the end of the play, that no matter how bad a king, he is still ruler by divine right, and revolt is inexcusable:

For though kings fault in many a foule offence
Subiects must sue, not mend with violence.

(85)

With the world still seen as a divinely-ordained hierarchy, a dramatist could not afford to be too telling in his insights into royal vices. Munday cleverly evades the problem of explaining John's base motivation by letting Brand sympathise with, and then explain it. Munday uses his unusual insight to show in detail the process by which John's thoughts move from pursuit to murder, and the assumptions implicit in such a change.

Munday's psychological elaboration on his plot continues in the next scene, when Brand's soliloquy is interrupted as Matilda is brought in by the corrupt Monk and Abbess. The Abbess asks Matilda many searching questions about her sexual conduct, ostensibly as part of her confession, and steers the conversation towards persuading her to sleep with John under cover of secrecy. The stage directions convey Matilda's panic at finding once again that the appearance of safety has been deceptive, and that nowhere is proof against John's pervasive power to corrupt. The Abbey, an apparent sanctuary, turns out to be another prison where she is trapped with two pandars and a hired killer. Matilda "first runs to the Monke, and then to the Abbesse", and draws out a crucifix to exorcise what she takes to be "two damned spirits, in religio wedes". Finding that the inversion of values she is experiencing is indeed reality, not the results of a diabolical hallucination, Matilda pours out her disgust, and her feelings of alienation from a society in which such things can happen:

O where shall chastitie haue true defence,
When Churchmen lay this siege to innocence
Where shall a maide haue certaine sanctuary,
When Ladie lust rules all the Nunnery:

Now fie upon yee both, false seeming Saints
Incarnate divels, divelish hypocrites.

. (86)
Now fie vpon this age, would I were deade.

Munday cleverly uses the shock techniques of revealing danger where it is least suspected to draw sympathy for Matilda's plight as John's victim, and also to underline the important theme of her alienation from her society.

Since John has complete control over the state, and can buy or coerce obedience as he pleases, Matilda's world can be changed around her. As Fitzwater says, as he is banished to France, John's control over their lives is absolute:

Thou seest our Soueraigne, Lord of both our liues,
A long besieger of thy chastitie,
Hath scattred all our forces, slaine our friendes
Racd our castles, left us nere a house
Wherein to hide us from his wrathfull eye. (87)

As the banquet and abbey scenes have shown, John's influence is everywhere, and many characters feel ill at ease in "so ill an age". Just as chastity and the civilised values it characterised were seen as safe only in Sherwood in the Downfall play, Matilda becomes the alienated custodian of these virtues in its sequel: "Where vertue, chastitie and innocence remain, there is Matilda."

As well as conveying, through several scenes of striking realism, what it feels like to be in Matilda's position, Munday demonstrates the moral authority she holds, despite her social alienation, by showing its effect upon other characters. When Matilda is taken captive by John's forces, Queen Isabella's first reaction is to abuse her and attempts to mutilate her beauty. When, through a change in the tide of battle, their position are reversed, Matilda refuses to incriminate Isabella and instead procures her release, the Queen is convinced of her unwilling rival's

innocence and nobility, and subsequently pleads Matilda's case to John. Similarly, Matilda's resistance sparks off similar moral courage in John's men, such as Hubert de Bough, who captures her on King's orders. Knowing that in the past de Bough defied John's order that Prince Arthur should be blinded, Matilda asks for his assistance in escaping to become a nun. Hubert finds:

Thy teares and loue of vertue haue the power
To make me, at an instant, true and false
True to distressed beautie and rare chastitie:
False to King John, (88)

and arranges a safe-conduct for her to Dunmow.

The most extreme demonstration of the strength of Matilda's moral influence is its effect on Brand the murderer. When he comes to kill her, Matilda welcomes him calmly, guessing him to be the agent of her death:

I thought thee to be grim and fierce at first.
But now thou hast a swete aspect, milde lookes.
Art thou not come to kill me from the King:
... thou art welcom, euen the welcom'st man
That euer came unto a woefull maid. (89)

Matilda speaks to Brand cordially, giving him her last valuables, and accepts death with a combination of non-chalance and piety which astounds him. She urges him "come, come, dispatch" when he falters, and enquires by what means she is to die. On hearing that she is to be poisoned, she is thankful that this means that she will die like Robert, and drinks off the cup with an ironic toast: "now to King Johns health/A full carouse." Brand calls her "a manly maid" and wonders "Zounds she cares not, she makes death a ieast". But Matilda's is also an exemplary religious death, as she forgives John and assures Brand:

I doe forgiue thee to, but doe aduise
Thou leaue this bloodie course, and seeke to saue
Thy soule immortall, closed in thy brest. (90)

The stage directions make it clear that as Matilda dies, Brand "stands staring and quaking". When Oxford arrives with the Queen and asks who he is, Brand's reply, "a bloodie villaine, and a murderer/A hundred haue I slaine with mine owne hands", shows that his encounter with Matilda has brought home to him the sense of personal guilt about his occupation which he denied for so long. Despite Matilda's appeals for someone to restrain him, Brand, determined to "hurry to damnations mouth/Forst by the gnawing worme of conscience", rushes out to hang himself.

Matilda's death has a similar effect upon John, achieving his eventual repentance and thus saving Britain from civil war. In line with the conventions established in the testing comedies, Matilda's chastity succeeds in recalling the King to his duties and thus in saving the state, although it costs her her life.

Munday's plot source requires that Matilda should be primarily an exemplar of chastity, which makes it necessary that her virtue should be established early on and remain unshakable throughout the play. However, Munday succeeds in making us sympathise with her plight as pursued victim by several scenes of remarkable subtlety and insight. He uses a similar technique, in Brand's speech, to trace and condemn the motives behind John's obsessive and cruel pursuit. Munday also develops the greater dramatic potential of chastity-testing tragedy, as against that of a testing comedy, by stressing the way in which Matilda's values force her into isolation in a society perverted by John's influence, but win respect and support from other characters, despite the personal dangers they incur as a result. It is very significant that although the poison is supplied by John, the decision to take it is Matilda's.

The point of the play would be lost if he simply succeeded in destroying her. Matilda chooses to die rather than compromise with the society John has created, whose lawlessness and moral inversion have left no place for her. Her acceptance of death, and powerful moral authority, mean that Matilda moves towards being a tragic heroine, as well as the moral exemplar required by the play's conventional and melodramatic plot.

2. Jane Shore

Munday, then, developed the tragic potential of the chastity test theme through the idea of the heroine who dies for her values rather than being rewarded for them with social approval and a happy ending. Thomas Heywood, in Edward IV Parts 1 and 2 (1599) approached the idea of a tragedy of testing in a different way. In his characterisation of Jane Shore, he explored what might happen to women who failed the chastity test and fell into the dangerous role of the royal mistress.

Heywood's play was the third in 20 years to feature Jane Shore. A study of the two earlier plays gives us some insight into the way in which dramatist's attitudes to the unchaste wife were changing during this period.

The earliest of the plays in which Jane Shore appears is the Latin play Richardus Tertius (1577/80) by Thomas Legge, which was performed at St. John's College, Cambridge. As Henry Adams explains, Jane makes only one appearance when:

Clad in a white sheet and carrying a candle in token of her repentance, she plods her doleful way across the stage as part of the ceremony of public penance. (91)

Such an episode, by its very brevity, does not raise the issue of the moral interpretation of Jane's plight which is so essential to the latter plays. Subsequently, playwrights tended to use her story as an illustration of a tragic fall from prosperity, combined with a warning about the consequences of failing a test of chastity. The subtitle of the second of the surviving Jane Shore plays, The True Tragedy of Richard the Third (1591), which promises "a lamentable end of Shores wife, an example for all wicked women", is a clear statement of moral intent of this kind, and the play does contain much obvious moral instruction on these lines. After Edward's death and her fall into beggary, Jane laments:

Ah unfortunate Shores wife, dishonour to the King, a shame to thy countrey, and the only blot of defame to all thy kindred. Ay why was I made faire that a King should favour me? (92)

Having sounded the familiar theme of the danger beauty presents to its owner's chastity and marriage, Jane laments her friends' and husband's lack of moral rigour:

my friends should haue preferred discipline before affection: for they knew of my folly, yea my owne husband knew of my breach of disloyaltie and yet suffered me. (993)

As well as providing an example for wicked women, Jane is shown as the conventional figure of tragedy as the mediaeval and early Renaissance writers understood it: the person about to lose her precarious position at the top of Fortune's Wheel. As she waits for news of Edward's death, Jane reflects that Fortune "as she haue aduanced me/So may she throw me downe." However, many of her soliloquies show a more sensitive insight into the predicament of the royal

mistress, which is at odds with the simple didactic purpose outlined in the play's sub-title. Jane's lament:

... when the tree decaies
Whose fruitfull branch haue flourished many a yeare
Then farewell these ioyfull dayes and offspring of my
heart (94)

reflects a knowledge of how completely her prosperity is dependent upon the life and political power of a single man. The news of his death enables her not only to foresee her fall, but its nature and people's reaction to it:

Now will my foes tryumph at this my fall
... now shall Shores wife be a mirroure and looking glasse
To all her enemies. (95)

Jane is well aware that she will be made an example, not only by righteous people, but by her opponents. She knows that as a former royal mistress, she will be a natural victim, since all those who previously envied her beauty, prosperity and influence will now be able to express their hatred under the guise of moral indignation. Although Richard claims a moral reason for his persecution of Jane, we know from the outset that his real motives are envy and hatred. Immediately after Edward's death, Jane explains her despair at the news that Richard had been declared Lord Protector "he could neuer abide me to the death... he alwaies hated me whom his brother loued so well." The em-poverished courtesan is the natural whipping-post of a materialistic society with moral pretensions.

The apparent didacticism of the play's presentation of Jane Shore is further undermined by the scenes in which former beneficiaries of her generosity refuse to help her, mocking her instead. In terms of conventional morality, and the requirements of the mediaeval idea of tragedy, these episodes need only illustrate the fickleness of fortune and futility of good works in comparison with a sinful soul.

However, although Jane is presented as sinful and repentant, regarding her suffering as deserved and self-induced, those who tell her she has brought her troubles on herself and regard her degradation as just punishment are shown as inhumane rather than upright.

The only character of any moral standing who comments on Jane's plight is the servant of Morton who, although he describes Jane as "a foole, and euer thy owne enemy", shares his savings with her until he is detected by the Page, one of Richard's henchmen. The Page jeers at Jane's miserable state: "thy wicked and naughtie life hath undone thee, if thou wantest maintenance, why dost not fall to thy old trade again?" Jane indignant retort, "if thy faults were so written in thy forehead as mine is, it would be as wrong with thee", reveals the cruelty and ethical confusion of his taunt.

Even more respectable citizens, who in the past had benefited from Jane's aid, show themselves equally lacking in humanity. The Citizen who condemns Jane as "the dishonor to the King... the shame to her husband, the discredite to the Citie" feels no shame or dishonour in his ingratitude to her for saving his son's life because "for my part, I would he had bene hanged seuen yeares ago, it had saued me a great deale of money then". But the dramatist's strongest irony is reserved for Lodwicke, a nobleman whose estates Jane had saved from confiscation. Having refused to give her charity for fear of Richard's edict, he decides:

I will shun her company and get me to my chamber, and there set downe in heroicall verse, the shamefull end of a Kings Concubin, which is no doubt as wonderfull as the desolation of a kingdome.

(96)

Lodwicke, whose cowardice prevents him from taking practical action to relieve the suffering of his former

benefactress, finds it less threatening to retire to safety and turn her story into a work of didactic literature: "an example for all wicked women", perhaps? It seems that the playwright may be mocking his audience for their expectations, but whether or not we accept this possibility, it is certain that we are being shown that Jane's detractors are less than humane in their attitude, and that she is more gracious than those who condemn her.

By the time Heywood came to tackle the Jane Shore story, then, dramatists were already starting to question its conventional didactic interpretation as a warning for adulterous women. Heywood was to take its development still further.

Heywood's full title,

The First and Second Partes of King Edward the Fourth containing... his love to faire Mistrisse Shoore, her great promotion, fall and miserie, and lastly the lamentable death of both her and her husband

(97)

shows that, unlike the earlier plays, this version makes the Jane Shore story as important as the history plot. Thomas Heywood's approach to the story makes the later type of chastity testing play, in which a marriage is threatened and destroyed by a powerful seducer, into a dramatic tragedy within the setting of a history play. Most of the play's moral ethos comes from this view of a virtuous marriage entangled and destroyed by political involvement, and is articulated by Jane's husband, Matthew Shore. However, Heywood's most interesting departure from convention is to make Jane a sympathetic character, whose integrity gives her a degree of moral authority, even though she stands outside the play's morality and that of the real world. Heywood goes further still, in making Jane

and her plight the ultimate test of the personal integrity of the play's other characters.

Unlike earlier authors, who tended not to portray Jane's estranged husband, Heywood signals that this is essentially a tragedy of a ruined marriage rather than that of a fallen woman by making Matthew Shore a leading character from the outset. Matthew is at the centre of the play's moral system, invoking the value of marriage and constantly reminding the audience of the pathos of his destroyed partnership with Jane.

Matthew Shore's personal tragedy springs from the conflict between his strict Christian morality and the fate which overtakes Jane. Although he loves her as a husband and as a Christian and would like to forgive her, he cannot condone her adultery or accept any personal gain from her position as the King's mistress. His behaviour after her seduction is dictated by these scruples. Matthew accepts Jane's desertion stoically and leaves the country as quickly as possible, to avoid any suspicion that he may stand to profit from his wife's preferment, and also to avoid the shame of being identified as the King's mistress's husband. He rejects Jane's last-minute attempts at a reconciliation before he embarks, even when she begs to come back to him as a servant, for both moral and practical reasons: to live together would be too much like condoning adultery, and besides, now she has given herself to one as powerful as Edward, her return might have dangerous repercussions for both of them.

On returning to Britain, Matthew avoids Jane as far as possible until her fall. As soon as he is no longer under suspicion of standing to gain by it, Matthew begins to visit her in disguise in order to help her. He finally

reveals his identity and forgives Jane "as at God's hand I hope to be forgiven" when she is dying.

Matthew, then, behaves scrupulously according to his beliefs, but this is of little comfort to him. His marriage to Jane is his prime value: when he explains to her why he fought so hard to defend London against Falconbridge's rebels, he places her defence before that of the King and the City. After losing Jane, Matthew recalls his pride in her reputation:

When she with me was wont to walk the streets
The people then, as she did pass along
Would say, "There goes fair, modest, mistress Shore".
When she attended like a city dame
Was praised of matrons. So that citizens
When they would speak of ought unto their wives,
Fetch'd their example still from mistress Shore. (98)

His pride turned to shame, he wonders:

Where shall I hide my head, or stop mine ears,
But like an owl I shall be wondered at? (99)

He longs to escape recognition, leaving the country, using an assumed name and seeking honourable ways to die, short of suicide. Matthew's main emotions remain world-weariness, a wish for death and disinterested Christian concern for Jane, until he is overwhelmed with pity upon hearing what her fate is to be:

But poor Jane Shore; in that I lov'd thee once
And was thy husband, I must pity thee.
The sparks of old affection, long ago
Rak'd up in ashes of displeasure, kindle
And in this furnace of adversity
The world shall see a husband's loyalty. (100)

Thereafter Matthew risks execution by providing Jane with food and, with great courage, pursues a vendetta against Rufford, one of Jane's worst tormentors, exposing

him as a counterfeiter and traitor, and confirming a detection Jane had made during her days in favour. Heywood presents him as the epitome of the good husband, morally scrupulous but loving, whose marriage is so central to his life that its loss leads to a wish to obliterate his own identity. In doing so, Heywood took the unusual step of showing holy matrimony as a man's value as well as a woman's.

Although the value of marriage is clearly central to the play, Heywood endows Jane with sympathy and moral authority even though she deviates from it. He builds our understanding for her in a number of ways, one of which is showing in detail the events leading up to her seduction, thus establishing her pleasant personality and love for her husband. To this end, Heywood makes good use of the Falconbridge episode.

The Pretender Falconbridge engineers an uprising and leads a band of rebels to sack London, urging them on with lavish descriptions of the goods they will be able to loot during the state of anarchy they will impose. Seeing Matthew Shore among the group of citizens who meet him at the city gates, Falconbridge's memory is jogged:

What! not that Shore that hath the dainty wife?
Shore's wife, the flower of London for her beauty? (101)

Crude as any of his band of thugs, Falconbridge roughly demands Jane as his share of the spoils of war:

Shore, listen: thy wife is mine, that's flat.
This night, in thine own house, she sleeps with me. (102)

Fired with indignation, Matthew fights with exceptional bravery to repulse the rebels. He tells Jane later that it was:

chiefly... to keep thee from the evil
Of him that to my face did vow thy spoil. (103)

Jane's reaction is one of concern for the risks Matthew has taken, surprised gratitude at how highly he values her, and a conventional assurance that he need not have worried:

Were I by thousand storms of fortune tost
And should endure the poorest wretched life,
Yet Jane will be thy honest loyal wife.
The greatest prince the sun did ever see,
Shall never make me prove untrue to thee. (104)

But the sincerity which underlies this formulaic statement is proved by Jane's reaction when Matthew is called back to the siege. She begs him not to go, ignoring his assurances that she is well provided for, and would be able to re-marry, crying bitterly:

I'll never marry, nor I will not live
If thou be killed. Let me go with thee, Mat. (105)

In this episode, Heywood has already established Jane's love for Matthew, her sincere wish to be faithful to him, and the threat that her beauty and its reputation presents to their marriage, by causing powerful men to covet her. He uses it to make one further important point. Building on the historic fact that the King knighted some of the bravest citizens for their part in defeating Falconbridge, Heywood shows Matthew refusing a knighthood as being too far beyond his deserts. Jane wholeheartedly applauds his decision:

... though some hold it as a maxim
That women's minds by nature do aspire,
Yet how, both God and Master Shore, I thank
For my continuance in this humble state. (106)

In a single episode, then, Heywood forestalls any suspicion that Jane was a born social climber, establishes her love

for Matthew and the potential danger of her reputation for beauty.

The scene in which Jane first meets the King is constructed in an equally clever way. Heywood makes the Lord Mayor, Jane's uncle, a widower feeling keenly the lack of a wife's support in preparing for a royal entertainment. With Matthew's consent, he borrows Jane for the occasion, greeting her "Needs you must be our Lady Mayoress now/And help us, or we are shamed for ever." As well as providing a plausible situation in which a citizen's wife might meet a king, the scene performs several other functions. On the one hand, it conveys Jane's kind nature and willingness to help out, and on the other, like Falconbridge's lust for Jane, Matthew's decision to 'lend' his wife to another man prefigures her seduction by the King. Indeed, the ideas of 'borrowing' and seduction seem to chime together in Edward's mind: trying to dismiss his involuntary comparison of Jane's beauty with that of his wife, he channels his interest in her into the socially-sanctioned device of proposing a toast, and his tension into a joke with Matthew "And, master Shore, how like you this/The Lord Mayor makes your wife his Lady Mayoress." Edward's earlier aside means we cannot miss the import of this: another man has appropriated Shore's wife; so, later on, will he.

The process of Edward's seduction of Jane is followed in equal detail, so that we see at first hand the pressure brought to bear upon her. Edward is shown haunting the Shores' goldsmith's shop in disguise, and sending pleading letters, much to Jane's weariness and distress. In despair, she asks Mrs. Blague, her neighbour for advice, but Blague gives only an apparently balanced appraisal of the morality of both the options open to Jane, which is actually stacked in favour of gaining power and wealth. Jane

declares "Oh that I knew which were the best of twain/Which for I do not, I am sick with pain!"

At this crucial moment of weakness and indecision, the King returns, to talk not in terms of choice, but of coercion:

Thou must, sweet Jane, repair unto the Court
His tongue entreats, controls the greatest peer:
His heart plights love, a royal sceptre holds;
And in his heart, he hath confirm'd thy good,
Which may not, must not, shall not be withstood. (107)

Heywood has already indicated Jane's fear of the King's authority in her reaction to his revelation of his identity, showing her apologising for her earlier "boldness" in rebuffing his advances. Thus it comes as no surprise that she bows to his authority: "If you enforce me, I have nought to say/But wish I had not liv'd to see this day." When Edward leaves, Jane clarifies the spirit in which she has submitted: "Well, I will in; and ere the time begin,/Learn how to be repentant for my sin."

Heywood deviates from earlier adaptations in showing Jane as conscious of her sin from the outset, but coerced into it by absolute power. His detailed treatment of the process of seduction demonstrates that Jane's appeal to Matthew "I did endure the long'st and greatest siege/That ever batter'd on poor chastity" is founded on fact.

Heywood continues to portray Jane after her seduction as a sympathetic and humane character, showing the works of charity she performs as the King's mistress, which in earlier versions of the story are only reported. Jane is seen visiting prisons, interceding for those who are wrongfully detained, receiving petitions and promising help, or giving news of aid already secured, of lives saved and lands restored. These scenes also establish that her kindness is not unthinking benevolence, but is founded on

integrity and intelligence. As well as interceding for her petitioners, Jane thinks about their practical needs, offering board and lodgings with her servants for those who have come long distances. Furthermore, she is not taken in by requests which might be against the interests of the state, like Rufford's petition for an export licence for corn and lead, which she is quick to detect as an attempt to supply enemy armies with food and arms for private profit.

Jane is shown as an intelligent women who uses her influence responsibly, but also understands the morality of her situation. Pressed by Ayre to accept money for saving his son's life, Jane objects:

What, think ye that I buy and sell for bribes
His highness' favour, or his subjects' blood?
No, without gifts, God grant I may do good!
For all my good cannot redeem my ill;
Yet to do good I will endeavour still. (108)

Later, when Brackenbury praises her kindness in visiting prisons, Jane demurs:

Peace, good Sir Robert, 'tis not worthy of praise,
Nor yet worth thanks, that is of duty done.
For you know well - the world doth know too well -
That all the coals of my poor charity
Cannot consume the scandal of my name. (109)

These statements are crucial to Heywood's presentation of Jane's character. Earlier dramatisations of the story imply that Jane's charitable works were simply a self-interested attempt to redeem herself, as an alternative to married chastity. Heywood is careful to demonstrate that Jane knows and accepts that good works cannot win her forgiveness from society or from God, and that she believes in the ethical system which condemns her. Her humanitarian work is an expression of her own nature, not an attempt at atonement, and it is this personal value that gives Jane a

moral authority independent of the ethical system she feels is right to condemn her. Her kindness and courage go beyond the play's central moral ethos and make her a real heroine, not just an example.

This treatment of an unchaste wife is revolutionary in itself, but in the play's final scenes, Heywood goes even further. He makes Jane a touchstone for the morality of other characters by forcing them to choose between opportunism and responsibility; accountability to the corrupt temporal authority of the state, represented by Gloster, or to the ultimate authority of God. As the agent of spiritual choice, Jane is even presented as a Christ-analogue.

The theme of choice between temporal and spiritual values is firmly established in the episodes preceding the climactic scenes of Jane's desolation and death. First Mrs. Blague, the neighbour with whom Jane takes refuge after fleeing the Count after Edward's death, reneges on her promised friendship and turns Jane out as soon as Gloster's proclamation is made. Perhaps because of some lingering awareness that she owes her entire livelihood to Jane (who restored her estates after they were squandered by her profligate husband), Blague scrabbles for some moral reason for turning out her benefactress. Jane must be a traitor, as Gloster says so, and, as an adultress, deserves all she gets:

You have been a wicked liver,
And now you see what it is to be unchaste:
You should have kept you with your honest husband:
'Twas never other but that such filthiness
Would have a foul and detestable end.

(110)

When Jane objects "time was that you did tell me otherwise", Blague falls back on one of the most familiar reasons given by tempters in the testing plays; that it was

"more, indeed, to try your disposition,/Than any way to encourage you to sin".

Blague's useful position of moral outrage masks her blatant opportunism. Having claimed Jane's remaining gold and jewels to cover her rent, Blague reflects:

So now, her jewels and her gold is mine
And I am made at least four thousand pound
Wealthier by this match than I was before:
And what can be objected for the same?
That once I lov'd her: well, perhaps I did;
But now I am of another humour;
And women all are governed by the moon,
Which is, you know, a planet that will change. (111)

Blague is not entirely inhuman: she does have feelings, but feelings which are adaptable to circumstances. Just as she earlier used morality as an excuse for her cruelty to Jane, she has all the answers when it comes to justifying herself to herself. She is even willing to accept the degrading image of women developed by male satirists because it helps her evade personal moral responsibility by making her faithlessness a sexual rather than personal characteristic.

The theme of personal moral responsibility and its evasion continues into the next scene, in which Dr Shore, the murderer of the two princes in the tower, tries to convince himself that Gloster forced him to do it. Eventually he has to admit:

No, thou wast not enforc'd;
But gain and hope of high promotion
Hir'd thee thereto, (112)

and starves himself to death as penance, hoping to save his soul.

By the time we come to scenes of Jane Shore's penance and beggary, then, we have a heightened awareness of the question of personal conscience versus material gain and, by implication, of accountability to divine or temporal authority. Jane is a perfect touchstone for these values. She deserves help on the level of personal fidelity, since many people are indebted to her, and also on the more general level of Christian charity. As a destitute woman in need of aid, and, in the eyes of contemporary moralists, a repentant prostitute, she is a natural candidate for disinterested charity given 'for Christ's sake'. To aid her, however, is to break the law of the state and risk execution as a traitor: to refuse her is both inhumane and unchristian.

Ayre, one of Jane's sympathisers, outlines the issues at stake in his reprimand to Rufford, who bears a grudge against her and claims he has a right to torment her in her misery because:

She is a curtizan
And one abhorred of the world for lust.
... The world hath judg'd and found her guilty,
And 'tis the King's command she be held odious. (113)

Ayre replies "The King of Heaven commandeth otherwise."

The final scenes of Jane's life are concerned with the role she plays in the sounding-out of personal ethics. Even the setting, outside the Aldgate, which divides the city from "the naked, cold, forsaken field" is full of significance. In mediaeval times, the last street within a city's gates was often called 'World's End'. Inside the Aldgate is London, materialism, commerce, politics - 'the world'; outside is a desolate area, a non-world. In it, those who visit Jane choose, by their response to her, compromise with Gloster's corrupt values and return to 'the world' at the price of their integrity, or espousal of other-worldly

values which will result in death to 'the world'. Jane acts as a tester not only of her own humanitarian values, but of those of the Christian religion, to which she hopes to be reconciled by her repentance and death.

The test she presents to the other characters is very stringent. Sir Robert Brackenbury, whose cousin's life Jane had saved, escapes detection when bringing her food and a prayer book, but Jocky, her former servant, is whipped for slipping provisions to her. Ayre, whose life she had saved some years before, decides that he would "rather choose to die for charity/Than live condemned of ingratitude." He insists on describing his action in helping Jane not as heroic, but as an observation of strict reciprocity. Ayre even talks about it in financial terms to diminish its impact, comforting Jane:

... I ow'd thee a life
When it was forfeith unto death by law,
Thou begg'd'st it of the King and gav'st it me.
This house of flesh, wherein this soul doth dwell,
Is thine, and thou art landlady of it,
And this poor life a tenant but at pleasure.
It never came to pay the rent till now
But hath run in arrearage all this while,
And now for very shame comes to discharge it. (114)

Ayre's description of his action as a duty as prosaic as paying the rent throws into relief the distorted morality of Gloster's regime, which repays honouring ordinary human obligations with death ("Your good devotion brings you to the gallows").

The most rigorous moral examination though, is that undergone by Matthew Shore, who is arrested and sentenced with Ayre for helping Jane. Angry at being called a traitor, Matthew reveals his long-rejected identity as Jane's husband, and claims his special rights to help his wife. Gloster admits "we confess that thou hast privilege/And art excepted in our proclamation", but sets a trap for Matthew.

He had noticed that he is "well staid and temperate", and sets a condition he knows will repel him:

... thou may'st lawfully relieve thy wife,
Upon condition thou forgive her fault,
Take her again, and use her as before;
Hazard new horns.

(115)

Gloster's action demonstrates the horror of absolute power vested in someone so perverse. Not content with destroying life, he wants to destroy dignity and integrity as well. He can do this by reducing relationships to their crudest elements since he can, in effect, ban whole ranges of emotion, such as humanitarian concern, by law. Matthew is faced with a terrible choice between his religious ethics regarding sexual conduct and the charity it requires. The choice it entails is particularly harsh since Matthew's memories of the happy domestic life he once shared with Jane are returning, along with his affection for her. Unusually for such an ethically precise play, Matthew is left in an impasse which is resolved by the suddenness of his death and Jane's rather than by a moral choice. However, his last words to Gloster, that charity, not sexual desire, prompts his affection for Jane, imply that Matthew will refuse to let Gloster destroy either his religious beliefs or his humanitarianism, and will continue to help Jane on a charitable basis, thus incurring the death penalty.

It is unusual enough for an adulteress to become a touchstone for the ethics of other characters in this way; but Heywood goes even further. As well as showing Jane as Christ's representative, in the sense of Matthew 25.46 ("Inasmuch as ye have done unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"), he identifies her directly with Christ in many subtle ways, to which a sixteenth-century audience familiar with the Bible would have been sensitive. Jane meekly undergoes a penance which

involves a painful passage through the crowded streets of a city and, to complete her ordeal, is abandoned to die outside the city wall. She laments her physical and psychological isolation in these terms:

All things that breathe, in their extremity
Have some recourse of succour. Thou hast none.
The child, offended, flies unto his mother.
The soldier, struck, retires unto his Captain.
The fish, distressed, slides into the river.
Birds of the air do fly unto their dams
And underneath their wings are quickly shrouded.
Nay, beat the spaniel and his master mourns him.
But I have neither where to shroud myself
Nor any one to make my moan unto. (116)

The resonances are obvious:

Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the
Son of man hath not where to lay his head. (117)

Also like Christ, Jane forgives and prays for her tormentors. This identification starts at the stage in the play when Jane repents and is converted to Christianity, which probably accounts for its inclusion in the play, but this does not diminish its remarkable nature. To treat a fallen woman, not only as an exemplar of humanitarian values but as a Christ-analogue was a brave innovation.

Heywood also uses Jane's predicament to introduce some unusually sensitive ideas about women and their status in society, and in particular their position in a violent and male-dominated political world. The main exposition of this theme takes place in the stylised but ideologically crucial Act II Scene 2, in which Jane, already the King's mistress, is dragged by the Marquis of Dorset to his mother, the Queen. Heywood skilfully builds up our expectations about the nature of their meeting by showing us Dorset's abuse of Jane, her fears that she is to be mutilated by the jealous Queen, and by reminding us of historical precedent: the Queen refers to Fair Rosamund, Henry

II's mistress, and the revenge his Queen took upon her. All these elements lead us to expect the conventional scenario of the righteously enraged queen bent upon revenge on the mistress, and at first it appears that the scene will develop in this way. The Queen ironically greets Jane as "Your Majesty! My Lady Shore" and invites her to sit with her on the throne, since "I am sure, you are our sister-queen at least". The sadistic Marquis Dorset encourages her:

Spurn the whore, mother! tear those enticing eyes,
That robbed you of King Edward's dearest love. . . . (118)
Maybe those locks, the baits to his desires.

However, we are alerted earlier by a brief aside from the Queen that this is to be no conventional scene of jealousy and revenge. Although the Queen continues with her speeches of reproach, apparently of righteous indignation establishing her right to punish Jane, she frequently alludes to the similarities between Jane and herself. Apparently to establish her right to be angry, Elizabeth asks Jane to imagine how she would feel if their positions were reversed:

Why, as I am, think that thou wert a queen;
And I as thou should wrong thy princely bed,
And win the King thy husband, as thou mine:
Would it not sting thy soul? Or it that I,
Being a queen, while thou didst wrong thy husband,
Should but have done as thou hast done to me,
Would it not grieve thee? Yes, I warrant thee.
.
You are flesh and blood as we, and we as you (119)
And all alike in our affections.

Jane does not catch this aspect of the Queen's words. In a way it is psychologically credible that her expectations should blind her to it. Hearing only the vengeful import of what Elizabeth says, Jane admits that she has every right to be enraged and invites her:

Inflict on me what may revenge your wrong:
Was never lamb abode more patiently
Than I will do. Call all your griefs to mind
And do ev'n what you will, or how likes you,
I will not stir - I will not shriek or cry. (120)

At this point, Dorset offers to torture Jane, but his mother makes him leave the two women together. The Queen then makes as if to stab Jane, but throws down her knife, falls on her knees beside her and embraces her, exclaiming:

Jane, I forgive thee! What fort is so strong,
But, with besieging, he will batter it?
Weep not, sweet Jane! alas, I know thy sex,
Touch'd with the self-same weakness that thou art:
And if my state had been as mean as thine,
And such a beauty to allure his eye
(Though I may promise much to mine own strength)
What might have hapt to me I cannot tell. (121)

It would be easy to dismiss this apparently sudden change of heart as mere melodramatic effect, if the idea that the two women have much in common were not well-supported elsewhere in the play. Jane is a tradesman's wife, whom Edward desired for her beauty, and coerced into submission. Elizabeth, although a noblewoman, is also below Edward's status (as the Duchess of York complains in Act I Scene 1), but is sufficiently aristocratic for him to marry her.

Like Jane, Elizabeth appealed to Edward because of her beauty: even Hob the Tanner knows that the king "married a poor widow, because she's fair". Of course, a marriage based only on this very limited sort of love is unstable from the beginning, simply because every man is bound, at some time, to encounter a woman who is more beautiful than his own wife. Edward's soliloquy on attempting to cope with this experience shows how limited his appreciation of Elizabeth is, and the mockery made of fidelity by such an attitude:

What change is this? proud, saucy, roving Eye,
What, whisper'st in my brain that she is fair?

I know it, I see it: fairer than my Queen?
Wilt thou maintain it? What, thou traitor Heart,
Wouldst thou shake hands in this conspiracy?
Down, rebel, down; back, base, treacherous conceit;
I will not credit thee. My Bess is fair,
And Shore's wife but a blouze, compar'd to her. (122)

Seeing a woman more attractive than his wife, and attempting to be faithful to Elizabeth, Edward cannot balance his feelings by bringing to mind that she is wise, or amusing, or pleasant to live with, or even dear because familiar. Beauty is his only criterion for evaluating women, and accordingly he can only make a makeshift attempt at fidelity by trying to deny the evidence of his eyes, by attempting to convince himself that Jane is unattractive. Needless to say, this attempt at self-deception does not last long.

Edward's beauty-obsession necessarily denies Elizabeth many of the rights and advantages of being a wife rather than a concubine. As Juliet Dusinberre says, Humanists such as More and Erasmus felt that "men who coveted women for their beauty made them whores by denying them equality of mind", and Elizabeth's plight reflects this idea. Valued only for her beauty, her sole influence over Edward is in her ability to be pleasing and attractive to him. Like a mistress, she has no power when out of favour, and must ask Jane, the current favourite, to put in a good word for her. Furthermore, Elizabeth has no political power independent of Edward's: when he dies, she is "turn'd out" just as Jane is, and she is powerless to prevent her sons from being murdered. Obviously, this marriage is far from the Puritan ideal of equality and unity: in terms of their actual position, Elizabeth and Jane are equals. The only reason that one is a Queen, the other a quean, is that one is married.

As well as shattering the conventional polarity of queen and quean, Heywood shows us something even rarer in Renais-

sance political drama: instead of blaming one another for their problems and being rivals for the King's affection, the two women recognise how much they have in common, share their knowledge about Edward and his weaknesses, and decide to become allies. Of course, since neither has any real power of her own, they can accomplish very little, but they are able to support one another through the fluctuations of Edward's fancy, and after his death we hear that they are together "sadly bemoaning such a mighty loss". Elizabeth's early ironic remark was, in fact, true: she and Jane are sister-queens, or more accurately, sister-queans in their dependency on Edward's favour and lack of power. The only realistic response is to recognise their sisterhood.

Heywood's treatment of Jane Shore, then, builds on the sympathy for her we have seen developing in earlier versions of her story in a number of innovative ways. While making the Christian ethic of marital faithfulness central to his play, Heywood takes the unusual step of making her a heroine in her own right, because of the way in which she adheres to her own humanitarian values despite her conviction that she is barred from social or spiritual redemption. His decision to use her as a Christ-analogue, because of the test she presents to other characters' values is a bold and unusual step. At the same time, Heywood uses Jane's story to convey some very radical and perceptive ideas about women's position in society and in the political world.

3. Gismond of Salerne

As we have seen earlier, the advent of the theme of romantic love in drama resulted in a new approach to female characterisation. It necessitated a move away from the limited types inherited from classical tragedy - whose ethos could not admit romantic love as a noble emotion for

women - and towards the creation of female characters who possessed the moral authority and the ability to make choices which might set them at odds with their society necessary to make them tragic heroines. This was in marked contrast with women in earlier, didactic drama, whose function was simply to act as exemplars of the professed morality of the play as a whole.

Gismond of Salerne (1567) is the earliest surviving English love tragedy. Despite its many flaws and inconsistencies, it is a fascinating record of an early attempt to tell the story of a heroine whose determination to gain self-expression through romantic love places her at odds with her father, the state and the demands of current morality, in the form of a stage tragedy. In some ways, the play's very lack of sophistication adds to its interest, since it makes it easier to identify the host of conflicting themes and ideas which its authors were attempting to synthesise and to trace their origins in contemporary art and ideology.

The play's origins are unusual, as it was composed by a committee for a special occasion. It was written by a group of graduate lawyers, Rod. Stafford, Henry Noel, G.A.L., Charles Hatton and Robert Wilmot, for performance at the visit to the Inns of Court of Elizabeth I, by whom, the records state, "it was then as princely accepted, as of the whole honourable audience notably applauded".

One of the group, Robert Wilmot, was to edit the resulting play for printing, as Tancred and Gismund, 24 years later in 1591. The changes made in this later version enable us to see how attitudes to the play's subject matter had changed during the intervening period.

For their plot, the group of dramatists chose the story of Ghismonda from the fourth day of Boccaccio's Decameron

(c.1350), on which the company discussed tragedies of love. In the story, Ghismonda, the daughter of Prince Tancredi of Salerno, is widowed and returns home to her elderly father, who is delighted to have her back again. As she recovers from her grief, she begins to miss the companionship and sexual fulfilment she had experienced in marriage, but knows that her father will not let her marry again. She sets out to select a lover worthy of her, and chooses Guiscardo, her father's valet, because of his noble character. She devises a means for them to meet in secrecy, but when Tancredi learns of their illicit love, he is enraged and has Guiscardo imprisoned. He then confronts Ghismonda with his knowledge, tells her he will put Guiscardo to death, and asks what plea she can make for her own life. Ghismonda bravely justifies her actions. Sexual love is natural, and, as her father, Tancredi should not have expected her to be immune from it. She has exercised great care in the choice of her lover and has done all she can to protect her reputation and her father's honour. Finally, she tells him not to worry about what to do with her, since she has no intention of living without Guiscardo. Infuriated by her unrepentant attitude, Tancredi has Guiscardo strangled, his heart cut out, placed in a golden chalice and sent to Ghismonda as if it were a gift from him. Ghismonda impassively sends her thanks for the precious gift, but once alone, weeps over the heart till the chalice is full, then adds poison and drinks it. Tancredi arrives full of remorse, but too late: all he can do is promise to obey his daughter's last request; that since she and Guiscardo were not allowed to lie together in secret, they should be buried together for all the world to see.(123)

Adapting this story into a Senecan drama would have presented a number of problems, the most obvious being that a Senecan love tragedy is a contradiction in terms, since the classical ethos regarded women as inferior beings, and their love as a form of destructive madness. Boccaccio, on

the other hand, was a great admirer of women, and advocate of free love. His sympathy clearly lies with his heroines who have the courage to win the love they seek, whether within marriage or illicitly, and Ghismonda is no exception.

This clash of ideologies would not have been so apparent if the co-authors had simply used the Senecan five-act form and written all of the material themselves. However, they chose to adopt many of the idiom's conventions, such as a Chorus' comments on the action and classical machinery in the form of Cupid and Megaera the Fury, as well as dramatic techniques such as soliloquy and report to convey the information narrated by Boccaccio, the discussion of topics important to the plot, and the provision of a confidante, to whom Gismond can describe her emotions. Furthermore, they "borrowed" parts of choruses, proverbs and speeches from classical tragedies, most notably from Dolce's Italian adaptation of Dido (the source of Gismond's widowhood lament) and from the Phaedra (the source of Claudia's description of her mistress's distraction). This extensive use of established conventions, and of existing material, meant that the clash remained explicit.

The dramatists' selection of the story of Ghismonda set up another source of conflict within the play; between the story's ethos and contemporary social morality. Mediaeval readers would have understood Ghismonda's actions in outwitting her father and monarch and taking a lover, in the context of the necessity of illicit affairs because of the prevalence of arranged marriage, and of the frequently cruel and authoritative behaviour of some powerful mediaeval fathers. By the Renaissance, though, the growth of Protestant ideas of holy matrimony and the importance of the family unit in the state had brought about a reinforcement of patriarchy. Renaissance audiences would have been brought up to believe in the sanctity of marriage, the

importance of female chastity, and the moral authority held by fathers, who were now supposed to be deeply involved in their children's upbringing and spiritual welfare. The chain of duty arising from these obligations was seen as extending upwards to the head of state, who was increasingly seen as the father of his people. This change in attitudes means that Gismond's rebellion against her father/king in the play is far more diametrically opposed to contemporary values than is Ghismonda's in Boccaccio's story.

This conflict must have faced the playwrights with a difficult choice: should they go against current ideas and produce a play sympathetic to the new concept of romantic love, or endorse current morality by condemning the lovers? In 1567, there was still a strong tendency for plays to include some moral comment; it is important to remember that some later Morality plays were still appearing at this time. It also seems to have been common for authors to take romantic stories from continental sources and to add some moral import in order to produce plays for home consumption: the 1527 adaptation of the romantic novella La Celestina into the moral interlude Calisto and Melebea is a clear example of this process.

It appears that the committee of authors, faced with this problem, decided simply to juxtapose the contradictory elements and to let the ideas speak for themselves. Thus the live action sequences, in which the characters argue their cases, are placed beside scenes in which contemporary moral views are advanced. In the tradition inherited from early Senecan tragedies, opposing views would be explored through discussion, and the audience would be able to draw its own conclusions. This seems a particularly likely expedient for a group of young lawyers, used to the discipline of

presenting opposing arguments for a jury to consider, to choose.

The way in which the play was written is in itself a further source of conflict and inconsistencies. The group divided up the plot, and agreed to write one act each. As well as variations in their styles of writing and the level of advocacy skills they were able to bring to their characters, the five co-authors are likely to have had differing personal views of the nature of the characters, and of the moral which emerged from the story. Some may have been inclined to regard it as Boccaccio did, as the tale of a brave and noble heroine; others as a cautionary tale condemning illicit love. Our only source of information on this point is the author of Act V, Robert Wilmot, who later claimed of the authors:

herein they all agree, commending virtue, detesting vice,
and lively deciphering their overthrow that suppress not
their vnruely affections. (124)

However, this is not the view which emerges from a reading of the 1567 manuscript version of the play, since there are many instances in which the juxtaposition of action and moral comment seems to be questioning the current code of social morality by subtle implication. Gismond emerges from these scenes as a heroine, showing great courage in defying her father, the state and current social beliefs in her conviction that she deserves the fulfilment of love. The degree of moral authority she seems to acquire is such that Tancred's motives are called into doubt, with the result that a fundamental questioning of the basis of patriarchy arises. If absolute power is vested in one individual, the king or father, what happens if he is flawed in some way?

The importance of Gismond's character in such a reading is emphasised by the changes by Robert Wilmot when he produced

a new edition of the play, which he described as a work for moral instruction. Almost all the changes he made in order to bring the play into line with orthodox morality affect the character of Gismond. I shall examine these changes and their effect in detail later.

In the original 1567 version of Gismond of Salerne, the moral ethos of the play, voiced by the Chorus, Cupid and Megaera the Fury, is the contemporary code of the Renaissance. Although one might expect conflict to arise between current moral ideas, which presuppose free will, and the ethos of classical tragedy, in which mortals cannot escape their pre-ordained fate, the problem does not occur. In fact, the Senecan idiom and contemporary morality cohere remarkably well, mainly because of their agreement about the destructive nature of passionate love, and the necessity of resisting it. Cupid and Megaera, like the Chorus, are simply used as personified mouthpieces for current social morality.

Such a view is borne out by a study of their speeches. The play opens with the appearance of Cupid, who announces his intention to:

... enflame the faire Gismond soe
in creeping through all her veines within
that she thereby shall raise much ruthe and woe (125)

in order to demonstrate his mastery over human nature. This might suggest an entirely classical view of Cupid as a god with human characteristics, rather than a personification of an abstract quality, unless we notice Cupid's motive for re-asserting his authority:

... the world, not seing in these dayes
such present proues of myne almighty power,
disdaines my name, and seketh sondry wayes
to conquer and deface me euerie houre (126)

This complaint links Cupid with Renaissance morality. People are learning "to conquer and resist" their physical desires, and to prevent what was thought to be the tendency of unbridled passion, its domination of human personality, which would have catastrophic results. Cupid can be seen as a personification of sexual desire in this first scene, in which he introduces one of the most important themes of the play; the suppression of passion by reason and duty. Later, in Act III, Cupid announces his triumph in making Gismond "forgett/Her turtles truthe, and burne wth raging lust".

In the following Act, Megaera the Fury condemns Gismond's failure to subordinate passion to reason, and announces her impending downfall.

Furies must aide, when men will cease to know
their Goddes; and Hell shall send reueging paine
to these, whome Shame frō sinne can not restraine. (127)

Although Megaera is a classical figure, the terms in which she speaks - of sin, shame and hell as the source of punishment - indicate that she is operating in a Christian setting. As Margeson points out, she is identified with the concept of nemesis, which could be used in much the same way as the more Christian idea of divine retribution for sin. The morality she professes is almost identical to that of the Chorus.

Throughout the play, the Chorus voices contemporary moral views on the need to restrain passionate love, as a counterpart to the action. The Act II Chorus censures Gismond's fickleness in falling in love again after her husband's death, and her conduct is compared unfavourably with that of women of classical legend, who went to considerable lengths to uphold the ideal of wifely chastity and fidelity. The Choruses of Acts III and IV go on to suggest "sundry wayes to conquer and resist" desire. The Act III

Chorus gives many examples of industrious people who have avoided love and its disastrous consequences and concludes that "Love assaultes not but the idle hart". The idea that industry helps to avoid love was a common one at this time. It was proverbial that the idleness of aristocratic life encouraged promiscuity, and parents were accordingly advised by moral writers to keep their daughters well occupied with housework and sewing.

The Act IV Chorus is equally concerned with contemporary ideas of love and chastity. It cites examples of unhappy love affairs and concludes that "the end of wicked love is blood", offering as an alternative "Good love", or the chaste or Platonic love, whose ideology was spreading through Britain after the publication in 1561 of Hoby's translation of Castiglione's Courtier. According to the Chorus, the Platonic lover avoids all the emotional turmoil of the unchaste lover:

he feleth not the panges, ne raging thronges
of blind Cupide: he liues not in despair,
as doen his seruates all, ne spends his dayes
twixt ioy and care, betwixt vain hope and fere

.

No ielous drede,
not so suspect of ought to let the sute,
wch causeth oft the louers hart to blede,
doeth frete his mind, or burneth in his brest.
He wailleth not by day, ne wakes by night,
when euery other liuing thing doeth rest:
nor findes his life or death in her one sight
... ne writes his woefull laies,
to moue to pitie, or to pluck adowne
her stony minde

(128)

What does the Platonic lover do, then? Hoby instructs:

let him obey, please and honour with all reverence his woman... let him have a care not to suffer her to run into an error, but with lessons and good exhortations seeke alwaies to frame her to modestie, to temperance, to true honestie, and so to worke that there may never take place in her other than pure thoughts, and farre wide from all filthinesse of vices. And thus in sowing of vertue in

that garden of that minde, he shall also gather the
fruites of most beautiful conditions, and savour them with
a marvellous good relise. (129)

The Chorus also says in very similar terms that "he that
doeth in vertue his lady serue,/ne willes but what vnto her
honour longes", and "sekes allway what may his soueraigne
please/in honor!" The lover is instructed:

Desire not of thy soueraigne the thing
whereof shame may ensure by any meane:
nor wish not ought that may dishonor bring (130)

and told that "He who so serues reapes the frute of his
swete service ay". Few people would have any moral objec-
tions to this kind of love, since, in theory, it did not
threaten the all-important value of female chastity which
formed the basis of public morality.

As I have shown, the Senecan idiom and contemporary
morality combine remarkably well to form a unified moral
framework, whose dictates are very similar to those of
Gismond's father, and those prescribed to women by moral
writers of the Renaissance. However, at several points,
the moral framework is in direct conflict with the live
action of the play. This clash arises because although the
moral framework advances the current ideas of reason, duty
and chastity, condemning "wicked love", the lovers them-
selves are still presented as Boccaccio envisaged them,
noble, brave and faithful. This means that the audience
witnesses noble behaviour, then hears it condemned
immediately afterwards. More specifically, there is a
particular concentration on the opposition between Gismond
and her personal feelings and the public morality,
represented by Tancred and the Chorus, which condemns her
failure to abide by its tenets. Perhaps the audience,
hearing repeated condemnation of an admirable heroine,
would have been disturbed by the discrepancy between action

and morality, even to the extent of feeling the morality to be inadequate.

There are several reasons for my view that some of these inconsistencies may be significant and deliberate. Firstly, the early scenes in which the "widowhood debate" takes place are original to the play. They reflect credit on Gismond in several ways, demonstrating her love for her late husband, and her desire to remarry with no other motive but foresight and prudence. Furthermore, the Chorus in Act II which condemns Gismond's behaviour is disturbing in several ways, with twisted logic and strange sentiments. The character of Tancred is also treated in a way which undermines his authority and raises doubts about the wisdom of a moral system which gives absolute power to fathers and heads of state whose justice and impartiality cannot be guaranteed. This, too, is original to the play. Since much of the effect of the shifting perspectives produced by the use of conflicting material depends on its place in the sequence of events, the only way to appreciate it fully is to analyse it scene by scene.

After Cupid's statement of intent, the "live action" begins with the scenes written by Rod. Stafford. These are original to the play and deal predominantly with the debate over the duty and status of widows, a very controversial subject in the Renaissance. As for wives and maidens, chastity was the determining factor of the correct behaviour. It was generally agreed by moral writers that a widow should lament "since not to weep at all is a sign of a hard heart and unchaste mind", but her grief should not pass the bounds of reason, but remain appropriate to the reasoned, dutiful love a wife should bear her husband. Ideally:

women who had sacrificed their virginity, but not their chastity, upon the altar of marriage at the death of their husbands should, if truly chaste and continent, seize the

opportunity to return as far as possible to their state
before marriage. (131)

The truly good widow was advised to be dead to the world, "showing that she had buried all pleasure and delight with her husband", and should live in remembrance of him, continuing to do everything as he would have wished.

Although remarriage was somewhat morally suspect because it suggested impurity, it was recommended by the more humanistic moralists as a means of avoiding fornication, much as St. Paul recommended marriage as an alternative to celibacy. Young childless widows, who were still attractive and lusty, were felt to be particularly at risk and were often advised to remarry. This, then, was the confused outlook on widowhood which fuels the debate in the opening scenes.

Gismond's laments for her dead husband convey much about her character and the nature of her marriage. Her lament "my minde, alas, it wanteth now the stay/wheron was wont to lean my recklesse thought", reveals that she has lost a valued companion whom she loved passionately rather than dutifully ("In him was all my pleasure and delight/to him gave I the fruites of my first loue".) She even contemplates finding:

... some way to vnburdened of my life
and with my ghost approche thee in some wise
to do therein the dutie of a wife. (132)

Since suicide was a mortal sin, it is evident that Gismond's idea of wifely duty is governed by her own feelings. Her words also suggest that her grief for her husband is prompted by love more intense than was thought necessary or desirable in a wife. This is particularly apparent when Gismond's attitude to mourning as an expression of emotion is contrasted with Tancred's view of it

as a duty. He urges his daughter to renounce her grief "which may not ought availe", since she has already done enough to merit the reputation of a dutiful widow:

The world doeth know ther lacked not of yor part
ought that belonged vnto a faithfull wife. (133)

A stichomythia passage contrasts their attitudes very strongly:

Gismond: Oh sir, these teres loue chalengeth as due.

Tancred: But reason sayeth they do no whitt auaille.

Gismond: Yet can I not my passions so subdue.

Tancred: Your fond affections ought not to prevaile.
(134)

Tancred leaves his daughter with advice to "let reason work in yow", and in obedience to his wishes, Gismond modifies her planned suicide to the more acceptable "death to the world":

I will bothe serue his sprite that was my fere
with plaint and teres, and eke your will obey. (135)

However, although Tancred's advice is apparently good, his motives are already being questioned, since one of the reasons he gives Gismond for moderating her grief is:

... though your husband death hath reft away:
yet life a louing father doeth sustaine,
who (during life) to you a doble stay
as father and as husband will remaine
with dobled loue, to ease yor grefe for want
of him whoes loue is cause of yor complaint. (136)

This seems to raise the implication that Tancred may have dubious motives for offering this good advice; perhaps his daughter's excessive grief displeases him because he envies the man who inspired such love in her. What, then, will

happen to the moral scheme when its figurehead, the head of state and of the family, is flawed?

An irrelevant Chorus, composed of many extracts from different Senecan plays, follows this scene, suggesting that some time has passed before the next act opens. Act II, written by G.AL, is also original to the play. Once more, the question of widowhood is discussed, with particular attention to the idea of second marriage. Gismond confides in her aunt Lucrece, a character original to the play, her increasing unease with her present way of life, and her wish to marry again:

... when I layed in my secret bed
amidde the silence of the quiet night
wth curious thought present before myne eyes
of gladsome youth how fleting is the course,
how sone the fading floure of beautie dyes...

This makes me in the silent night
oft to record how fast my youth withdrawes
it self away, how swift doeth rune his race
my pleasant life. This, this (aunt) is the cause,
when I aduise me sadly on my case
that maketh me in pensiuie dumpes to stay.
For if I shold my pleasant yeres neglect
of fresh grene youth fruteless to fade away:
whearto liue I?

(137)

By using the idea of Gismond's lying awake taking stock of her life, which must be something everyone has done at some time, the author manages not just to suggest the loneliness of a widow, but a profound sense of doubt about the very purpose of life.

Gismond's tentative wish to marry again is made more touching as she voices her doubt about her father's approval and tries to reconcile herself to the life of duty he has every right to prescribe for her, using language which conveys the emotional repression this will entail:

But what though? I force not: I will remaine
still at my father's hest, and driue away

these fansies quite. But yet my chefest paine
is that I stand at such vncertain stay.
For if my lingring father wold pronounce
his final dome, that I must driue forth still
my life as I do now; I wold renounce
myne owne free choise, and frame me to his will;
in widowes state with patiece wold I passe
my dayes, and as I might wold beare the grefe,
and force my self contented.

(138)

There is a very strong sense of Gismond's struggle to make her personal desires fit into the framework of duty.

Aunt Lucrece, though, is encouraging: her outlook is that of the liberal humanistic writers. She praises her niece's "wise foresight" in renouncing her mourning and "skilfull care of fleeting youth's decay" in wanting to marry again, and promises to ask Tancred's permission. Clearly, Lucrece sees her niece as a woman who knows her own nature and is trying to plan her future accordingly. She expresses this view in her interview with Tancred in the next scene, in which she puts forward liberal, humanistic arguments for Gismond's marriage, substantiated with ideas taken from Ghismonda's defence of her actions in Boccaccio's story. She argues that although Gismond has buried her husband

she hath not layed vp wth him in graue
those sparkes of senses, wch she did receiue
when kind to her bothe life and body gaue:
nor with her husbandes death her life doeth ceasse
but she yet liues, and liuing she doeth fele
such passions.

(139)

Gismond's heart is alive, not made of stone as Tancred's plans for her seem to suppose, and so, she asks,

such stern hardnesse ne ought ye to require
in her, whoes gentle hart and tender yeres
yet flouring in her chefest lust of youth
is led of force to feele the whote desires
that fall vnto that age.

(140)

Tancred, though, interrupts her

For well I see wherto your tale doeth tend.
This feared I when you beganne to name
My daughter ones

(141)

and refuses to hear more because of his aversion to the idea of Gismond's leaving home again. Tancred cannot see Gismond as an unhappy person, only as he wants to see her, as a "ioyfull presence", a "desired sight", which he wants to fill his empty house and to perform his funeral rites.

He argues his case with a reminder of his rights as a Renaissance father, and of Gismond's considerable moral and material obligations to respect his wishes. As a father, he has every right to his child's duty and obedience, since "she were uniuist/to seke to hast his death that gave her life", and his first comment is an appeal to duty:

My later hour approcheth loe: and when
my dere daughter yclosed hath mine eyes,
and with her woefull teres bewept my graue,
then is her duty done in perfect wise:
there is no farther seruice I may craue.

(142)

He explains:

Her late mariage hath taught me, to my grefe,
that in the frutes of her desired sight
doeth rest the only cōfort and relefe
of my vnweldy age. For what delight,
what ioy, what cōfort in this earth haue I,
if my Gismunda should depart from me.

(143)

Tancred instructs Lucrece:

Tell her, I am her father, whoes estate,
wealth, honor, life and all that is in me
doeth wholly rest on her. Tell her I must
account her all my ioy, and my relefe.
Work as she will: but yet she were uniuist,
to seke to hast his death that gaue her life.

(144)

The idea of reciprocal obligation between parents and children, which Tancred is invoking here, is common in

didactic writing in the Renaissance, and would probably have been familiar to contemporary audiences. Common opinion would probably have backed his case. However, it is important to note that although Tancred's request is apparently a very small one, that Gismond should stay at home until he dies, he is in effect proposing to commit her to involuntary celibacy for an indefinite period, since his expectations of her chastity apply as strongly as ever - as his later actions indicate. Moreover, despite his professed love for Gismond, his reply to Lucrece's plea on her behalf does not once mention his daughter's welfare, or the possibility that she may re-marry. Tancred's sole concern is with his own feelings, and with his fear of losing her.

In the next scene, Lucrece relays Tancred's message to Gismond. Apparently because of concern for her brother's well-being, she has abandoned her earlier humanistic views and adopted his language of moral and emotional obligation. She recommends Gismond:

... myne aduise shalbe, to stere
no farther in this case: but sins his will
is grounded on his fatherly loue to yow,
and that it lieth in yow to saue or spill
his old forwasted age, yow ought t'eschue
to seeke the thing that shold so much agreue
his tender hart: and in the state yow stand
content yor self.

(145)

Once again, Gismond resigns herself to obeying her relations, and envisages the self-repression this obedience will entail:

I can no more, but bend my self to finde
meanes as I may to frame my yelden hart
to serue his will, and as I may to driue
the passions from my brest that brede my smart,
and diuersly distracting me do striue
to hold my minde subdued in dayly paine:
whome yet (I fere) I shall resist in vaine.

(146)

This sincere confession of difficulty in obeying the strict rules of public morality is immediately followed by a Chorus which compares Gismond's lack of constancy with the steadfastness of wives of classical history and legend, a time when "wemen examples were/of hye vertues". These virtuous women are Lucrece, who:

disdained to liue
longer than chast, and boldly without fere
toke sharp reuenge on her oppressed corps
with her own hand, for that it not withstode
the wanton will, but yelded to the force
of proud Tarquine, and bought her fame with blood; (147)

Artemis, who ate her husband's body in order to unite it with hers; and Portia, who committed suicide by eating burning coals. The Chorus praises their "vertues worthy of eternall praise" and comments, not altogether surprisingly, "Rare ar those vertues now in womans minde". "Those good ladies" are commended as "a mirrour and a glasse to womankinde", and their exemplary behaviour is contrasted with that of Gismond:

... that so late lamented here
her princes death, and thought to liue alone,
as doeth the turtle true without her feere:
behold now sone that cōstant minde is gone. (148)

There are many uncomfortable elements in this passage. The criticism of Gismond's behaviour in comparison with that of Lucrece, Portia and Artemis is obviously not valid, since like Portia, Gismond did want to commit suicide to join her husband, until swayed by her father's arguments for reason. The statement that Artemis honoured a promise made to her husband and "drank his heart" has odd reverberations later on, when Gismond drinks a mixture of poison, tears and blood from the chalice that contains Guiscard's heart. These inconsistencies seem to undermine the Chorus' criticism.

The Chorus incorporates several more disturbing features, such as the strong element of self-chastisement in the description of Lucrece's suicide, and the generally abnormal nature of the acts commended. Self-chastisement, suicide and cannibalism are very extreme proofs of marital love. The impression of unease is heightened when one considers that these acts would have been praised by a Chorus consisting of ".4. gentlemen of Salern", especially since as gentlemen (which implies that they own property) they might well have their own reasons for encouraging the elevation of the value of female chastity and fidelity to the status of a religion, even to the extent of providing it with holy martyrs who have died for the cause.

At the beginning of Act III, Cupid appears and announces:

Gismond haue I now framed to forgett
her turtles truthe, and burne wth raging lust.
I made her doting father her denie
the wealfull wyuely state to tast againe,
and (Iuno thus forclosed) I made to flye
a thrilling shaft the perced her youthfull vaines
with loue of Counte Palurine: and he
doeth fele like wound sent frō my deadly bowe. (149)

This speech has several very important functions: it emphasises the lapse of time between Gismond's desire to marry again and her falling in love with Palurine, informs the audience of the social standing of Gismond's lover (in Boccaccio's story he was a young valet: presumably this disparity in rank was thought too great for a court audience) and also identifies Tancred's refusal to let Gismond marry as the work of Cupid or personal desire, which further discredits him.

In the ensuing scene, Claudia, a confidante character, describes the symptoms of Gismond's inner conflict in a close adaptation of the Nurse's speech from the Phaedra. One might think that a speech directly drawn from Seneca might

convey unmitigated condemnation, but in fact its effect in this play is very different from its impact in its original setting. In the Phaedra, this speech describes the emotional restlessness of a woman who, during her husband's absence on a perilous expedition, has become infatuated with her stepson, a confirmed misogynist. Phaedra has every reason to be worried, since she has all the obstacles of adultery, incest and Hippolytus' natural disinclination to discourage her. On the other hand, when the same description of sleeplessness, nightmares, weeping, desire for solitude and general inability to cope with life is applied to Gismond, its effect is to generate sympathy and approval for the sensitivity which causes her such suffering when her desire (which, unlike Phaedra's, is far from unnatural and breaks only man-made laws) conflicts with her duty. It also indicates the love Gismond inspires in her attendants, and ensures that in the next scene, when she has taken action and contacted Guiscard, the audience knows that her decision was not taken lightly.

The main purpose of the succeeding scene, in which Guiscard receives the cane and finds the message Gismond has concealed in it, is to demonstrate that Gismond has chosen a lover who is worthy of her, and to convey what Boccaccio was able to narrate, what happened when it was given. This insignificant episode is a fascinating illustration of the extent to which attitudes to women changed in the years between the different versions.

Boccaccio's Ghismonda (c. 1350) is an intrepid and witty heroine. When she slips Guiscardo the cane, she hints at its significance in a suggestive witticism; "Turn it into a bellows-pipe for your serving-wench, so that she can use it to kindle the fire this evening". By 1567 in Britain, however, it was coming to be thought that a chaste lady would pretend not to have heard such jokes, and that it was far from fitting for a princess to make them; or perhaps the

authors thought that women in love should not joke about such a serious matter. For whatever reason, the 1567 version of the play makes Gismond contrive the hand-over in a more modest way. Guiscard recounts:

Assuredly it is not without cause
she gaue me this: something she meant thereby:
for therewithall I might perceiue her pause
a while, as though some weighty thing did lye
vpon her hart, wch she cōceled, bycause
the bystanders shold not our loue espie. (150)

The author adds a pleasant touch to Boccaccio's description of Guiscard's happiness upon finding the note: before opening it, he exclaims

Who wold not ioy to serue
where wit and beautie chosen haue their place?
Who could deuise more wisely to cōserue
things fro suspect? (151)

This appreciation of Gismond's inventiveness before he is aware of what he stands to gain from it reflects well on Guiscard.

Guiscard determines to accept the assignation and the scene is immediately followed by a chorus on the necessity of keeping occupied, since "Loue assaults not but the idle hart". The effect of this moral would depend greatly on the impression of the lovers' characters gained from the previous scenes. Although no scene in the play actually shows the lovers together, their soliloquies and other characters' reports of them leave no doubt that both are people of integrity, and are dignified and direct in their dealings with one another. Their nobility means that the Chorus seems to be missing its mark, especially since we have seen little to indicate that their love could have been avoided if they had been better occupied.

After Megaera has announced the approach of catastrophe, Tancred appears in soliloquy and tells the audience that he has seen Gismond with her lover. He feels that he has been cheated of the happiness she owed him, both by duty (in return for her own happy life) and by special obligation (because she means everything to him). He wonders:

O daughter (whome alas most happy had I ben
if liuing on the earth the sone had neuer seen)
is thys my hoped ioy, my comfort and my stay,
to glad my grefefull yeres that wast and wear away?
For happy life, that thow receiued hast by me,
ten thousand cruel deathes shall I receiue by thee?
For ioy that I haue had, and for my whole delight
that I accursed wretch did settle in thy sight,
is this my due reward? (152)

He regards Palurine as an enemy of himself and of the state, a "traitor thefe" who has induced Gismond to "forsake/her father and her selfe, her dutie and her fame". To the sterner contemporary moralists, this view would have been justified: both the lovers are criminals, Gismond because she has neglected her duty to the family honour, and Guiscard could be accused of treachery since he may have ruined Gismond's chances of advantageous marriage and brought less noble blood to the succession. However, Tancred's lack of interest in finding a match for Gismond is what has caused the crime, and only he knows about it, so Gismond's reputation and prospects of marriage cannot be said to be lost. Similarly, although Guiscard's offence could be said to constitute treachery, there is also an impression that whatever displeases the monarch may be treachery. Once again, there is the implication that Tancred is using state arguments to mask a personal grievance, as the sentence he pronounces suggests.

The traitor shall not liue
to scorn his pained prince: the hart I will bereue
out of his ripped brest, and send it her, to take
her last delight of him, for whome she did forsake,

her father and her self, her dutie and her fame.
For him she shall haue grefe, by whom she hath the shame.

(153)

His fear that Guiscard has defeated him in some way and will mock his grief, and his desire to make Gismond suffer for her disloyalty to her father and his wishes indicate jealousy. Tancred dispatches his men to arrest Guiscard, and summons Gismond to him.

The ensuing scene is one of the most crucial of the play, a confrontation between the outraged father and head of state and the woman who has broken the laws of both, as daughter and as subject. Tancred begins his tirade with a complaint about the unfairness of his position: he sees himself as the injured party and Gismond as the careless, unkind, unloving criminal, telling her

Gismond, if either I could cast aside
all care of thee, or if thow woldest haue had
some care of me: it shold not thus betide,
that either through thy faut my ioy shold fade,
or by my follie I shold beare the paine,
that thow thow hast deserued.

(154)

He strengthens his case by stressing that he had expected better of his daughter and trusted her to obey him:

... there stayed in me so settled trust
that thy chast life and vncorrupted minde
wold not haue yelded to vnlawfull lust
of strayeng loue, other than was assigned
lefull by law of honest wedlockes band,
that, if these self same eyes had not behold
thy shame, that wrought the woe, wherin I stand,
in vain ten thousand Catoes shold haue told,
that thow didst ones dishonestly agree
with that vile traitor Counte Palurine,
without regard had to thy self, or me,
vnshamefastly to staine thy state and myne.

(155)

The way in which Tancred constantly identifies Gismond's interests with his own ("thy self, or me", "thy state or

myne") is interesting. It is as if he feels that Gismond is his, she must be like him, so even if she thinks she has done what she wanted, she must have betrayed her true self. Tancred announces that Guiscard will be killed, and like many an outraged parent angling for an apology, asks his daughter what she has to say for herself:

I am contented of thy self to know,
what for thy self alone thow cannest recite...
.
Say why thow sholdest liue. (156)

Instead of apologising for her conduct or pleading for her life as he expects, Gismond replies with a speech of great dignity and defiance. This crucial speech is original to the play, since the corresponding speech in the Decameron is mainly concerned with Ghismonda's defence of Guiscardo's lowly rank, and not relevant to this version of the story. Charles Hatton structured it entirely as an ironic answer to Tancred's question, and the resultant tight syntax heightens the impression of the great control Gismond must be exercising over her emotions at this point.

Gismond tells Tancred that for her, having any reason to live would depend on two factors; Guiscard's well-being, since she lives for him, and on Tancred having the nobility appropriate to a prince. If that were the case, she would have no need to plead for either of their lives. However, since Tancred has already decided Guiscard will die, and that he will not be the father or prince she thought he was, even though Guiscard's past services and her own pleas both deserve clemency, it is pointless for him to ask what she can say in order to live. She has no intention of living, and will stand by her decision.

Instead of accepting the position of disgraced and repentant daughter that Tancred and the play's apparent moral framework would allocate her, Gismond not only stands by

her own values, but criticises Tancred's behaviour, sounding out a fundamental weakness in the ideology of patriarchy in the process. Gismond implicitly rebukes Tancred for his lack of imagination and sensitivity in asking such a redundant question. At the same time, she explicitly criticises him for falling short of the ideal of princely behaviour appropriate to someone in his position. The absolute power which the system of patriarchy gives to the head of the family or of the state requires that the holder of such power must have perfect judgement. If such a ruler falls short of this ideal, as Gismond tells Tancred he is doing, disaster may ensue for the family or the state.

If the audience picked up the significance of this observation, they would then have had an alternative view of the cause of the catastrophe and bloodshed at the end of the play. According to the characters who voice the play's apparent moral framework, it is precipitated by divine punishment, from a classical or Christian deity, on the lovers for their wickedness. But Gismond has identified another cause by alluding to the essential flaw in the idea of patriarchy. Disaster can follow when a father or king, who is a fallible human being, has been given the power of a god over his family or subjects.

Gismond's speech also gives a strong impression of the moral authority she holds, despite being at odds with the play's ethos. Her firmness in refusing to pandar to Tancred by showing the contrition he expects adds to her dignity. Instead, she stands by her own values of constancy in love, nobility and sympathy, refusing to compromise them even under threat of death.

In the next scene, Tancred summons Guiscard, who bravely accepts his verdict of death in terms similar to Gismond's and announces

eke by death I ioy that I shall shewe
my selfe her owne, that hers was liuing here,
and hers will be, where euer my ghost shall goe.
.
I will use my life and death for prefe
That hers I liued and died, that liued myne. (157)

This claim provokes a revealing outburst from Tancred:

Thyne, Palurine? and shall I so susteine
such wrong? Is she not myne, and only myne?
Me leuer were ten thousand times be slayen,
than thow shold iustly claim and vse for thyne
her that is dearer than my self to me. (158)

The repetition of "myne" sounds obsessive, implying that Tancred is driven by personal possessiveness, not reasons of state and honour as he claims.

Guiscard is led off to die, and his last words are a prayer that somehow Gismond may stop loving him "that she/may heare my death without her hurt". This altruistic thought is immediately followed by a Chorus commenting that "the end of wicked loue is blood". Since Guiscard is about to meet with a very bloody end, the implication seems to be that his love was wicked. How, though, could an audience accept this when the memory of his bravery and selflessness was still fresh? The conflict between the live action and the professed morality of the play continues when immediately after the Chorus, when Renuchio describes how Guiscard's courage in the face of death astounded and touched the torturers so much that they could not be persuaded to kill him, until the Count placed the garrotte on his own neck, reminding them to do their duty.

This implicit questioning of the values of Tancred and the Chorus continues throughout Act IV, in the scenes depicting Gismond's reaction to the news of Guiscard's execution. Renuchio unwillingly carries out Tancred's order and presents Guiscard's heart to Gismond in a golden chalice with the words:

Thy father, o Quene, here in this cup hath sent
that thing, to ioy and comfort thee withall,
wch thou loued best, euen as thow weart cotent
to comfort him wth his chefe ioy of all. (159)

The author preserves Boccaccio's presentation of this episode, in which Ghismonda gives the servant a splendidly controlled and ironic message of thanks to convey to her father, and gives vent to her feelings and weeps over the heart only after he has left the room. The playwright adds a brief aside to inform the audience that Gismond knows the significance of the chalice's contents, then gives a versified translation of the polite reply of Boccaccio's Ghismonda:

Certes vnto so noble a hart could not
a fitter herse ben lotted than of gold.
Discretely therefore hath my father wrought,
that thus hath sent it me for to behold.
In all my life to this my latter day
so passing dere ay haue I found to me
my fathers tender loue, that I ne may
deserue the same: but inespacially
so much in this, as I requier ye
these my last thankes to yeld to him therefore. (160)

The dramatist adds the ironic conclusion

wch is to me the greatest grefe may be
that I can not reacquite the same no more. (161)

Gismond's lament follows Boccaccio's account closely, retaining the idea of her horror at her father's cruelty in forcing her to see in reality the heart she only wanted ever to see in her mind's eye, her weeping over the heart,

and her conviction that Guiscard's soul is waiting for her to join him. The dramatist adds only a brief desire for revenge on Tancred, which is quickly rejected for the greater attraction of death:

... let vs dye
for in such sort it likes vs to assay
to passe down to the paled ghostes of hell,
and there enjoy my loue, whome thus my sire
wold not permitt in earth wth me to dwell. (162)

Her decision to commit suicide is clear minded and deliberate, despite the horror of her circumstances.

Tancred rushes in too late, and the representatives of instinct and duty confront one another for the last time. Tancred's counsels of moderation "recomfort your distress/ and suffer not these heapes of grefe t'assaile/your wery mind" have a very hollow ring when applied to a tragedy he has caused. However, he still manages to see himself as the victim, protesting

Ay me, doeth my dere daughter take it soe?
What? will she slay her self, and be therby
worker of her own death, causer of woe
vnto her frendes, and meane to make me dye?
.
O my daughter hast thow receiued thy life
from me? and wilt thow, to reacquite the same,
yeld me my death? yea death, and greater grefe
to see thee dye for him that did defame
thyne honour thus, my kingdome and my crowne? (163)

Gismond rebukes his moral short-sightedness in clinging to the idea that his honour is damaged more by her behaviour than by the atrocity he has committed:

... So sayest thou my renoune
thy kingdome and thy crowne defamed to be,
when thow my loue with cruel handes hast slayen,
and sent his heart to me for to behold? (164)

She makes her last request

that, sins it pleased thee not thus secretly
I might enjoy my loue, his corps and myne
may natheless together graued be
and in one tombe our bodies bothe to shrine. (165)

This contrast between secret love and public burial is retained from the Decameron, in which Ghismonda asks Tancredi

since it displeased you that I should live quietly with
Guiscardo in secret, see that my body is publicly laid to
rest beside his in whatever spot you chose to cast his
remains. (166)

Tancred, unable to face life alone now that his inability to share Gismond has caused him to lose her completely, decides that suicide is preferable. The means of his suicide, however, is significant. He plans:

the tomb my self then will crepe into,
and wth my blood all bayne their bodies dead.
This heart there will I perce, and reue this brest
the irksome life, and wreke my wrathfull ire
vpon my self. she shall haue her request:
and I by death will purchace my desire. (167)

It is as if Tancred cannot bear to leave the lovers alone even when they are dead: instead, he insists in forcing himself upon them, even staining their bodies with his blood. The stealth and secrecy of the way he plans to achieve this, combined with the earlier sexual implications of joint burial as described by Gismond means that the action of the play ends with a recurrence of the earlier implications of near-incestuous love and jealousy. This in turn revives the question, sounded by Gismond earlier in the play, of the wisdom of a system which gives absolute power to a prince or patriarch who may be swayed by a personal fixation to abuse the control he has over his subjects or family. A system which demands obedience from wives, children or subjects depends on the ruler having

perfect wisdom or fairness. Under patriarchy, any flaw in the ruler can become a threat to liberty and to life.

Gismond emerges from such a reading of the play as a heroine of considerable standing, challenging conventional morality and the patriarchal system, and sufficiently committed to her own values to decide to die for them rather than compromise. The dangerous challenge such a character would have presented to the views likely to be held by the audience was offset by the play's use of an apparent moral framework in line with current views, the technique of debate and unresolved inconsistencies, and of a non-committal ending which sidesteps the question of which set of values the playwrights would finally endorse. The revolutionary view of Gismond was acceptable in this context, since it was presented as one of several conflicting interpretations of the story which the audience would accept or reject as they judged fit.

A very different approach, however, can be seen in the edition of the play Robert Wilmot produced for printing in 1591. The title, Tancred and Gismund, signals the change of emphasis which has taken place in this version: it is no longer a tragedy of a woman at odds with her society, but of a man and his daughter. Unlike the version edited by J.W. Cunliffe from the surviving manuscripts, which is morally inconsistent and has a noble heroine, the edition prepared by Robert Wilmot for printing has a consistent moral outlook, which has been achieved at the expense of the character of Gismund. In this version, she can be dismissed as a foolish deviant from the moral code, rather than troubling the audience by the challenge she presents to its ideas. Most significantly, almost every textual change weakens her moral standing, and strengthens that of Tancred and the Chorus.

The circumstances of Robert Wilmot's publication of his edition shed some light on the way in which it differs from the earlier version. Twenty-two years after his dramatic debut at the Inns of Court, Robert Wilmot had become a rural clergyman, holding two livings in Essex. In the letters which form the Preface to his edition, Wilmot explains that he was re-editing the play, which he regarded only as "waste papers", reluctantly, and only in response to the urgings of his friend William Webb. However, he had agreed to make the play "newly reuiued and polished according to the decorum of these daies" for the sake of its moral potential: "my purpose in this Tragedie, tendeth only to the exaltation of vertue, & suppression of vice". Although he regarded the play as the work of "young heads", showing the limitations of the young authors' skills, he concluded that it was worthy of publication because "herein they al agre, commending vertue, detesting vice, and liuely deciphering their ouerthrow that suppress not their vnruly affections".

Wilmot dedicates his edition to two "right Worshipfull and vertuous Ladies" as a means of bringing himself to their notice, and repeats that only the moral element justifies the story of the play, which

being a discourse of two louers, perhappes it may seeme a thing neither fit to be offered vnto your Ladyships, nor worthie me to busie my selfe withall.

(168)

However, he says, he offers it because it contains "the knowledge of wise, graue & worthie matters, tending to the good instruction of youths, of which you are mothers".

The question of whether Wilmot made his edition from a text of the original play which differed considerably from the other surviving manuscripts, as W.W. Greg suggests, or whether he simply made his own alterations to the manuscript we know is impossible to resolve. However, I think

that all the evidence of the particular textual changes made, social pressure and personal motive suggests that Robert Wilmot altered the play to make it more coherent, and to bring it into line with current morality, which also made it more fit for his own personal circumstances and needs.

Wilmot brings the play into line with current social morality by making numerous changes to its text, some small but significant and some sweeping. He lessens the impact of one of the most problematic Choruses, the one at the end of Act II, by attributing it to a "Chorus of four maidens" rather than the original ".4. gentlemen of Salern". This changes the impression from that of a code recommended by property-owning men to women, to one of a set of values to which women assent, and which they promote. The implication is that Wilmot's Gismund is deviating from an ideal valued by others of her sex.

Tancred's moral standing is increased in a similar way. His motivation is shown as the righteous anger of a father and head of state, rather than the jealousy of a flawed individual, and the sexual undertones of the play are diminished accordingly. Tancred's jealous outburst to Guiscard in the 1567 version, with its obsessive repetition of "myne", is replaced in Wilmot's version by a speech full of ironic "thine"s:

Traitor thou wrongst me, for she liueth mine.
Rather I wish ten thousand sundrie deaths,
Than I to liue and see my daughter thine.
Thine, that is dearer than my life to me?
Thine, whom I hope to see an Empresse?
Thine, whom I cannot pardon from my sight?
Thine, vnto whom we haue bequeath'd our crown? (169)

Wilmot attributes Tancred's anger to reasons of state, rather than personal jealousy.

Wilmot modifies the account of Tancred's suicide in a similar way. Firstly, he phrases Gismund's request for public burial in more chaste terms than in the original version, so that the sexual significance of the idea is considerably lessened. Secondly, the account of Tancred's behaviour is changed. In this edition, Tancred plans his suicide nobly and openly. His suicide is not an act of escape, but of self-chastisement, necessary because of his keen sense of justice. He decides to "wreake due vengeance on that head/ That wrought the means these lovers now be dead". Tancred decides "vpon these eyes we must be first auenged", because they wished to see Guiszhard's heart, and pulls them out. He then instructs his trusted servant Julio to arrange the funeral of the lovers, and

That done, I swear thee thou shalt take my corps
Which thou shalt find by that time done to death,
And lay my bodie by my daughters side. (177)

This planned, public funeral is very different from the picture of Tancred covertly creeping into the lovers' tomb given in the first play. Wilmot increases Tancred's standing by diminishing the incest-theme, and portraying him more as a righteously enraged monarch than a jealous father.

Wilmot's most significant changes, though, are to the character of Gismond, whose standing is undermined throughout the play, and completely changed in some of her most vital speeches.

The scenes with Aunt Lucrece are changed in several subtle ways. The first scene in Act II, in which Gismond explains her desire to marry again, has been altered to show her motives in a different light. At first there are small verbal changes which alter the implications of Gismond's words: whereas the original Gismond describes having disturbing thoughts "when I layed in my secret bed", Wilmot's

Gismund describes feeling unhappy "when I laid in my widow's bed", a change which implies that the second Gismund finds her bed distressing in comparison with a nuptial bed. This impression is confirmed when shortly afterwards, Wilmot's Gismund wonders

Why have I tasted the delights of love
And felt the sweets of Hymenaeus bed? (171)

Furthermore, she has motives other than prudence and self-knowledge for wanting to marry again: she is already in love, unlike the earlier Gismund, who assesses the possibilities of marriage long before she considers taking Guiscard as her lover. This coy confession is inserted in Wilmot's edition:

And shall I tell mine Aunt? come hether then,
Geue me that hand, by thine owne right hand,
I charge thy heart my counsels to conceale.
Late haue I seene, and seeing, tooke delight,
And with delight, I will not say, I loue,
A Prince, an Earle, a Countie in the Court.
But loue and duetie force me to refraine. (172)

In this way, Gismund's motive is shown to be personal inclination rather than a more disinterested planning for the future.

Wilmot also alters our impression of Gismund's relationship with her aunt, by giving Lucrece the speech from the Phaedra in Act III, which is spoken by Claudia in the original play. This makes its effect very different, since Lucrece already knows about Gismund's longing for love and has no need to be puzzled by her behaviour. However, she says of Gismund:

Yet she denies what she confessed of yore
And then conjoined me to conceal the same;
She loved once (she saith) but never more
Nor ever will her fancy thereto frame. (173)

Wilmot's Gismund is shown to be a liar, even to her aunt and confidante.

Wilmot also changes our perception of the lovers by giving his Guiszhard a different description of the gift of the cane. The original description is retained, but this passage is added:

And as we danst, she dallied with the cane,
And sweetly whispered I should be her king,
And with this cane the scepter of our rule,
Command the sweets of her surprised heart.
Therewith she raught from her alluring lockes,
This golden tresse, the fauour of her grace,
And with her owne sweet hand she gaue it me. (174)

The description of all this dancing, whispering and giving of locks of hair in public diminishes the impression of dignity given by the secrecy and directness of the original lovers, makes the secrecy of the letter succeeding all this public display of affection seem very redundant, and devalues Guiszhard's praise of Gismund's cleverness, since he already knows that he stands to profit from it.

Wilmot's most important alteration, though, is to Gismund's crucial speech to Tancred in Act IV Scene 3. Instead of challenging Tancred's authority, Wilmot's Gismund begins her reply

O king, and father, humbly geue her leaue
To plead for grace, that stands in your disgrace.
Not that she recks this life: for I confesse
I haue deseru'd, when so it pleaseth you,
To die the death. Mine honour and my name
(As you suppose) distained with reproach,
And wel contented shall I meet the stroke
That must disseuer this detested head
Fro these lewd limmes. (175)

She explains that she was involuntarily overcome by "Loue, heate of the hearte, life of the soule", which

Would not endure controulement any more:
But violently enforst my feebled heart.
(For who am I alas, still to resist
Such endless conflicts.) To relent and yeeelde. (176)

Having apologised for her conduct, Gismund tries to plead for Guiszhard and herself, by calling Tancred

... father, if that name may be
Sweet to your eares, and that we may preuaile
By name of father, that you favour vs. (177)

Wilmot has completely re-structured the scene which forms the centre of the alternative reading of the play, by transforming the character of Gismund. Whereas the original Gismond had all the courage of her convictions, criticised Tancred's inhumane behaviour and insisted on her right to die rather than accept it, Wilmot's Gismund shows by her apologies that she endorses the moral code from which she has deviated. She acknowledges that she deserves to die, but nevertheless pleads for her life, hoping that she and Guiszhard can soften Tancred's heart by calling him "father"; a hope which is as sentimental as it is unlikely. Wilmot represents her as an erring, repentant daughter who kills herself when she finds she cannot avert a death sentence which she herself admits she deserves. Even the meaning of her suicide is devalued, as Wilmot shows her invoking the Furies and letting down her hair, which implies that she is in a state of frenzy. Her suicide is presented as the desperate action of an unbalanced mind, rather than the original Gismond's calm act of will.

Wilmot's adjustment to the play seem to be an attempt to bring the live action into line with the play's professed morality, and thus with contemporary thought about women and their place in the family and society. The essential opposition, which the original playwrights either intended to include in the play or simply ignored, seems to have arisen between the different views of fathers and children

inherent in the mediaeval plot and in more contemporary ideas and stage traditions.

When Gismond of Salerne first appeared, there were two types of father in dramatic conventions; in comedy, the "mediaeval" father, who must be duped in order to achieve independence and happiness, and the more recent "moral" father, who holds religious and moral authority, and whom no virtuous child could consider disobeying. The story of Ghismonda (c. 1350) is firmly set in the mediaeval period, when the authority of fathers over their daughters was distant and temporal rather than intimate and spiritual. Boccaccio viewed Ghismonda's defiance as brave and admirable, and the later "live action" scenes of Gismond of Salerne, which are taken directly from the Decameron, preserve the view of Gismond as a heroine who must defy paternal authority to win independence and to champion the cause of love. Charles Hatton went even further in inventing the superb speech in Act IV in which Gismond's defiance would be expressed to the best dramatic effect.

The earlier scenes of the play, however, have no such detailed source in the Decameron, since Boccaccio merely sketched in the beginning of the story. This left the authors of those acts free to elaborate upon the bare bones of the plot.

At liberty to create original scenes, they drew on the ideas about father/child relationships to them from didactic drama. For instance, G. AL., faced with creating a completely original scene in which Tancred explained his objections to Gismond marrying again, phrased these objections in the language of moral and emotional obligation which would have been familiar to him from didactic drama. Tancred's much-repeated idea of reciprocal obligation between parents and children, "For happy life, that thow received hast by me/ten thousand cruel deaths shall I

receive by thee?" is particularly similar to the reasoning employed by Patient Grissill. Aunt Lucrece's caution to Gismond is phrased in similar terms of moral and emotional responsibility: to go against Tancred would "greve his tender hart", and Gismond should obey her father because

... his will
is grounded on his fatherly loue to yow
and that it lieth in yow to saue or spill
his old forwasted age. (178)

The central problem is that Tancred talks like an early Renaissance father, even though he behaves like a mediaeval one in his disregard for the individual, his obsession with family honour and his callous savagery. This makes him much more pitiful than his counterpart in the Decameron, especially as Gismond behaves throughout as a typical daughter of mediaeval fiction, duping him reluctantly, but with no sense of extreme sin, since she feels her actions are justified by her own moral standards.

By the time Robert Wilmot came to re-edit Gismond of Salerne, the early anonymous True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters had already been added to the dramatic material concerning filial duty, and its ideal of daughterly behaviour was obviously in accord with the growing influence of love and moral obligation upon family ties. No early Renaissance audience well versed in these ideals could have missed, as Leir does, the immense import of Cordella's words

I cannot paynt my duty forth in words
I hope my deeds shall make report for me
But looke what loue the child doth owe the father
The same to you I beare, my gracious Lord. (179)

The general corruption of the unkind daughters' is shown by a corresponding lack of standards in other areas of their lives, as they nag, plan to dominate their husbands and the

state and even plot to have Leir murdered, drawing comments such as

Trust not alliance; but trust strangers father
Since daughters proude disloyall to the father. (180)

Adapting Gismond in the year after King Leir was produced, Robert Wilmot adjusted the play in order to make it more coherent, and more consonant with current views of the moral importance of parental authority, of which, as a clergyman, he would have been particularly aware. Accordingly, Tancred's character is made more dignified in a number of ways, as befits his paternal moral standing, while the character of Gismond is blackened. By altering Act IV so that Gismond admits that she has sinned most gravely in deviating from Tancred's moral code and that she deserves to die for it, Robert Wilmot converts her from a mediaeval heroine to a weak and sinful Renaissance daughter who has strayed from her duties, then been recalled to an awareness of the error of her ways. In doing so, he produces a play which is more dramatically coherent, and is consistent with the contemporary moral outlook, but which has lost the kaleidoscopic shifting and interplay of different moral viewpoints inherited from Senecan tragedy which made Gismond of Salerne such an exciting and unique play.

It is significant, though, that he could achieve this coherence only by changing Gismond from a heroine of considerable moral authority, able to challenge the values of the prevailing system and willing to die for her own beliefs, to a sentimental, lying, grovelling strumpet. That he felt it necessary to do so reinforces the importance of this unusual early heroine of political tragedy. Gismond is probably unique in that the threat she presented to patriarchal values seems to have extended beyond the imaginary world of the play - so much so that twenty years on, one of her creators felt it necessary to replace her

with a changed character who would not disturb the status quo. There could hardly be a more telling tribute to her significance.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the presentation of women in tragedy tended to be inhibited by the view of women it inherited from classical tragedy, as virtuous and passive, or wicked and active. Classical tragedy was also the source of the idea of natural law, a means of assessing women's moral status and conduct which was carried into neo-classical tragedy, despite the fact that its roots do not stand logical scrutiny.

Classical ideas about women transferred to political and historical tragedy particularly easily because the ethos of such plays was especially close to that of the classical world. Their emphasis on military and political might creates a setting in which female virtue, as the Renaissance understood it, is ineffectual, but in which active women are culpable, because it is considered unnatural for them to wield power.

The portrayal of women in tragedy breaks away from this restricted view only when the subject matter of the plays moves away from the limited field of politics and combat, and towards areas in which women can be considered as individuals capable of action and choice in the same way as men are.

Paradoxically, the apparently opposed ideologies of religious belief and romantic love are the themes instrumental in transcending the narrow inherited view of women in tragedy. Both are fields in which individuals could be seen as equals, regardless of sex, and equally capable of the crucial element of choice, which distinguished the pathetic character from the tragic hero or heroine.

The three plays discussed in detail as examples are all flawed in many ways, but are significant because all of them show the way in which the tragic genre's potential to create exciting heroines began to develop. In contrast with the women in didactic drama and in many comedies, who exist simply to illustrate the play's moral systems, Matilda, Jane Shore and Gismond acquire a moral authority of their own, which exists independently of the societies from which their actions alienate them. The playwrights of the late sixteenth century were beginning to use tragedy to offer a view of women which was directly opposed to the submissive, compliant ideal taught by the Protestant moralists. Instead, dramatists asserted that women, like men, were capable of the courage and independence needed to weigh social approval, and even life itself, against some personal goal, whether romantic love or religious belief - and to count the world well lost if it was found wanting.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. F.S. Boas, University Drama in the Tudor Age (Oxford, 1914), chapters 2, 3 and 6.
2. H. de Vocht, Introduction to Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens 1559, 1560 and 1561, edited by H. de Vocht, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, (Louvain, 1913, Vaduz, 1963), Band 41.
3. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975), p. 276.
4. Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens 1559, 1560 and 1561, edited by H. de Vocht, p. 16.
5. Seneca his Tenne Tragedies edited by Thomas Newton, edited by C. Whibley, Tudor Translations, Second Series (London, 1927), I, p. 156.
6. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London, 1936), p. 4.
7. T.S. Eliot, Introduction to Seneca his Tenne Tragedies, edited by C. Whibley, p. xiii.
8. Joel B. Altman, The Tudor Play of Mind (California, 1978), pp. 231-40.
9. Studley's Translations of Seneca's Agamemnon and Medea 1566, edited by E.M. Spearing, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas (Louvain, 1913 Vaduz, 1963), Band 38, p. 136.
10. Studley's Medea, p. 213.
11. Studley's Medea, p. 213.
12. Studley's Medea, p. 214.
13. Studley's Medea, p. 221.
14. Seneca his Tenne Tragedies, p. 142.
15. Jill Tweedie, In the Name of Love (London, 1979), p. 51.
16. Studley's Agamemnon, p. 36.
17. George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe, Jocasta in Early English Classical Tragedies, edited by J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford, 1912), p. 75.
18. Jocasta, p. 75.

19. Jocasta, p. 89.
20. Jocasta, p. 102.
21. Jocasta, p. 132.
22. Jocasta, p. 133.
23. Jocasta, p. 146.
24. Gorboduc in Early English Classical Tragedies, edited by J.W. Cunliffe, p. 41.
25. Gorboduc, p. 41.
26. Gorboduc, p. 47.
27. Gorboduc, p. 47.
28. Gorboduc, p. 48.
29. Gorboduc, p. 46.
30. John Pickerying, A Newe Enterlude of Vice Conteyning the Historye of Horestes (1567), edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1962), line 202.
31. Horestes, line 208.
32. Horestes, line 499.
33. Studley's Medea, p. 213.
34. Horestes, line 509.
35. Horestes, line 535.
36. Horestes, line 1183.
37. Horestes, line 1188.
38. Joel B. Altman, The Tudor Play of Mind, p. 264.
39. Thomas Hughes, The Misfortunes of Arthur in Early English Classical Tragedies, edited by J.W. Cunliffe, p. 229.
40. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 230.
41. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 230.
42. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 232.
43. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 232.
44. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 232.

45. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 233.
46. Misfortunes of Arthur, p. 234.
47. Jocasta, p. 78.
48. Jocasta, p. 79.
49. Jocasta, p. 83.
50. Foster Watson, Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, (London, 1912), p. 67.
51. Jocasta, p. 112.
52. Jill Tweedie, In the Name of Love, p. 134.
53. Troas, p. 28.
54. Troas, p. 73.
55. Troas, p. 84.
56. Studley's Agamemnon, p. 118.
57. Studley's Agamemnon, p. 119.
58. Studley's Agamemnon, p. 119.
59. F.S. Boas, University Drama in the Tudor Age, pp. 56-59.
60. F.S. Boas, University Drama in the Tudor Age, p. 61.
61. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, p. 110.
62. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, p. 276.
63. King Leir, edited by W.W. Greg and R. Warwick Bond, Malone Society (Oxford, 1907), line 2369.
64. The Troublesome Raigne of King John, edited by F.J. Furnivall and John Munro, The Shakespeare Classics (London, 1913), p. 4.
65. Christopher Marlowe, The Massacre at Paris in The Plays of Christopher Marlowe, edited by Roma Gill (London, 1979), p. 420.
66. The Massacre at Paris, p. 436.
67. The Massacre at Paris, p. 436.

68. Richard II or Thomas of Woodstock, edited by
W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1979),
line 406.
69. Thomas of Woodstock, line 806.
70. Thomas of Woodstock, line 1035.
71. Thomas of Woodstock, line 1061.
72. Christopher Marlowe, Dido Queen of Carthage in The
Plays of Christopher Marlowe, edited by
Roma Gill, p. 35.
73. Marlowe, Dido, p. 35.
74. Marlowe, Dido, p. 36.
75. Antony Munday, The Downfall of Robert, Earle of
Huntingdon, edited by Arthur Brown and John C.
Meagher, Malone Society (Oxford, 1964),
line 1539.
76. Munday, Downfall of Robert, line 1341.
77. Antony Munday, The Death of Robert, Earle of
Huntingdon, edited by Arthur Brown and John C.
Meagher, Malone Society (Oxford, 1965),
line 1000.
78. Munday, Death of Robert, line 1006.
79. Munday, Death of Robert, line 1283.
80. Munday, Death of Robert, line 1327.
81. Munday, Death of Robert, line 1340.
82. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2260.
83. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2416.
84. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2221.
85. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2315.
86. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2552.
- 87.. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2153.
88. Munday, Death of Robert, line 1960.
89. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2572.
90. Munday, Death of Robert, line 2843.

91. Henry Hitch Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, Columbia Studies in English (New York, 1943), No. 159, p. 87.
92. The True Tragedy of Richard the Third, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1929), line 1019.
93. Richard III, line 1022.
94. Richard III, line 262.
95. Richard III, line 250.
96. Richard III, line 1076.
97. Thomas Heywood, The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV Histories, edited by Barron Field, The Shakespeare Society (London, 1842), No. 13, p. 1.
98. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 84.
99. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 84.
100. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 167.
101. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 16.
102. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 16.
103. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 24.
104. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 24.
105. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 25.
106. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 61.
107. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 78.
108. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 84.
109. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 125.
110. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 165.
111. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 166.
112. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 168.
113. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 174.
114. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 186.
115. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 185.
116. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 171.

117. Luke 9. 58, (Authorised Version).
118. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 132.
119. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 132.
120. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 132.
121. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 133.
122. Heywood, Edward IV, p. 61.
123. Boccaccio, The Decameron, translated by G.H. McWilliam (London, 1972), pp. 332-42.
124. Robert Wilmot, The Tragedie of Tancred and Gismund, edited by W.W. Greg, Marlone Society (Oxford, 1914), Dedicatory letter to the Gentlemen Students of the Inner Temple, line 40.
125. Rod. Stafford, Henry Noel, G. Al., Christopher Hatton and Robert Wilmot, Gismond of Salerne in Early English Classical Tragedies, edited by R.W. Cunliffe, p. 169.
126. Gismond of Salerne, p. 168.
127. Gismond of Salerne, p. 191.
128. Gismond of Salerne, p. 201.
129. Horley's translation of Castiglione's Courtier in Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 147.
130. Gismond of Salerne, p. 201.
131. Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, p. 132.
132. Gismond of Salerne, p. 169.
133. Gismond of Salerne, p. 171.
134. Gismond of Salerne, p. 171.
135. Gismond of Salerne, p. 172.
136. Gismond of Salerne, p. 171.
137. Gismond of Salerne, p. 176.
138. Gismond of Salerne, p. 176.
139. Gismond of Salerne, p. 178.
140. Gismond of Salerne, p. 178.

141. Gismond of Salerne, p. 178.
142. Gismond of Salerne, p. 178.
143. Gismond of Salerne, p. 178.
144. Gismond of Salerne, p. 179.
145. Gismond of Salerne, p. 181.
146. Gismond of Salerne, p. 181.
147. Gismond of Salerne, p. 182.
148. Gismond of Salerne, p. 182.
149. Gismond of Salerne, p. 183.
150. Gismond of Salerne, p. 185.
151. Gismond of Salerne, p. 185.
152. Gismond of Salerne, p. 191.
153. Gismond of Salerne, p. 194.
154. Gismond of Salerne, p. 196.
155. Gismond of Salerne, p. 196.
156. Gismond of Salerne, p. 196.
157. Gismond of Salerne, p. 200.
158. Gismond of Salerne, p. 200.
159. Gismond of Salerne, p. 210.
160. Gismond of Salerne, p. 210.
161. Gismond of Salerne, p. 210.
162. Gismond of Salerne, p. 212.
163. Gismond of Salerne, p. 212.
164. Gismond of Salerne, p. 212.
165. Gismond of Salerne, p. 212.
166. Boccaccio, Decameron, p. 341.
167. Gismond of Salerne, p. 215.
168. Robert Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, Dedicatory letter
to Ladie Mary Peter and Ladie Anne Graie, line 19

169. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 1265.
170. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 1822.
171. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 306.
172. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 318.
173. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 646.
174. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 786.
175. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 1156.
176. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 1171.
177. Wilmot, Tancred and Gismund, line 1181.
178. Gismond of Salerne, p. 181.
179. King Leir, line 276.
180. King Leir, line 767.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that English drama has been a vehicle for discussing the nature and status of women from its very earliest origins, whether it was used as a means of teaching and reinforcing currently accepted views, or as a means of evaluating or questioning them.

As this study has shown, contemporary drama seems to confirm Lawrence Stone's interpretation of the major social changes which took place during the mediaeval and early Renaissance period.

In Church-dominated mediaeval drama, women and marriage are presented as a celibate clergy viewed them. Biblical characters like the Virgin Mary and Eve illustrated the Church's polarised images of women as sexless, obedient exemplar and flawed, fleshly reality. Yet even at this early stage, the character of Mrs. Noah, whose function in the main ideology of the plays seems to be that of an awful warning about the hazards of marriage, begins to become a channel for more positive views of women familiar from contemporary folk literature. Similarly, the identification of Lechery with women in the Morality Plays is a faithful reflection of contemporary religious ideas, just as the female virtues who appear in later Moralities are an early indication of changing attitudes to marriage bred of popular frustration with the Church's corruption and its insistence on celibacy.

However, the more positive view of marriage promulgated by the Protestant Reformers failed to deliver the more enlightened view of women it seemed to promise, in drama as in life. In contemporary society, Stone argues, it resulted in a reinforcement of patriarchy, and a reduction in the status of women. It also bred a concern with ensuring

perfect wifhood which led to a highly restrictive code of education and behaviour for young women.

While conduct-books and educational theories proliferated in real life, the stage too became a means of promoting the new ideology. The Testing Plays illustrated the way in which young women could be educated to become perfect wives, and the way in which the virtues of constancy and chastity, once instilled in this way, should withstand testing by husbands and would-be seducers alike. Because of its artistic limitations, dramatists turned away from didactic plays promoting this code of female virtue, when it was still widely accepted in society, and shifted their attention instead to an issue made controversial by the reinforcement of patriarchy under the Protestants: that of the marriage debate.

Controversy about the marriage question in Post-Reformation society seems to have been fuelled by a clash between literature and life. Perhaps it was simply fortuitous that the period when religious changes were making belief in the right of parents to dictate their children's choice of occupation or spouse stronger than ever coincided with the arrival in Britain of translations of many continental Renaissance works promoting the ideal of romantic love. On the other hand, autocracy invites opposition, and the very comprehensiveness of parental power during this period may have generated dissent, and a market for literature which voiced it.

Given that, as we have seen, drama showing the younger generation rebelling against their elders in search of romantic love, it would seem natural to expect that dramatists in general would throw in their lot with the young and with mainstream literary influences, and endorse romantic love and marriages made by personal choice. However, evidence from the surviving plays shows that this was never

the case. Dramatists seem to have felt that it was important to reflect and extend the current debate, by using drama's ability to present temporary models of any given view of the world, and to examine how they would work in practice. The resulting plays seem to represent the whole spectrum of contemporary opinion. For every dramatist who endorsed the new ideal of romantic love, there were others raising doubts about its suitability as a basis for marriage, expressing confidence in arranged marriage, or simply suggesting small modifications to the status quo. Very few used their plays simply as propaganda attacking prevailing social ideas.

Clearly, then, the drama of the mediaeval and Reformation period closely follows Lawrence Stone's account of social changes and concerns. The areas in which drama departs from or challenges ideas prevalent in contemporary society are harder to identify, as are the reasons behind such divergences.

The influence behind the earliest dissenting voice in conformist drama, the increasingly positive presentation of women and marriage which start to emerge in the later Mystery and Morality Plays, is that of folk entertainment. Broad comedy in these plays, first used as the bait to catch the audience's attention, became a voice for the realities of working life amid the restricted religious interpretation of the world. An impression of the equality which necessarily existed between men and women who had to work equally hard to make a living emerges through these episodes, challenging the conventional views of the Church.

The greater practical equality of women among the working classes was also a factor in early drama's most clear and important departure from the mainstream of contemporary opinion - the plays of the More circle. These plays are unique within the period covered by this study, not only

for their exciting and individualistic portrayal of women, but because they are the only ones which we can be reasonably certain were written in a conscious effort to offer an alternative view of society and of women, and to influence their audience. We can deduce this because of the dramatists' closeness, in both social and philosophical terms, to Thomas More. His beliefs, philosophical background and the way in which he used humour and entertainment to suggest ideas to the influential are unusually well documented, and this makes it easy to detect when authors close to him, and who shared his ideas, seem to have been adopting the same techniques.

The innovative portrayal of women in these plays as rational and articulate beings clearly stems from Humanist philosophy, and from Humanist ideas about education in particular. More's intellectual honesty led him to reject his Church's traditional view of women as less rational than men. He insisted that both men and women possessed the faculty of reason which distinguished men from animals, and that both were equally capable of education which would extend their intellectual capabilities. If women were inferior, it was because society had decided to make them so, by educating them for subservience.

In his Utopia, More created an alternative world whose ideal nature depended on women taking their share in economic and intellectual life. This sharing was necessary so that men as well as women could study as well as work, and thus become full human beings rather than mere wage slaves. More also believed that, even within the limitations of contemporary society, education for women would improve the quality of life for society at large and would mean a better life for men as well.

The dramatists who shared More's beliefs seem to have set out to convince their audience of the necessity of a

rational life of work and education for both men and women. They sought to do so not only by explaining the importance of the ideal for both sexes, but by taking More's views about women as a starting point. To have a voice - to be able to explain your position and argue logically - requires an education. The dramatists of the More circle demonstrate what could result from Humanist educational policies, by showing us rational, articulate women who are capable of using logical debate to prove their worth or convey their point of view. The image of women they presented to their courtly audience challenged both the court's view of women as fit only for leisure and for ornament, and the view current in other levels of society that women were less rational than men, and therefore fit only for domestic work.

However, as we have seen, the influence of this small pressure group, and of Humanist views that women had the potential to become men's intellectual equals, was very brief. Belief in female inferiority and irrationality was reinstated by the Protestant Reformers, and education for women came to mean only education for wifedom.

The Testing Plays seem to have originated as deliberate propaganda for the new educational ideal. The way in which they are virtually advertisements for the code they illustrate is highlighted by their odd resemblance to modern television commercials for cars and other consumer durables; once proofed against sin by receiving an education in the right values, the wife undergoes a series of stringent tests, almost to the point of destruction, to demonstrate the code's effectiveness. For the female viewer, the message is to acquire these virtues; for the male, to select a wife who has been trained in them.

Drama's importance as a means of instructing women in the new ideal would have increased as its effects began to take

hold. As the new code of training spread, the educational opportunities available to women of all social classes became even more restricted. Consequently, drama would have become a prime medium for transmitting the ideology to a female population which was already becoming less literate because of its effects.

The Testing Plays seem to have started as a conscious attempt by some dramatists to promote the code of wifely submissiveness. However, while support for the reinforcement of patriarchy was still increasing in society, there are signs in the surviving plays that the appeal of the Testing idiom quickly began to go stale. While the number of new didactic plays being written seems to have fallen, an increasing number of dramatists still using the genre were beginning to find ways of questioning, adapting and ridiculing it. In the process, they started to create more active and interesting heroines than the straight Testing Play tended to provide.

The only available evidence for the reasons behind this change - the clues we can find in the plays themselves - indicates that it was for purely artistic reasons, rather than any intention to prompt social change by undermining current morality. The extreme boredom of the later purely didactic plays, the appearance of fossilised formulaic phrases in inappropriate contexts, and the number of obvious burlesques on the Testing theme indicate that its dramatic potential was very limited and was soon exhausted.

Dramatists who wanted to provide exciting entertainment, with action, uncertainty and dynamic characters, were forced to subvert the conventions of the Testing Plays. They were also forced to depart from the static images of female virtue offered in the Testing Plays in order to create heroines who were active and interesting. In order for a comedy focussing on a woman to be a true comedy, she

must be capable of changing and maturing as a result of her experiences within the play. For this to happen, she must be less than perfect at the outset, or capable of discovering that her original code of behaviour was unrealistic. Similarly, the current identification of female virtue with domestic seclusion meant that dramatists had to make an effort to free their heroines from this code, through disguise and removal of male authority, to make them capable of action in the wider world. To make interesting drama, Testing Play heroines like Cassandra, Em, Mariana and Perseda had to violate the limited idea of female virtue which forms the basis of the genre.

Of course, the unlikely nature of some of the methods dramatists found of freeing their heroines would also simultaneously have diminished the impact of portraying women as active or independent by placing the action at one remove from the reality of everyday life. Audiences would have found unusual views of women less disturbing in such settings, in much the same way that modern film censors find violence more acceptable if it is shown in a setting which is clearly one of fantasy, rather than real life. Paradoxically though, the fact that women were being shown in this way at all may have raised people's awareness of the possibility that women could behave in this way if the circumstances were right, and this may have increased the possibility of its coming about in society.

Other purely artistic factors also helped to influence the presentation of women in drama at this time, sometimes reinforcing its divergence from the social reality. The restricted view of women inherited from classical tragedy tended to reinforce existing ideas as it cohered remarkably closely with contemporary views of female frailty. Classical comedy, on the other hand, while not extending the characterisation of women, was an important source of

plot material, enabling drama to add to the current love and marriage debate.

The main literary influences which steered views of women in drama away from current social beliefs were those of romance and of romantic love. The influence of romance, with the unlimited potential it offered the creative imagination, produced some of the most striking images of women to appear in Renaissance drama. Many of the means of freeing heroines from the restrictions of the ideal of domestic virtue which we take for granted in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries - unusual events, travel, bereavement, male disguise, the ability to use rational argument and to formulate plans - have their origins in romance. Once again, romance's strength and weakness lay in its distance from reality. What it said about women was perceived as less likely to be true, but this very unlikeliness meant that dramatists could offer more divergent views of women with impunity than would have been tolerated in a more realistic genre.

The other largely literary influence which seemed likely to result in more interesting and individual characterisation of women was that of romantic love. Because of its view of the importance of the individual, the ideal of romantic love seems to imply a similar assumption of equality between men and women as the ideas of the Humanist educationists did. Women as well as men could be affected by love and forced into conflict with their parents and the expectations of society in order to achieve fulfilment.

Paradoxically, though, very few heroines in drama dealing with romantic love seem to fulfil this potential. Apart from a few, like Mariana in Faire Em and Sabia in Comon Condiciones, who actively seek love, they tend to be the wooed rather than the wooer, compliant rather than daring. Others who actively seek fulfilment through love are viewed

ambiguously because of shifting moral perspectives within the play, which leave it uncertain whether the emotion in question is love or lust.

The tragic treatment of the theme of romantic love seems to invite the creation of more exciting heroines, but there are few examples to show that this possibility was realised. Gismond of Salerne is the most important heroine to emerge from a love-tragedy, yet even in the original version of the play, shifting points of view are used to allow all her actions to be interpreted as lustful deviance from current moral standards, as well as noble decisiveness in risking all for love, depending on the audience's own point of view. However, the fact that Wilmot, in making his later edition of the play, felt the need to modify her character so that her bravery and the rebuke it presents to contemporary values are extinguished seems to indicate his concern about the challenge it presented, even in the context of a balanced debate.

The same restriction seems to apply to the way in which women are presented in the later comedies of romantic love and marriage. These plays, whose prime concern is with the current marriage debate rather than with questioning the nature of women, seem to be a perfect illustration of what More understood: that female nature is a product of society's requirements. Women in these comedies illustrate not what women are like, but what the author would like them to be, depending on the particular ideal of marriage he advances. Women in plays promoting marriage for love are independent in their choice of suitor and then faithful to the man of their choice; in plays supporting arranged marriage they are virtuous and obedient to their parents, or froward and rebellious. In the more problematic plays, the way in which women characters are shown is so ambiguous that a comprehensive reading of what they are like is impossible: the audience's view of any female character

would have depended largely on whether or not they agreed with the premises of the moral ideas against which she was being shown.

With women in these late comedies so much the creatures of their author's interpretation of the current marriage debate, it is impossible for true heroines to emerge. Although because of the nature of their plot-material, plays dealing with love, courtship and marriage need to give a prominent role to women, they do not develop into heroines, since none of them conveys the necessary independent moral authority. Florila is an anti-heroine rather than a heroine; witty Mall appears to be an individual and realistic character, but cannot transcend her role as a young wench eager for an arranged mating in a society in which this is the norm. Honorea is either pathetic or erring and redeemed depending on how one views patriarchy. Even the women in Dekker's Shoemaker's Holiday, whose most memorable characteristic is the optimism it conveys about human nature, are likeable and varied, but none of them really becomes a heroine in her own right.

It is when we consider that many of these plays are contemporary with Shakespeare's earlier works that we become aware of just how limited their portrayal of women is in comparison. The flighty daughters of Englishmen for my Money (1598) and The Angry Women of Abington (1588) are amusing, but their limitations are highlighted by the much more positive image of female subversion of male expectations offered by The Merry Wives of Windsor. Even witty, outspoken heroines like waspish Mall (1588) and courtly Martia (1597), although unusual for their time, remain very one-dimensional in comparison with Beatrice (1598).

A telling example of the extent of this difference can be found in the character of Rossaline, Piero's niece in John Marston's Antonio and Mellida (1599). Like Shakespeare's

Beatrice, she is a court lady under no pressure to marry for political advantage, and has a reputation for a waspish wit. But there the resemblance ends. While Beatrice's wit has the edge of necessity given by the tension of a proud independence which is constantly on the brink of the fear of isolation, Rosaline's is just another accomplishment of a social goddess who announces gaily

I have 39 seruants, and my munkey, that makes the fortieth. Now I loue all of them lightly for something, but affect none of them seriously for anything. (1)

Rosaline has no serious side; she is never grieved, angry or committed to a cause, but remains as Marston created her, a pretty, ornamental and amusing court lady. He shows us only the external display of her wit; while Shakespeare, showing us similar wit in Beatrice, also manages to convey the understanding that wit can be a defence as well as an accomplishment, for women just as much as for men.

Juliet Dusingberre shows the extent to which Shakespeare's presentation of women transcends the ideas derived from religion and literature which were still current at his time. Instead of accepting the ready-made wisdom they offered, she argues, he allied himself with the emerging alternative voice offered by Puritan ideology, with its insistence on spiritual equality between men and women, and on the need for reform of marriage customs. Although, as she says, they lacked the intellectual radicalism of the Humanists, they adopted and re-voiced many of their ideas. These influences, she argues, would have enabled Shakespeare to make the same deductions as More: that women were potentially men's equals, and that society's view of female nature was simply the product of its own expectations, achieved by the type of education and training it ordained for them.

She provides ample evidence that Shakespeare embarked upon the presentation of characters of both sexes from a very different basis from much of contemporary thought. She demonstrates how his plays illuminate the similarities between men and women, not the differences, showing not only that women are capable of the qualities and skills the Renaissance associated with men, like courage, endurance and articulacy, but that deficiency in the 'feminine' qualities of affection, sympathy and mercy warps the personality and makes it less than fully human, whether it is male or female.

While discrediting literary stereotypes of women, Shakespeare allows his female characters to play truant from femininity itself through male disguise. In keeping with the double nature of drama, illusion demonstrates truth: the disguise reveals the underlying likeness between the sexes, itself disguised by a society which insists on exaggerating the difference by artificial means.

As Juliet Dusinberre concludes:

Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses. To talk about Shakespeare's women is to talk about his men, because he refused to separate their worlds physically, intellectually or spiritually

(2)

However, my own detailed study of plays earlier and contemporary with Shakespeare indicates that the difference between his presentation of women and that of even his close contemporaries is more marked than Juliet Dusinberre suggests. She asserts that while Shakespeare's portrayal of women exceeds that of his contemporaries, the difference is simply in the level of his artistry, and that similar attitudes to women can be found in the works of many

dramatists of the same period. Certainly I would agree with her that these dramatists do ask the same questions as Shakespeare about women, men's attitudes to them and the way in which society treats them; it is clear that their plays are constantly pointing to the flaws in contemporary ideas of women through a process of questioning and exploration. Their female characters, however, remain very clearly bounded by the current views they are used to explore. Shakespeare, however, seems to transcend the level of discussing current social assumptions about women and to start from an entirely different basis.

Given that all the remarkable accumulation of factors and influences which were available to Shakespeare's contemporaries still did not enable them to make the vital cognitive leap from questioning women's role from the basis of existing views to transcending them and considering women as individuals, it seems that we have to conclude that some element in Shakespeare's own personality predisposed him not just to question but to go beyond much of his period's accumulated lore about the nature of the sexes.

Obviously, to attribute such a view to purely personal insight raises more questions than it answers, and I am well aware of the dangers of biographical speculation. Nevertheless, the Sonnets alone show evidence of a tendency to focus on the individual rather than the outside appearance, and on the similarity between the sexes, not the differences.

Certainly the language and imagery of some of the later Sonnets reflect the idiom of anti-feminist invective and satire, which was the common currency of a great deal of contemporary writing. But at the same time, the Sonnets show us a world in which personal identity and gender are ill-defined, in which the beauty which inspires love can be masculine or feminine, and whose imagery subverts

conventional sex-roles. The poet becomes a husband who is deceived, not by his wife, but by another man, a deserted child, a servant to his master-mistress. Even the love-tangle of the later Sonnets leads back to the essential likeness of the three protagonists.

Perhaps the most significant element of the Sonnets, though, is the way in which they unite ranges of emotional experience currently identified as masculine and feminine. The experience of love, as described in the Sonnets, incorporates elements which must have been common to women's lives at this time. The beloved youth is of higher social status than the poet, much in demand socially, and has moral flaws which even his considerable beauty makes it impossible to overlook. The poet therefore shares with contemporary women the knowledge of what it is to love as a social inferior, to watch the clock for the beloved and wonder what he is doing elsewhere, and to fear loss and desertion.

Most importantly, though, he shares with women the experience of having to accept and forgive the man's flawed nature. Tenderness, long-suffering and forgiveness - qualities women were encouraged to cultivate, particularly in the context of the ideology of harmonious marriage - are shown to be qualities which are also inescapably part of male nature. His insights probably make the poet less manly, as his age understood the term, but a more complete human being.

It seems, then, that Shakespeare may have differed from his contemporaries in kind, not in degree, because of his particular insight into the essential sameness underlying society's ideas of what was appropriate to masculinity or femininity. This insight enabled him to look beyond the limited and limiting inherited female stereotypes of his

age, and the outward trappings of sex; and in fact to go one better than Donne's Worthies;

If, as I have, you also do
Virtue attired in woman see
And dare love that, and say so too
And forget the He and She.

(3)

Shakespeare's predecessors and contemporaries were certainly aware of the importance of the debate on the nature of women, and many made adept use of the dramatic idiom to explore and to ask questions about current ideas. Only Shakespeare, however, seems to have had the particular insight needed to go beyond this and to start to suggest answers.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. John Marston, Antonio and Mellida Part I, edited by W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford, 1922), line 1745.
2. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, p. 308.
3. John Donne, The Undertaking or Platonic Love in The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne, edited by Theodore Redpath (London, 1967), p. 8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Primary Sources

- Axton, Richard., ed., The Interlude of Calisto and Melebe in Three Rastell Plays (Cambridge 1979)
- Bevington, D., ed., Medieval Drama (Boston 1975)
- Bond, W., ed., Misogonus, in Early Plays from the Italian (Oxford 1911)
- Brandon, S., The Tragicomoedi of the Vertuous Octavia, ed., W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909)
- Brooke, C.F.T., ed., Common Conditions, Yale Elizabethan Club Reprints (Yale 1915)
- ., ed., The Shakespeare Apocrypha (Oxford 1908)
- Brown, A., ed., The Wisdom of Dr. Dodypoll, Malone Society (Oxford 1965)
- Bullough, G., ed., The Taming of a Shrew, in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare Volume 1 (London 1958)
- Chapman, George, A Humorous Day's Mirth ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1937)
- ., The Blind Beggar of Alexandria ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1929)
- Crow, J., and F.P. Wilson, eds., Jacob and Esau, Malone Society (Oxford 1956)
- Davies, N., ed., Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments, Early English Text Society, Supplement 1 (Oxford 1970)
- Davies, R.T., ed., The Corpus Christi Play of the English Middle Ages (London 1972)
- Dawson, G., and F.P. Wilson, eds., July and Julian, Malone Society (Oxford 1955)
- Dekker, Thomas, Old Fortunatus and The Shoemakers' Holiday in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers, Volume 1 (Cambridge 1953)
- Dekker, Thomas, and Chettle, The Pleasant Commoedye of Patient Grissill in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers, Volume 1 (Cambridge 1953)

- Eccles, M., ed., The Macro Plays, Early English Text Society, No. 262 (London 1969)
- Edwards, Richard, Damon and Pithias in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, IV (London 1874)
- Farmer, John, ed., The Dramatic Writings of John Heywood, Early English Dramatists (London 1905)
- Fulwell, Ulpian, Like Will to Like in Tudor Interludes, ed. Peter Happe (London 1972)
- Furnivall, F.J., and John Munro, eds., The Troublesome Raigne of King John, The Shakespeare Classics (London 1913)
- Garter, Thomas, The Commodity of the moste vertuous and Godlye Susanna, ed. W. W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1937)
- Gascoigne, G., and F. Kinweltershe, Jocasta, in Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford 1912)
- _____, Supposes in Early Plays from the Italian, ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford 1911)
- Gayley, C.M., ed., Representative English Comedies, I (London 1903)
- Greene, Robert, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, ed. J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London 1969)
- _____, The Scottish History of James the Fourth ed. J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London 1967)
- _____, John of Bordeaux or The Second Part of Friar Bacon, ed. W. W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1936)
- _____, Alphonsus, King of Aragon ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1926)
- _____, A Looking Glass for London and England, George-a-Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield and Orlando Furioso, in The Works of Robert Greene, ed. Thomas H. Dickinson, Mermaid Series (London 1909)
- _____, Selimus ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909)
- Greg, W.W., ed., Richard II or Thomas of Woodstock, Malone Society (Oxford 1979)

- _____, and E.L. Smart, eds., Jack Juggler, Malone Society (Oxford 1933)
- _____, ed., The Dead Man's Fortune (plot only), in Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses (Oxford 1931)
- _____, The True Tragedy of Richard the Third, Malone Society (Oxford 1929)
- _____, ed., A Pleasant Comodie of faire Em the Millers Daughter of Manchester, Malone Society (Oxford 1928)
- _____, ed., The Pedlers Prophecie, Malone Society (Oxford 1914)
- _____, ed., Clyomon and Clamydes, Malone Society (Oxford 1913)
- _____, ed., Tom Tyler and his Wife, Malone Society (Oxford 1910)
- _____, ed., A Newe Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, Band 5 (Louvain 1909, Vaduz 1963)
- _____, ed., A Lamentable Tragedy of Loctrine, Malone Society (Oxford 1908)
- _____, and R. Warwick Bond, eds., King Lear, Malone Society (Oxford 1907)
- Halliday, F.E., ed., The Legend of the Rood, with the Three Maries and The Death of Pilate from the Cornish Miracle Plays (London 1955)
- Happé, P., ed., English Mystery Plays (London 1975)
- _____, ed., "R.B.", A new Tragical Comedie of Apius and Virginia, in Tudor Interludes (London 1972)
- _____, ed., Tudor Interludes (London 1972)
- Haughton, William, Englishmen for my Money ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1913)
- _____, Grim the Collier of Croydon in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W.C. Hazlitt Volume VIII (London 1984)
- Hazlitt, W.C., ed., The Trial of Treasure in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, II (London 1874)
- _____, Lusty Juventus in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, II (London 1874)

- _____, ed., Mucedorus, in, Dodsley's Old English Plays Volume VII (London 1874)
- _____, ed., Thersites, in, Dodsley's Old English Plays Volume I (London 1874)
- _____, ed., The Disobedient Child in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, II (London 1874)
- _____, ed., Dodsley's Old English Plays (London 1874)
- Heywood, J., A Play of Love, ed. J.A.B. Somerset, F.M. Mares and W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1978)
- _____, Johan Johan in Medieval Drama, ed. D. Bevington (Boston 1975)
- _____, The Play of the Wether, in Medieval Drama, ed., David Bevington (Boston 1975)
- _____, The Foure PP in Specimens of the Pre-Shakesperean Drama, ed., John M. Manly, I (New York 1897)
- _____, The Pardoner and the Friar in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed., W. Hazlitt, II (London 1874)
- Heywood, Thomas, The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV Histories, ed. Barron Field, The Shakespeare Society, No. 13 (London 1842)
- Hughes, Thomas, The Misfortunes of Arthur in Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford 1912)
- Jonson, Ben, Every Man Out of his Humour in The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, ed. G.A. Wilkes, Volume 1 (Oxford 1981)
- _____, The Case is Altered in The Complete Plays of Ben Johnson, ed. G.A. Wilkes (Oxford 1981)
- Kyd, Thomas, The Spanish Tragedy, in Five Elizabethan Tragedies, ed. A.K. Mc Ilwraith (Oxford (1938) 1971)
- _____, The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda in The Complete Works of Thomas Kyd, ed. F.S. Boas (Oxford 1901)
- Lindsay, Sir David, A Satire of the Three Estates, ed. Matthew McDiarmid (London 1967)

- Lumiansky, R.M., and D. Mills, eds., The Chester Mystery Cycle, Early English Text Society, Special Series 3 (Oxford 1974)
- Lumley, Lady Jane, trans., Iphegenia, ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909)
- Lyly, John, Lyly's Gallathea and Midas, ed. Lancashire (London 1969)
- ., Mother Bombie ed. Kathleen M. Lea and D. Nichol Smith, Malone Society (Oxford 1939 [1948])
- ., Alexander and Campaspe, ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1933)
- Manly, J.M., ed., Specimens of the Pre-Shaksperean Drama, I, (New York 1867)
- ., ed., Mundus et Infans in Specimens of the Pre-Shaksperean Drama, I (New York 1867)
- ., ed., Nice Wanton in Specimens of the Pre-Shaksperean Drama, I (New York 1867)
- Marlowe, Christopher, The Massacre at Paris and Dido, Queen of Carthage, in The Plays of Christopher Marlowe, ed. Roma Gill (London 1979)
- Marston, John, Antonio and Mellida Part 1 ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1922)
- McKerrow, R.B., ed., A Newe Interlude of Impacyente Poverté, Materialen zur Kunde des alteren Englischen Dramas, Band 33 (Louvain 1911)
- Medwall, H., Fulgens and Lucres, in Tudor Interludes, ed. Peter Happe (London 1972)
- ., Nature, in Recently Rediscovered 'Lost' Tudor Plays, ed., John S. Farmer, Early English Dramatists (London 1907)
- Munday, Anthony, The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntingdon, ed. Arthur Brown, Malone Society (Oxford 1964)
- ., The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntingdon, ed. Arthur Brown, Malone Society (Oxford 1965)
- ., A Knack to Know a Knave, ed. Arthur Brown, Malone Society (Oxford 1963)
- ., John a Kent and John a Cumber ed. W.W. Greg and Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Malone Society (Oxford 1923)

- _____, The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W.C. Hazlitt, Volume VI (London 1874)
- _____, Two Italian Gentlemen (Fidele and Fortunio) ed. W.W. Greg, and Percy Simpson, Malone Society (Oxford 1909 [1933])
- Peele, George, The Old Wives Tale ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909)
- _____, King Edward the First, ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1911)
- _____, The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe, ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1912)
- Philip, J., The Commodity of patient and meeke Grissill, ed., W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1909)
- Pickering, John, Horestes (A Newe Enterlude of Vice) ed. Daniel Seltzer and Arthur Brown, Malone Society, (Oxford 1962)
- Porter, Henry, Two Angry Women of Abington ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1913)
- Preston, Thomas, Cambises, in Pre Shakespearean Tragedies, ed. Ashley Thorndike, Minor Elizabethan Tragedies (London 1958)
- Redford, J., Wit and Science, in Tudor Interludes, ed., Peter Happe (London 1972)
- Rhys, Ernest, ed., Everyman and other old Religious Plays (London 1909)
- Rose, Martial, ed., The Wakefield Mystery Plays (London 1961)
- Sackville, Thomas, and Thomas Norton, Gorboduc in English Classical Tragedies, ed. J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford 1912)
- Shakespeare, William, Works, all in Arden Edition
- Simpson, R., ed., Jack Drum's Entertainment, in The School of Shakespere, Volume II (New York 1878)
- Skelton, John, Magnyfycence, ed., R.L. Ramsay, Early English Text Society, E.S. No. 48 (London 1958)
- Smith, Lucy Toulmin, ed., The York Plays (New York 1963)

- Spearing, E.M., ed., Studley's Translations of Seneca's Agamemnon and Medea 1566, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, Band 38 (Louvain 1913, Vaduz 1963)
- Stafford, Rod., Henry Noel, G. Al., Christopher Hatton and Robert Wilmot, Gismond of Salerne in Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford 1921)
- Stevenson, William, Gammar Gurton's Needle in Representative English Comedies, ed. C.M. Gayley, Volume 1 (London 1903)
- Udall, Nicholas, Ralph Roister Doister in Representative English Comedies, ed. C.M. Gayley, Volume 1 (London 1903)
- de Vocht, H., ed., Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens 1559, 1560 and 1561, ed. H. de Vocht, Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, Band 41 (Louvain 1913, Vaduz 1963)
- Wager, Lewis, The Buggbears in Early Plays from the Italian, ed. R. Warwick Bond, (Oxford 1911)
- Wager, William, The Longer Thou Livest The More Thou Art, ed. Mark Barbour (London 1968)
- _____, The Trial of Treasure in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, III (London 1874)
- Whetstone, George, The Historie of Promos and Cassandra, in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, ed. G.M. Bullough, II (London 1958)
- Whibley, C., ed., Seneca his Tenne Tragedies edited by Thomas Newton, Tudor Translations, Second Series (London 1927)
- Wilmot, Robert, The Tragedie of Tancred and Gismund, ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1914)
- Wilson, Robert, The Three Ladies of London in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, VI (London 1874)
- Wilson, Robert, The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. Hazlitt, VI (London 1874)
- Woodes, Nathaniel, The Conflict of Conscience in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. Hazlitt, VI (London 1874)

2. Secondary Sources

- Adams, Henry Hitch, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy,
Colombia Studies in English (New York 1943)
- Anderson, M.D., Drama and Imagery in English Medieval
Churches (Cambridge 1963)
- Ariosto, Ludovico, Orlando Furioso, translated by Guido
Waldman (Oxford 1974)
- Altman, Joel B., The Tudor Play of Mind (University of
California, 1978)
- Bloch, Marc, Feudal Society (La Societé Feudale), trans.
L.A. Manyon (London 1961)
- Boas, F.S., University Drama in the Tudor Age,
(Oxford 1914)
- Boccaccio, Giovanni, The Decameron, trans. G.H. McWilliam
(London 1972)
- Bolwell, R.W., The Life and Works of John Heywood
(New York 1921)
- Bradbrooke, M.C., The Rise of the Common Player
(London 1962)
- Bradbury, M, D. Palmer and N. Denny, Medieval Drama,
Stratford upon Avon Studies, 16 (London 1973)
- Brooke, C.L., ed., The Harley Lyrics (Manchester 1956)
- Burford, E.J., Bawds and Lodgings (London 1976)
- Burgess, Anthony, The Kingdom of the Wicked (London 1985)
- Carey, M., The Wakefield Group (New York 1926)
- Castiglione, Baldesar, The Book of the Courtier, trans. and
intro. George Bull (London 1967)
- Charlton, H.B., The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance
Tragedy (Manchester 1946)
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, The Clerks Tale, and The Phisiciens
Tale, in The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,
ed., F.N. Robinson (Oxford 1966)
- Cleugh, James, Love Locked Out (London 1963)
- Coulson, G.G., Medieval Panorama: The Horizons of Thought
(Cambridge 1938)

- Dawson, Giles, Introductory Notes to July and Julian ed. Giles Dawson and F.P. Wilson, Malone Society (Oxford 1955)
- Day, Mabel, ed., The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe, Early English Text Society, Original Series, No. 225 (London 1952)
- Dobson, R.B., and J. Taylor, Rymes of Robyn Hood (London 1976)
- Donne, John, The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne, ed., Theodore Redpath (London 1967)
- Drayton, Michael, The Works of Michael Drayton, ed. J. William Hebel, I. (Oxford 1931)
- Dusinberre, Juliet, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London 1975)
- Eliot, T.S., Introduction to Seneca his Tenne Tragedies edited by Thomas Newton, ed. C Whibley (London 1927)
- Farnham, Willard, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Oxford 1958)
- Fleischer, Martin, Radical Reform and Political Persuasion in the Life and Writings of Thomas More (Geneva 1973)
- Francis, W. Nelson, ed., The Book of Vices and Virtues, Early English Text Society, Original Series, No. 217 (Oxford 1942)
- Gardiner, H.C., Mysteries' End: an investigation of the last days of the medieval religious stage (Yale 1967)
- Greer, Germaine, The Female Eunuch (London 1971)
- Greg, W.W., Introductory Notes to Two Angry Women of Abington ed. W.W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford 1913)
- Habenicht, Rudolph E., ed., John Heywood's A Dialogue of Proverbs, University of California English Studies No. 25 (California 1963)
- Hindley, Geoffrey, England in the Age of Caxton (London 1979)
- Hoy, Cyrus, Introduction, Notes and Commentaries to texts, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed., Fredson Bowes (Cambridge 1980)
- Jardine, Lisa, Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Brighton 1983)

- Kelso, Ruth, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance
(Illinois 1956)
- Kott, Jan, Shakespeare our Contemporary (London 1965)
- Langdon-Davies, John, A Short History of Women
(London 1928)
- Lavin, J.A., Introduction to Friar Bungay and Friar Bacon,
ed. J.A. Lavin, New Mermaid Series (London 1969)
- Lewis, C.S., The Allegory of Love (Oxford 1936)
- Lucas, F.L., Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy (Oxford 19?)
- Maclean, Ian, The Renaissance Notion of Woman
(Cambridge 1980)
- Margeson, J.M.R., The Origins of English Tragedy
(Oxford 1967)
- More, Thomas, Utopia in, The Complete Works of Thomas
More, ed. E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter (Yale 1965),
IV.
- Morewedge, Rosemarie Thee, The Role of Women in the Middle
Ages (Albany 1975)
- Oesterley, H., ed., Shakespeare's Jest Book: C. Merry
Tales (London 1866)
- Owst, G.R., Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England
(Cambridge 1933)
- Pecock, Reginald, A Reule of Crysten Religioun ed. William
Cabell Greet, Early English Text Society, No. 171
(London 1927)
- Penman, Bruce, ed., Five Italian Renaissance Comedies
(London 1978)
- Potter, Robert, The English Morality Play (California 1975)
- Power, Eileen, The Position of Women, in The Legacy of the
Middle Ages, ed. C.G. Crump and E.F. Jacob
(Oxford 1926)
- "Réage, Pauline", The Story of O, (London 1976)
- Ribner, Irving, The English History Play in the Age of
Shakespeare (Princeton 1957)
- de Rojas, Fernando, The Spanish Bawd, represented by
Celestina or The Tragicke-Comedy of Calisto and
Melbea, trans. James Mabbe 1631, ed. H. Warner
Allen (London 1893)

- Tweedie, Jill, In the Name of Love (London 1979)
- de Vocht, H., Introduction to Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens 1559, 1560 and 1561, ed. H. de Vocht, Materialien zur Kunde des alteren Englischen Dramas, Band 41 (Louvain 1913, Vaduz 1963)
- Walker, Sue Sheridan, Widow and Ward: The Feudal Law of Child Custody in Medieval England in Woman in Medieval Society, ed. Susan Mosher Stuart (Pennsylvania 1976)
- Warner, Marina, Alone of All Her Sex (London 1976)
- Watson, Foster, ed., Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women (London 1912)
- Wilson, F.P., ed., The Batchelors Banquet (London 1929)
- Wilson, Jean, Entertainments for Elizabeth I, Studies in Elizabethan and Renaissance Culture, 2 (Woodbridge and Totowa USA 1980)
- Wilson Knight, G., The Golden Labyrinth (London 1962)
- Wright, Thomas, ed., The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry, Early English Text Society, Original Series No. 33 (London 1868, revised version 1906)
- Zall, P.M., ed., A Hundred Merry Tales (Lincoln USA 1963)