

**Satire and Anxieties concerning Female Sexuality and  
Transexuality in Late Elizabethan and Early Jacobean England**



**Part 2**

**Lynsey Dawn Blandford**

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## Chapter Four The Impotent Man

### The Threat of Impotency

Early modern impotency has connotations of sexual dysfunction and disempowerment. Impotency is linked to effeminacy through this perceived depletion of masculine mastery; however, it contrasts with the perception of the cause of effeminacy, an excess of heterosexual activity. The inversion of masculinity preoccupies Marston's and Guilpin's satires, in which the impotent man exposes the cost of a sensual life through the loss of his spiritual connection and his ability to procreate. Impotency also signalled a man's inability to perform a husband's 'duties' and ensure the patriarchal lineage, yet ultimately acts as an emblem of male sexual failure and humiliation. Irrationally it evokes anxieties of far-reaching implications that reflect on a man's masculine identity and authority. Impotency in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods is a signifier of emasculation; it removes the masculine boundaries and creates a man caught between the state of child and woman.

The satiric treatment of impotency and cuckoldry formed part of a national preoccupation reflecting anxiety over the condition of contemporary masculinity when confronted with sexually avaricious women. The influence of the Ovidian representation of impotence within the poetry which was contemporary with the satires, and within poetry of subsequent decades, will be discussed. An exploration of the theme of impotency within two early Jacobean plays, a tragedy and a comedy, will further expose the use of impotence as a topical subject of humiliation, a treatment shared by the satires.

The contemporary French reaction to the social threat of impotency provides an interesting juxtaposition to the English treatment, emphasising cultural differences and similarities. The closest English comparison to the public French impotency trial, the annulment hearing of Frances Howard and Essex, exposes the national preoccupation with impotency. The case reveals the reaction to the husband who cannot perform and the wife who voices her dissatisfaction, responses which reflect and influence the anxieties concerning impotency in early modern England. Patricia Parker alludes to a preoccupation in the late sixteenth century with impotence and male sexual failure which reached 'almost epidemic

proportions,' and was expressed through a wide variety of 'distinct and interconnected contexts — legal, medical, theological, [and] literary'.<sup>1</sup> The early modern treatment of impotency contrasts with the present sociological and biological approach as adopted by Eric Carlton in 1980. Early in his book, Carlton writes, '[t]he term "impotence" lacks precision. It is still used to cover a number of different conditions which are thought to be related: ejaculatory impotence, premature ejaculation and — most commonly — erectile impotence.'<sup>2</sup> Carlton continues an early modern attitude which classed man's sexual failure as a public failure, while his antithesis, the woman, contained a threatening unknown sexuality:

The female response has a 'hidden-ness' that is ultimately inaccessible to the male. The female anatomy reflects this; the covert internality of the vagina involves a secret world of sexual possibilities. In the final analysis, the female sexual response is unknowable to the male.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of female deception as opposed to male truth resurfaces: 'there is a kind of sexual "honesty" about the overt externality of the male genitalia that precludes even the possibility of deception.'<sup>4</sup> Mark Breitenberg treats masculinity as the anxious performance of outward signs and expressions.<sup>5</sup> Impotency was and apparently is perceived as a public and undeniable truth, thus emphasising its treatment as a symbol of masculine failure and humiliation.

Contemporary medical belief gave force to the emphasis of the sexual menace of women in the creation of male impotency. Calbi notes that writers such as Crooke, Paré and Duval, depict the womb as an embodiment of the fear of castration; Crooke describes the womb that 'snatcheth [...] and catcheth the seed of the man,' which 'greedily draw[s] and more narrowly embrace[s] the seede'.<sup>6</sup> Women via the womb are assumed to absorb man's essence into a female void, a consequence of their insatiable sexual appetite. Man's precarious possession of the phallus is only confirmed by Duval's advice that man should emit sperm into the womb without delay as 'too long a friction of the genital parts provokes such a dissipation of the [vital] spirits that the virile member waxes soft'.<sup>7</sup> Paré

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Parker, 'Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain', *Critical Inquiry*, 19:2 (Winter, 1993), 337–64 (p. 345).

<sup>2</sup> Eric Carlton, *Sexual Anxiety: A study of male impotence* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Carlton, p. 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> Carlton, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Crooke, *Microcosmographia*, pp. 262, 295, in Calbi, Maurizio, *Approximate Bodies: Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Duval, *Des Hermaphrodits*, p. 35, trans. by Calbi in *Approximate Bodies*, p. 68.

shares the same anxiety of impotence, stressing that ‘through delay the seed waxe cold, and so become unfruitful’.<sup>8</sup> The importance of semen not only as a defining essence of man, but also as the insurance of progeny is fully expressed in this fear of temporary efficacy and possible dissipation. Despite the obvious necessity of a womb for creation, it also acts as a combatant to man’s virility. Bruce R. Smith maintains that masculinity defined itself in opposition to women, sodomites, and people from low origins or other countries.<sup>9</sup> Breitenberg’s theory also perceives masculinity as dependent upon the construction of the feminine as the ‘Other who either confirms or disrupts masculine identity’.<sup>10</sup> Levine interprets masculinity as a performance, with the feminine as a default position.<sup>11</sup> Man can penetrate woman, and yet by doing so he risks transformation into a reflection of her sexual self. Calbi cites the image of the wounded warrior in early modern tragedy as an embodiment of ‘the lack of the phallus’ and in the example of Coriolanus an ‘uncanny proximity to formless penetrable “femininity”’.<sup>12</sup>

Othello expresses his sense of his beloved Desdemona as a paradox, the creator and the destroyer of his sexual virility. He imbues woman with the power to control man’s sexual appetite, his sexual pleasure and his ability to procreate:

But there where I have garnered up my heart,  
Where either I must live or bear no life,  
The fountain from the which my current runs  
Or else dries up — to be discarded thence! (IV. 2. 58–61)

Othello displaces his own personal responsibility and masculine anxieties of sexual failure onto the fantasy object of the woman. Callaghan observes, ‘as the repository of Othello’s desire and his seed, Desdemona becomes responsible for inflicting spiritual aridity and physical impotence upon him.’<sup>13</sup>

Impotency, however, is not merely a matter between man and woman. Virility was also a marker of distinction amongst men, while impotency destroyed ideas of masculine hierarchy. Callaghan understands virility as ‘a *potentially* radical construction of

<sup>8</sup> Paré, *The Workes*, p. 887, in Calbi, *Approximate Bodies*, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Breitenberg, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> L. Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization 1579–1642* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Calbi, *Approximate Bodies*, p. 75; *Coriolanus* V. 6. 104.

<sup>13</sup> Dymna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A study of King Lear, Othello, the Duchess of Malfi, and The White Devil* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 145–6.

masculinity in Renaissance tragedy, which undermines class difference between men' and acts as 'the great equaliser between men, since all men are potentially subject to it'.<sup>14</sup> Callaghan's study of tragedy reveals an unstable masculinity defined by negatives: 'the possession of the phallus and hence the possession of the women are predicated upon the anxiety of dispossession' which takes the form of 'impotence, castration, or cuckoldry'.<sup>15</sup> Impotency was the mark of an incomplete man and prevented his participation in extending the patriarchal line.

*Of Domesticall duties eight treatises* (1622) by William Gouge was one of many moral guidance books applying theological doctrine to matrimony and domestic life. He specifically bars the impotent from marriage and encourages the 'able who haue past the floure of their age, and are not by defect of nature, or any other occasion made impotent'.<sup>16</sup> Informed by the Bible, Gouge defines the 'impotent' and prohibits their marriage as an act against God's judgement:

They are to be accounted *impotent*, and in that respect vnable to performe the essential duties of mariage, who (to vse the Scripture phrase) *were born Eunuchs from their mothers wombe*: or by any accidentall occasion are so made: as they who are defectiue, or closed in their secret parts: or taken with an incurable palsie: or possessed with frigidity, or any other such like impediment.

These ought not to seeke after mariage: for by those signes of impotencie God sheweth that he calleth them to liue single.

Contrarie to this manifestation of Gods will doe they sinne, who conceale their impotencie and ioyne themselues in marriage, whereby they frustrate one maine end of mariage, which is procreation of children; and doe that wrong to the partie whom they marie, as sufficient satisfaction can neuer be made.<sup>17</sup>

Gouge insists that the purpose of marriage, procreation, can never be fulfilled by the impotent. Unable to perform the 'essential duties' of a husband, the impotent man will irrevocably 'wrong' his wife, asserts Gouge. By implication, 'unfruitful' marriage will create unfulfilled lust, which may lead to adultery or licentious attempts at satisfaction without the godly objective to procreate. Virility was more than just a marker of masculinity; it was socially significant during a period of high infant mortality. Moulton suggests that the impotent man's wasted seed was 'disturbing to an erotic economy that

<sup>14</sup> Callaghan, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Callaghan, p. 165.

<sup>16</sup> William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties eight treatises* (London: Iohn Haviland for Willaim Bladen, 1622), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 12119, Folger Shakespeare Library <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010] (The second treatise, Part 1. Of Husband and Wife, who are so to be accounted, p. 180).

<sup>17</sup> Gouge, Part. 1, Treat. 2, pp. 181–2.

insists on proper spending to ensure conception'.<sup>18</sup> The perception of impotency as conspicuous is emphasised in Gouge's comparison of the ailment with barrenness. The impotent man who marries is a deceiver, while the barren woman cannot know of her impediment or of its duration: '[i]mpotencie may by outward sensible signes be knowne and discerned, barrenesse cannot: it is not discerned but by want of child-bearing.' He expands upon the contrasting impediments:

Impotencie is incurable: but barrenesse is not simply so. Many after they haue beene a long while barren haue become fruitfull:

[...]

On these grounds many Saints, who haue beene barren, haue married, and their practise therein not disallowed, nor their mariage dissolved. For though procreation of children be one end of mariage, yet is it not the only end: and so inuiolable is the mariage bond, that though it be made for childrens sake, yet for want of children it may not be broken.<sup>19</sup>

Gouge's double standards concerning the acceptability of barren women rather than the impotent man in marriage are based upon the presumption of a woman's pre-marital virginity. The only reliable method to test if a woman could bear children would be to indulge in pre-marital sex, which was deemed immoral by the church and too expensive with the consequential illegitimate children for the parish authorities. Gouge's emphasis upon the transience of barrenness, and his later insistence on the inviolable reality of marriage in such circumstances, betray a social anxiety and move to ensure that wives are not discarded due to their inability to produce heirs. Impotency, in contrast, is an indelible stain upon a man's authority and reputation, and, as will be seen in the ensuing discussion, preoccupied literature as a pervasive anxiety to be resolved or annexed.

### The Ovidian Influence in Early Modern Poetry

Two of the most celebrated treatments of the impotence trope in English writing in fact occur on what may be thought of as a cusp between early modern and restoration writing, and these therefore partake in some of the restoration's greater freedom in writing about risqué sexual matters. These are Rochester's and Behn's poems. Maureen Duffy notes the similar content of Behn's 'The Disappointment' (1680) and Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment': '[b]oth are versions of a French original "L'Impuissance" but in any case the

<sup>18</sup> I. F. Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> Gouge, Part. 1, Treat. 2, pp. 182–3.

theme is universal.’<sup>20</sup> Richard E. Quaintance distinguished the ‘imperfect enjoyment poem’ as a category of its own right dominated by male poets including Rochester yet also including Behn.<sup>21</sup> Characteristically they present variations on Ovid’s theme of impotence through erotic encounters between two lovers. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester’s ‘The Imperfect Enjoyment’ narrates an intimate meeting between two lovers, which ends in sexual disappointment. Bruce Boehrer shares Lisa Zeitz’s and Peter Thoms’s argument that ‘while the lover fails to control the unfolding of the sexual encounter, he recovers power in narrating, and thereby in exerting some artistic control over the events’.<sup>22</sup> The female lover is sexually eager to consume and even penetrate the masculine body:

She clips me to her breast, and sucks me to her face.  
The nimble tongue (love’s lesser lightning) played  
Within my mouth.<sup>23</sup>

Through his self-expression, the male lover appears effeminised by her phallic penetration: ‘My fluttering soul, sprung with the pointed kiss,’ thus feminising the soul as well as ‘pointing’ the woman’s kiss (11). The woman acts to stimulate male arousal by the physical use of her hand to ‘guide that part,’ his member (13). He is unable to control his passion and experiences premature ejaculation, which is emblematic of the evaporation of his masculine essence:

In liquid raptures I dissolve all o’er,  
Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore:  
A touch from any part of her had done’t,  
Her hand, her foot, her very look’s a cunt. (15–18)

The woman is imbued with the power to control his state of arousal, a concept reminiscent of Othello’s definition of Desdemona as the centre of his desire and disappointment (IV. 2. 57–60). His displacement of blame upon the female lover is a defensive reaction to the realisation of his sexual inadequacy and by implication his masculine authority:

Eager desires confound my first intent,

<sup>20</sup> Maureen Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn, 1640–89* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> Richard E. Quaintance, ‘French Sources of the Restoration “Imperfect Enjoyment” Poem’, *PQ*, 42:2 (April 1963), 190–9 (p. 191).

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Zeitz and Peter Thoms, ‘Power, gender, and identity in Aphra Behn’s “The Disappointment”’, *SEL*, 37:3 (Summer 1997), 501–516 (p. 508); Bruce Thomas Boehrer, ‘Behn’s “Disappointment” and Nashe’s “Choise of Valentines”’: Pornographic Poetry and the Influence of Anxiety’, *EL WIU*, 16: 2 (Fall 1989), 172–87.

<sup>23</sup> John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, ‘The Imperfect Enjoyment’, in *Rochester: Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. by Paddy Lyons (London: Everyman, 1993), pp. 50–2 (6–8).

Succeeding shame does more success prevent,  
 And rage, at last, confirms me impotent.  
 Even her fair hand, which might bid heat return  
 To frozen age, and make cold hermits burn,  
 Applied to my dead cinder, warms no more,  
 Than fire to ashes could past flames restore,  
 Trembling, confused, limber, dry,  
 A wishing, weak, unmoving lump I lie. (28–36)

The emotional journey from ‘eager desires’ through ‘shame’ and finally to ‘rage’ charts the gradual loss of his masculine prowess to impotence. He assumes a frozen state, an indistinguishable and purposeless ‘lump’ bereft of his masculine identity and beyond all possibility of rejuvenation. However, he refocuses upon his ‘dart of love’ and recounts its sexual history of success and unrelenting force:

Stiffly resolved, ’twould carelessly invade  
 Woman or man, nor aught its fury stayed,  
 Where’er it pierced, a cunt it found, or made. (41–3)

His assertion of the past virility of his penis is aggressive and restores masculine power through a sadomasochism that is thrilled by its penetrating dominance over all combatants male or female. His brutal fantasy of male virility distances the lover from the object of desire, as a strategy for self-preservation. He adopts a similar method by chastising the inadequate penis as the ‘treacherous, base deserter of my flame,’ who is ‘So true to lewdness, so untrue to love’ (46, 49). The lover disowns his ‘common fucking-post,’ and condemns it to pain and discomfort (63):

May’st thou to ravenous cankers be a prey,  
 Or in consuming weepings waste away.  
 May strangury and stone thy days attend,  
 May’st thou ne’er piss, who did refuse to spend,  
 When all my joys did on false thee depend. (66–70)

His curse inverts male anxieties of penis disarmament and disfigurement to isolate his failing member and verbally reassert his own virility and authority. Zeitz and Thoms suggest that ‘his fury becomes a conduit for a linguistic tour de force that re-establishes his claims to virility, potency, and control on a poetic level’.<sup>24</sup> Rochester’s rebuke of the flaccid member is humorous and powerful through its poetic castration of the failed member from the self. The persona’s sexually aggressive language is triggered by the anxiety and frustration of impotency, and is a projection of the persona’s wish-fulfilment for his member, for its ‘piercing point’ (37). Despite Rochester’s virile reassertion through

<sup>24</sup> Zeitz and Thoms, p. 508.

poetry, impotency remains a mark upon the physical man, and a humiliation in front of a lover and society, proving ‘fatal to my fame’ (47).

Aphra Behn’s ‘The Disappointment’ (1680) was attributed to Rochester in the early edition of his pirated poems late in 1680, yet it is unique amongst the genre due to her feminine narrator. Behn made an original translation of the first third of Canteac’s poem ‘L’Occasion perdue recouverte’, although as Quaintance revealed, she omitted the part which saw the male lover regain his sexual virility.<sup>25</sup> The passionate encounter of the lovers, Cloris and Lysander, culminates in impotence and finally separation.<sup>26</sup> The poem opens avowing the ‘impatient passion’ of Lysander and the previously reluctant Cloris ‘who could defend herself no longer’ (2, 4). Yet a few lines later Cloris is proactively seeking her desire, as she replaces the sun with her ‘brighter eyes’, a lover’s gaze (10). As Zeitz and Thoms emphasise, ‘Cloris is no passive object of Lysander’s sexual ambitions, but an active, vigorous, and desiring participant in the unfolding events in the “lone thicket”’ (11).<sup>27</sup> Cloris performs the idealised female role, affecting her resistance yet desiring intimacy, while Lysander, in contrast, is a man of timidity and anxiety: ‘Whilst he lay trembling at her feet’ (18). Cloris takes the initiative and manipulates her chaste image to titillate her love: ‘*Cease, cease — your vain desire, | Or I’ll call out*’ (25–6). Lysander’s sexual inexperience is betrayed by his frantic kissing and ‘burning trembling hand’ while Cloris in comparison offers herself unreservedly, ‘All her unguarded beauties lie | The spoils and trophies of the enemy’ (39–40). Cloris releases Lysander from his inhibitions:

And now without respect or fear,  
He seeks the object of his vows,  
(His love no modesty allows)  
By swift degrees advancing — where  
His daring hand that altar seized,  
Where gods of love do sacrifice. (41–6)

Cloris presents herself as a willing sacrifice, which frees Lysander to seek the ‘object’, and seize the fantasised ‘altar’. Despite the increased erotic intimacy between the lovers, Cloris assumes a comatose state, as if paused in motion before Lysander: ‘Cloris half dead

<sup>25</sup> Quaintance, p. 198.

<sup>26</sup> Aphra Behn, ‘The Disappointment’, in *The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth-century Verse and Prose*, Vol. I: Verse, ed. by Alan Rudrum, Joseph Black, & Holly Faith Nelson (Hertfordshire: Broadview press, 2001), pp. 453–5.

<sup>27</sup> Zeitz and Thoms, p. 504.

and breathless lay' (55). The increasing pressure on Lysander to perform is emphasised by the description of Cloris waiting in anticipation:

He saw how at her length she lay,  
He saw her rising bosom bare;  
Her loose thin robes, through which appear  
A shape designed for love and play;  
Abandoned by her pride and shame,  
She does her softest joys dispense,  
Offering her virgin-innocence  
A victim to love's sacred flame;  
While the o'er-ravished shepherd lies  
Unable to perform the sacrifice. (61–70)

Cloris projects a masculine fantasy through her body, which reveals Lysander's inadequacy in the role of the male protagonist. He is not the potent man she desires; he is defeated by his passion and lies 'o'er-ravished' and 'unable to perform'. Desire weakens his mind, driving him 'Mad to possess', and 'too transported' to act as a man (77, 72). Lysander's member is finally described as a defeated effeminate, 'The insensible fell weeping in his hand,' and the narrator attributes his premature ejaculation to his overpowering affection: 'Excess of love his love betrayed' (90, 88). Lysander's frustration at his masculine failing now prolongs his impotence: 'Not all her naked charms could move | Or calm that rage that had debauched his love' (99–100). Lysander's physical inadequacy to satisfy Cloris is explicit, even if the extent of his physical reaction is uncertain. John H. O'Neill maintains that Lysander 'achieves no erection or ejaculation anywhere in the poem'.<sup>28</sup> Lysander's failure impinges upon his personal and the public perception of his masculine identity. Zeitz and Thoms comment, 'Behn authors an inversion of convention through the figure of the "o'er-Ravish'd" shepherd, himself a victim of social and literary constructions of gender.'<sup>29</sup> The poem emphasises the destructive power of gender expectation which placed the man automatically as the sexual protagonist. Impotency is a self-inflicted pain rather than a result of an enemy woman as Cloris, confined by her appearance of chastity, even discreetly attempts to restore Lysander's virility:

Her timorous hand she gently laid  
(Or guided by design or chance)  
Upon that fabulous Priapas,  
That potent god, as poets feign;  
But never did young shepherdess,

<sup>28</sup> John H. O'Neill, 'An Unpublished "Imperfect Enjoyment" Poem', *PLL*, 13:2 (Spring 1977), 197–202 (p. 200).

<sup>29</sup> Zeitz and Thoms, p. 505.

Gathering of fern upon the plain,  
 More nimbly draw her fingers back,  
 Finding beneath the verdant leaves a snake. (103–10)

Cloris's shock is reflected by her nimble retreat as she discovers an ominous flaccid 'snake', a clear contrast to the godlike 'Priapas,' the lie which male 'poets feign'. The snake also alludes to Cloris's obligation to conform to female types, choosing the chaste virgin over the temptress Eve. Her fantasy of masculine virility is rudely contrasted with Lysander's reality:

Finding that god of her desires  
 Disarmed of all his awful fires,  
 And cold as flow'rs bathed in the morning-dew. (112–14)

Cloris, the balanced sexual protagonist, is shaken from her passionate state:

The blood forsook the hinder place,  
 And strewed with blushes all her face,  
 Which both disdain and shame expressed:  
 And from Lysander's arms she fled,  
 Leaving him fainting on the gloomy bed. (116–20)

The 'blood' or heat dissipates from the source of her desire to constitute blushes, expressing a sense of sexual shame and resentment towards Lysander's inadequacy. Lysander is left wasting away on the 'gloomy bed', physically and mentally consumed by his impotency, which was prefigured early in the poem by his anxious concern over his sexual performance:

The nymph's resentments none but I  
 Can well imagine or condole:  
 But none can guess Lysander's soul,  
 But those who swayed his destiny.  
 His silent griefs swell up to storms,  
 And not one god his fury spares;  
 He cursed his birth, his fate, his stars;  
 But more the shepherdess's charms,  
 Whose soft bewitching influence  
 Had damned him to the hell of impotence. (131–40)

The narrator allies herself in feminine solidarity with Cloris, and instead of creating the familiar male fantasy, she presents Cloris's female desire. Gardiner remarks that the poem 'differs from others of these poems by its stress on the woman's point of view'.<sup>30</sup> Zeitz and Thoms describe Behn's piece as a mock imperfect enjoyment poem due to its female perspective and as 'the female speaker depicts the crumbling of Lysander's sexual and

<sup>30</sup> Judith Kegan Gardner, 'Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect', *WS*, 7:1–2 (1980), 66–7 (p. 74).

authorial control, and makes no effort to halt that erosion'.<sup>31</sup> Lysander is isolated and destroyed, and blames all for his own impotency, especially 'the shepherdess's charms' and 'soft bewitching influence'. It is true that Cloris 'acts' the role of the 'loved maid' which she believes will attract and arouse Lysander and enable her to enjoy sexual pleasure. Behn presents Cloris as a woman thinly concealing her desires, while attempting to encourage Lysander. The change arrives when she physically feels and sees his flaccid member, and simultaneously is brought back to an overwhelming sense of 'd disdain' and shame of her involvement in this erotic encounter (XII). Lysander's final attack upon Cloris in this instance seems a hollow attempt at displacing the responsibility from his own failings. Ultimately the poem emphasises Cloris's desire and Lysander's inability to act sexually as a man. Zeitz and Thoms identify a role reversal where 'Cloris, the supposed victim, is endowed with the power of "design" [...] and Lysander, the supposed pursuer, is unmanned and rendered powerless'.<sup>32</sup> Lysander's power originates from his role as the virile masculine protagonist, the emblem of which is his erect member. Impotency, a product of his lack of self-control, destroys his expected masculine role and places him in the position of the pursued and vulnerable female lover. Carol Barash observes, 'Behn emphasizes the sexual contest at work in "The Disappointment" by shifting rapidly between the swain's and the nymph's points of view.'<sup>33</sup> Primarily both Rochester and Behn approach the sexual encounter as a battle between man and woman, yet ultimately it becomes a struggle between the virile male ideal and the real man. Rochester's personal narration and Behn's feminine perspective each assign sexual power to, in the former case the masculine poetic creation, and in the latter female desire. Impotency provides the opportunity to explore and undermine gendered images of sexual power.

Written in the early Restoration and thus at the very end of what can be thought of as the early modern period, Rochester's and Behn's poems treat male impotence with what one might think of as a characteristic Restoration freedom in representing risqué sexual matters. These two poems however are in one sense, for all their Restoration brio, a very developed reworking of an impotence trope that has its origins in Ovid's celebrated *Elegy* (III. 7), and from the later years of the sixteenth century English writers can be seen revisiting and adapting this impotence trope. Marlowe's *Elegy* in translation or imitation

<sup>31</sup> Zeitz and Thoms, p. 508.

<sup>32</sup> Zeitz and Thoms, p. 503.

<sup>33</sup> Carol Barash, 'The Political Possibilities of Desire: Teaching the Erotic Poems of Behn', in *Teaching Eighteenth Century Poetry*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: AMS Press, 1990), pp. 159–76 (pp. 168–9).

of the Ovidian original, which was briefly discussed in the previous chapter and Campion's 'Song' provide two examples.

Marlowe translated Ovid's *Elegies* while at Cambridge, yet an unknown person printed them at Middleburgh. Six editions of Marlowe's translation were published throughout the last two decades of the sixteenth century and the earliest known appearance of Davies's and Marlowe's work was in an octavo approximately dated c. 1594–1595, held in the Huntington Library, which includes ten of Marlowe's more erotic verses and three of Davies's 'Ignoto' sonnets. The Bishops' Ban of 1599 ordered that 'Davyes Epigrams with Marlowes Elegyes' were to be burned. Roma Gill blames the taint of association for Marlowe's inclusion in the punishment: '[e]cclesiastical displeasure, then, was occasioned by Davies's work, not by Marlowe's, but being printed together the two suffered together.'<sup>34</sup> Gill identifies the similarity between the type ornaments of two of the six early editions with those used by the printer Roberts to decorate Marston's *The Scourge of Villanie* (1598), 'another of the books condemned to be burnt.'<sup>35</sup> Both the Marlowe's and Davies's volume and Marston's satires were united in their appearance and their censorship, an indication of their provocative content and dangerous target audience.

From the translation ten elegies were selected, and the overall narrative of the selection is agreed by many critics to threaten through its subversive sexual content. Earlier commentators, Tucker Brooke and Millar MacLure, described the selection as directed towards the 'vulgar'.<sup>36</sup> Gill claims that the Elegy III. 6 on temporary impotence is balanced by 'I. xv on the immortality of verse, which would have less appeal to the "base conceived wittes [who] admire vilde things" (I. 35)'.<sup>37</sup> Gill's error is to assume a similarly censorious attitude to the presentation of masculine sexual anxiety as if it were pornography, which would lessen the value of a work. Moulton has recently made the case that the *Elegies* were included in the Bishops' Ban of 1599, as they could be seen to contain 'matter of Ribaldrie' encouraging subjects 'to wantonness'.<sup>38</sup> He refers to the

<sup>34</sup> Roma Gill, 'The Early Editions of Marlowe's *Elegies* and Davies's *Epigrams*: Sequence and Authority', *Library*, 26 (1971), 242–249 (p. 242).

<sup>35</sup> Gill, p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Tucker Brooke, *The Works of Christopher Marlowe* (1910), p. 553; Millar MacLure, *Marlowe's poetry* (1968).

<sup>37</sup> Gill, p. 246.

<sup>38</sup> 20 March 1595/6 Liber A fol. 67<sup>v</sup> in Ian Frederick Moulton, "'Printed Abroad and Uncastrated": Marlowe's *Elegies* with Davies' *Epigrams*', in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality, New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), p. 77.

motivation behind the high commission's order of 1596, led by John Whitgift Archbishop of Canterbury, to regulate books and pamphlets. Erotic writing was not destroyed but remained within manuscript culture and, as Arthur F. Marotti notes, 'it did [...] take a relatively long time for the bawdy and obscene verse that was so popular in the manuscript system to reach print.'<sup>39</sup>

Marlowe's ninth poem, *Elegy* III. 7 (numbered III. 6), is focused upon impotency and its accompanied shame. Masculine identity is subjected in the following *Elegy* I. 2, when the persona accepts enslavement to sensual love. Man will lose his masculine identity for erotic love with a woman, and yet it is also a pleasure he welcomes. Moulton explains the censorship of the *Elegies* by means of their message 'that the blurring and shifting of gender boundaries is desirable'.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of Davies's epigrams in the volume with Marlowe's *Elegies* added to their controversial content, due to the prominence of satire as a targeted genre in the ban. Yet both works explore masculine erotic arousal at the cost of sexual subjection. Davies's epigram concerning Francus exposes a similar treatment:

When *Francus* comes to solace with his whore  
He sends for rods, & strips himselfe stark naked;  
For his lust sleepes, and will not rise before,  
By whipping of the wench it be awaked.  
I enuey him not, but wish I had the power,  
To make my selfe his wench but one halfe houre.<sup>41</sup>

The sadomasochistic focus upon the sexual perversion of arousal through flagellation connects with the idea of early modern man recklessly immersing himself in pleasure. Francus is symbolically impotent as his only method of arousal is by the 'whipping of the wench', which considering the naked deprecation of Francus, refers to his own desire for the dominatrix. The epigrammatist vents his hostility to Francus through the fantasy of becoming his 'wench' and imparting thirty minutes of real pain. The traditional idea of man as the rational superior of woman is blatantly undermined by the combination of Davies's epigrams and Marlowe's *Elegies*.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> I. F. Moulton, *Before Pornography*, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Sir John Davies, In Francum. 33, in Christopher Marlowe and Sir John Davies, *Epigrammes and elegies. By I. D. and C. M.* (Mid[...]gh: 1603), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 18931, Bodleian Library <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010].

Marlowe is not writing original work but is ‘translating’ from Ovid’s Latin; therefore, his work has a different provenance and pedigree from, for example, a more original text such as Nashe’s *Choise of Valentines*. Marlowe’s interpretation of the Ovidian original and its subsequent selection and arrangement for a late Elizabethan readership create its value. The work reveals the cultural interests and concerns, not least by the fact of its censorship. For example, the concluding elegies III. 6 and I. 2 of Marlowe’s translation emphasise impotency and the appeal of male subjugation. While Elegy II. 10, which precedes these two, stresses the male pursuit and enjoyment of physical pleasure at all costs:

Let one wench cloy me with sweet loues delight  
 If one can doore, if not, two euery night.  
 Though I am slender, I haue store of pith,  
 Nor want I strength, but weight to presse her with  
 Pleasure addes fuell to my lust-full fire,  
 I pay them horne with that they most desire. (II. 10. 21–6)

The persona presents his virility as a formidable masculine force exuding the source of life, a ‘store of pith,’ and the ability to satisfy female desire. Unlike the late Elizabethan satires the Elegy asserts sexual sport as pleasurable and entertaining, as he imagines more than one lover to satiate his own desire. The next poem contrasts free sexual pleasure with the loss of masculine identity through impotency (III. 6). The blatant emphasis upon the effects of love in terms of impotency was a topical and challenging issue, as we have already discovered. Keach states that writers including Marlowe and Marston were exploring the Ovidian works in more subversive areas outside of the ‘strictures of the moralizing and allegorical tradition’.<sup>42</sup>

Impotency dominates the Elegy and a defensive tone is established when the male persona blames the female lover for his weakness. He clutches at straws to explain his dramatic sexual defeat: ‘Either she was foule, or her attire was bad, | Or she was not the wench I wish t’haue’ (III. 6. 1–2). The persona can only comprehend his defeat as a betrayal of his body against his emotions — ‘Idly I lay with her, as if I lou’d not’ — and against his intentions ‘Yet could I not cast anchor where I meant’ (III. 6. 3, 6). His private sexual failure is interpreted as scandalous by both lovers: she fears the maid’s discovery of the truth and he describes the tension ‘like a burthen grieu’d the bed that mou’d not’ (4). The

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<sup>42</sup> William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe and their contemporaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), p. 132.

female lover becomes the ‘masculine’ protagonist in her attempts to sexually arouse his body:

She on my neck her Iuory armes did throw,  
 Her armes fa[...]re wither, then the *Sythian* snow.  
 And eagerly she kist me with her tongue,  
 And vnder mine her wanton thigh she flung.  
 Yea, and she sooth'd me vp, and call'd me fire,  
 And vs'd all speach that might prouoke and [...]re.  
 Yet like as if cold Hemlock I had drunke,  
 It mocked me, hung downe the head and sunke. (III. 6. 7–14)

The lover is proactive; it is she who embraces his neck with those idealised arms, and she who kisses with her provocative ‘tongue’, and even proceeds to place her ‘wanton’ thigh under his. There is a strong sense of her lust for intimacy. She also employs words that ‘might provoke and stir’ to arouse him. Her white physical beauty and potent sexual appeal are contrasted with the persona’s inactive form that he imagines paralysed by the malevolent poison of Hemlock, as if he were the bewitched hero. The focus moves to his flaccid member, personified as an ‘it’ which can ‘mock’ and now stands alone or metaphorically castrated from his body. He is an incomplete man and his previous proud assertions of virility are now hollow past adventures. Without his sexual prowess he has no place in society, and appears lost between virile youth and rusty age:

What will my age do? age I cannot shunne,  
 When in my prime my force is spent and done.  
 I blush, that being youthfull, hot and lustie,  
 I proue neither youth nor man, but old and rustie. (III. 6. 17–20)

The persona cannot reconcile the paradox of his condition, torn between physical male ‘prime’ and an inability to act sexually as a man. He expresses his own self-loathing deriving from a loss of virility, a physical symptom of the more disturbing damage to his masculine identity. His frustration is conveyed through a series of idealised images of the lover as a pure and unthreatened entity:

Pure rose she, like a Nunne to sacrifice,  
 Or one that with her tender brother lyes.  
 Yet boarded I the golden *Chie* twise,  
 And *Libas*, and the white cheekt *Pitho* th[...]i[...]je.  
*Corinna* crau'd it in a summers night.  
 And nine sweete bowts we had before day-light.  
 What wast my limbs through some *Thessalian* charmes?  
 May spells, and drugges do silly soules such harmes?  
 With virgin waxe hath some imbast my ioints?  
 And pierc'd my liuer with sharp needlesse points?  
 Charmes change corne to grasse and make it die,  
 By charmes are running springs and fountaines dry.

By charmes mast drops from oakes, from vines grapes fall,  
 And fruite from trees when ther's no winde at all.  
 Why might not then my sinewes be inchaunted?  
 And I grow faint as with some spirit haunted. (21–36)

He despises his reduction to the passive effeminate or brother. With his sense of impaired masculine sexual mastery he recites his past conquests as if a military record, which anticipates Rochester's later tirade. Evidence of physical endurance and the ability to quench numerous female desires are the main emphasis of his past record. His sexual boasts, instead of pronouncing his potency, lead his thoughts to the effects of his sexual excess. The dangers of sexual pleasure are figured in terms of female bewitchment and potions. Ancient charms, 'virgin waxe' and malevolent magic involving needles piercing his organs explain his present impotency. He, like the corn that is transformed to grass and finally dies, has suffered an inexplicable decline. The charms and enchantments of women convert his phallic potency into the equivalent of fallow, and cause him to 'die'; women have the power to bring him to orgasm and equally to commit him to a metaphorical castration of his masculinity. He fills the passage with imagery of fruitful abundance reaching its climax and falling into decay, to emphasise the crisis of his fall from potent virility to impotence. In contrast to the role of enchantment, the persona points to shame as further inhibiting his sexual performance: 'To this add shame: shame to performe it quaild me, | And was the second cause why vigour failde me' (III. 6. 37–8). His poor sexual performance is harshly compared with the behaviour of her past male lovers: 'Yet might her touch make youthfull *Pylius* fire, | And *Tythou* liuelier then his yeares require' (III. 6. 41–2). Impotency is treated as a repudiation of all the good fortune he has received to get to the stage of intercourse. His male inadequacy brings a sense of unbearable shame on a mythological scale:

I thinke the great gods grieu'd they had bestow'd,  
 The benefite: which lewdly I fore-slow'd.  
 I wisht to be receiued in, in I get me,  
 To kisse, I kisse; to lie with her she let me.  
 Why was I blest? why made King to refuse it?  
 Chuffe-like had I not gold and could not vse it? (III. 6. 45–50)

He is ashamed that he cannot complete his masculine task to penetrate and must disappoint the gods' faith in his ability. The sense of humiliation permeates his rhetorical questions in which he asks why he could not perform when he had all the means. He has the 'gold', the semen, yet is frustrated by his inability to spend his virile essence during intercourse. The concept of a man with all the attributes and opportunity failing to penetrate is

incomprehensible, and renders him less than a man, unless he shares the blame with his lover: 'Worthy she was to moue both gods and men, | But neither was I man nor liued then' (III. 6. 59–60). Responsibility for his sexual failure is implicitly directed at the female lover, but the implication rebounds as he in fact draws attention to his substandard state: he is not a man, as he has not proved himself a man. The shifts of the Elegy reflect his thought patterns concerning his concept of the self. He moves between fits of anxiety and frustration, searching for an explanation for his condition, the most terrifying one being his own inadequacy. His penis is treacherous and lies dead, making it an accoutrement of shame for its bearer:

Yet not-withstanding like one dead I lay,  
Drouping more than a rose puld yester-day.  
Now when he should not iette, he boults vpright,  
And craues his taske, and seekes to be at fight.  
Lie downe with shame and see thou stire no more,  
Seeing thou wouldst deceiue me as before.  
Thou cosonest me: by thee surpriz'd am I,  
And bide sore losse with endlesse infamy. (III. 6. 65–72)

The penis becomes a symbol of emasculation, a mark of his own inadequacy to fulfil the role of the penetrative man. Moulton observes how '[t]he speaker's masculine member has changed to a vaginal rose'.<sup>43</sup> He treats his penis as a figure of deceit beyond his control and he is suspicious of its further ridicule of his identity. The inappropriate show of erect readiness by his member leads him to chastise, assuming its actions are designed to humiliate. He despises the penis as if it has its own will, chiding it with 'shame' and 'surprised' by its betrayal. Through an imaginary castration he feels bereaved by the betrayal of his member, and the subsequent loss of his reputed potency through the 'infamy' of his sexual failure. In a final attempt his lover employs her seductions and literally holds the fate of his manhood:

Nay more the wench did not disdain a whit,  
To take it in hand, and play with it.  
But when she saw it would by no meanes stand,  
But stil droupt downe, regarding not her hand.  
Why mockst thou me she cryed? or being ill  
Who bad thee lie downe heere against thy will?  
Either th'art witcht with bloud of frogs now dead,  
Or iaded camst thou from some others bed. (III. 6. 73–80)

The female lover, much as Behn's future portrayal of Cloris, is humiliated by the unresponsive member and soon repulsed by its disobedience, which she interprets as a

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<sup>43</sup> Moulton, *Before Pornography*, p. 107.

personal slight. She too imbues the member with a consciousness intent upon mocking her sexual appeal. The familiar explanation of the effects of sorcery emerges through the concept of a witch's potion, a convenient way to blame an imaginary foe. In imitation of the persona she also suspects her lover of sexual exhaustion from another's bed. The female lover abandons the persona due to his demonised member. Her departure reveals the strength of belief in the connection of male sexual performance to self-worth. He is no longer a man and his presence taints her reputation. Far from a naïve innocent, she sees the failed encounter as a 'disgrace' which if known would harm her sexual repute. Consequently the female lover fakes the action with water: 'And least her maide should know of this disgrace, | To couer it, spilt water in the place' (III. 6. 83–4). The conclusion of the Elegy emphasises that impotency had implications for both the man and woman in terms of their reputation and position in society.

The early unauthorised publication of a selection of Marlowe's *Elegies* with Davies's epigrams was ordered by a printer or publisher, and therefore any sense of there being a covert 'narrative' in linking the poems is an imposition on their original authorial identity. However, the arrangement is significant as it shows a deliberate intention to present a story of masculine impotence and submission to sexual pleasure for an envisaged reader. D. Frantz emphasises that the popular Ovidian poetry, which portrays love heroically, 'if it does not praise lust, at least presents it in a salacious, uncondemned manner for the pure enjoyment of it all.'<sup>44</sup> The banned selection of Marlowe's *Elegies* presents the argument for male sexual excess. The opening lines of Elegy I. 2 are transformed by the previous ideas of sexual incapacity and the attributed shame:

WHat makes my bed seeme hard seeing it is soft?  
Or why slips downe the couerlet so oft?  
Although the nights be long, I sleep not tho,  
My sides are sore with tumbling to and fro. (I. 2. 1–4)

The image of a sleepless persona in an uncomfortable bed unites with the previous elegy's reference to the inactive lovers as a burden to their bed. The contrast between images of hard and soft with 'slips down' in the light of the previous poem also seems sexually suggestive. The persona is emasculated by Cupid's penetration with a 'slender dart,' a metaphor for the unpleasant consequences of love: 'Tis cruell loue turmoyles my captiue

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<sup>44</sup> D. Frantz, 'Leud Priapians and Renaissance Pornography', *SEL*, 12 (1972), 157–72 (p. 159).

heart' (I. 2. 7–8). He is a prisoner of war, one that willingly surrenders and declares that inaction is the best course: 'Let's yeeld, a burthen easly borne is light' (I. 2. 10). His immersion in love symbolically castrates and yet he willingly ties himself to sensual pleasures, despite the pain and humiliation of surrendering his manhood:

Young Oxen newly yoakt are beaten more,  
Then Oxen which haue drawne the plough before.  
And rough Iades mouthes with stuborne bits are torne,  
But managde horses heads are lightly borne.  
Vnwilling louers, loue doth more torment,  
Then such as in their bondage feele content.  
Loe I confesse, I am thy captiue I,  
And hold my conquer'd hands for thee to tie.  
What need'st thou warre. (I. 2. 13–21)

The persona advocates passive enjoyment of pleasure and surrender to love to avoid the discomfort caused by fighting against it. Love is a formidable power that cannot be fought and beaten, and so he chooses the easier path towards sensual pleasure, and willingly sacrifices his masculine rationality and dominance. The persona chooses to be yoked and managed rather than fight: his impotency has converted him into a subject of divine love: 'Yong men, and women shalt thou lead as thrall, | So will thy triumph seeme magnificall' (I. 2. 27–8). He is a man of his age ruled by lust and intent on adorning and serving love, the opposite of the idealised man of vigour and authority. His fantasy of enslavement, 'I lately caught, will haue a new-made wound,' emphasises the loss of his masculine power (I. 2. 29). Moulton interprets his wound as evidence of being 'symbolically castrated'.<sup>45</sup> In fact the image of a 'new-made wound' as an orifice is suggestive of penetration and therefore reflects the persona's assumption of a passive feminine role. The persona, like Davies's *Francum*, is aroused by the masochistic fantasy of pain, penetration and of being dominated. Courtship is portrayed as a battle, with Cupid and her allies of 'Smooth speaches, feare, and rage' fighting to conquer 'Gods and men' (I. 2. 35–7). The persona, perhaps to justify his own lust, paints love as savage: he asks Cupid 'where is thine honour then?' (I. 2. 38). He creates a fantasy in which he is the martyred hostage to be displayed or 'spoiled':

Then seeing I grace thy show in following thee,  
Forbare to hurt thy selfe in spoyling me.  
Behold thy kins-mans *Caesars* prosperous bands,  
Who guards thee conquered, with his conquering hands. (I. 2. 49–52)

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<sup>45</sup> Moulton, *Before Pornography*, p. 106.

In this sexual fantasy, mastery, war, wounds, pleasure and enslavement titillate as they distort the masculine ideal by placing the man as a submissive slave. The persona is keen to be symbolically castrated and reduced to the submissive captive, like a child or woman. He enjoys the self-sacrifice for his worshipped goddess of love who is compared to and in Ovid's original related to Caesar the aggressor who conquers and suppresses other men, and whose name means 'incision' echoing the previous eroticised wound imagery, which the persona bears as a mark of his castrated manhood.

The arrangement of the final two elegies emphasises male impotency and the dangerous pleasure of male subjection, which prompts the question: why were they framed with such an importance laid upon the loss of masculine identity? A commercial explanation can be found in the choice of a provocative and topical subject, which would make the volume notorious and increase sales. The *Elegies* present an entertaining tale of masculine love and sexual adventures, which undoubtedly would have been appealing to contemporary gentlemen who fashioned themselves as gallants. Furthermore, the volume was a product of its time and expressed the contemporary preoccupation with the subject of impotency and effeminacy through lust. Frantz remarks that satirists, moralists and the religious in the period reacted to 'a literature of lust inundating England'.<sup>46</sup> Such a preoccupation was manifested in a fear for masculinity, caused by a perceived change in traditional gender identities. The volume of Marlowe's *Elegies* formed part of a reaction to the cultural and social context, which produced anxiety concerning man's position in the sexual balance of power.

Thomas Campion's poem, 'If any hath the heart to kill' (IV, 21), illustrates the way the Ovidian moment, epitomised through Marlowe's translation, held a currency in other forms of writing. Thomas Campion's poems were often destined to be sung as songs, and accordingly, as Edward Lowbury, Timothy Salter and Alison Young note, "'If any hath the heart to kill" (IV, 21) is almost entirely in the Dorian Mode, particularly emphasised by the scale passage which forms the first phrase.'<sup>47</sup> As a song sung by a man it entertains through a personalised narrative of the humorous and taboo issue of failed masculine virility. Campion also produced masques to commemorate the wedding of Robert Carr to

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<sup>46</sup> Frantz, p. 158.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Lowbury, Timothy Salter, and Alison Young, *Thomas Campion: Poet, Composer, Physician* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 164.

the Countess of Essex on 26 December 1614, and the wedding of the King's daughter Elizabeth to Frederick the Elector Palatine in 1613. On the latter occasion Kevin Curran has recently suggested that the celebration was shaped to reassert a militant cultural ethos: 'Campion's masque is allowing James to take part in a fantasy of rhetorical authority, one that grants him the ability to intervene in the circulation of fictions around his daughter's marriage, and to hold absolute power over them.'<sup>48</sup> Campion's writing coincided with a period of anxiety concerning masculine weakness, and his commission specifically by the king shows an attempt to re-establish a masculine martial identity through art; as Claire McManus observes with reference to the opening of *The Lords' Masque* (1613), 'Campion figured the creative impulse as a masculine quality.'<sup>49</sup>

Pamela Coren's analysis of Campion's female persona poems illustrates the other side of his poetry which concerned personal representations of gendered sexual experiences: 'Campion's choice of female personae may be part of a complex strategy in his songbooks, an exploration of male and female erotic experience, with the female voices providing a "realistic" education of the male lover, though only if we read the songbooks in sequence.'<sup>50</sup> In a similar way 'If any hath' invites a shared masculine solidarity over an anxiety concerning man's identity and dominant role. The personal sentiment of the poem has been interpreted by earlier critics as autobiographical, one of whom, Percival Vivian, asserts the 'peculiarly intimate and real atmosphere; their allusion to obviously real occurrences, passions, and disappointments permitting of little doubt on the point'.<sup>51</sup> In Campion's work appear two lovers *Caspia* and *Mellea* who are perceived by Vivian as Campion's allusions to his own lovers. Vivian is the product of a late-Victorian critical world in which it came naturally to see poems as rooted in, and as evidence for, autobiography. The personal nature of Campion's work is not, to more modern eyes, a self-evident fact. *Caspia* and *Mellea* in this critical perspective cannot be thought to represent 'real' lovers of the poet, but rather are conventional sexual 'types' constructed to enable equally conventional posturing. The poem participates with its own different idiom in the tropes of Ovid's famous *Elegy*, Marlowe's translation of which we have just

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Curran, 'James I and Fictional Authority at the Palatine Wedding Celebrations', *Renaissance Studies*, 20 (2006), 51–67 (p. 61).

<sup>49</sup> Claire McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court, 1590–1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> Pamela Coren, 'In the Person of Womankind: Female Persona Poems by Campion, Donne, Jonson', *Studies in Philology*, 98:2 (Spring 2001), 225–250 (p. 229).

<sup>51</sup> *Campion's Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. xlvi.

discussed. The poem is significant as it participates in contemporary tropes concerning impotence, not because it offers a snapshot of Campion's own sexual embarrassments. The personal nature of Campion's poem XXI in *The Fourth Book of Ayres* is necessary considering its transmission through one male singer or speaker and due to the sensitive nature of impotency:

If any hath the heart to kill,  
 Come rid me of this woefull paine.  
 For while I liue I suffer still  
 This cruell torment all in vaine:  
     Yet none aliue but one can guesse  
     What is the cause of my distresse.  
 Thanks be to heau'n, no grieuous smart,  
     No maladies my limbes annoy;  
 I beare a sound and sprightfull heart,  
     Yet liue I quite depriu'd of ioy:  
 Since what I had in vaine I craue,  
 And what I had not now I haue.

A Love I had, so fayre, so sweet,  
     As euer wanton eye did see:  
 Once by appointment wee did meet:  
     Shee would, but ah, it would not be:  
 She gaue her heart, her hand shee gaue;  
 All did I giue, shee nought could haue.

What Hagge did then my powers forespeake,  
     That neuer yet such taint did feele!  
 Now shee reiects me as one weake,  
     Yet am I all compos'd of steele.  
 Ah, this is it my heart doth grieue:  
 Now though shee sees, shee'le not belieue.<sup>52</sup>

The opening lines of the poem place the persona in a vulnerable state, willing the symbolic castration of his emotional pain as a precursor to the evidence of his actual impotence. The familiar frustration and incomprehension of the discord between his sexual passion and his physical incapacity is deeply expressed. The effects of impotency upon the masculine self dominate the poem and contemporaries would no doubt recognise the Ovidian theme. The persona longs for his sexual virility prior to his impotency, which he took for granted and 'had in vaine'. His ominous assertion that he possesses something new refers to his incapacity and his new status as a lesser man and a figure of ridicule. The poem builds towards the climax and the anticlimax of his performance, at first casting their meeting 'by appointment' as an amorous rendezvous. The beloved characteristically desires sexual consummation as he emphasises 'Shee would'. She asserts a sexual autonomy in which

<sup>52</sup> Poem XXI, *The Fourth Booke of Ayres in Campion's Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), pp. 185–6.

she can choose her own socially forbidden sexual relationships although concealed by a secret meeting, like Behn's Cloris who enacts the chaste and reluctant lover. By giving 'her hand' she provides her lover with the sexual freedom of a husband, and also suggests her own knowledge of masturbation to arouse the man. The persona verbalises his sexual impotence despite his intentions: 'All did I giue, shee nought could haue.' A familiar element of the Ovidian trope appears in his suspicions of supernatural female witchcraft, the 'Hagge' who has weakened his 'powers' through sorcery and potions. The persona attempts to reassert his sexual potency by painting the incident as unique, which adds further support to his argument of *maleficium*. Lindley notes how the 'transhistorical and transcultural nature of the belief [of witchcraft] testifies to the way in which it figures a deep-seated and universal male fear'.<sup>53</sup>

The persona's sexual failure has implications for his masculine identity and in terms of its effect upon women: 'shee reiects me as one weake.' His attempts to reclaim his virility, 'Yet am I all compos'd of steele', in fact emphasise a cold sterility. Reminiscent of Marlowe's translation, the image of the erect penis is dismissed as a façade by the beloved: 'shee'le not belieue.' He is desperate to perform and impress or inspire awe in a woman as a mark of his masculinity, yet his failure has 'tainted' and undermined his reputation forever. The poem reflects men's anxiety concerning the transient nature of male virility and the effects upon their image in relation to women. 'If any hath the heart to kill' and Ovid's *Amores* share the sense of male turmoil at the prospect of the effects of impotency, especially upon their reputation as men. Both works depict a conventional female beauty that conceals a female sexual appetite and also projects a fear fantasy of female witchcraft cursing men with impotency. In sharp contrast to the *Elegies*, Campion's expression of impotency is more personal in its direct address from a speaker or singer. It is impossible to know if Campion is speaking from real experience or has constructed the persona. The poem is able to strategically manoeuvre the reader and seek an empathy with the persona's anguish. Campion addresses men on an intimate subject which evoked male and social anxiety in early modern England, and did so through a personalised contemporary scenario entwined with the familiar Ovidian tale of a man's sexual failure.

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<sup>53</sup> David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard, Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 101.

Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Elegies* and Campion's 'Song' keep the impotence trope in its recognisably Ovidian form. In contrast Nashe's *The Choise of Valentines* can be thought of as a more radical relocation of Ovid's theme in a recognisable English, contemporary world, but still with Ovidian features. The poem places the trial of impotency in a world not just of failed sexual trysts but also of sexual commerce: Francis has been relocated from her former home of past loves to a brothel presided over by a Bawd. Nashe brings impotence home to the 1590s and London's south bank.

Thomas Nashe's *The Choise of Valentines* (1592–6) was never published during the sixteenth century and instead circulated as a manuscript.<sup>54</sup> Six copies remain in poetical miscellanies and the extent of their imitation of the original is unknown. G. R. Hibbard claims that the narrative poem has 'no real point and part of it is downright silly'.<sup>55</sup> C. Nicholl only praises it as an 'erotic vignette; comic, titillating, full of cartoon-like visual touches'.<sup>56</sup> Past critics have dismissed the poem as pornographic; Frantz terms Nashe as the 'pre-eminent [...] author of English obscenity'.<sup>57</sup> The poem is focused upon the sexual failure of Tomalin, which removes his right to sexually master a woman. Recently Moulton has maintained that the poem reveals insecurity concerning masculine identity 'based on sexual mastery of the female'.<sup>58</sup> He emphasises the value of *The Choise of Valentines* as a 'detailed articulation of anxiety over male sexual function, an articulation which undermines prevailing constructions of masculine dominance and control'.<sup>59</sup>

Nashe's satiric poem pokes fun at the sexual inadequacies of male clients. The poem begins with the choosing of a valentine, and a pastoral image is presented of rustic courtship traditions. Tomalin, like other 'yong-men in their iollie roguerie | Rose earlelie', energised by masculine desire to seek out sex under the guise of searching for his love Francis who has been driven out of the country for prostitution (2–3):

Thither went I, and bouldlie made enquire  
If they had hackneys to lett-out to hire,  
And what they crav'd by order of their trade

<sup>54</sup> *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by R. B. McKerrow, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, rev. by F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) III, 397–416.

<sup>55</sup> G. R. Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> C. Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London, Boston, Melbourne, Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 92.

<sup>57</sup> Frantz, p. 167.

<sup>58</sup> I. F. Moulton, 'Transmuted into a woman or worse', *ELR*, 27 (1997), 57–88 (p. 70).

<sup>59</sup> Moulton, 'Transmuted into a woman or worse', p. 58.

To lett one ride a iournie on a iade. (25–8)

Sexual satisfaction is a commodity, and one which Tomalin is willing to purchase, expressing his intentions with the terms of a whore and prostitute, ‘hackneys’ and ‘iade’ that are hired to men for a ‘ride’. The first challenge to his sexual assertiveness is made by the Bawd who suspects his inadequacy, yet Tomalin proceeds with his commercial transaction and pays a deposit, ‘Gods-pennie’ to ease his ‘thirst’ (36, 40). Tomalin acts as a modern consumer and rejects two ‘pretie Trulls’, desiring ‘fresher ware’ perhaps for fear of disease or to secure the best flesh, ‘gentle mistris Francis’, the commodity for which he has paid (50–6). The Bawd hints at the cost of his choice to both his wallet and potency; she is a ‘morsell of more price,’ for which Tomalin must pay financially and physically (59). The Bawd’s warning seems to predict Tomalin’s imminent impotence, which is further confirmed by his awe at Francis’s reception: ‘Oh, I am ravish’t; voide the chamber straight, | For, I must neede’s upon hir with my weight’ (79–80). Tomalin is so consumed with a fantasy of the pleasure that awaits him, that he is sexually aroused simply by her appearance. Before he can unleash his passion, Francis acts first and her reciprocation is reminiscent of the Ovidian trope. She, like Behn’s Cloris, is the protagonist of physical sexual pleasure:

With that she sprung full lightlie to my lips,  
 And fast about the neck me colle’s and clips.  
 She wanton faint’s, and falle’s upon hir bed,  
 And often tosseth too and fro hir head.  
 She shutts hir eyes, and waggles with hir tongue:  
 Oh, who is able to abstaine so long?  
 I com, I com. (93–9)

The physical behaviour of Francis and the rhythm of her description — ‘colle’s and clips’, ‘tosseth too and fro’ — deliberately conjures imagery of her orgasmic experience during sex. She appears experienced in foreplay and presents a male fantasy of sexual availability without inhibition. Tomalin physically succumbs at this tactile portrayal of the sexual female body and is unable to restrain himself: ‘I com, I com.’ Tomalin then proceeds to describe his exploration of her body, offering a voyeuristic and erotic titillation for readers. Once Tomalin reaches Francis’s genitalia he is held or enslaved in a trance:

Oh heaven, and paradize are all but toyes,  
 Compar’d with this sight, I now behould,  
 Which well might keepe a man from being olde.  
 A prettie rising wombe without a weame,  
 That shone as bright as anie siluer streame;  
 And bare out lyke the bending of an hill,

At whose decline a fountaine dwelleth still,  
That hath his mouth besett with uglie bryers  
Resembling much a duskie nett of wyres. (106–14)

Tomalin believes that he has found his own earthly heaven in the form of the female body, and enslaves himself to its vision. Ironically he proclaims that the sight of Francis's genitalia could 'keepe a man from being olde', whereas in fact this sensual paradise will incapacitate him. Tomalin describes the female sexual body in conventional topographical imagery, the language of the servile male lover who aims to seduce his unobtainable beloved. His portrayal of her genitalia conveys an ominous threat through its 'uglie' defences that will entrap by 'nett'. Tomalin is overawed by Francis's sensual offensive and suffers a defeat by losing his erection:

Oh Gods, that euer anie thing so sweete  
So suddenlie should fade awaie and fleete,  
Hir arme's are spread, and I am all unarm'd  
Lyke one with Ouids cursed hemlock charm'd,  
So are my limm's unwealdie for the fight,  
That spend their strength in thought of hir delight.  
What shall I doe to shewe my self a man?  
It will not be for ought that beawtie can.  
I kisse, I clap, I feele, I view at will,  
Yett dead he lyes not thinking good or ill.  
Vnhappie me, quoth shee, and wilt' not stand?  
Com, lett me rubb and chafe it with my hand.  
Perhaps the sillie worme is labour'd sore,  
And wearied that it can doe no more. (121–34)

Tomalin's lamentation for his sudden impotency echoes the Ovidian trope in which the speaker is frustrated by his physical inadequacy. Tomalin perceives his defeat in military terms and is distraught that his female combatant has conquered him: 'I am all unarm'd.' He places his impotence in a classical tradition of men who have been made impotent by women or their potions, and specifically references 'Ouids cursed hemlock'. Lindley draws attention to the Ovidian origins of Tomalin's explanation for impotence: his inadequacy is 'displaced on to the witch, or interpreted as a mark of the insatiability of the female'.<sup>60</sup> An excess of desire is the main cause of paralysis, wasting his virility by merely the contemplation of Francis. Tomalin's focus upon 'hir delight' evokes not only a sense of his anticipation of intercourse, but also of his own anxiety over sexual performance. It is apparent that in Tomalin's ethos sexual prowess makes a man, and through his virility he can prove his masculinity. Tomalin despite frantic attempts is powerless to incite his penis to action, and dismisses the organ. Francis mocks his 'sillie worme' and manually takes

<sup>60</sup> Lindley, p. 102.

control of his member: 'she tooke and rould it on hir thigh' (139). Tomalin's penis becomes an inanimate and useless object that is symbolically castrated from his body, a flaccid puppet which Francis, the victor, plays with at the cost of Tomalin's manhood; she 'dandled it, and dance't it up and doune' (141). Tomalin achieves an erection due to the ministrations of Francis, although his frustrated passion is translated into a physical ambush:

And then he flue on hir as he were wood,  
 And on hir breeche did thack, and foyne a-good;  
 He rubd', and prickt, and pierst hir to the bones,  
 Digging as farre as eath he might for stones.  
 Now high, now lowe, now stryking short and thick;  
 Now dyuing deepe he toucht hir to the quick. (143–8)

The violent action and blind aggression presents his member as a small soldier who attacks with vigour, which betrays his will to prove his masculinity and the fear of its transience. Tomalin previously despised his penis for its inaction, 'not thinking good or ill', although now it appears to think 'ill' of Francis (130). Francis and Tomalin are compared to Aurora and Tithonus, the goddess of Dawn and her lover an immortal swain ravaged by age and unable to satisfy her lust (169–76). The comparison is not accidental as Tithonus serves as an example of impotent weakness in *Amores* (III. 7. 42), *Aeneid* (IV. 585) and *The Faerie Queene* (I. 2. 7, III. 3. 20). Despite his efforts, Tomalin's sexual performance is adjusted to Francis's sexual needs: 'As she prescrib'd, so kept we crotchet-time, | And euerie stroake in ordre lyke a chyme' (187–8). Francis's efforts to reach an orgasm are thwarted by Tomalin's premature sexual climax: 'I faint, I yeald; Oh death rock me a-sleepe' (203). He collapses in complete surrender to orgasm and impotence, 'I faint, I yeald.' Tomalin makes fruitless attempts to incite his member to action, yet he is expended in all senses: 'The whilst I speake, my soule is fleeting hence, | And life forsakes his fleshie residence' (211–12). Tomalin feels isolated from his member and personifies it as a callous man in control of his fate:

He heare's me not, hard-hearted as he is:  
 He is the sonne of Time, and hate's my blisse.  
 Time ner'e looke's back, the riuers ner'e returne;  
 A second spring must help me or I burne.  
 No, no, the well is drye that should refresh me,  
 The glasse is runne of all my destinie. (221–6)

There is a sense of Tomalin's sexual potency ebbing away, and ageing, with talk of 'Time' and rivers that 'ner'e returne'. He professes his desire to prove his virility to Francis, 'I

burne', yet his member affirms the reality of his physical defeat. Tomalin is resigned to dependence upon his fate, and realises his physical impotency with no time or semen left to spend.

The inadequate male penis is rejected by Francis who exerts her will to be sexually satisfied: 'Adiew faint-hearted instrument of lust, | That falselie hast betrayde our equale trust', and instead she turns to her 'little dildo' (235–6, 239). Unlike weak Tomalin the dildo quenches desire and yet does not impregnate: 'For, by Saint Runnion he'le refresh me well, | And neuer make my tender bellie swell' (245–6). The dildo signifies the complete replacement of man and establishes her preference for orgasm without conception. Tomalin has lost his masculine identity and virility, yet Francis has become empowered and sexually autonomous. Nashe's poem extends beyond the Ovidian trope and places a sexual rebellion within a contemporary scene of male anxiety, the brothel, which after 1570 was the focus for legal suppression. Nashe, unlike Marston, does not attack the social elite, and places the dildo and female autonomy within the underworld of the sex trade. In reality the brothel and the dildo may not have simplistically been the seat or tool of female sexual independence; however, Nashe emphasises the potential for gender inversion in the criminal world. Within the brothel sexual pleasure is a commodity to be traded. Tomalin buys his opportunity to sexually 'spend' with Francis, while she replaces her faulty means of satisfaction, man, with a more efficient phallic tool. Francis's prostitution provides the means and freedom to purchase her sexual pleasure if a man proves incapable. It seems a typical male fantasy to imagine the prostitute as a sexually enticing yet threatening figure.

Nashe writes the most detailed description of the dildo in Renaissance English literature:

Attired in white velvet or silk,  
And nourisht with whott water or with milk;  
Arm'd otherwhile in thick congealed glasse. (273–5)

Moulton speculates that Francis utilises a murano glass dildo, which if so directly relates to Aretino's inclusion of exactly the same tool in *Ragionamenti*.<sup>61</sup> The dildo embodied a woman's severance of her dependency upon men purely for female sexual pleasure. It evoked masculine anxiety which is made explicit in the implement's personification as an

<sup>61</sup> Pietro Aretino, *The Ragionamenti: the lives of nuns, the lives of married women, the lives of courtesans* (London: The Odyssey Press, 1970), 84, 22.



eternally erect usurper of man: that ‘stands as stiff, as he were made of steele’ (242). The dildo’s resilient ability to penetrate is salaciously asserted in stark contrast to Tomalin’s fallibility: ‘In clammie waies he treaddeth by and by, | And plasheth and sprayeth all that be him nye’ (283–4). The dildo ultimately is mastered by the woman as an impressive alternative to man: it ‘sucks the sap, whilst sleepe detaineth thee’ (251–2). Tomalin unlike the ‘Streight, round, and plumb’ dildo, leaves the brothel ‘leane and lank’ (270, 310). By presenting Tomalin’s anxiety and sexual inadequacy, Nashe was attempting a humorous exorcism of anxiety for his male readers. Evidence of contemporary male criticism, including John Davies of Hereford’s *Papers Complainte*, which suggests the negative reception of Nashe’s dildo — ‘And made *Dildo* (dampned *Dildo*) beare, | Till good-mens hate did me in peeces teare’ — combined with the censorship of Nashe’s work under the Bishops’ ban, reveals that his method of liberation was not wholly successful.<sup>62</sup> The dildo was offensive as a symbol of female sexual transgression and evoked the fear of cuckoldry, as Mr Allwit’s song celebrating his freedom as a cuckold in Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* indicates: ‘*La dildo, dildo la dildo, la dildo dildo de dildo.*’<sup>63</sup> The fascination with female masturbation was rooted in its taboo and perverse reputation. In his travel journal dated September 1580, Montaigne referred to a transvestite woman hanged for using ‘illicit devices to supply her defect in sex’, ‘[des inventions illicites à suppléer au défaut de son sexe].’<sup>64</sup> Donne’s second Elegy features Flavia who even repulses her dildo, while Moulton identifies an anonymous reference to a woman who apparently ‘made hir Dildo of a mutton bone’.<sup>65</sup> Despite a contemporary interest in female masturbation, others such as John Davies, sought its censorship from literature.

Three of the six remaining copies of Nashe’s poem exclude the section concerning the dildo, and ‘erase the possibilities of autonomous female sexuality’, claims Moulton.<sup>66</sup> These altered versions also restrict Tomalin’s sexual inadequacy to the Ovidian limits of personal failure rather than complete replacement by a monstrous dildo. The Rosenbach

<sup>62</sup> John Davies, *A Scourge for paper-persecutors; Or, Papers complaint, compil’d in ruthfull rimes, against paper-spylers of these times. By I. D. With a continu’d iust inquisition of the same subiect, fit for this season. Against paper-persecutors. By A. H.* (London: H. H[olland] and G. G[ibbs], 1625), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 6340, BL <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010] (A4<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>63</sup> *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. by Linda Woodbridge, in Thomas Middleton, *The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 907–958 (l. 2. 57).

<sup>64</sup> *The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 869–70.

<sup>65</sup> Rosenbach MS 1083/15, c. 1600–20, in I. F. Moulton, *Before Pornography, Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Moulton, ‘Transmuted into a woman or worse’, p. 60.



conforms to the process of sexually proving his authority through the mastery of his muse, even though to the extent of physical exhaustion.

### The Cuckold and Impotent on Stage

Poetry expressed a tradition developed from Ovid's representation of impotency in the *Amores* which was combined with the contemporary concern over the threat to gender identity. Impotence is also a compelling theme explored within a number of plays in the period especially through the figure of the cuckolded husband. The horned beast was a familiar symbol of the cuckold, a man ridiculed by his inability to satisfy and sexually control his wife, or alternatively a genderless figure content with allowing another man to 'labour' in intercourse with his wife. Douglas Bruster places the theme in context: '[t]he myth of cuckoldry came to form an indispensable part of the London theaters' rhetoric of social and economic relationships, a cultural grammar which [...] developed rapidly during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period.'<sup>69</sup>

James I's court gained a morally lax reputation, as Anne Clifford in her diary in 1603 commented, 'all the ladies about the Court had gotten such ill names that it was grown a scandalous place.'<sup>70</sup> Plays often reflected a similar perception, as in the example of *The Maid's Tragedy*, which features Evadne who makes a cuckold of Amintor by her affair with the King.<sup>71</sup> She refuses his embrace and says 'A maidenhead *Amintor* | At my yeares?' (II. 1. 193). The ridicule of Amintor as a cuckold reinforces the impression that a court virgin was impossible. Linda Pollock concludes that women were brought up to be deferential to their husbands, while their education encouraged independent thought particularly in preparation for ruling a household. Women would employ feminine or masculine qualities according to the situation; however, this versatility of sex caused difficulties for the patriarchy.<sup>72</sup> The perception of female autonomy and possible rebellion

<sup>69</sup> Douglas Bruster, 'The Horn of Plenty: Cuckoldry and Capital in the Drama of the Age of Shakespeare', *SEL*, 30:2 (Spring 1990), 195–215 (p. 211).

<sup>70</sup> Anne Clifford, *The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford*, intro. by V. Sackville West (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 16–17.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 10 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1970) II, 1–166.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Pollock, "'Teach her to live under obedience": The making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 4:2 (1989), 231–258.

was expressed through the popular figure of the cuckold who was unable to master his wife. Bruster explains the use of the figure to heal rifts in society: ‘London’s drama seized upon the cuckold myth as a dialectical metaphor capable of reconciling — however uneasily — evolving tensions between country and city, production and reproduction, female and male.’<sup>73</sup>

The symbol of the horned beast was used to mark a cuckold both in literature and real life during moments of public shaming. Coppélia Kahn expands upon the meaning of the cuckold’s horn, ‘endopsychically, from the cuckold’s point of view, horns are a defense formed through denial, compensation, and upward displacement.’<sup>74</sup> Adultery, as exposed through the figures of the cuckold and the man who cuckolds, involves an idea of transference of masculine possession in the form of the wife or woman’s sexual body as belonging to a man. Inevitably such a transference involves the belief in one man’s virile masculinity to steal another’s wife, and alternatively the impotency in the form of the husband who cannot or chooses not to sexually satisfy his wife. Bruster observes the popularity of the dramatic figure of the cuckold as ‘the practitioner of husbandry’, and emphasises, ‘Cuckoldry’s metamorphic origins in the drudgery of the husband [...] seen clearly in the parade of animals associated with the image.’<sup>75</sup> These include the horned ox, camel, snail and the ass, the traditional beast of burden. Callaghan interprets the cuckold’s horns as a symbol of excess: ‘a product of feminine infidelity, becomes physically attached to the man, making him an object of ridicule. The phallus of the cuckold is useless and misplaced — displayed for all to ridicule on the forehead while the cuckold remains blissfully unaware of it.’<sup>76</sup>

John Webster adopts the form of the cuckold as an ignorant figure of ridicule, manoeuvred by other men who assert their own masculine virility and agency. His tragedy *The White Devil* was first performed in 1612, unsuccessfully, at the Red Bull in Clerkenwell by Queen Anne’s Men, and it was published in Quarto during the same year. As Salgãdo notes, ‘for many readers the play will flare into life in the great Trial scene and in the

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<sup>73</sup> Bruster, p. 210.

<sup>74</sup> Coppélia Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 172.

<sup>75</sup> Bruster, p. 201.

<sup>76</sup> Callaghan, p. 164.

cataclysmic deaths of the two “white devils” — Vittoria and Flamineo.<sup>77</sup> In fact the play characteristically figures an overlooked cuckold, Vittoria’s husband Camillo, whose virility is consistently undermined.

Flamineo emphasises Camillo’s sexual inadequacy through an implicit contrast with the sexually superior Bracciano, the man who literally transforms him into a cuckold. Flamineo in his pursuit of favour and position seeks to establish his sister Vittoria as Bracciano’s mistress, and savours diverting her husband Camillo. Flamineo is keen to dismiss Bracciano’s fears of a ‘jealous’ husband’s reprisals:

Hang him, a gilder that hath his brains perished with quicksilver is not more cold in the liver. The great barriers moulted not more feathers than he hath shed hairs, by the confession of his doctor. An Irish gamester that will play himself naked, and then wage all downward at hazard, is not more venturous. So unable to please a woman that like a Dutch doublet all his back is shrunk into his breeches.<sup>78</sup>

Camillo’s masculine threat to the Duke’s sexual ambitions is nullified by Flamineo’s depiction of his impotence. Flamineo baldly states that his brother-in-law is ‘more cold in the liver’, the seat of passion, than even a gilder suffering from dementia caused by inhaling mercury fumes. The concept of his incapacity is suggested by aged images of shrinking and extreme hair loss. Evidence of Camillo’s impotence is cast in terms of secret knowledge obtained from the Doctor, which attribute further connotations of venereal disease to the symptom of shedding hairs. His weak back is synonymous with impotency, and so the portrayal of Camillo’s close fitting doublet around his ‘shrunken’ back is indicative of his sexual inadequacy. Flamineo symbolically castrates Camillo of his masculine identity, which significantly strips his authority as a husband to possess his wife. Camillo’s masculinity is even overshadowed by a gambler who stakes and loses his genitals, according to Flamineo.

Upon Camillo’s entrance, Flamineo mockingly asks if he is to bed his wife tonight. Camillo’s reply epitomises the image of his cold and frigid marital bed:

My voyage lies  
More northerly, in a far colder clime;  
I do not well remember, I protest,  
When I last lay with her. (I. 2. 50–3)

<sup>77</sup> Gāmini Salgādo, ed., *Three Jacobean Tragedies* (London: Penguin Group, 1965), ‘Introduction’, p. 34.

<sup>78</sup> *The White Devil*, in *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and other plays* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1998), pp. 1–102 (I. 2. 26–32).

Cuckoldry humour is invaluable to a tragedy, as Maus notes: ‘not only does jealousy dominate the plots of many plays, but songs about the cuckolded and the abandoned, jokes and saws about the unreliability of wives and lovers, turn up in other plays on the slightest of pretexts.’<sup>79</sup> Yet the bitter edge of Flamineo’s ridicule of impotency emphasises the general anxiety which masculine sexual mastery evokes in all men. Camillo, although the only labelled cuckold within the play, voices the general male anxiety that his usurpation by another more virile man can happen to any man at any time: ‘A man may be made cuckold in the daytime | When the stars’ eyes are out’ (I. 2. 70–1). Wives in Camillo’s world are sexually uncontrollable, and can easily be courted by another man, thus making the conversion of a husband into a cuckold a concealed yet ever-present threat. Flamineo does not deny Camillo’s risk of being cuckolded by the Duke, although still pretends to pity and be his ally: ‘I do commit you to your pitiful pillow | Stuffed with horn-shavings’ (I. 2. 72–3). Flamineo advises against the plan of locking his wife away from ‘revels’:

And so you should be certain in one fortnight,  
Despite her chastity or innocence,  
To be cuckolded, which yet is in suspense:  
This is my counsel and I ask no fee for’t. (I. 2. 79–82)

Flamineo insists that even a restrained, chaste and innocent woman will become lustful and adulterous, as withholding revelry increases its attraction. Camillo’s ignorant jealousy is intensified by the dramatic irony of Flamineo’s real incentive to ensure the Duke’s free access to Vittoria. Flamineo employs the powerful emblem of the cuckold’s horn to convince Camillo of his argument that imprisoning Vittoria will ensure he becomes a cuckold:

It seems you would be a fine capricious mathematically jealous coxcomb, take the height of your own horns with a Jacob’s staff afore they are up. These politic enclosures for paltry mutton makes more rebellion in the flesh than all the provocative electuaries doctors have uttered since last Jubilee. (I. 2. 87–92)

Flamineo employs the image of the restricted ‘mutton’ by the process of agricultural enclosure, to illustrate how imprisonment of a naturally loose woman evokes a sexual rebellion against the husband which is more extreme than that induced by aphrodisiacs or ‘provocative electuaries’. Vittoria assists Flamineo in his stripping of Camillo’s masculine identity, with the allusion, ‘I did nothing to displease him; I carved to him at supper-time.’

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<sup>79</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus, ‘Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama’, *ELH*, 54 (1987), 561–583 (p. 561).

Flamineo extends her implicit hint at Camillo's castration into a full bawdy jibe: '[*whispers to Vittoria*] You need not have carved him in faith, they say he is a capon already' (I. 2. 118–21). Vittoria's reference to carving the meat implicitly suggests her husband's lack of virility, which Flamineo immediately embraces as a symbolic castration and casts Camillo as a capon, a castrated cock. Camillo is also portrayed as 'a maggot' and 'a false stone, yon counterfeit diamond,' drawing attention to the inadequate size and decayed content of Camillo's genitalia (I. 2. 133, 135). Camillo's impotency is established and Flamineo ridicules his brother-in-law as a shadow of a gentleman due to his sexual inferiority. Flamineo's metaphor casts Vittoria as 'a goodly foil' while her husband is 'false stone' and the 'counterfeit diamond'. Flamineo ridicules marriage and emphasises the wealth of adultery through the image of Bracciano's virility as a jewel which 'she must wear [...] lower' (I. 2. 217). Camillo is persuaded by Flamineo to remain aloof from Vittoria and he explains his absence to his wife with the analogy: 'your silkworm useth to fast every third day, and the next following spins the better' (I. 2. 168–9). Camillo expresses the common perception of his inability to spin or produce semen, a proof of manhood.

The emblem of the horned beast and the shame of cuckoldry return to haunt Camillo when Monticelso presents the figure that he claims was thrown at Camillo's window:

CAMILLO	Here is a stag, my lord, hath shed his horns, And for the loss of them the poor beast weeps — The word ' <i>Inopem me copia fecit</i> '.	At my window?
MONTICELSO	Plenty of horns hath made him poor of horns. (II. 1. 319–23)	That is,

The emblem of the hornless stag publicly exposes Camillo's denial or ignorance of his cuckold state. The motto, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (III. 466), means 'Abundance has rendered me poor', which reflects Camillo's sense of loss of his wife and masculinity. Monticelso implies that Camillo has been cuckolded many times by numerous men having sex with his wife, and so depriving him of the use of his 'horn' or penis. Monticelso is keen to provoke a reaction from Camillo and states, 'You are a cuckold', yet Camillo prefers that his shame 'keep within doors' (II. 1. 324, 327). Camillo remains unaware of the machinations of other men, which furthers his emasculation. Monticelso encourages Camillo's voyage to the Italian coast in a misplaced martial exercise to allow the Duke and Vittoria to deepen their sin. 'Go change the air for shame, see if your absence | Will blast

your cornucopia', he advises (II. 1. 352–3). Monticelso with all men mocks Camillo's withered 'horn' and inability to husband his wife.

The character of Camillo exposes the association of the cuckold with impotence and jealousy, yet he also displays an ignorance of the actual occasions of his wife's adultery. He is universally mocked, mostly by other men within the play who through their mockery symbolically castrate Camillo of his masculine identity and place him as an exile, a type of eunuch. Other men distance Camillo from the ideal image of masculinity as a form of defence and denial, as ultimately they are also vulnerable to the sexual advances of other men and the expression of adulterous female desire. The anxiety caused by the threat to masculine virility is translated through the cuckold's paranoid suspicion:

I have seen a pair of spectacles fashioned with such perspective art that, lay down but one twelvenpence o'th' board, 'twill appear as if there were twenty; now should you wear a pair of these spectacles, and see your wife tying her shoe, you would imagine twenty hands were taking up of your wife's clothes, and this would put you into a horrible causeless fury.

(I. 2. 95–100)

Flamineo attempts to reassure Camillo's fears of cuckoldry, his spectacles represent the cuckold's jealous vision of rampant adultery. Bruster claims, '[m]ultiple perspective combines with indiscriminating fertility to produce, for the householding "husband" Camillo, a nightmare of generation.'<sup>80</sup> The bawdy humour directed at the cuckold serves to conceal the threat to male mastery posed by men, as evident in the lawyer and Flamineo's discussion of Vittoria's trial:

LAWYER Methinks none should sit upon thy sister but old whoremasters.

FLAMINEO Or cuckolds, for your cuckold is your most terrible tickler of lechery. Whoremasters would serve, for none are judges at tilting, but those that have been old tilters. (III. 1. 12–16)

The lawyer alludes to the appropriateness of 'old whoremasters' as judges to 'sit upon' a whore, yet Flamineo suggests that cuckolds would serve well as they are 'ticklers' of lechery. A cuckold deprived of personal sexual satisfaction was believed to live vicariously through other's sexual acts; the cuckold burdened with symbolic horns is contrasted with the whoremaster armed for tilting or sexual battle. The cuckold is primarily depicted as a victim of men, who castrate his virility and masculine identity reducing him to a ridiculous pawn. In fact their actions aimed at asserting their own virility thinly veils the universal truth that any man can be made a cuckold, and it is man's

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<sup>80</sup> Bruster, p. 205.

ability in the play to alter women and men through his sexual actions which will be considered in the final chapter.

The Jacobean comedy *Epicoene*, written by Ben Jonson, was performed between 1609 and 1610 at the private theatre Whitefriars by the Children of her Majesty's Revels. As suggested in the previous two chapters and characteristic of an early Jacobean play, *Epicoene* exposes the perception of contemporary gender inversion. Significantly Jonson places impotency as a primary issue which influences the progress of the plot. Morose, the patriarch, is symbolically castrated of his virility by the male usurpers who surround him. Male virility is figured as a substance of status and economic value, which is threatened by the appetites of other men.

*Epicoene* and the rest of the satirised cast in the play lose or distort their sexuality.<sup>81</sup> The collegiate women, whom we discussed in the second chapter, live away from their husbands, express their views with masculine authority and address each other by their surnames. La Foole is described as a 'precious manikin', a 'wind-fucker', who claims to have carnal knowledge of *Epicoene* and suffers a ritual castration (I. 3. 24, I. 4. 72). Otter is described as an 'amphibian', hinting at his indeterminate sex, while to escape marriage Morose would be an impotent 'bridegroom uncarnate' and a cuckold. Morose is a misanthropist who hates the sound of life, and distrusts his heir Dauphine, leading him into marriage and his own destruction. Truewit's penetrative role creating public scenes of symbolic castration is characteristic of the satirist persona, especially Marston's Kinsayder whose name meant to castrate a dog.<sup>82</sup> The title and the events of the play subvert the system of gender. 'Jonson's comedy collapses gender, rendering it an altogether unstable system of reference and implies that both femininity and masculinity — the fetishistically sexed body parts that inform those terms — are essentially prosthetic and malleable', comments Johnston.<sup>83</sup> He describes the men responsible for Morose's symbolic castration as 'four epicene figures: Dauphine, *Epicoene*, Cutbeard the barber (disguised as a canon lawyer), and Captain Otter (disguised as a doctor of divinity)'.<sup>84</sup> There is a potent sense of a new generation of effeminate men who construct their artificial gender. Boehr

<sup>81</sup> Ben Jonson, *Epicoene; or, The Silent Woman*, ed. by L. A. Beaurline (London: Edward Arnold, 1967).

<sup>82</sup> John Marston, *The Scourge of Villanie*, 'To those that seeme iudicial perusers', in A. Davenport, *Poems of John Marston* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961), p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Albert Johnston, 'Prosthetic Absence in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholmew Fair*', *ELR*, 37 (2007), 401–428 (p. 408).

<sup>84</sup> Johnston, p. 416.

observes that the youths of the play ‘neither wed nor fructify, nor do they engage in anything that can really be called combat’.<sup>85</sup> The effeminate gallants La Foole and Daw most conform to Boehrer’s definition of the modern man.

A boy asserts his manhood over the effeminate knight La Foole by threatening to marshal him with ‘a truncheon’ (I. 3. 48). La Foole is an example of the paradox of male virility, as his indulgence in sexual relations with women leaves him unmanly. Truewit’s later exposé of La Foole’s apparent deceit concerning his intimacy with Epicoene also paints him as weak and dishonest. He is a man without true virility, and asserts, ‘[i]t should be extremely against my will, sir, if I contested with any man’ (I. 4. 16–17). Daw and La Foole are unmanned by Truewit’s trick to instil a fear of each other and to endure revenge beatings for slandering Dauphine. Clerimont informs the collegiate ladies, and they reject Daw and La Foole from their sexual favour, choosing Dauphine as their replacement. Before Daw and La Foole return on stage Dauphine pleads to the ladies to act as before, ‘that we may see how they will bear up again, with what assurance and erection’ (IV. 6. 71–3). The sexual innuendo of his request betrays his desire to see how far they can act as men after their physical humiliation. The concept of lost manhood is extended as La Foole and Daw lose their swords as well as their masculinity to Clerimont (V. 1. 1). Mavis’s request, ‘Gentlemen, have any of you a pen and ink?’, is very apt considering their apparent lack of masculine authority (V. 1. 9).

Truewit in contrast to the knights is forthright and phallic in his cutting comments and assertive judgements of others. To prevent the disinheritance of Dauphine he bombards Morose with an attack on marriage. Truewit boasts of his believed achievement, the severance of the uncle’s match with Epicoene:

this horn got me entrance, kiss it. I had no other way to get in but by feigning to be a post; but when I got in once, I prov’d none but rather the contrary, turn’d him into a post or a stone or what is stiffer, with thund’ring into him the incommodities of a wife and the miseries of marriage. If ever Gorgon were seen in the shape of a woman, he hath seen her in my description. I have put him off o’ that scent forever. (II. 4. 9–15)

Truewit displays his phallic ‘horn’ and asks the others to worship it; it is his literal key unlocking Morose’s household and also represents his potency. The whole idea of

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<sup>85</sup> Bruce Boehrer, ‘The Classical Context of Ben Jonson’s “Other Youth”’, *SEL*, 43:2 (Spring 2005), IV <<http://go.galegroup.com/chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA102340089&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w>> [accessed 6 April 2010]

penetrating and ‘thund’ring into him’ conjures images of Truewit as the sexual aggressor and Morose as the passive receiver. Truewit asserts his authority by claiming to have scared Morose away from women and by converting Morose into an erect yet frigid ‘post or a stone’. He acts as a virile masculine power pronouncing a misogynistic diatribe against the ‘the incommunities of a wife and the miseries of marriage’. Truewit claims that a wife with her expensive fashions emasculates her husband by spending his wealth: ‘she feels not how the land drops away, nor the acres melt, nor foresees the change when the mercer has your woods for her velvets’ (II. 2. 104–6). Johnston expands upon Truewit’s argument ‘that a female focus on commodity culture never takes into account what is sacrificed, never recognizes the economic castration that a wife’s pursuit of artificial, prosthetic femininity inflicts upon her poor husband’.<sup>86</sup> *Epicoe* portrays cuckoldry through a wife’s excessive spending as equally affecting a man’s sexual mastery. Adultery is also common in the world of the play, and Truewit expects Morose to act the role of a cuckold and benefit from another’s creation of his heir. He warns Dauphine of his imminent disinheritance:

Yes, and be poor and beg; do, innocent, when some groom of his has got him an heir, or this barber, if he himself cannot. Innocent! — I pray thee, Ned, where lies she? Let him be innocent still. (I. 2. 52–5)

Morose’s plans to marry a quiet wife are clearly not motivated by any desire for companionship, love or even sexual desire. He perceives marriage as a route to secure the wealth and integrity of his dynastic line, rather than bestowing his estate, which imbues his masculine authority, upon the pretender Dauphine. Marjorie Swann comments, ‘Morose assumes that elite male power relations are negotiated through reproductive female bodies, and he intends to vanquish Dauphine through his instrumental use of Epicoe’s sexual organs.’<sup>87</sup> Morose’s objective is founded in a definition of his masculinity based upon his economic status which he imagines can be transferred through his seed to form another version of himself, his son. The play is dominated by social competition, maintains Boehrer: ‘Morose, for instance, does not simply plan to disinherit his nephew Dauphine Eugenie; he plans to do so by performing two of the signature acts of early manhood — by marrying and begetting a more immediate heir.’<sup>88</sup> Masculine virility is proven by the use of women to produce and increase, not only through their reproductive capacity but also as

<sup>86</sup> Johnston, p. 415.

<sup>87</sup> Marjorie Swann, ‘Refashioning Society in Ben Jonson’s *Epicoe*’, *SEL*, 38:2 (Spring 1998), 297–315 (p. 297).

<sup>88</sup> Boehrer, ‘Jonson’s “Other Youth”’, III.

emblems of their husband's masculine mastery and wealth. Morose's actions can also be interpreted as phallic displays of dominance by severing Dauphine's future establishment of his own position of masculine authority. Helen Ostovich maintains, 'Morose attempts to destroy Dauphine's masculinity by cutting off his finances.'<sup>89</sup> The imagery of severing Dauphine's means of wealth, power and future husbandry of a wife is indicative of a castration. Johnston in agreement asserts, 'Morose's threat to disinherit his nephew is fundamentally castrative.'<sup>90</sup>

Morose's scheme is made impotent by the machinations of Dauphine. Johnston emphasises, 'his refusal to adapt to the rapid changes occurring around him puts his economic survival — his masculinity, as it were — in jeopardy.'<sup>91</sup> He is shocked by the discovery that his new wife can speak and wishes to rule the household. After the wedding Truewit instils a fear of becoming a cuckold in Morose's mind: 'you deserve to be grafted and have your horns reach from one side of the island to the other' (III. 6. 98–9). Epicoene's familiarity with Truewit evokes Morose's assumption that she is a whore and he is now a cuckold: 'I have married his cittern, that's common to all men' (III. 5. 59–60). Morose targets his distress towards his bride-finder the barber Cutbeard, aptly named for his part in Morose's symbolic castration. The barber becomes the man who has used his wife suggestively as the barber's lute or cittern. Morose's investment of his masculinity in a wife is threatened by the uncertainty of female sexual integrity: as Callaghan observes, such an investment 'in the feminine as property [...] can only be insecure'.<sup>92</sup> Morose's assumption of the role of the cuckold, although fictional, begins the depletion of his virility and authority.

Morose's decline into the status of impotency is gradual. His phallic force verges on the ridiculous when he descends upon a brawl between Mrs Otter and her husband. The stage directions read, 'Morose *descends with a long sword*' and Mrs Otter, Daw and La Foole flee from his phallic threat (IV. 2. 106). Mrs Otter explains her shriek: 'he came down with a huge long naked weapon in both his hands, and look'd so dreadfully!' (IV. 3. 2–3). Morose's sexual mastery is evident and yet he is also ridiculed through Mrs Otter's image of mad perversion.

<sup>89</sup> *Ben Jonson: Four Comedies*, ed. Helen Ostovich (London: Longman, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>90</sup> Johnston, p. 409.

<sup>91</sup> Johnston, p. 410.

<sup>92</sup> Callaghan, p. 165.

Morose regrets following the Barber's counsel to marry Epicoene and he expresses his willingness to castrate a part of his body to a higher power to bring an annulment:

MOROSE Would I could redeem it with the loss of an eye, nephew, a hand, or any other member.

DAUPHINE Marry, God forbid, sir, that you should geld yourself to anger your wife.  
(IV. 4. 7–10)

Morose's extreme offer to sacrifice a 'member' is immediately seized upon by Dauphine as an opportunity to mock his willingness to castrate himself all because of a wife. It also forecasts Morose's public castration enacted by his own words after his marriage. Truewit, with Cutbeard and Otter in disguise, works upon Morose's weakness to force his declaration of impotence as an escape from marriage. Both impersonators lead Morose in Latin jargon through the twelve ways to annul a marriage. After much noise and perambulation they finally reach the clause, which could possibly apply to Morose:

CUTBEARD The twelfth and last is *si forte coire nequibus*.

OTTER Ay, that is *impedimentum gravissimum*. It doth utterly annul and annihilate, that. If you have *manifestam frigiditatem*, you are well, sir. (V. 3. 159–62)

The humour of the trick is inescapable, especially Otter's assertion that if Morose is sexually frigid, he is well! The masculine gender is completely inverted and Truewit continues the joke, '[w]hy, there is comfort come at length, sir. Confess yourself but a man unable, and she will sue to be divorc'd first' (V. 3. 163–4). Morose does conform to the concept of the unwitting cuckold through his ignorance and unaware emasculation. The reality, as proven at the end of the play, is that impotence is more degrading to a man than an inappropriate marriage in a society dominated by the currency of masculine virility and the artificial construction of gender. Despite the sinister intentions humour permeates the scene through extended definitions, mispronunciations and the ignorance of Morose who believes he is more knowledgeable than others:

OTTER That a boy or child under years is not fit for marriage because he cannot *reddere debitum*. So your *omnipotentes* —

TRUEWIT Your *impotentes*, you whoreson lobster.

OTTER Your *impotentes*, I should say, are *minime apti ad contrahenda matrimonium*.

TRUEWIT *Matrimonium*? We shall have most unmatrimonial Latin with you: *matrimonia* and be hang'd. (V. 3. 171–7)

The anxiety of impotence is dispersed, however misguidedly, as a condition which befalls fools, lesser men who invite ridicule. Their debate as to correct definitions and possible

loopholes adds another dimension with the unnecessary noise, which evidently would be torturous to the sound-sensitive Morose. They proceed to taunt Morose with the possibility of an annulment and with the ways in which impotency could still keep him married, particularly if the impediment of frigidity was post-marital, a circumstance which would allow them to coexist as brother and sister. The two actors present impotence as Morose's only option, and they emphasise the gravity of this for his reputation:

OTTER Does not the verse of your own canon say, *Haec socianda vetant conubia, facta retractant* —

CUTBEARD I grant you, but how do they *retractare*, master parson?

MOROSE (Oh, this was it, I fear'd.)

OTTER *In aeternum*, sir. (V. 3. 187–191)

Otter asserts that an impotent is forbidden to marry and therefore the union will be revoked. Cutbeard asks how, and Morose utters his 'fear' of Otter's answer 'to all eternity'. A claim of impotence has further-reaching implications than just the annulment of his union with Epicoene. Morose will be deemed impotent for eternity, and thus be prevented from marrying another and producing a legal heir, otherwise later evidence of potency will establish his original marriage as legitimate. Morose fears the social realities of the plea of impotence; as Swann notes, '[i]n declaring himself impotent, Morose rescinds his power to shape a hereditary social order.'<sup>93</sup> Morose's fictional sexual dysfunction becomes reality through the public discussion of his sexual capacity by the equally fictional doctor and parson:

OTTER 'Tis false in humanity to say so. Is he not *prorsus inutilis ad thorum*? Can he *praestare fidem datam*? I would fain know.

CUTBEARD Yes, how if he do *convalescere*? (V. 3. 193–5)

The debate includes the extent of Morose's ability to fulfil his matrimonial promise, and the implications of a sexual recovery. The public dissection of his sexual performance is deliberately taunting, especially when Cutbeard hits upon the reality of the situation, which brings Morose close to anxiety, unaware of the dramatic irony: '[o]r, if he do *simulare* himself *frigidum, odio uxoris*, or so?' Otter labels a man guilty of such falsity as an '*adulter manifestus*' and '*prostitutor uxoris*', a manifest adulterer prostituting his wife, and deliberately evokes Morose's anxiety and cowardice: '[g]ood sir, let me escape' (V. 3. 199–203). Morose is driven by the scheme of others to surrender his masculine autonomy, proclaiming in desperation, 'I will do anything' (V. 3. 218). Otter's emphasis of the great

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<sup>93</sup> Swann, p. 297.

arm of justice, '[e]xercendi potestate', conjures a threatening phallic image which prepares the audience for Morose's imminent scene of ritual castration (V. 3. 222).

Morose's public announcement, in which he discards his masculine persona, is the product of the machinations of other men. Truewit arranges an audience to ensure the efficacy of his denunciation, including the ladies and knights, and urges Morose to confess:

Be brief, sir, and confess your infirmity, she'll be afire to be quit of you; if she but hear that nam'd once, you shall not entreat her to stay. She'll fly you like one that had the marks upon him. (V. 4. 26–9)

Truewit insists and Morose is convinced that the prospect of no sexual intercourse will make Epicoene leave; she will treat his incapacity as a symptom akin to the marks of the plague. Such a comparison depicts impotency as a disease, which can infect others, distorting their sexuality and undermining positions of respect, most obviously in the lack of conjugal relations. Morose directs his announcement to the ladies and pleads for their 'pardons': '[f]or a wrong I have done to your whole sex in marrying this fair and virtuous gentlewoman' (V. 4. 30–3). He treats impotence and its effect upon a wife as a sin against the whole female sex. Rather than a private concern within a marriage, it is to be concealed and cannot be reconciled with a woman as sexual virility is the debt a husband must pay:

MOROSE Being guilty of an infirmity which, before I conferr'd with these learned men, I thought I might have conceal'd —  
 TRUEWIT But now being better inform'd in his conscience by them, he is to declare it and give satisfaction by asking your public forgiveness.  
 MOROSE I am no man, ladies.  
 ALL How!  
 MOROSE Utterly unabled in nature, by reason of frigidity, to perform the duties or any the least office of a husband. (V. 4. 35–43)

Morose's confession and public apology are uncomfortable, as we know that he is merely the pawn of others' machinations; however, this is tempered by our knowledge that he actually despises the women he is addressing so politely and betrays his own ability to deceive. Truewit claims that it is Morose's 'conscience' that forces him to unveil the truth, a quality which no character within the play seems truly to exhibit. The scene builds towards Morose's assertion that 'I am no man,' the moment when he is unmanned by words and public perception. He continues in absolutes and legal-styled jargon devoid of emotion. Boehrer remarks, 'Morose's confession of impotence of course places him

squarely in the category of old age described so contemptuously by Clerimont.<sup>94</sup> Clerimont declares that the pursuits of horse racing, hunting, and wagers are designed for the old and impotent: '[c]ome, the other are considerations when we come to have gray heads and weak hams, moist eyes and shrunk members. We'll think on 'em then; then we'll pray and fast' (I. 1. 40–43).

Clerimont associates impotent 'shrunk members' with old age, which dictate by necessity a life of modesty and piety — 'we'll pray and fast.' By implication his virile youth should be occupied with debauchery and excess. In fact Morose's impotency at this stage is merely a matter of words designed to enable his escape from marriage. In the public sphere, however, 'I am no man' is more than mere words:

MAVIS Now, out upon him, prodigious creature!  
 CENTAUR Bridegroom uncarnate.  
 HAUGHTY And would you offer it to a young gentlewoman?  
 MRS OTTER A lady of her longings? (V. 4. 44–7)

The ladies of the collegiate despise Morose for his impotency, particularly his presumption to marry and burden a woman with impotence, an odd similarity shared with William Gouge's prohibition of impotents from marriage in his *Of Domesticall duties eight treatises* (1622) discussed earlier (p. 177). Morose is heckled as a 'prodigious creature' and 'Bridegroom uncarnate', wounding his masculine virility and authority amongst women. He is legally a husband and yet is 'uncarnate', not of flesh or blood, and by implication unable to sexually perform as a husband. His worst crime is his offering of 'it', his inadequate and alien member, to a woman with passions. The Collegiates recognise and uphold the right of female desire, yet throughout the play are insatiable and loose: their behaviour negates any notion of Jonson advocating women's rights to sexual expression and autonomy. On the contrary he seems to be re-enforcing the concept of the unquenchable and animalistic lust of women. Epicoene typically is more perceptive than the gullible ladies of the collegiate and questions Morose's incapacity:

EPICOENE Tut, a device, a device, this, it smells rankly, ladies. A mere comment of his  
 own.  
 TRUEWIT Why, if you suspect that, ladies, you may have him search'd.  
 DAW As the custom is, by a jury of physicians.  
 LA FOOLE Yes, faith, 'twill be brave.  
 MOROSE Oh me, must I undergo that!  
 MRS OTTER No, let women search him, madam: we can do it ourselves.

<sup>94</sup> Boehrer, 'Jonson's "Other Youth"', III.

MOROSE Out on me, worse!

EPICOENE No, ladies, you shall not need, I'll take him with all his faults.

MOROSE Worst of all! (V. 4. 48–58)

The suggestion of a physical search of Morose's body to discover evidence of his impotency draws upon the contemporary reality of inspections. The Frances Howard case, and most notably for men the French impotency trials, established a cultural context of suspicion and a national concern with impotency. Epicoene is more reasoned in her judgements and accepts Morose despite his sexual want. She stands as an ideal woman, the only member of her sex unmotivated by lust, yet is revealed to be a man instructed by other men. The real women of the play are sexually aggressive, as shown by Mrs Otter's glee at inspecting a man's body, and her threatening persona will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter. Mrs Otter's enthusiasm strikes fear in the heart of Morose who views female molestation as worse than the humiliation of the inspection by male physicians. In England the inspection of the male body for impotency was quite rare in contrast to the similar inspection of a woman to confirm her virginity. Jonson is focusing upon the horror of the voracious female controlling a subjected and vulnerable male body, without any comparison to the reality of the contemporary invasive bodily inspection of the female. The intelligence and success of Epicoene, the boy performing as a woman, only emphasises the vanity, rebellious and loose morality of the real women in the play. The unveiling of Epicoene as a male character reminds the audience that male actors also perform the 'real' women in the play, although this does not undermine the general sense of the base nature of the ladies. Despite the avowal of sexual desire by female characters, their argument is marginalized by their presentation by a male playwright and male actors.

The failure of Morose's claim of impotency to secure a divorce, due to Epicoene's embracement of his faults, is inconsequential to Truewit, although not to Morose. Morose has been unmanned in public and irrelevant of the future, his reputation will prevent him from marriage to a woman and dash his chances of creating an heir. Furthermore, for a man who hates the sound of others, he will now be accompanied by public derisive comments. The reality of Epicoene's refusal to separate and his impotent identity leads to his exclamation, '[w]orse, worse than worst!' (V. 4. 63). Truewit reassures Morose in his feigned friendship and instructs Epicoene as a puppet in his performance: 'Dauphine, whisper the bride that she carry it as if she were guilty and asham'd' (V. 4. 68–9). He now returns to Morose's depiction as a cuckold and presents the testimony of the knights:

DAW That we have known your bride, sir —  
 LA FOOLE In good fashion. She was our mistress, or so —  
 CLERIMONT Nay, you must be plain, knights, as you were to me.  
 OTTER Ay, the question is, if you have *carnaliter* or no.  
 LA FOOLE *Carnaliter?* What else, sir? (V. 4. 99–103)

Epicoene affects weeping at the prospect of annulment, while Morose is undaunted by now being declared a cuckold and praises the men who claim to have slept with his wife: '[o]h, let me worship and adore you, gentlemen!' (V. 4. 106). The ladies immediately defend the tainted Epicoene; Haughty claims that the knights are 'not good witnesses in law' and approves her behaviour: 'I love you the better for't' (V. 4. 115–17). The Collegiates' support of female desire is unshaken and proven to be immoral by their endorsement of adultery. The disguised Cutbeard crushes Morose's hopes with the realisation that immoral conduct prior to marriage will not bring an annulment:

Why then I say, for any act before, the *matrimonium* is good and perfect, unless the worshipful bridegroom did precisely before witness demand if she were *virgo ante nuptias*. (V. 4. 122–24)

Morose is found guilty of neglect by not establishing his wife's virginity as a prerequisite to marriage. The weight of a further injury to his masculinity, the label of cuckold, finally affects Morose: '[t]his is worst of all worst worsts that hell could have devis'd! Marry a whore! and so much noise!' (V. 4. 132–3). Morose is made ridiculous by his fluctuations between elation and distress with the frequent use of his favourite phrase 'worst of all worst worsts'. Dauphine conveniently intervenes to 'help' his uncle, and presents him with a tantalising offer, to 'free you of this unhappy match absolutely and instantly' (V. 4. 145–6). Morose is desperate and is willing to promise his 'whole estate' and to submit his person: 'I will become thy ward' (V. 4. 155). His wealth is the final mark of his significance as a powerful virile man and yet he is easily persuaded to discard it. Dauphine repeats his request for five hundred pounds a year and the remaining at Morose's death, a request 'to which I have often by myself and friends tender'd you a writing to sign, which you would never consent or incline to' (V. 4. 161–3). Morose agrees to the deal and signs away his estate and wealth, which Johnston interprets as 'an act that would symbolically castrate the old patriarch by transferring his privileged masculinity'.<sup>95</sup> The incapacity of Morose is almost complete and he is forced to borrow a pen, a phallic tool, which embodies his loss and Dauphine's usurpation of masculine authority:

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<sup>95</sup> Johnston, p. 417.

Come, nephew, give me the pen. I will subscribe to anything, and seal to what thou wilt for my deliverance. Thou art my restorer. Here, I deliver it thee as my deed. If there be a word in it lacking or writ with false orthography, I protest before God, I will not take the advantage. (V. 4. 177–81)

Morose is now classed as sexually impotent, a cuckold, and has signed away his wealth, leaving any prospect of an heir impossible. Boehrer observes, ‘having failed to furnish himself with the dependent child who would confirm his own virility, he is prepared to assume the legal status of a dependent child on behalf of his nephew,’ which is ‘paralleled by a similar slide into impotent old age’.<sup>96</sup> Once Dauphine receives the legal confirmation of the settlement he releases Morose from his marriage in a humiliating display, which completes the unmaning of his uncle. Dauphine literally unveils the masculine identity of Epicoene under the peruke and annuls the unlawful marriage in an instant: ‘[y]ou have married a boy: a gentleman’s son that I have brought up this half year at my great charges, and for this composition which I have now made with you’ (V. 4. 183–5).

Epicoene’s transformation is the reverse of Morose’s situation, and the unveiling is tantamount to proclaiming, ‘I am no woman.’ Morose’s castration directly affects his tongue and member, the tools of power and influence. He is now revealed to have married a boy without realising it, a further dent to his masculinity. A hint of public pederasty destroys Morose’s authority, as he is also unable to prove his patriarchal rights through sexual mastery over a woman. The subversive suggestion of homoerotic desire also reduces his authority by his preference for a man as a more desirable alternative to the reality of a woman. The crafting of an idealised woman by male playwrights and the early modern all-male casts are here exposed in microcosm by Ben Jonson as part of the play. It is also a clever trick to play on an audience who accept that men act the female parts, and then to disrupt their sense of reality with a gender reversal. Critics have debated the extent to which the audience perceives Epicoene’s disguise. Dryden established the assumption that the audience were unaware of Epicoene’s true sex until she is revealed to be a boy.<sup>97</sup> Charles A. Carpenter alternatively claimed that the audience could only be fooled on their first view of Epicoene.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, Hibbard proposed that the audience was expected to

<sup>96</sup> Boehrer, ‘Jonson’s “Other Youth”’, III.

<sup>97</sup> John Dryden, ‘An Essay of Dramatic Poesy’ in *Selected Poetry and Prose of John Dryden*, ed. by Earl Miner (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 86.

<sup>98</sup> Charles A. Carpenter, ‘Epicoene minus its secrets: surprise as expectation’, *Xavier University Studies*, 7:3 (1968), pp. 15–22.

‘understand the secret of Epicoene’s sex well before the onstage audience does’.<sup>99</sup> Either way Epicoene’s true gender is crucial to the concept of masculine identity as a fragile and transferable commodity. As discussed earlier, Jonson also parodies the contemporary phenomenon of the mannish woman, who featured in plays such as *The Roaring Girl*, by revealing his hermaphrodite to be a man.

Dauphine exposes the extent of the scheme and the betrayal by men to affect Morose’s symbolic castration, after which he dismisses his uncle: ‘I’ll not trouble you till you trouble me with your funeral, which I care not how soon it come. [*Exit Morose.*.]’ (V. 4. 194–6). Morose is silent during his humiliation and ritual castration. Reuben Sanchez describes the end of the play as troubling due to ‘the absence of an anticipated resolution to a comedy’.<sup>100</sup> Dauphine, despite his hardships and Morose’s unpleasant character, appears callous and is pleased with the effects of his scheme, especially the banishment of a muted Morose from his company. Morose prior to his castration was extremely vocal, preferring only the sound of his own voice. The dialogue in the play presents a gradual decline in the effectiveness of Morose’s voice, most notably throughout the scene with the Doctor and Parson in which he utters emotional outbursts. At the close of the play Morose is impotent, devoid of masculine virility and wealth. He also suffers the metaphoric castration of his tongue, his last phallic vestige of influence, albeit characteristically feminine.

The effect of the anxiety concerning impotency and cuckoldry upon the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean literature has been to create a poetic tradition of imitation and inspiration deriving from Ovid’s original portrayal of a male lover suffering impotence and yet willingly subjecting himself to passion. Marlowe’s translation revealed the contemporary topicality of the subject, while his censorship is indicative of its taboo nature. Campion and Nashe adopted the Ovidian trope in different ways, the former to convey a personal masculine approach through a song, while the latter in the contemporary and provocative setting of a south bank brothel characterised by female sexual autonomy. The two Jacobean plays, Webster’s tragedy and Jonson’s comedy, exposed the sinister characterisation of impotency, cuckoldry and castration in early Jacobean drama.

<sup>99</sup> G. R. Hibbard, ‘Ben Jonson and Human Nature’, in *A Celebration of Ben Jonson*, ed. by William Blissett, Julian Patrick, and R. W. Van Fossen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 74–75.

<sup>100</sup> Reuben Sanchez, “‘Things Like Truths, Well Feigned’”: Mimesis and Secrecy in Jonson’s *Epicoene*, *Comparative Drama*, 40:3 (Fall 2006), 313–36 (VI)

<<http://go.galegroup.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA161502007&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w>> [accessed 6 April 2010].

Masculine identity is both crucial to man's social success and yet constantly threatened by the very men who share the same anxiety and weakness. In *Epicoe* it is suggested that Morose be physically examined to determine if he really is impotent. The play, through this reference to a legal process of proving a man's virility, reflects upon the contemporary obsession with male impotency. Masculine authority involved a concept of sexual mastery and virility, not solely in literature. At Wells in 1607, the Puritan constable Hole was derided by a 'Riding' for impotence.<sup>101</sup> Figures of authority could easily be undermined by slights upon their sexual prowess. The annulment hearings of the Earl of Essex and Francis Howard in 1606 encouraged a public debate upon the threat of impotency within marriage and the effects this had upon the concept of masculinity.

### Claims of Impotency

Morose's terror at the prospect of a physical examination to determine his masculine virility draws upon the contemporary early modern concept of impotence trials. The most notorious public annulment hearing, which was first brought with claims of male impotence, was that between Frances Howard and the Earl of Essex. On 5 January 1606 Frances Howard married Robert Devereux the third Earl of Essex: she was aged fifteen and he fourteen. Their union was political and dynastic, making an alliance between two opposing families. She returned to her family while Robert Devereux travelled abroad from the end of 1607 to 1609, after which the marriage deteriorated. During the summer of 1611, Essex took his wife to Chartley in Staffordshire. Essex had complained to her parents that she was not fulfilling her marital obligations and the Suffolk family believed she was at fault. To Anne Turner and Simon Forman, she smuggled letters, one of which (to Turner) she ordered to be burned, but it was not destroyed. In this letter she emphasises 'for my father, my mother, and my brother said, I should lie with him':

worst of all my Lord [her husband] hath complained that he hath not lain with me, and I would not suffer him to use me. My father and mother are angry, but I had rather die a thousand times over; for, besides the sufferings, I shall lose his [Carr's] love if I lie with him. I will never desire to see his [Carr's] face, if my Lord do that unto me.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Barry Reay (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 166–97 (p. 185).

<sup>102</sup> William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials*, 9 vols (London: T. C. Hansard, 1809), II, 785.

Incriminating rumours surrounded the unhappy union including that on 25 July 1610 when Samuel Calvert wrote to William Trumbull suggesting Essex should look to his Lady ‘for they say plots have been laid by [her] to poison him’.<sup>103</sup> Later evidence continued the attack upon Frances’s reputation including in the summer of 1613 reports of her connection with Mary Woods and the latter’s claim that Frances sought poison for her husband, and Mrs Turner’s now lost confession that a practitioner called Savory had cast sorcery on Essex’s body. It was further insinuated at the Overbury murder trial of 1615 that Frances Howard had sought potions to instil impotency in her husband by the evidence of her letter to Simon Forman, practitioner and astrologer, who is mentioned by Ben Jonson in *Epicoene* (1609), *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), and inspired the bogus practitioner of *The Alchemist* (1612). The letter reminds Forman to send ‘jellies’ and also refers to Essex contemptuously: ‘[m]y Lord is lusty and merry, and drinketh with his men, and useth me as doggedly as ever before, and all the contentment he gives me is to abuse me.’<sup>104</sup> Forman’s notes revealed his familiarity with impotency in the case of Sylvanus Scory who in April 1598 was diagnosed: ‘the humour abounding is that of melancholy, which breeds a stone [...]. He hath had it long and can never be cured thereof [...] weakness in his genitals *quod non potest coire* [so that he cannot copulate] and grieveth much.’ Forman attributes impotency to Scory’s lifestyle: ‘[i]t comes through much lechery. He is unfortunate by accident and will not be ruled.’<sup>105</sup> Forman’s understanding of the condition reflects the Ovidian concept of sexual intercourse weakening a man, while he also knew how to induce the condition:

In the time of matrimony take a point [a lace] and tie three knots thereon. When the priest says, ‘Whom God hath joined together, let no man separate,’ then they knit the knots, naming the party, saying, ‘Whom God hath joined together let the Devil separate. *Sara*, until these knots be undone.’ And he shall never meddle with the said woman. *Probatum*.<sup>106</sup>

Frances’s association with Forman’s services was enough evidence for some to believe both guilty of inducing impotency upon Essex by magical means.

<sup>103</sup> David Lindley, pp. 43–4.

<sup>104</sup> Anne Somerset, *Unnatural Murder: Poison at the Court of James I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), pp. 82–3.

<sup>105</sup> A. L. Rowse, *Simon Forman: Sex and Society in Shakespeare’s Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 196.

<sup>106</sup> Somerset, p. 80.

In May 1613 action to bring the couple's annulment began and meetings between the two families of Essex and Frances agreed the terms of the 'libel' which a commission headed by George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, assisted by three bishops and six civilian lawyers and judges received on 17 May. The libel claimed that Frances Howard was 'desirous to be made a mother, from time to time, again and again yielded herself to his power, and as much as lay in her offered herself and her body to be known; and earnestly desired conjunction and copulation,' but the Earl could not 'have that copulation in any sort which the married bed alloweth'. Essex's ability to copulate was asserted as was Frances's virginity and ignorance of Essex's impediment prior to their marriage. The Earl confessed 'in good earnest, before Witnesses of good credit, and his friends and kinsfolks, that although he did his best endeavour, yet he never could; nor at this time can, have copulation with the said lady Frances, no not once'. The final clause aimed to allay gossip, especially concerning Frances's character: 'in regard of womanish modesty, the lady Frances hath concealed all the former matters, and had a purpose ever to conceal them, if she had not been forced, through false rumours of disobedience to the said Earl to reveal them.'<sup>107</sup> At the start of the hearings it was alleged that Essex's impotence was caused by witchcraft (*maleficium*), which was later dropped yet left a mark on public opinion.

Essex claimed the effects of *maleficium* in a reply to the libel: 'he believeth, that before and after the Marriage, he hath found an ability of body to know any other woman, and hath oftentimes felt motions and provocations of the flesh, tending to carnal copulation.'<sup>108</sup> Reginald Scot sceptically records the belief that, 'manie are so bewitched, that they cannot use their own wives: but anie other bodies they maie well enough away withal,' in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).<sup>109</sup> Despite Scot's scepticism, belief in the power of witchcraft to affect impotency was widespread. Middleton's *The Witch* has been identified as referring to the annulment. Within the play Sebastian has seen his fiancée Isabella stolen from him by Antonio, and to prevent their consummation he appeals to Hecate to provide an impotence charm of skins of serpents and snakes:

So sure into what house these are conveyed,  
Knit with these charmèd and retentive knots,  
Neither the man begets nor woman breeds,

<sup>107</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 785–7.

<sup>108</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), ed. by Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), p. 77.

No, nor performs the least desires of wedlock  
Being then a mutual duty.<sup>110</sup>

Allegations of impotence caused by *maleficium* were rare in English courts, although they were prevalent in France, which caught Sir Charles Somerset's attention on his travels during 1611 to 1612. He commented upon '*Noueurs d'esquillette* that is Tyers of points, which are witches'.<sup>111</sup> Abbot wrote to the King doubting the possibility of *maleficium* causing impotence yet the King maintained, 'if the Devil hath any power, it is over the flesh, rather over the filthiest and most sinful part thereof, whereunto original sin is soldered.'<sup>112</sup> Essex was loosely questioned rather than examined, and Abbot later recalled the inquiry:

my lord of Litchfield had put to him [Essex] certain questions, that four things were necessary in generation; 'membrum virile', erection, penetration, and 'ejaculatio seminis'; which, although they were then smiled at, and since that time much sport had been made at the court and in London about them; yet now our married men on all hands wished that punctually his lordship might have been held to give his answer unto them.<sup>113</sup>

The limited verbal examination led to ribald comment; Weldon mocked the 'bawdy bishops'. Essex's counsel issued the block to his physical examination and insisted that it was a case of *maleficium*. Perhaps the Earl resisted an inspection because he was impotent or because it would reveal that husband and wife were in collusion. Wilson in his later record blamed Frances for Essex's impotence through 'an *Artifice* too immodest to be exprest, to hinder *Penetration*,' and suggests that Forman 'did use all the *Artifice* his *Subtilty* could devise, really to imbecillitate the Earl'.<sup>114</sup>

Essex's claim of an impediment with his wife led the court to request a physical examination of the Countess. Essex's denial of impotency reflects the contemporary ridicule associated with the condition as reflected in contemporary English literature. Essex was never physically examined yet a crucial point during the annulment hearings was whether Frances was a virgin. As a woman she was expected to prove her innocence and genital conformity, through a similar physical examination that was applied to

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. by Marion O'Connor, in *The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: OUP, 2007) pp. 1124–64 (I. 2. 155–9).

<sup>111</sup> University of Leeds MS Trv.q.3, p. 92, in *The Travel Diary (1611–12) of an English Catholic, Sir Charles Somerset*, ed. by Michael Brennan (Leeds: Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, 1993), pp. 163–4.

<sup>112</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 801.

<sup>113</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 816.

<sup>114</sup> Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain being the life and reign of King James the First, relating to what passed from his first access to the crown, till his death* (London: Richard Lownds, 1653) Wing / W2888, Huntington Library <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010] (p. 58–9).

suspected witches. Matrons examined the Countess under veils and confirmed that she was a virgin, 'fitted with abilities to have carnal copulation and apt to have children.'<sup>115</sup> Essex's supporters claimed that Frances had been substituted with the daughter of Thomas Monson or Frances's cousin Mistress Fines. Abbot's report casts aspersions on the expertise of Frances's inspectors: the Ladies apparently 'had no skill,' while the midwives may have been 'tampered with'.<sup>116</sup> The annulment was not granted easily, and disagreement amongst the commissioners led to the King's intervention, adding two more commissioners, which secured the nullity on 25 September by a majority of seven to five. Both could remarry dependent on their own conscience. The bishops who had voted for the nullity were later ridiculed, as for example the Bishop of Winchester's son when knighted shortly after the verdict was dubbed 'Sir Nullity Bilson'. Essex was castrated of influence over the outcome of the hearing when the King prevented his reappearance before the commission. His resentment at the annulment was caused by the damage to his masculine image and to his wealth as he was forced to pay back Frances's six thousand pounds dowry.

Frances through her public case against her husband's sexual inadequacy was perceived by critics as a woman ruled by her desire and therefore transgressing her role as the obedient wife, as one verse insisted: 'Letchery did consult with witcherye | how to procure frygiditye.'<sup>117</sup> Abbot advocated that a wife was expected to suffer in silence with her marital circumstances: 'it is no more but one lady doth want that solace which marital conjunction would afford unto her; which many a good woman is enforced to endure, and yet commits no sin, neither labours to violate the laws of the church.'<sup>118</sup> A similar attitude was revealed by John Chamberlain who wrote that a nullity 'in some sort were pity as well for the example and consequence as for that I have heard from some that may know, that all this business rises from wilfulness'. He makes a special note of Frances's 'forwardness and untowardness'.<sup>119</sup> The relative speed of her second marriage to Robert Carr also confirmed impressions of her dubious motives. Lindley emphasises, 'the underlying feeling that a woman ought to submit to her husband's sexual desire (or tolerate his lack of it) is an important strand in the nexus of assumptions which Frances Howard opposed by

<sup>115</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 805.

<sup>116</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 807.

<sup>117</sup> Bodleian MS Rawlinson D, 1048, fol. 64 in Lindley, p. 118.

<sup>118</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 857.

<sup>119</sup> John Chamberlain, 'September 9, 1613', in McClure Thomson, p. 115.

prosecuting her suit for annulment.<sup>120</sup> An anonymous forty-page poem defended the nullity and responds to these contemporary objections when the poet asserts the equal rights of the wife to complain over the use of her body in marriage: ‘Hers to be found | And heard is just as his.’<sup>121</sup> Yet another anonymous verse undermined the findings of Frances’s physical examination: ‘This Dame was inspected but Fraude interjected | A maid of more perfection.’<sup>122</sup>

However, Frances never revoked her accusation of Essex’s impotency, and after her death the minister of Chiswick reported: ‘speaking with her of this business, she did then protest upon her soul and salvation that the Earl of Essex was never her husband.’<sup>123</sup> Frances’s family also believed the impotency charge, and Northampton referred to Essex as ‘my good lord the gelding’.<sup>124</sup> Essex challenged Frances’s brother Harry Howard, due to insults, on 20 August to a duel. Essex’s involvement in quarrels and duels has been interpreted as evidence of a displacement of anxiety about his virility into proofs of a masculine valour. However, a counterargument would be that such speculation over his manhood would drive him to prove himself, if impotent or not. Despite reports of Essex’s confession of impotency to Worcester, Knollys, and Suffolk, others such as Abbot reported to the contrary through one particular occasion when Essex ‘did shew to them all so able and extraordinary sufficient matter’.<sup>125</sup> Somerset undermines Abbot’s superficial ‘evidence’: ‘[a]s an unmarried man who was himself utterly inexperienced in sexual matters, he did not realise that the ability to obtain an early morning erection prior to urinating is not necessarily indicative of sexual potency.’<sup>126</sup> Such evidence, however, illustrates the fear of publicly admitting the impotency of a man of the aristocracy, not only for the individual but also for the image of the ruling elite as a whole. The later evidence of Essex’s second marriage, which produced a child, was undermined by rumours that the child of his wife Elizabeth, born six years after they were married, was the result of an affair with Sir William Uvedale. The impotency of Essex can never now be proved or

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<sup>120</sup> Lindley, p. 93.

<sup>121</sup> William Terracae, ‘A Plenarie Satisfaction, oute of the holie Scriptures, Cannons, and Civill Lawes authorised’, Northamptonshire Record Office, Finch-Hatton MS 319 fol. 11<sup>v</sup> in Lindley, p. 91.

<sup>122</sup> Chester City Record Office, MS CR 63. 2. 19, fol. 14, in Lindley, p. 99.

<sup>123</sup> Godfrey Goodman, *The Court of King James the First* (London: R. Bentley, 1839, repr. London: Elibron Classics Series, 2005), p. 222.

<sup>124</sup> *CUL MS Dd. 3. 63*, fol. 37, in Lindley, p. 95.

<sup>125</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 822.

<sup>126</sup> Somerset, p. 127.

disproved, despite the attempts of historians such as Somerset, yet what is significant is the consistent speculation and ridicule which the charge brought upon an early Jacobean man.

The annulment was the subject of satirical poems in commonplace books, which became more condemnatory after Frances's prosecution at the Overbury trial. Frances was also adversely affected by the annulment through literary and public accusations of witchcraft, poisoning and sexual lust. As a woman and wife speaking of desire she displayed an attempt to escape masculine control, and additionally evidence of a loose tongue was a symbol of a loose morality. Frances Howard challenged convention by demanding her right to sex and to choose a new husband. Legally her physical examination would rebut Essex's counter claim that it was her impediment which prevented sex, yet it also became a test of her sexual purity. The physical search of Frances and not Essex embodied the double standard of sexual morality and, as Lindley suggests, exposed the demand that 'virginity must have an objective and examinable existence, whereas male potency was apparently thought altogether too erratic and fragile a thing to be available to demonstration'.<sup>127</sup> In fact the examination was not as powerful as the image of a woman publicly evoking the spectre of male sexual inadequacy and expressing her desire for a potent husband. Frances was ultimately condemned as a woman driven against the word of God by lust. Discovered in Essex's papers, Frances Howard's autopsy report revealed her death in 1635 was due to uterine cancer. The location of her illness appeared to her opponents as a case of just punishment for her female sexual depravity:

For that part of her Body which had been the receptacle of most of her sin, grown rotten (though she never had but one Child) the ligaments failing, it fell down, and was cut away in *flakes*, with a most nauseous and putrid *savour*; which to augment, she would roul her self in her own ordure in her bed, took delight in it. Thus her affections varied; For nothing could be found sweet enough to augment her *Beauties* at first, and nothing stinking enough to decipher her loathsomeness at last: Pardon the sharpness of these expressions, for they are for the Glory of God, who often makes his *punishments (in the balance of his Justice)* of equal weight with our *sins*.<sup>128</sup>

The repulsive sadistic pleasure of the report exposes the resentment felt towards a woman who induced male impotency, bewitchment and murder as convicted in the Overbury trial. The literal decay of Frances's internal lower body, the means of female sexual pleasure and creation emphasises in powerful terms the consequences of a woman asserting and securing her own desires. Her death is constructed through the report as a tortuous and

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<sup>127</sup> Lindley, p. 109.

<sup>128</sup> Wilson, *The History of Great Britain*, (p. 83).

degrading punishment for her transgression beyond the confines of the modest and ever-enduring wife. The extract echoes Spenser's description of the stripped Duessa and the personal vehemence against Frances is comparable to the reports of witch-hunts. Frances Howard the seductress and murderess serves as a warning against the rights of the wife to sexual pleasure at the expense of the husband's masculine identity.

### Impotency: An Anglo-French Concern

The English anxiety concerning impotency and the threat to masculine identity was part of a European context. France exhibited the same concern with virility although it emerged in an alternative manner. Montaigne's writing on gender change reveals a similar interest in the formation of gender. In 1588 Montaigne's *Essais* were altered with additions which discussed the topical anxiety of impotence. Parker and Albert Thibaudet have proposed that Montaigne had personal experience of impotency, yet this is not explicitly stated, and his emphasis of authority is typical of his style of debate. The *Essais*, particularly the first of the 1580s edition, begins with conventional gender types, although this premise is transformed through the discussion of impotency and the tale of Marie Germain's production of male genitalia. Parker notes, 'the rigid polarity of male and female begins to relax, and terms such as *mollesse* and *lâcheté*, generally used pejoratively for the feminine, are applied, both negatively and more positively, to Montaigne himself.'<sup>129</sup> The final 1595 version witnesses the expansion of the theme of impotence to almost half the essay, which includes the *Travels* tale of Marie Germain. Parker comments that the same text is preoccupied 'with anecdotes of men who, on their wedding night or at equally inopportune times, also find that they lack the required "instrument" and have themselves to find ways to *suppléer au défaut*'.<sup>130</sup> Montaigne was not alone in writing on impotence and late sixteenth-century France showed a preoccupation with impotency caused by sorcery in texts including Pierre de Bourdeille, Abbé de Brantôme's *Vies des dames galantes* and Martin Del Rio's *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*.<sup>131</sup> Yet Montaigne contrasted with these writers through his treatment of impotency as a product of fear.

<sup>129</sup> Parker, p. 349.

<sup>130</sup> Parker, p. 344.

<sup>131</sup> Abbé de Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Ludovic Lalanne (Paris: Renourd, 1873), VIII:92, and Martin Del Rio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (Louvain, 1599), II:64.

Montaigne throughout his *Essais* explores the issue of impotency as a force of imagination, which can also be corrected through fantastical beliefs or charms. He recounts the example of an Earle who on his wedding day is expected to suffer impotency due to sorcery or *nouements d'aiguillettes*. Armed with this negative expectation in bed, Montaigne asserts, 'hee could not run on poste.'<sup>132</sup> Montaigne provides numerous counter charms, including the wearing of his nightgown and a fastened gold plate with gestures, which succeed: 'my characters proved more venerian than solare, more in action, than in prohibition.'<sup>133</sup> Montaigne emphasises the intractable nature of a man's member in comparison to other parts of the body:

Men have reason to checke the indocile libertie of this member, for so importunately insinuating himselfe when we have no need of him, and so importunately, or as I may say impertinently failing, at what time we have most need of him.<sup>134</sup>

He also suggests a more practical solution: 'waiting for some or other fitter occasion, and more private opportunitie, less sudden and alarmed.'<sup>135</sup> Montaigne attributes impotency to the powers of the imagination, and equally maintains that similar counter-techniques or practical awareness of one's abilities can solve the difficulty. Words and thoughts of impotence have the power to psychologically and then physically weaken a man. Parker remarks, 'Montaigne's particular innovation with regard to the impotence described in essay 1. 21 is to ascribe it to imagination and fear rather than, as with contemporaries like Jean Bodin, to witchcraft.'<sup>136</sup> Montaigne treats impotency as a symptom of a lack of control over the body and he presents a psychological interpretation and remedy, which dismisses fears of witchcraft. Montaigne's combination of classical stories with anecdotes may be fictitious, yet it is valuable as a reflection of the power of the contemporary myth and reality of impotency.

The development of the French impotency trials was not matched in England yet reveals the same contemporary fear of impotency. Despite the difference in treatment, the French concept of impotency exposes a similar construction of masculinity to that revealed in the English literature previously discussed. Darmon claims that in every man is the fear of

<sup>132</sup> *Montaigne's Essays: Florio's Translation*, ed. by J. I. M. Stewart, 2 vols (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1931) I, 87.

<sup>133</sup> Florio, I, 88.

<sup>134</sup> Florio, I, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Florio, I, 89.

<sup>136</sup> Parker, p. 348. Jean Bodin in *Demonology of Witchcraft* (1580) referred to 'lier l'aiguillette' as a cause of impotency.

castration, whereas ‘the myth of virility can be seen as the sublimation of the anxiety into an abstract form which is the basis of a man’s prestige, yet completely beyond his control’.<sup>137</sup> The condemnation of the impotent as an anomaly serves to idealise the position of the virile man as the norm. The French impotency trial enforced the church’s ideology of normality and embodied the defensive mechanism of men to distance themselves from the threat to their authority. Darmon states that from the end of the sixteenth century, ‘the institute of marriage began to deteriorate, and the impotence trial finally came into its own in the atmosphere generated by a sudden explosion of discussion about sexuality.’<sup>138</sup> The detection of an impotent individual required tests, from the public demonstration of ‘erection’, ‘elastic tension’ or ‘natural motion’ and occasionally the ‘proof of ejaculation’ to the ‘trial of congress’. Prior to the trial the woman would be examined and bathed, and while the couple were in bed, the witnesses would remain in an adjoining room, although the matrons would stay. After a few hours the experts would return to examine the woman for evidence of dilation and intromission. From 1550 onwards trial by congress, performing intercourse in front of witnesses, dominated proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts, but was abolished in 1677.

Darmon’s study claims that anxiety over the threat of impotency to the doctrine of marriage led to the defining of ‘the norms within which every man could affirm his potency, and, conversely, to contain from the outset the impotent man within a “structure of exclusion”’.<sup>139</sup> The eternal trinity confirming a man’s virility, ‘erecting, entering, emitting’, was established by the surgeon Jacques Guillemeau (1550-1613) and expanded by the jurist Vincent Tagereau, and Zacchia, founder of forensic medicine. The absence of one of the three actions confirmed impotence, and such a rigid scheme did not cater for the complexities of the condition. ‘Frigidity by evil spell’ reflected the Ovidian concept of hemlock and was caused by drinking a potion, the casting of a spell or charm, or by the ligature or *nouement d’aiguillette*. As has been noted above (page 215) in relation to Jonson’s *Epicoene*, only if marital impotence existed prior to the union could annulment be granted.

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<sup>137</sup> Pierre Darmon, *Trial By Impotence: Virility and Marriage in Pre-Revolutionary France*, trans. by Paul Keegan (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Darmon, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> Darmon, p. 13.

Two events marked the treatment of impotency in France: the first, on 27 June 1587, was the Pope Sixtus V's order of the mandatory dissolution of guilty marriages where an impotent man had usurped the title of husband, which ended any hope of passive liberalism. The *D'Argenton affair* marked the height of repression. The marriage of the Baron d'Argenton to Magdeleine de la Chastre in 1595 was scrutinised after four years when his wife lodged an impotency suit and the case was brought before the ecclesiastical judge of Sens who ordered an inspection of the Baron's genitals. The report specified that D'Argenton, 'had no visible cullions [testicles], but as if a purse without sovereigns, the which did withdraw inside his person when he turned over, in such fashion that he had nothing left him but his member, and even this being far smaller than is customary among men.'<sup>140</sup> Despite the Baron's repeated appeals to the Primate of Lyon and the Pope, the verdict of impotence was confirmed. By this point the Baron's testicles were infamous and the subject of philosophical and forensic controversy amongst surgeons and theologians. The Baron's masculine identity was destroyed yet he attempted to re-establish his gender: 'I am in no wise a castrate, for I have a bearded chin and my voice is not shrill but resembles that of other men, being strong and manly.'<sup>141</sup> On the 3 February 1604 the Baron died without clearing his name and many rushed to be present at his autopsy which divulged the following: 'his two cullions, that nature had concealed from view, showed themselves, and, upon being anatomised, were found to be in all respects similar to those of other men.'<sup>142</sup> D'Argenton was posthumously declared potent, and the Faculty of Medicine of Paris pronounced by decree that for engendering offspring it is not imperative that testicles be visible.

Trials for female impotence were rare compared to their male counterparts. Darmon discovered a few dozen trials of this instance, which suggests that they constitute five percent of all cases. Frigidity was not applied to women, who it was believed could have intercourse if biologically able at all times. Women who could not respond to their husband despite his conformity to canon law were ignored, while those married to an impotent man were depicted in sympathetic images of frustration and sexual abuse at the hands of a desperate husband trying to prove his potency. In the sixteenth century medical examination reports were made public and a fairground atmosphere prevailed around the

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<sup>140</sup> Darmon, p. 20.

<sup>141</sup> Darmon, p. 21.

<sup>142</sup> Darmon, p. 22.

trials. Antoine Hotman's *Traicté de la dissolution du mariage* (1581) reflected a response which blamed the impotency trials upon the female insatiable sexual appetite. Comparable to Frances Howard, those wives who did embark upon the trials immediately compromised themselves and were often perceived as driven by sexual lust, despite the belief that remaining with an impotent husband would risk her immortal salvation, as he would soon become licentious with her body.

The canon laws concerning impotence were the same in both France and England, yet they were more developed in the former due to their greater use. An understanding of the ecclesiastical attitude towards impotency places the English literature previously discussed in context. This is most apparent in the case of the satirised legal debate concerning the annulment clause of impotence in Jonson's *Epicoene*. Impotency was seen as a crime and could have dire consequences for the accused. In both countries punishment of impotency could be social, through public humiliation and the financial and emotional consequences of annulment. The implications for the 'impotent' clearly entailed ridicule in their social environment and for members of the ruling classes such as D'Argenton and the Earl of Essex it was on a national scale. Masculinity was proven and defined by virility as revealed by the most extreme edge of the spectrum, eunuchs. They were held in contempt by the public and treated as outcasts or monsters, while being strictly ostracised by the ecclesiastical and civil legislation. Sexual dysfunction was an obsession of the period, which expressed a sense of uncertainty and a fear of the corruptibility of human gender and sexuality. In France the reaction took a legal and more aggressive route to try to expose and contain the threat of impotency. In England annulment for impotency was not as common, but the subject of impotency was a constant preoccupation and was discussed throughout literature and drama, as a way of dissecting and of expressing a fear for masculinity. Anxiety surrounded the idea of unproductive marriages, as the household was viewed as a microcosm of the state which needed to be healthy and ordered by a patriarch. There was a fear that if 'incomplete' men did reproduce, their offspring would be illegitimate or 'inferior' and constitute a threat to society.

## Defending Virility

The spectre of impotency evoked a fear over the integrity and the possible threat to the concept of the ideal man. The late Elizabethan and early Jacobean man was a construct of sexual potency and marked by his distinction from the much-ridiculed cuckold or impotent figure who was ostracised by his fellow males, including writers such as the satirists. The Ovidian theme of impotency which embraced sensual pleasure yet also a fear of female sorcery was employed throughout the period to express the anxiety over the quality of contemporary men made effeminate by their culture, pursuits and superficial fashions. Early Jacobean drama in its characteristically vicious strain revealed the role of men in the assertion of a sexual distinction between true men and lesser men. Men are shown to assert their own masculine virility by subjecting others to the role of the cuckold or by successfully displaying their superiority by manipulating patriarchs such as Morose into sacrificing their potency, wealth and power. The satires of *Marston* and *Guilpin* of the later Elizabethan years express a repulsion and derisive attitude towards men whose lust for women or inability to satisfy their wives has damaged their masculine identity. The image of the impotent man within the satires is part of a contemporary anxiety derived from a literary tradition, which was controversially placed in the contemporary world of social and sexual change by writers such as Nashe. The preoccupation with impotency reflected a larger social fear for the superior mastery of man, against disconcerting signs of change in marital law, strong female voices calling for autonomy, and the threat from within by other men seeking to usurp the role of the patriarch.

## Chapter Five The Enchantress

### The Enchantress Revived

Marston's *The Scourge of Villanie* and Guilpin's *Skialetheia* draw the reader's eye to the enchantress, a figure derived from a literary tradition, whom they depict as a real threat to the modern Elizabethan man. Contemporary women who employ modern cosmetics and the newest fashions are cast as Elizabethan enchantresses who deceive and seduce men through artificiality. As a result female beauty is discredited as a fallacy fashioned by ointments and potions that are created by generations of women. Fashion and cosmetics are strongly associated with the feminine gender, by the way they effeminate man and by their use and production by women. The concept of women creating an illusion, which attracts men, is easily associated with female witchcraft and subversive aims of sexual pleasure and the subjection of man as a lover. Through the iconic figure of the enchantress the satirists were expressing anxieties concerning the subservience of man to women and by demonising her image they also were attempting to educate men and discredit modern powerful women. These modern women evoked fear as they appeared to pervert their natural form and maternal capacity to satiate their sexual desires.

The late Elizabethan and early Jacobean obsession with witchcraft and punishing women within society who professed or were accused of causing harm through sorcery also played a significant role in the satirist's concept of contemporary women as dangerous enchantresses. The literary tradition of the enchantress and the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean concern with the falsity of contemporary women combine to express a potent anxiety over the contemporary relationship between women and men. As noted previously in the first chapter both Guilpin and Marston draw upon the literary figure of the threatening and alluring enchantress in the contemporary works of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Harington's translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and Chapman's version of Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Marston within *The Scourge of Villanie* condemns female cosmetic enhancement as a symbol of dissimulation concealing moral decay. The 'celestiall Angell' embodies the

deception of female beauty and conceals her true appearance and identity through a mask and ointments, 'one face vnder two hoods.'<sup>1</sup> Unlike contemporary gallants, her cosmetic mask is a blatant obstacle confronting the satirist's view, which in fact defaces the woman. The satirist is suspicious of concealment and fears the freedom such a disguise would allow women, unconstrained by social rules and free to act as they choose under the protection of anonymity. The 'vizarded' witch, traditionally a social outcast, can infiltrate society and freely entrap men or enact her sexual desires (*SV*, VII. 166).

Guilpin uniquely establishes an intriguing connection between contemporary women and witchcraft within *Skialetheia*, which justifies a far closer inspection of his treatment. He draws directly upon the enchantress literary tradition to expand the image of woman as a powerful witch driven by voracious female sexual appetite that consumes men. Guilpin's second satire is a criticism of women primarily based upon deception and has similarities with Juvenal's sixth satire and the English anti-feminist tract. The satire conveys the 'painted' woman as an enchantress who deceives men by sorcery:

Where are thine eyes? But now I call to mind,  
These can bewitch, and so haue made thee blind;  
A compound mist of May deaw and Beane flowre,  
Doe these *Acrasias* on thy eye lids powre:  
Thou art enchanted (*Publius*) and hast neede  
Of *Hercules*, thy reason, to be freede.<sup>2</sup>

Guilpin refers to a specifically Elizabethan interpretation of the enchantress figure in the form of Spenser's Acrasia of *The Faerie Queene*. His reference reflects the assumed understanding between writer and reader concerning the significance of the enchantress to a satire attacking modern female vices. Guilpin's '*Acrasias*', contemporary women, are responsible for bewitching the 'eyes' of male lovers, and in so doing, have 'blinded' their reason and perception of reality. These women merge into witches who create herbal yet sinister potions, and are already familiar to the reader through witchcraft pamphlets. Their 'mist' that blinds man is deceptively pleasant and dreamlike while permeating through the eyes and corrupting male true sight. Her method of enchantment shares the power of Love-in-idleness in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (1600):

The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,

<sup>1</sup> *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. by A. Davenport (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961), *SV*, VII. 163, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Everard Guilpin, *Skialetheia; or, A Shadowe of Truth, in Certaine Epigrams and Satyres*, ed. by A. D. Carroll (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1974), II. 13–18.

Will make or man or woman madly dote  
Upon the next live creature that it sees.<sup>3</sup>

The potion's effect upon Titania mirrors Guilpin's description of the effects of enchantment upon men: 'So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape.' Bottom, as is the case with other fools, pierces the delusion with the voice of reality, echoing Guilpin's dismay at the subjection of reason to love for women: 'to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays' (III. 1. 133, 137–8). The disconnection of man's reason through love enrages the satirist of *Skialetheia* who attacks those 'enchanted' by masked women (*S*, II. 17). Guilpin dually censures the willing male victim and the artificial women who construct their appearances beyond all natural beauty to establish themselves as 'idols' to be worshipped by men.

Guilpin presents a mythic retelling of the history of female potion-making, incorporating numerous natural ingredients, which imbue a sense of the ancient and occult. Female beauty is in fact the product of the toil of generations of women and is not a natural grace or mark of rarity. These potion-makers who transform women into enchanting beauties tap into contemporary beliefs in female witchcraft and *maleficium*, expressed by writers such as Stubbes.<sup>4</sup> The potent fear of delusive female empowerment drives the satire, yet the terms on which it is established are of most concern. It is indicative that their female beauty is undermined and termed as 'bastard faires,' a false purchase, which is constructed by women who normally, due to their witchcraft or sexual deviance, would be socially ostracised (*S*, II. 27). Guilpin's satirist cuts through the false artificiality of the modern woman with harsh words, destroying their illusion, as if all fashionable women are sorceresses intent on making men subservient to their wishes.

Guilpin's representation of the alchemy of natural ingredients leaves the reader with the predominant image of harsh and defacing cosmetics, rather than any sense of a woman beneath. The witch is evoked in a revelation reminiscent of the discovery of Duessa's true form within *The Faerie Queene*. The cosmetics do not simply create beauty but in fact conceal witch-like deformity and act as 'bawds' to repulsive skin conditions. The witch

<sup>3</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), pp. 889–912 (II. 1. 170–2).

<sup>4</sup> Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. by M. Kidnie, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 245 (Tempe, Arizona: Renaissance English Text Society, 2002), 2064–8.

beneath her mask is a picture of decay and ugliness, which reflects her inner corruption. Lust corrupts the morality, health and purpose of these fashionable women:

Thus altering natures stamp, they're altered,  
From their first purity, innate maydenhead:  
Of simple naked honesty, and truth,  
And giuen o're to seducing lust and youth:  
Whose stings when they are blunted, & these freede,  
Then shall they see the horror of this deede:  
And leauing it their lothsome playstered skins,  
Shall shew the furrowed riuels of their sins:  
And now their box complexions are depos'd,  
Their iaundise looks, and raine-bow like disclos'd,  
Shall slander them with sicknes e're their time,  
For pocket-healths, vaine vsage in their prime. (*S*, II. 77–88)

Honest female origins are corrupted by self-fashioning through cosmetics. The initiation into the world of depravity sacrifices woman's chaste purity to 'seducing lust and youth', a multi-reference to her own lustful desire to remain young, her infection by lust and her schemes of seductions upon men. Guilpin visualises the realisation of 'horror' when lust is extinguished and the women will see skin that is decayed and diseased, a mark of their depraved lifestyles and the corrosive effect of their transforming cosmetics. He expresses a faith in physical truth, despite the clear anxiety over illusory cosmetics.

Guilpin throughout *Skialetheia* exposes the employment of potions not only to enhance but also to invert a woman's fertility and procreative role. He reveals a fear of the liberation of women through self-inflicted contraception and abortions, which would enable female sexual autonomy. Women are now depicted focussing upon sexual pleasure, and employing arts to prevent conception or full term pregnancy. Their 'pocket-healths, vaine vsage in their prime', evoke the image of health drinks and implies a more sinister purpose with the reference to the pocket or womb (*S*, II. 88). Lustful women were imagined to use this forbidden knowledge of contraception, and Paster highlights one such technique 'that whores used urination immediately after copulation both as a form of contraception and as a preventative against venereal disease'.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Guilpin's enchantress physically alters 'natures stamp,' evoking a coinage metaphor concerning the change of design and mould. From 'innate maydenhead' her arts destroy God's natural mould, the womb, and pervert his instruction to create new life (*S*, II. 77–8). The womb itself is treated with suspicion and as an organ of concealment. The satirist earlier describes the unfathomable

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<sup>5</sup> G. Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 37.

womb, which shields against penetration and also obscures sin: ‘Gainst sinnes inuasions, rende the foggie clowde, | Whose al black wombe far blacker vice doth shrowd’ (*S*, I, 15–16). Female genitalia threaten on account of the powerful ability to procreate, yet the satirist also fears the potential to conceal and harbour illicit female sexuality freed by devices of contraception and abortion. Paster observes that the ‘demonised womb’ was believed to consume the man’s seed and was imagined as ‘fully animate, capable of movement, sensitive to smells’.<sup>6</sup> Joubert’s *Popular Errors* described the womb in a similarly fearful way as ‘unclean, filthy, and foul’.<sup>7</sup> Guilpin’s satirist voices a masculine anxiety over propagation and more specifically the sexual role of women. His accusations of the abuse of the rites of motherhood betray a fear of man’s lack of control over pregnancy and childbirth. Women are established as enemies of men through their empowerment via the potion’s grant of beauty and sexual freedom.

#### Circe: The Original Enchantress

Acrasia is the enchantress figure conjured throughout Guilpin’s satires to reflect upon the contemporary danger of emasculating lust and the bewitchments of artificial women. Acrasia was part of a literary tradition, which Giamatti traces by positioning her as ‘an obvious descendant of Alcina, Acratia, Armida — ultimately Circe’.<sup>8</sup> Spenser drew upon the enchantress ‘type’ to construct the figure of Acrasia; as Giamatti claims, he ‘introduces elements resembling Alcina’s ability to manipulate illusion and Armida’s to corrupt specific moral standards’.<sup>9</sup> A. C. Hamilton also cites Acrasia as an archetypal enchantress comparable to others equally notorious:

She is Circe, the witch who transforms men into beasts; and Calypso who lures her victims by promising an immortality of slothful desire; and a greater Dido who keeps men so enthralled that he forever forgets all virtuous action — a Dido, moreover, whose magic art destroys the escaping lover, Mortdant, and causes Amavia instead to die for love.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Paster, pp. 45–6.

<sup>7</sup> Paster, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Giamatti, p. 253.

<sup>10</sup> A. C. Hamilton, ‘Spenser’s Treatment of Myth’, in *Critical Essays on Spenser from ELH* (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 75–94 (p. 84).

E. Heale similarly describes Acrasia and her Bower as new interpretations of ‘a long tradition of seductive enchantresses and emasculating gardens’.<sup>11</sup> Even the ivory gates to her bower are engraved with the tale of Medea, an enchantress who betrays her father, kills her brother for her love of Jason, and with a bewitched garment burns his new love Creusa. The beautiful gates carry an implicit reference connecting Acrasia to the rich tradition of the lustful and dangerous enchantress.

Circe, the original enchantress figure, is an important element of the late Elizabethan construction of the seductive woman who employs sorcery and lust to transform men. The works of Homer were highly influential and Chapman dedicated his life to translating Homer’s works, first *The Illiad*, which was published in instalments in 1598, 1609 and 1611 and later *The Odyssey* (1614–15). Adam Roberts praises the ‘beauty and vigour’ of Chapman’s version of *The Odyssey* and maintains that ‘Chapman himself undertook the translation in an attempt to get at the “heart” of Homer, the Homeric truth and soul, rather than slavishly to reproduce the letter of the poems’.<sup>12</sup> Chapman’s translation provides access to an early modern mind obsessed with Homer, which reflects the contemporary value and popularity of his works in terms of their application to real life. Circe dominates the Tenth Book of Chapman’s translation of *The Odyssey* and is the predecessor of Acrasia and Alcina through her beauty and danger to those who succumb to her seduction. Like Acrasia only divine powers can conquer Circe, while mortal man is vulnerable to her sorcery and can be converted into swine. Odysseus, however, is fortunate and receives the antidote to Circe’s bewitchment from Mercury. Circe is also associated with potions, through her previous poisoning of her husband and the sight of yellow smoke from her home at the Isle of *Æaea*, where ‘faire-haired, dreadfull, eloquent Circe rained’.<sup>13</sup> Circe paradoxically is alluring through her beauty yet also threatening and ‘dreadfull’. Art and drugs construct the image of luxury which entices Eurylochus and twenty-two men to Circe’s abode:

These in a dale did Circe’s house describe,  
Of bright stone built in a conspicuous way;  
Before her gates hill-wolves and Lyons lay,  
Which with her virtuous drugs so tame she made

<sup>11</sup> E. Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A reader’s guide* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Adam Roberts, ‘Introduction’, in Homer, *The Odyssey* trans. by George Chapman, introduction and notes by Adam Roberts (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth editions, 2002), p. vii.

<sup>13</sup> Homer, *Chapman’s Homer: The Odyssey & Lesser Homerica*, ed. by A. Nicoll, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), II, X. 175.

That Wolfe nor Lyon would one man invade  
 With any violence, but all arose,  
 Their huge long tailes wagd, and in fawnes and would close  
 As loving dogs when masters bring them home. (280–7)

Circe's house is provocatively conspicuous and before her gates lie fierce animals which her 'virtuous drugs' have tamed. The scene of wild beasts reduced to passive pets reflects Circe's effect upon men, converting them through sorcery into base lust driven animals. The same transforming drugs when used upon man are not deemed 'virtuous', as they emasculate and domesticate the subject of Circe's sorcery. Her close alignment with spider imagery emphasises her role as the cunning predator and confirms her connection with Acrasia:

And heard within the Goddesses elevate  
 A voice divine, as at her web she wrought,  
 Subtle and glorious, and past earthly thought. (294–6)

All the men except Eurylochus enter; they are fooled by Circe who, like the spider's web, conceals evil within beauty. Plentiful rich food hides a sinister danger:

But harmefull venoms she commixt with these,  
 That made their Countrey vanish from their thought  
 Which eate, she toucht them with a rod that wrought  
 Their transformation farre past humane wunts;  
 Swines' snowts, swines' bodies tooke they, bristles, grunts,  
 But still retained the soules they had before,  
 Which made them mourne their bodies' change the more.  
 She shut them straight in sties, and gave them meate —  
 Oke-mast and beech and Cornell fruite they eate,  
 Groveling like swine on earth in fowlest sort. (316–29)

Circe is the predator who mixes her 'venoms' to transform men who have supped from the table of luxury. They lose reason and a sense of masculine responsibility to their home, while the extreme physical conversion is charted in specifically base details of the swine who wallows in filth. The men are punished, first with the pain of a man's soul within the body of a beast, and secondly from being forced to eat and live as animals. The form of the 'fowlest' beast symbolises the bewitchment of man by female sensuality and luxury, while her 'rod' is a phallic emblem of her mastery over men. Living within the false luxury of her web is ultimately no different from living in the sty. In both cases the men are debased by their incapacity, whether mentally or physically.

Odysseus sets out alone to find the ‘manie-medicine-making Dame’ and to rescue his men (366). At her door he meets Mercury, in the guise of a young man, who offers an antidote to Circe’s poison and advises Odysseus to counter her phallic rod through force:

when she  
 Shall with her long rod strike thee, instantly  
 Draw from thy thigh thy sword, and flie on her  
 As to her slaughter. She, (surpride with feare  
 And love) at first will bid thee to her bed. (391–5)

Circe represents female sensuality and sorcery, which Odysseus can battle with man’s counsel and the protective Moly potion. He must exert masculine force in the form of his sword to repel her phallic transforming ‘rod’. She will submit physically to Odysseus if he can reassert his masculine authority over her own power. In contrast, Spenser and Harington do not advise the sexual subjection of the enchantress by the hero, as intercourse renders man vulnerable to female seduction. Odysseus is richly welcomed by Circe, yet he perceives her real intentions to transmute his gender and sexuality:

In a golden boule  
 She then suborned a potion, in her soule  
 Deformd things thinking, for amidst the wine  
 She mixt her man-transforming medicine. (421–4)

Odysseus’s phallic weapon, the sword, penetrates her power and prevents the use of the rod, enabling him to sexually conquer Circe. She, although sharing the seductive sensuality of later enchantresses, is not all-powerful when faced with a dominant male. Odysseus is able to match her strength and meet a truce through male mastery over women, yet Guyon in contrast is unable personally to combat Acrasia’s sorcery and sensuality. Circe submits due to her perception of Odysseus as a real man, uncorrupted by potions or seductions: ‘All but thy selfe are brutishly declind: | Thy breast holds firme yet and unchang’d thy mind’ (445–6).

Odysseus has usurped Circe’s dominant role through Mercury’s potion and advice which prevented his transformation and also secured Circe’s awe and affection by his rare resistance to a ‘brutish’ decline. Odysseus has passed the trial by poison and still remains a constant strong and true man. Circe offers the final submission of her body to who she believes is a true man:

Sheath then thy sword, and let my bed enjoy

So much a man, that, when the bed we prove,  
We may believe in one another's love. (446–8)

It is now Circe who desires Odysseus and seeks him as an equal lover, yet Odysseus remains suspicious and asks for a promise that she will not kill him when he leads a 'beast's life with thee, softn'd, naked, stript' (452). Circe is bewitched by Odysseus's masculinity and so converts his followers from beasts back to men; however, they remain seduced by her world and volunteer a year of their lives to remain with her: 'we did well allow | Her kind perswasions' (585). The life of sensual female luxury is still perilous to men, as the death of the drunken Elpenor reveals. Despite this warning, Circe provides invaluable advice to aid their journey and even dresses Odysseus: 'The Nymph adorn'd me with attires as bright, | Her own hands putting on both shirt and weede' (972–3). Circe the enchantress is converted into an adoring lover, although her true authority is later shown in Odysseus's description, 'Circe (the excellent utterer of her mind),' which reveals that ultimately the enchantress has seduced him (XI. 6).

#### Acrasia: The Elizabethan Enchantress

Guilpin invokes the original power of Circe's sexual allure and powers of transformation over man in his specific reference to Acrasia of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. However, Acrasia, a contemporary construction, embodies a far harsher criticism of female enchantment and cosmetics. Spenser's poem fails to arrive at a reassuring lovers' truce between man and enchantress, which may reflect his intentions to instruct gentlemen as discussed in Chapter Three. Women are portrayed within Books Two and Three as extremes, and their love only serves to obscure masculine reason. Hamilton observes, 'the feminine appears either as staunchly virginal in Belpheobe or blatantly sensual in Acrasia.'<sup>14</sup> The reader's first introduction to Acrasia is through the potent image of the dead body of a knight, a baby and a woman stabbed in the heart. The Lady Amavia tells Guyon the tale of Sir Mordant, her dead lover, who left her pregnant for adventure and provides a dire warning for Guyon:

*Acrasia a false enchaunteresse,  
That many errant knights have foule fordonne:  
Within a wandring Island, that doth ronne*

<sup>14</sup> Hamilton, 'Spenser's Treatment of Myth', p. 86.

And stray in perilous gulfe, her dwelling is;  
 Faire Sir, if euer there ye trauell, shonne  
 The cursed land where many wend amis,  
 And know it by the name; it hight the *Bowre of blis*.<sup>15</sup> (II. 1. 51. 3–9)

Acrasia is immediately held responsible for the early death of Mortdant and the ruin of his family through her seductions. The Bower of Bliss epitomises Acrasia, as both through their pleasures are ‘perilous’ places for masculinity. The Bower is the site where knights have fallen victim to the ‘cursed land’. Amavia’s warning of the dangers of the Bower specifically for men can equally be applied to the greater threat of Acrasia, whose Greek name significantly means ‘incontinence’:

Her blisse is all in pleasure and delight,  
 Wherewith she makes her louers drunken mad,  
 And then with words and weedes of wondrous might,  
 On them she workes her will to vses bad:  
 My lifest Lord she thus beguiled had;  
 For he was flesh: (all flesh doth frailtie breed.)  
 Whom when I heard to beene so ill bested,  
 Weake wretch I wrapt my selfe in Palmers weed,  
 And cast to seeke him forth through daunger and great dreed.  
 (II. 1. 52)

Acrasia drugs men with sensual pleasure until they are ‘drunken mad’ and beyond the grasp of reason. Acrasia then proceeds to use her arts of ‘words and weedes’, incantations and herbs through which she morally corrupts man and forces him to act her will. Her sorcery is later described as ‘charme and venim’ which reflects her conflicting allure and mortal threat to men (II. 2. 4. 6). Flesh is an inescapable weakness guaranteeing man’s fallibility, and one which removes responsibility from a man. The main protagonist is undoubtedly Acrasia, who utilises her sorcery and man’s sensual desire to entrap and control her lovers. The story of the lover Mortdant, meaning one who gives death, provides a personal illustration of Acrasia’s power and impact. He is discovered ‘thralld to her will, | In chaines of lust and lewd desires’ through which he is made effeminate and thus reduced ‘from his former skill’. Amavia is able to regain the knight and combat the ‘drugs of foule intemperance’ administered by Acrasia (II. 1. 54. 2–4, 8). As M. Evans suggests, through care she enables Mortdant to leave ‘the sterile embraces of Acrasia to her own more fruitful ones’.<sup>16</sup> Amavia and Acrasia are powerfully compared, illustrating the latter’s unnatural sterility, a product of her pursuance of sexual pleasure without the fruits

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London and New York: Longman, 1995)

<sup>16</sup> M. Evans, *Spenser’s Anatomy of Heroism: A Commentary on The Faerie Queene* (London: CUP, 1970), p. 115.

of pregnancy. Acrasia is also condemned as the jealous and vengeful female lover. Instead of releasing her hold upon the knight, she fatally deceives him with a charmed cup, which kills him instantly as he drinks. After Acrasia's dangers are imparted, Amavia dies unable to bear the loss of her lover. Guyon disconnects his emotions and offers a 'moral' to the tragic story:

When raging passion with fierce tyrannie  
 Robs reason of her due regalitie,  
 And makes it seruant to her basest part:  
 The strong it weakens with infirmitie,  
 And with bold furie armes the weakest hart;  
 The strong through pleasure soonest falles, the weake through smart.  
 (II. 1. 57. 4–9)

Guyon exudes the masculine ideal of rationality as he examines the scene of mortality before him and unlike Mortdant and even Amavia, he is able to discuss the effects of desire. He casts passion as a tyrannical warrior suppressing reason, and B. Nellist recognises Guyon's definition of desire as 'passive, the feminine principle'.<sup>17</sup> Without rationality the strong or masculine are weakened with 'infirmitie,' an effect of effeminacy. Paradoxically Acrasia affects Amavia who represents the feminine weak that are made 'bold' and inflamed. Both sexes suffer the same fate of death, men first through an immersion in sensuality and women second through their attributed suffering and suicide. Guyon concludes that 'temperance' would have saved both from the effects of Acrasia and desire (II. 1. 58).

Cymochles is presented as another lover and victim of Acrasia. Atin, squire to Pyrochles, encounters the image of the effeminate warrior within the seductive world of the Bower. The reader gains a detailed image of the enchanted garden, like that of Armida in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (X, XIV), which Guyon on his crusade of temperance is destined to face. Cymochles is discovered enjoying 'lust and loose liuing,' having discarded his weapons, 'Mingled emongst loose Ladies and lasciuious boyes' (II. 5. 28. 3, 9). The scene evokes the image of Botticelli's painting of *Mars and Venus* (c. 1485) as discussed in Chapter Three, in which sexual pleasures strip the man of his martial arms and masculine reason. There is a strong tension between art and nature, competing within the Bower and supporting the idle sensuality: 'And ouer him, art striuing to compaire | With nature' (II. 5. 29. 1–2). The scene is bewitching and consuming; nature is manipulated into an alluring

<sup>17</sup> B. Nellist, 'The Allegory of Guyon's voyage: An Interpretation', in *Critical Essays on Spenser from ELH* (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 188 (p. 189).

arrangement. Giamatti focuses upon the image of the ivy arbour as a projection of the corruptive role of art upon nature, 'just as Acrasia's principle of sexual indulgence undermines and corrupts the natural instincts of man.'<sup>18</sup> Yet to perceive Acrasia's art as the corrupter, nature must also be held in an unrealistic 'Eden' idealism. The art within the Bower 'manipulates' the voluptuous allure of nature, and emphasises this beyond all other natural elements such as winter and death. R. Headlam Wells maintains that 'nature provides an accompaniment to her false music', in terms of aiding the songs of temptation on Phaedria's island, the songs of the mermaids and the music preceding Acrasia's entrance.<sup>19</sup> He claims that to live by nature signals surrender to depravity and that Acrasia 'conspires with nature to corrupt man instead of leading his mind to as high a perfection as his degenerate soul can be capable of'.<sup>20</sup> Giamatti suggests that Spenser's emphasis upon 'art as "striving" with Nature,' is a way of highlighting 'an allegory of the good, natural, healthy instinct as it is perverted and infected by lust and overindulgence,' which is equally applied to man in whom 'lust, perverts, through self-indulgence, the natural creative act'.<sup>21</sup>

Acrasia's art, although an inciter of lust, is ultimately sterile and can only offer the image of nature's fertile abundance. Man is intoxicated by Acrasia's arts and sorcery, as is apparent in the trickling sound of a 'gentle streame,' which can lull a man to sleep, while the water's effect when consumed brings a 'creeping slomber' or amnesia (II. 5. 30. 2, 8). The picturesque scene of Cymochles surrounded by summer frolic conveys an appealing image of free sensual pleasure:

On a sweet bed of lillies softly layd,  
Amidst a flocke of Damzels fresh and gay,  
That round about him dissolute did play  
Their wanton follies, and light meriment;  
Euery of which did loosely disaray  
Her vpper parts of meet habiliments,  
And shewd them naked, deckt with many ornaments.  
(II. 5. 32. 3-9)

The reader is invited into a voyeuristic display of sensuality ranging from the natural abundance of lilies forming a bed, to the sexualised damsels, all examples of nature manipulated by art to appeal to and overwhelm men. The final three lines of the stanza

<sup>18</sup> Giamatti, p. 256.

<sup>19</sup> R. Headlam Wells, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> Wells, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Giamatti, p. 275.

delicately describe the women's naked 'upper parts' which evoke an erotic design suited to allure man. The damsels compete to entrap Cymochles with their naked forms and through their actions embody the female schemes of seduction, which Acrasia most successfully employs:

Some framd faire lookes, glancing like euening lights,  
 Others sweet words, dropping like honny dew;  
 Some bathed kisses, and did soft embrew  
 The sugred licour through his melting lips. (II. 5. 33. 3–6)

They are purely damsels of 'delights' with no sense of individuality, each aiming to outdo the next to succeed in satiating Cymochles' desire. These female seductions are all contrived. A woman's looks are compared to artificial night-lights, her words provocatively sweet, followed by kisses, which pour intoxicating serum into the mouth of the lover and infect. The women employ a form of sorcery, ranging from their probing looks, to seductive chants and finally a sweet female potion given orally. The women show no solidarity and are only united by their aim to sexually conquer. However, their connection with Acrasia emphasises their sinister threat to man, namely the price of lust being man's rational and spiritual soul:

He, like an Adder, lurking in the weeds,  
 His wandring thought in deepe desire does steepe,  
 And his fraile eye with spoyle of beautie feedes;  
 Sometimes he falsely faines himselfe to sleepe,  
 Whiles through their lids his wanton eies do peepe,  
 To steale a snatch of amorous conceipt,  
 Whereby close fire into his heart does creepe:  
 So, them deceiues, deceiu'd in his deceit,  
 Made drunke with drugs of deare voluptuous receipt.  
 (II. 5. 34)

Cymochles' whole existence is reduced by the means of drugs and voluptuous display to a half-conscious state of voyeurism. He is immersed in the scene and cannot perceive the performance of the damsels as anything less than reality, and feels fortunate to be able to spy upon the debauchery, when in fact it is all designed for his sight. Significantly the narration represents Cymochles as a lost and blunted 'Adder' surrounded and blinded by the weeds, or sorcery that surrounds him. There are numerous layers of deceit. Cymochles believes himself to be the deceiver spying upon a prohibited scene; however, he is only stealing a scene devised purely for his titillation. Giamatti similarly interprets the 'garden as an allegory for a self-deluding frame of mind, a false illusion or fantasy one creates, to

one's detriment'.<sup>22</sup> Evans utilises this episode to support his reading of Acrasia as 'the mother of all forms of cerebral eroticism, including that of Cymochles, the voyeur who watches the naked girls through half-closed eyes'.<sup>23</sup>

Atin exposes the transformation of the martial hero Cymochles to a lesser 'shade,' a ghost of his former self, having 'hong vp his mortall blade'. The pervasive power of female seduction has made the man effeminate, leading Atin to ask 'Is all his force forlorne, and all his glory donne?' (II. 5. 35. 4, 9). Atin assumes the mantle of masculine protagonist and employing his phallic sword attempts to stir the man within:

Then pricking him with his sharpe-pointed dart,  
He saide; Vp, vp, thou womanish weake knight,  
That here in Ladies lap entombed art. (II. 5. 36)

Atin appropriately tries to attack the knight with a phallic sword and thus free him from his effeminate entombment within the symbolic and literal female genitalia. Atin's victory is heralded by erect phallic imagery emphasising the awakening of masculine vigour:

As one affright  
With hellish feends, or *Furies* mad vprore,  
He then vprose, inflam'd with fell despight,  
And called for his armes; for he would algates fight. (II. 5. 37. 6–9)

Significantly the reminders of masculine martial sprite and mastery brought by Atin penetrate Cymochles and evoke a sense of shame at his effeminate decline: 'And *Atin* aie him pricks with spurs of shame and wrong' (II. 5. 38. 9).

Yet Cymochles is reclaimed by the female seductions of Acrasia channelled through her servant Phaedria of the Idle Lake. Giamatti understands Phaedria 'simply as that obstacle to duty which is the life of indolence and pointless ease'.<sup>24</sup> Cymochles is distracted by her womanly arts, and taken to her isle. Phaedria's 'litle Gondelay' alludes to her Italianate sensuality, and its phallic description also reflects her wanton nature, a 'shallow ship' guided by her desire 'Withouten oare or Pilot' (II. 6. 2. 7, II. 5. 1, 3). Again Cymochles is ensnared by female sensuality and 'to weake wench did yeeld his martiall might' (II. 6. 8. 5). Cymochles' lack of rationality makes him vulnerable to Phaedria's attacks, and he is

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<sup>22</sup> Giamatti, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> Evans, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Giamatti, p. 259.

transformed into a passive receptacle of her will and sorcery, paralysed through the senses. Phaedria assumes a masculine authority by 'laying his head disarm'd | In her loose lap' (II. 6. 14. 6–7). Phaedria's guidance of his willing head to her genitalia alludes to their sexual consummation. *Henry VI, Part 2*, a version of which was published in 1594, provides a contemporary example of a similar sexual innuendo: 'in thy sight to die, what were it else | But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap?'<sup>25</sup> Phaedria's sensual bewitchment leaves Cymochles deprived of manly power, yet fails upon Guyon.

Through their encounter with Phaedria, Cymochles and Guyon are compared, the former representing the delusional intemperate, and the latter the temperate man. Guyon is not so easily entertained by her merriment: 'Her dalliance he despisd, and follies did forsake' (II. 6. 21. 9). As a result Phaedria creates an even greater display of the island in which art exceeds the natural:

The fields did laugh, the flowres did freshly spring,  
The trees did bud, and earely blossomes bore,  
And all the quire of birds did sweetly sing,  
And told that gardins pleasures in their carolling. (II. 6. 24. 6–9)

Despite the performance Guyon remains immune to her enchantments: 'But he was wise, and warie of her will, | And euer held his hand vpon his hart' (II. 6. 26. 1–2). Despite his resolution, the risk is present; as Wells notes, '[i]t is when sexual temptation is combined with an invitation to relinquish his courtly mission that Guyon is most vulnerable.'<sup>26</sup>

The journey to Acrasia's Bower of Bliss is treacherous and echoes the trials of the classical hero particularly within *The Odyssey*. Guyon travels by boat with a cautious boatman and the Palmer, reflecting man's constant need for support and guidance. The terrain he passes is imbued with warnings for men; for example, between the *Gulfe of Greedinesse* and the *Rocke of Reproach* Guyon is informed of wrecked ships and crews that have suffered 'shame and sad reproch' due to their enjoyment of 'lewd delights' (II. 12. 9. 5–6). A return appearance of 'wanton *Phaedria*' is combated by the Palmer's bitter rebuke for being 'loose and light' (II. 12. 17. 1, II. 12. 16. 6). The palmer embodies reason over passion and is able not only to guide Guyon through the right path to Acrasia but also to safeguard his

<sup>25</sup> *The Arden Shakespeare, 2 Henry VI*, pp. 495–530 (III. 2. 389–90).

<sup>26</sup> Wells, p. 63.

masculine integrity. His services are again employed when Guyon is lured by the sorrowful calls of a maiden on an island, yet the palmer prevents her rescue:

For she is inly nothing ill apayd,  
But onely womanish fine forgery,  
Your stubborne hart t' affect with fraile infirmity. (II. 12. 28. 7–9)

The palmer holds the power of true sight which penetrates her female strategy to unman Guyon:

To which when she your courage hath inclind  
Through foolish pittie, then her guilefull bayt  
She will embosome deeper in your mind,  
And for your ruine at the last awayt. (II. 12. 29. 1–4)

The mermaid is another female adversary to be encountered on the journey. The description of their nature and how they came to be mermaids provides a eulogy on contemporary women:

They were faire Ladies, till they fondly striu'd  
With th' *Heliconian* maides for maistry;  
Of whom they ouer-comen, were depriu'd  
Of their proud beautie, and th' one moyity  
Transform'd to fish, for their bold surquedry,  
But th' vpper halfe their hew retained still,  
And their sweet skill in wonted melody;  
Which euer after they abusd to ill,  
T'allure weake trauellers, whom gotten they did kill. (II. 12. 31)

Despite Giamatti's interpretation of the mermaids competing with the '*Heliconian*' muses as a repetition of the shifting relationship between nature and art, they also reflect an Elizabethan concern with the attractions of women.<sup>27</sup> The ambitious and 'faire' ladies are shown to transform into monsters, disguising their deformity beneath the seas, and behind their beauty and melodic singing. Savage and ruthless, they lure the 'weake' possibly lustful men, and 'kill' them. The mermaid's connection with 'fish', an Elizabethan term for prostitute, suggests their lasciviousness. Additionally the mermaids reflect contemporary women consumed by sensuality, which destroys their beauty and their lovers through disease. Alcina is also emphatically associated with fish in *Orlando Furioso*. Such sexually predatory women are embroiled in legends emphasising their animal mutation, setting them apart from man. The sirens, originally depicted as bird-maids and

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<sup>27</sup> Giamatti, p. 267.

later as temptresses, Nellist writes, did not only represent the recreation of lust but also ‘the feminine values, beauty and ease and peace. They are a variant of sloth’.<sup>28</sup>

The Bower of Bliss is a place selected for its potential to deceive and enchant with excess luxury and deceptive art: ‘A place pickt out by choice of best aliue, | That natures worke by art can imitate’ (II. 12. 42. 3–4). Giamatti interprets the garden as a blasphemous illusion, aiming ‘to be a new Eden, inhabited by a depraved Eve, where all mankind can be induced “to fall”’.<sup>29</sup> Nellist similarly describes the Bower as ‘a hideous parody of our true haven, which indicates that on earth the reward of effort is still the demand for greater effort’.<sup>30</sup> Evans also compares the Bower to an ‘unfallen Garden of Eden’ which ‘embodies the powers of the emotions to colour our thinking and make us accept as rational what is merely desired’.<sup>31</sup> It is carefully constructed to pander to the fantasies of those who enter and, like Acrasia, the garden’s beauty is devised to seduce and enslave man as a beast to his desires. Wells boldly states that the Bower is an inversion of the *hortus conclusus*, a medieval garden, which became a metonymic symbol of the Virgin. Acrasia’s Bower by its very nature is pregnable: ‘wrought of substaunce light, | Rather for pleasure, then for battery or fight’ (II. 12. 43. 8–9). The Bower’s overflowing fountain, which provides the setting for an erotic display, contrasts with the Marian symbol of the blocked fountain that represents her uncontaminated womb. The Bower does not facilitate the procreative act and instead is a sterile place for seduction and enjoyment of sensations.

Two maidens frolicking in the fountain momentarily distract Guyon, which highlights his human weakness and connects him if tentatively with the victims of the enchantress figures. Giamatti asserts, ‘Guyon resembles Ruggiero, who was susceptible to Alcina, yet he is also like Carlo and Ubaldo, or Trajano, who had a moral mission to fulfil.’<sup>32</sup> While Giamatti describes the maidens as exuding the ‘sensuality of the garden’ through their association with ‘voyeurism, with the sterility of the sex by the eyes’, Sarah Annes Brown has shown a visual similarity between the ‘naked Damzelles’ and Ovid’s representation of the doors of the Palace of the Sun (II. 1–18).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore the wanton maidens offer a

<sup>28</sup> Nellist, p. 202.

<sup>29</sup> Giamatti, p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> Nellist, p. 195.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, pp. 142–3.

<sup>32</sup> Giamatti, p. 254.

<sup>33</sup> Giamatti, p. 276; S. Annes Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid from Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1999), p. 48.

preamble to the meeting with Acrasia, a personification of the two female strategies of seduction.

Heavenly music emanates from Acrasia, emphasising the design of her female arts to seduce all the senses. She has procured another lover from afar with witchcraft and has recreated the familiar image of the Mars-like hero effeminised by the overwhelming sensual pleasures of a goddess:

There, whence that Musick seemed heard to bee,  
Was the faire Witch her selfe now solacing,  
With a new Louer, whom through sorcere  
And witchcraft, she from farre did thither bring:  
There she had him now layd a slombering,  
In secret shade, after long wanton ioyes:  
Whilst round about them pleasauntly did sing  
Many faire Ladies, and lasciuious boyes,  
That euer mixt their song with light licentious toyes. (II. 12. 72)

Acrasia is associated with the gratification of the senses through all arts of beauty, music, singing, and heightened elements of nature offering luxurious tastes and titillating sights. The Bower is created perfectly to facilitate lovers exploring the delights of the flesh. Acrasia's sensual appetite for man's flesh is unquenchable, as although we have already encountered two past lovers, she now lies with a 'new Lover' surrounded by boys in imitation of the image of Venus and Mars, especially Botticelli's portrayal. Acrasia, however, does not entice through her own merits, but employs sorcery which strips man of all rational self-control reducing him to a state of slumber, a reflection upon the contemporary belief that excessive love of women emasculated men. Acrasia assumes the role of the sexual protagonist who orchestrates their activity with expertise. She encourages the man to lie down, an allusion to sexual intercourse. The sinister dominance of Acrasia is expressed by her carnivorous portrayal:

And all that while, right ouer him she hong,  
With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,  
As seeking medicine, whence she was strong,  
Or greedily depasturing delight:  
And oft inclining downe with kisses light,  
For feare of waking him, his lips bedewd,  
And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,  
Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;  
Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rew. (II. 12. 73)

She resembles a vampire hanging over her prey and greedily devouring his essence, yet her strength and sensual hunger is thinly concealed by a 'false' visage of tenderness. Despite

her performance as a devoted lover, her appetite conveys her ruthless lust. Like Venus with Adonis, the male lover becomes Acrasia's pasture which she consumes, a foreteller of his potential future existence as a feature of the landscape. Acrasia represents a paradox of pleasure and death for man; her kisses are taken while he is incapacitated, and his lips are described as 'bedewd' as if poisoned or drugged. Acrasia has melted his masculine 'spright,' and secures his transformation by extracting his spirit through his closed eyes. Hamilton identifies her with the Devil's familiars who suckled from witches: '[s]he is the succubus who defiles his body, the lamia who sucks out his spirit.'<sup>34</sup> Giamatti describes her love as 'necrophilia': '[t]he male seems dead and there is a vampirish quality about Acrasia,' whose 'kiss brings death'.<sup>35</sup> Evans understands Acrasia as 'not [...] a woman, but the symbol of man's own sensual nature seeking full possession, which is why Spenser shows her as the active partner "greedily depasturing delight", [...] not in the more ardent processes of procreation'.<sup>36</sup> Acrasia embodies the cannibalistic and overwhelming power of lust to conquer man's reason, and she derives from the masculine anxieties over the integrity of their gender in relation to the passionate and inferior feminine.

The dangers of Acrasia are emphasised through a chant which exerts the common argument used in the persuasion poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Marvel, and most closely Herrick. The justification of sexual freedom is offered by the principle that beauty in its full bloom is short-lived and therefore should be enjoyed in the present before it is too late. The song of the 'Virgin Rose' illustrates the point: 'Her bared bosome she doth broad display; | Loe see soone after, how she fades, and falles away' (II. 12. 74. 4, 8–9). The rose literally symbolises female genitalia, yet more generally sexual lust and through its short yet beautiful time enforces the need to act on desires: 'Gather therefore the Rose, whilst yet is prime, | For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre' (II. 12. 75. 6–7). The Bower as a place expresses the themes and arguments of the popular erotic and seduction poetry for contemporaries. The song forms part of Acrasia's spell within the Bower and those inclined to lust are offered justification, while others are tempted and driven by fear of time. Evans stresses that Acrasia and her Bower are the 'embodiment of all the erotic fantasies which the mind conjures up when in the grip of the repressed passions, all the visions of the Rose which young men tossing on their beds have dreamed

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<sup>34</sup> Hamilton, 'Spenser's Treatment of Myth', p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Giamatti, p. 279.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, p. 142.

up in love's despair'.<sup>37</sup> The image of Acrasia is staged to allure by drawing on the symbolism of the rose, upon which she lies and also through her inversion of clothing that highlights her erotic appeal:

Vpon a bed of Roses she was layd,  
 As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin,  
 And was arayd, or rather disarayd,  
 All in a vele of silke and siluer thin,  
 That hid no whit her alabaster skin,  
 But rather shewd more white, if more might bee:  
 More subtile web *Arachne* cannot spin,  
 Nor the fine nets, which oft we wouen see  
 Of scorched deaw, do not in th'aire more lightly flee. (II. 12. 77)

Acrasia's pose and appearance are designed to seduce through sight; paradoxically she is 'arrayd' as if for a composition in a provocatively 'disarayd' state. The art of seduction is presented through her use of music, visual decadence and sensuality, which is discredited as sorcery attracting the unsuspecting man. The innuendo of 'Upon a bed of Roses she was layd,' with the symbol of female genitalia and the slang for sexual intercourse presents her as the willing lover. Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (1594) applies the sexual connotation of 'lay' to a woman subduing an erection: 'To raise a spirit in his mistress' circle | [...], letting it there stand | Till she had laid it and conjur'd it down.'<sup>38</sup> Therefore a similar interpretation of 'layd' in 1590 is possible. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, written between 1598 and 1599, when spoken by Margaret 'lay' represents a woman's admittance of penetration: '[g]et you some of this distilled *carduus benedictus*, and lay it to your heart.'<sup>39</sup> Spenser's description of Acrasia emphasises the process of seduction beginning with the vision of her reclined and sexually aroused state, combined with the sensual luxury of the transparent draping fabrics caressing her 'alabaster skin'. Acrasia is adorned with a veil of silk, which is described preciously and temptingly as 'silver thin'. It is significantly finer than any web or 'fine nets' of Arachne, alluding to her skill of bewitchment and introducing the classical theme of women weaving fine web to ensnare men. Arachne, a Lydian maiden, was gifted at weaving and was challenged to a contest by Minerva and later changed into a spider (Met. VI. 5–145). Clytemnestra entangled her husband in a net enabling his murder by her lover Aegisthus with a two-headed axe. Acrasia utilises the qualities of the veil to entice, entrap and consume her lover's essence.

<sup>37</sup> Evans, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> *The Arden Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet*, pp. 1007–40 (II. 1. 24–26).

<sup>39</sup> *The Arden Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing*, pp. 913–40 (III. 4. 68–69).

Her female body is transformed into an erotic and rich sensual experience, strangely inverting the maternal body into one for pure pleasure:

Her snowy brest was bare to readie spoyle  
Of hungry eies, which n'ote therewith be fild,  
And yet through languour of her late sweet toyle,  
Few drops, more cleare then Nectar, forth distild,  
That like pure Orient perles adowne it trild,  
And her faire eyes sweet smyling in delight,  
Moystened their fierie beames. (II. 12. 78. 1–7)

The depiction of Acrasia's figure evokes the image of Armida of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, who also in a sensual paradise debilitates the Christian hero Rinaldo.<sup>40</sup> Acrasia's physical beauty is designed to titillate the voyeurs who are portrayed as constantly devouring her image. Acrasia's sexual activity leaves her in an aroused state which causes the release of a substance compared to wine 'forth distild,' and clearer than the flower's 'Nectar'. Acrasia does not produce the nurturing milk of a mother's breast but substances associated with rich luxuries and foreign imports including flower nectar, wine, snow and the exotic 'Orient perles'. Her body oozes orgasmic fluids which symbolise ripe sexual pleasure and confirm her status as a fantasy of desire. Paster in her examination of *City Comedy* highlighted the representation of 'women as leaky vessels by isolating one element of the female body's material expressiveness — its production of fluids — as excessive'.<sup>41</sup> Acrasia plays upon the excessive pleasure and freedom her female body can offer to men, and even her drops of perspiration serve to illustrate the contours of her body. Despite the image of Acrasia as the willing passive lover, her eyes penetrate and betray her self-awareness of the sexual power she wields, while emphasising her association with voyeurism which perverts procreation.

The effect of Acrasia's witchcraft upon her victim, a man, emphasises the dangers of allurements by false women:

The young man sleeping by her, seemd to bee  
Some goodly swayne of honorable place,  
That certes it great pittie was to see  
Him his nobilitie so foule deface;  
A sweet regard, and amiable grace,  
Mixed with manly sternnesse did appeare  
Yet sleeping, in his well proportioned face,  
And on his tender lips the downy heare

<sup>40</sup> T. Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, trans. by Edward Fairfax (1600), ed. by Henry Morley LL. D (New York: 1901), 15–16.

<sup>41</sup> Paster, p. 25.

Did now but freshly spring, and silken blossomes beare. (II. 12. 79)

The identity of the 'young man' is obscured by his surrender to lust and he is assumed to be an honourable swain. His anonymity is significant as it emphasises the potential for any 'good' man to fall through sensuality. Sexual seduction has stripped him of his masculine status and role, while his highly sought social identity or 'his nobilitie' has been defaced. Acrasia is a vandal of male hierarchy; she dominates and strips privilege, making all men equal and subservient to her female desires. He is physically transformed from masculine strength to an effeminised state with the growth of 'downy heare' upon his now 'tender lips' and 'face'. Acrasia's spell has the effect of mutating the masculine form and spirit into that of a passive woman.

The greater symbol of man's unnatural transformation is the rejection of masculine knighthood and warfare. Lyne describes Spenser's representation of the lover as harking back to 'the Mars and Venus theme but it also, perhaps, offers a hint of the Adonis story,' in which a young man rests with a superior figure.<sup>42</sup> The image of the subdued lover is intentionally symbolic:

His warlike armes, the idle instruments  
Of sleeping praise, were hong vpon a tree,  
And his braue shield, full of old monuments,  
Was fowly ra'st, that none the signes might see;  
Ne for them, ne for honour cared hee,  
Ne ought, that did to his aduancement tend,  
But in lewd loues, and wastfull luxuree,  
His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend:  
O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend. (II. 12. 80)

The classical portrait of the warrior defeated by love, epitomised by his abandoned armour, is powerfully repeated. His 'warlike armes' hung upon the tree as an 'idle' emblem of his masculine vigour, embody the inversion of masculinity into an unnatural femininity. The neglect of his 'braue shield,' and its representation of past military tests and triumphs, is seen as an aberration of his heritage. Ambition, here an aggressive attribute, is lost, and he cares not for his own 'aduancement' or more significantly 'honour'. By implication dishonour adorns him as a mark of his corruption by female lasciviousness, yet the power of Acrasia's bewitchment is not belittled. He is now half-man; his masculine form is 'blended' by female sorcery with lust instead of martial purpose.

<sup>42</sup> R. Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses, 1567–1632* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 116.

Acrasia and her lover are captured by the Palmer's net of rationality, as finely wrought as her veil, which Lyne has also suggested echoes 'the famous myth of Venus and Mars caught in Vulcan's net: this features in the *Metamorphosis* and in the *Odyssey*'.<sup>43</sup> Rational magic can only combat Acrasia's sorcery: 'The faire Enchauntresse, so vnwares opprest, | Tryde all her arts, and all her sleights, thence out to wrest' (II. 12. 81. 8–9). The enslavement of Acrasia and her lover asserts the power of masculine rationality and chastity to contain the dangers of lust and sorcery. Acrasia is restrained in chains and cannot be destroyed, while her lover Verdant can be retrieved from his moral decline through male counsel:

For nothing else might keepe her safe and sound;  
But *Verdant* (so he hight) he soone vntyde,  
And counsell sage in steed thereof to him applyde. (II. 12. 82. 7–9)

The temptation of lust as represented by Acrasia cannot be defeated by might, and can only be restrained through reason and virtue. Acrasia's dual pleasure-and-peril persona is emphasised to enforce the understanding that despite her attractions she is monstrous. The threat of the female sexual predator, both a fantasy and a fear for male readers, is predictably neutralised but not extinguished. The lover reclaims his masculine identity only when the masculine righteous have captured and suppressed the unnatural and excessive feminine. The identity of the noble man, embodied in his name '*Verdant*', is returned at the moment of his symbolic release. The knight and the Palmer who easily convert the effeminate youth through 'counsel sage' have restored correct order.

The beauty of the Bower is destroyed by Guyon's physical force while he is unable similarly to defeat Acrasia. Hamilton interprets Guyon's destruction of the Bower as evidence of Acrasia's effects upon him, which in fact releases the natural laws and the regeneration of nature begins.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, the beauty of the Bower may have been intended to catch the reader who is shocked at its destruction, thus implicating his or her own intemperance. Brown draws a strong link between the Bower and Ovid's description of Diana's grotto in which Actaeon glimpses her bathing: '[b]oth [...] are the dwelling-places of fascinating, dangerous and powerful females and both are invaded by an unwelcome male intruder.'<sup>45</sup> Guyon's ruthless annihilation of the Bower and Diana's

<sup>43</sup> Lyne, p. 115, (Met. IV. 178–9, VIII. 277–366).

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton, 'Spenser's Treatment of Myth', p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, p. 48.

punishment of Actaeon, she suggests, might lead the reader to question ‘whether “austere virginity” is an unmitigated good’.<sup>46</sup> However, Guyon’s destruction of the Bower seems natural to his quest of temperance, especially with the realisation that he can only imprison Acrasia. Acrasia’s sorcery is at odds with his faith, and as Heale states, ‘Acrasia’s wine cannot be safely diluted, it must be spilt.’<sup>47</sup> The destruction of the Bower, ‘the accomplishment of his quest defines the misleading delusions and sterile pleasures which stand in the way of virtuous love’, maintains Evans.<sup>48</sup> The Bower embodies intemperance and therefore must be destroyed, but by doing so Guyon in fact exposes his masculine anxiety and vulnerability to the threat of female seduction and sorcery.

The threat of Acrasia’s power to corrupt man is emphasised through the example of Acrasia’s past lovers who the Palmer reveals have been converted into base animals by her ‘enchantment’. Like Alcina and Circe who similarly dispose of past loves through transmutation, Acrasia’s true power lies in the alteration of men. Lyne claims that ‘[m]etamorphosis lies at the heart of Acrasia’s power, with the transformation of Grill and the other suitors making her as a type of Circe’.<sup>49</sup> The transforming powers of both Acrasia and Circe symbolise the metamorphosing powers of lust and sensuality. The Odyssean episode was often utilised as an allegory of the bestialising power of lust, as in Whitney’s emblem ‘*Homines voluptatibus transformantur*’, which is included in the illustrations.<sup>50</sup> Guyon orders the restoration of these fallen men; however, those who lived as beasts once returned to their male forms are far from natural:

Yet being men they did vnmanly looke,  
And stared ghastly, some for inward shame,  
And some for wrath, to see their captiue Dame:  
But one about the rest in speciall. (II. 12. 86. 3–6)

These men are described as unmanly, yet in a contrasting sense to Verdant’s effeminacy. The essence of man is almost lost in those who are overwrought with the realisation of shame and completely erased by those who feel loyalty to their imprisoned enchantress. The ‘special’ example is Grille who desires to remain in the form of a hog. Unlike

<sup>46</sup> Brown, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Heale, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Evans, p. 147.

<sup>49</sup> Lyne, p. 116.

<sup>50</sup> ‘*Homines voluptatibus transformantur*’, in Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and other deuises* (Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, Francis Raphelengius, 1586), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 25438, Huntington Library <[http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99855134](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo:citation:99855134)> [accessed January 2010] (p. 82). See illustration in appendix.

Verdant, he refuses to reject lust and regain his masculinity and, as L. H. Miller claimed, proves the humanist ethic that '[m]an, Protean creature that he is, can choose his own lot, can in the words of Pico, fashion himself in what ever shape he shall prefer'.<sup>51</sup> Grille reveals why Guyon cannot destroy Acrasia, as her threat is always present and some men choose to succumb to her sorcery. At the conclusion of Book Two it is admitted, in a moment of realism, that there are those who are gleefully intemperate, and are equally base in mind as in nature: 'The donghill kind | Delights in filth and foule incontinence' (II. 12. 87. 6–7). Finally those who submit to the enchantress are nothing more than lust-driven base animals, an illustrative lesson for any male reader and one which will be explored later by discussing the example of Duessa.

#### Alcina: The Italianate Enchantress

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* translated by Sir John Harington in 1591 provides one of the iconic enchantress figures, which influenced the late Elizabethan satires of Guilpin and Marston. Alcina is closely united with Acrasia through her artificial allure and also enacts a cruel sorcery upon her male lovers, as identified earlier in Chapter Three. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* was first published in 1536 and its influence spread beyond Italy to England. Spenser's Acrasia, Marlowe's inclusion of Isabella's death in *Tamburlaine* (1587–8) and Robert Greene's *Alcida* (1588), which refers twice to Angelica's rejection of kings for the soldier Medoro, reveal the accessibility of Ariosto's original text to educated English readers. Harington's translation attracted attention, and 1592 witnessed the publication of Robert Greene's drama focussed upon the madness of Orlando, *The Historie of Orlando Furioso*. Harington's translation preceded Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (written between 1598 and 1599), which utilises the tale of Dalinda's impersonation of Ginevra, and *As You Like It* (written 1599) which depicts Orlando carving initials on tree bark in the forest of Arden, an echo of the forest of Ardennes. Edmund Spenser also played a significant role in conveying Ariosto's text to the English reader. Gabriel Harvey in a letter reveals Spenser's intention to 'overgo Ariosto', while Spenser's own letter to Sir Walter Raleigh emphasises the influence of Homer and 'Ariosto

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<sup>51</sup> L. H. Miller Jr, 'A secular Reading of *The Faerie Queene* Book II', in *Critical Essays on Spenser from ELH* (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 206 (p. 221).

[...] in his Orlando' upon *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>52</sup> A potent example of Ariosto's influence can be seen in Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, which betrays elements of Alcina's garden, as well as that of Armida from Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.

Harington, the godson of Queen Elizabeth I, was royally ordered to compile a complete translation as a punishment for his original interpretation of the 'bawdy' canto xxviii. Townsend Rich explained this criticism when he identified Harington's compression of the work in Book Seven, apart from the scene of the lovers' intercourse.<sup>53</sup> R. McNulty also suggests that Harington 'increases the wantonness of some episodes, usually by adding specific detail or brief cynical comment, and he constantly intensifies the frequent attacks on women'.<sup>54</sup> Modern translators such as Reynolds have criticised Harington's emphasis upon the allegorical and his treatment of women within the work: '[h]e seems to have been less responsive as an artist than Ariosto to the theme of female beauty and to the theme of femininity in general. Wherever Ariosto rails against women, Harington makes his rendering fiercer, more hostile and condemning.'<sup>55</sup> Harington's translation is not a pure rendition of the Italian into English; however, this very fact makes his translation significant in a study of late sixteenth-century English attitudes. It is not purely the tale, but the way it is translated and the emphasis added by the translator, which betrays the contemporary interpretation.

Set in a world of magic, the work includes numerous significant sorcerers and sorceresses. Alcina is of the greatest interest as she is not only evil, but also a figure of sensuality, and McNulty notes that her affair with Rogero has attracted attention 'since it is the poem's most explicitly sensual passage'.<sup>56</sup> Rogero is brought to Alcina's isle by the Hippogriff which Harington interprets as youth swept away by the passion of love. The male protagonist Rogero learns of Alcina's powerful sensuality even before he meets her. Astolfo, a past conquest, provides the details of his seduction as a warning. He describes his awe at her ability to fish for men by 'reading in a little booke | Or mumbling words,'

<sup>52</sup> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 'Appendix I: A Letter of the Authors', p. 737.

<sup>53</sup> Townsend Rich, *Harington & Ariosto: A Study in Elizabethan Verse Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

<sup>54</sup> Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso translated into English Heroical Verse by Sir John Harington (1591)*, ed. by R. McNulty (Oxford: OUP, 1972), p. xxxviii.

<sup>55</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. by Barbara Reynolds, 2 vols (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), I, 91.

<sup>56</sup> McNulty, p. xxxi.

and how he became her new prey when she ‘sought forthwith to trap me by her skill’ (VI. 38. 3–7). Alcina converts men into fish to feed her appetite, a bawdy term employed for female prostitutes. She affects the image of Harington’s ideal woman, ‘modest,’ speaking ‘demurely,’ all to lure men into her trap (VI. 39. 2–3). Alcina, like Acrasia, is irredeemable; as with her sister Morgana they were ‘in incest gotten’ and born as thieving ‘bastards’ from their rightful sister Logistilla (VI. 43. 6–8). The theme of their sensuality is continued further when they are debased with bestial terms: ‘like the heyfor wanton and untamed’ (VI. 44. 4). Astolfo emphasises Alcina’s powerful seduction through her physical beauty: ‘When I her daintie members did imbrace, | I deemed then there was none other blisse’ (VI. 47. 1–2). His statement corroborates Rogero’s later obsessive detailing of Alcina’s body. However, the inconstancy and insatiable appetite of women soon caused Alcina to replace Astolfo from his privileged position as her favourite:

Her wanton, wavering, wily woman’s wit,  
 Accustomd in a trice to love and hate.  
 I saw another in my seat to sit.  
 Her love was gone, forgon my happie state,  
 The marke is mist that I was wont to hit,  
 And I had perfect knowledge then er long  
 That to a thousand she had done like wrong. (VI. 50. 2–8)

Astolfo blames his ill treatment not upon the individual or her sorcery, but her female gender. It is her woman’s ‘wit’ which is described by the undesirable terms of sensuality, inconstancy and cunning. The final note that she is a serial torturer of men further extends the expression of the magnitude of her crime against Astolfo. Alcina’s cruel sorcery converts her rejected lovers into natural features within her domain. They are transformed into trees, beasts, stone and ‘In rockes or rivers she doth hide the rest | As to her cruell fancie seemeth best’ (VI. 51. 7–8). Giamatti notes that these lovers become part of the illusion that first fooled them: ‘All the rocks, trees, flowers, grass are really disillusioned lovers, lovers who have lost their illusions about Alcina, and with them, lost their humanity.’<sup>57</sup> Rogero does not heed the words of his forebear Astolfo and upon seeing the golden house is immediately attracted with awe: ‘It seemd some Alcumist did make this hold’ (VI. 59. 6). Man is ridiculed for his blind ignorance, especially when Rogero meets Alcina’s citizens who sharply remind us of Acrasia’s beasts: ‘Some look like dogges and some like apes in vew, | [...] Some nakd, some drunk, some bedlem like enraged’ (VI. 61. 5, 8). The crowd physically reveal an unnatural deviance that lies beneath the handsome

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<sup>57</sup> Giamatti, p. 145.

surface of the realm. The two ladies, described by the narrator as ‘wanton damsels,’ who welcome Rogero as his saviours, in fact conquer his reason through their appearance (VI. 72. 2). Man is shown unable to overcome the dangers of the sensual and superficial:

Where love and lust have built their habitation,  
Where time well spent is counted as a shame,  
No wise staide thought, no care of estimation,  
Nor nought but courting, dauncing, play, and game,  
Disguised clothes, ech day a sundrie fashion,  
No vertuous labour doth this people please,  
But nice apparrell, belly cheare, and ease. (VI. 73. 2–8)

Attention is drawn towards the sensuality of Alcina and the lifestyle she has created in which love and lust overrule rational activities. The contrast with a Christian life is emphasised by the inversion of morality in which a life of love and lust is accepted as ‘time well spent’. The preoccupation with fashion, the mark of vanity and excess in all things including lust, directly relates to the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean interpretation of the new effeminate styles. These details, combined with the description of Alcina’s golden home and gates encrusted with diamond-like stones, enforce a sense of façade in which foul appears fair. Giamatti stresses the irony of Rogero’s belief that he has penetrated the centre of the isle: ‘once he has reached this core — Alcina — he has only arrived at the final source of all that is false.’<sup>58</sup> The same theme of Alcina’s artificiality is exposed at the beginning of Book Six through her paradise, which, like Acrasia’s Bower, is full ‘Of sundrie fruites and flowres that never fade’ (VI. 21. 3). The true macabre nature of Alcina is revealed by Astolfo who warns Rogero that she transformed him into a myrtle bush ‘for mallice and by magicke strange’ (VI. 32. 7).

Rogero’s bewitchment is explained by means of a Petrarchan-style praise of Alcina’s beauty in Book Seven. Mimicking the previous paradoxical descriptions of Alcina’s realm, these conventional images of female beauty emphasise the suspected corruption within:

Her heare was long and yellow to the same  
As might with wire of beaten gold compare.  
Her lovely cheekes with shew of modest shame  
With roses and with lilies painted are.  
Her forehead faire and full of seemely cheare  
As smoth as pullisht Ivorie doth appeare. (VII. 11. 3–8.)

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<sup>58</sup> Giamatti, p. 150.

Her long hair is compared to beaten gold wire, her cheeks even flush to reveal a flattering modesty; however, significantly her cheeks are 'painted' and her hair exudes an artificial beauty. Her skin is as smooth as ivory, conjuring the image of Pygmalion's crafted statue. Alcina is an artificial construct of the ideal woman who ensnares the male by means of her visage. Typically Alcina's sexual lure is further expressed by an eroticisation of her breasts:

Her brests as milke, her necke as white as snow,  
Her necke was round, most plum and large her brest,  
Two Ivory apples seemed there to grow,  
Full tender, smooth, and fittest to be prest. (VII. 14. 1-4.)

Unlike Acrasia's form, Alcina's breasts appear to produce maternal fluids of nourishment and exude fertility. Yet they are disconnected from the woman and represent key qualities, which Rogero finds desirable in a woman. The reference to 'milke' emphasises the maternal, which is further enhanced by the fertile fruit imagery, although these 'apples' are made of cold ivory. The final line reflects the tactile beauty through an erotic suggestion of foreplay. This theme is continued by the tried and tested technique of allowing the reader's imagination to run wild when concerning her genitalia: 'Yet by presumption well it might be gest | That that which was concealed was the best' (VII. 14. 7-8). Alcina's body is designed by art yet is itemised and praised to excuse Rogero's conviction that 'no fraud, no treason, nor no guile | Could be accompan'd with so sweete a smile' (VII. 16. 7-8). Rogero cannot believe that an attractive external appearance could be internally evil, and therefore after the description of her beautiful qualities he chooses to trust the superficial.

It is stressed throughout the work that Alcina is the aggressor; as with Acrasia, it is her eyes which penetrate:

Of stedie looke but apt to take compassion,  
Amid which lights the naked boy and blind  
Doth cast his darts. (VII. 12. 3-5)

Rogero is explicitly exonerated from responsibility, which is firmly directed towards Alcina's 'force of incantation' (VII. 17. 8). The consummation of Rogero and Alcina's desire reveals her sexual dominance within their relationship. A feast, music and lovers' games first seduce Rogero. He is then led to a chamber in which he and the reader are left to await the arrival of Alcina. During the prolonged period of delay Rogero becomes

restless and even calls out, betraying his anger at his powerless state, which is later revealed to be caused by lust. Alcina's entrance is sensual and luxurious 'with odors sweete | She was perfumd' (VII. 24. 1–2). Her predatory intentions to satiate her own and his desire are explicit: 'She goes to give and take of joyes her fill' (VII. 24. 6). Significantly Rogero is equally consumed with passion and violently rips off her mantel, 'The mantel with his furie fell away,' leaving a smock that reveals her sexual capacity and arouses him further, 'As doth a glasse the lilies faire and roses' (VII. 26. 5, 8). Alcina is enhanced through art: Giamatti suggests, 'under it she appears lovely, but she always is seen through such a veil' and emphasises that 'she wants to trap a man into believing that what seems is'.<sup>59</sup> Harington adds the note in the margin 'lascivious description of carnall pleasure' to dually protect himself from accusations of enjoying the scenes of sexual content and to alert readers to a salacious section. Their union is compared through natural metaphors and concludes with a reference to physical consummation: 'That oft they had two tongues within one mouth' (VII. 27. 8). 'Love [...] is shown to exist in Alcina's realm under many guises, but always to have lust as its basis,' observes Giamatti.<sup>60</sup> Rogero, like Astolfo before him, as Alcina's favourite lives a 'sensuall life' in which clothing symbolises depravity: 'They change their clothes so often as they lust' (VII. 29. 5, 2). In stark contrast the moral Bradamant cuts through the facade of Alcina and talks as if from a position of past knowledge of such women:

O poysond hooke that lurks in sugred bait,  
 O pleasures vaine that in this world are found  
 Which like a subtile theefe do lye in waite  
 To swallow man in sinke of sinne profound. (VII. 35. 1–4)

Alcina is again characterised as the predator who captures men, the fish, with an appealing yet poisoned bait, to draw them into a world of vice and finally to consume them. Bradamant and Melissa plan to free Rogero with a magic ring, although the shock discovery of Rogero evokes what Harington marks as '[a] description of an effeminate courtier':

His armes that erst all warlike weapons bare,  
 In golden bracelets wantonly were tide.  
 Into his eares two rings convayed are  
 Of golden wyre at which on either side  
 Two Indian pearles in making like two peares  
 Of passing price were pendent at his eares. (VII. 46. 3–8)

<sup>59</sup> Giamatti, pp. 156, 144.

<sup>60</sup> Giamatti, p. 155.

The contrast between martial masculinity and the effeminacy of the idle man is expressed through the image of his once warlike arms ‘wantonly’ tied in Alcina’s bonds of gold. Great attention is drawn to the elaborate decoration of his ears with exotic pearls from India, which suggests his lack of patriotism. Giamatti perceives his emasculation as an example of the enchantress’s artificiality: ‘Alcina’s subtle work has woven its soft threads.’<sup>61</sup> Overall the common argument against men indulging in fashion is directed at the harm this will cause to the quality of masculinity, national military defence and prowess. Rogero’s physical description emphasises his gender transmutation:

He had such wanton womanish behaviour  
As though in Valence he had long beene bred.  
So chaunged in speech, in manners, and in favour,  
So from himselfe beyond all reason led  
By these inchantments of this am’rous dame  
He was himselfe in nothing but in name. (VII. 47. 3–8)

Rogero’s ‘womanish’ and effeminate state is explicitly condemned for its exotic luxury and sexual freedom, evoked by his comparison to Valencians. Alcina is the agent of his retreat from reason primarily by the compulsion of ‘inchantments’. Ultimately Rogero seen through the eyes of the righteous is worth ‘nothing’, a negative of his former masculine self. Melissa directly pleads with Rogero not to waste his seed, which will harm the health of his family line and his homeland. She urges him to repel the lustful yet sterile world of Alcina which will then restore his masculine virility and ‘Out of thy loynes and bowels to proceed, | Such men whose match the world did never breed’ (VII. 52. 7–8).

At the conclusion of Book Seven, Harington reveals his own interpretation of the tale in the context of his contemporary late Elizabethan world. In the ‘Morall’ Harington directly translates the lesson for the predominantly male readers of *Orlando Furioso*:

In *Alcyna* and *Rogeros* lascivious love, from whom *Rogero* is glad at last to runne away, we may note the notable allurements of flesh by sensualitie and take a good lesson to avoyde them onely by flying from them as hath bene in part touched before. *Melissas* good counsell everie young *Rogero* may apply to him selfe and learne thereby to be gone to *Logistillas* in time least he be turned into some beast or tree as these notable enchauntresses do daily transforme their followers.<sup>62</sup>

Harington interprets the tale of Alcina and Rogero as a powerful lesson directly applicable to the contemporary late Elizabethan man. ‘Lascivious love’ is the most dangerous effect

<sup>61</sup> Giamatti, p. 158.

<sup>62</sup> *Orlando Furioso*, p. 88, VII, Morall, 3–8.

of the allurements of an enchantress or in contemporary terms a beautiful woman. The male vulnerability to the enticement of 'flesh' is fully recognised, as a man cannot physically suppress but must flee from the root of his weakness, as in the example of Rogero. Harington warns every 'young *Rogero*', every youthful male reader, to take heed of Melissa's advice and avoid his transformation into a 'beast or tree' through the sensual corruption of a contemporary enchantress. The reader is expected to understand the implication of a man's surrender to the sensual enticements of a woman, being the loss of rationality resulting in effeminacy, while also a paralysis of masculine action and sprite.

Harington further exposes the contemporary application of Ariosto's tale in his 'Allegorie' by systematically and chronologically identifying the 'things that allure most to sensualitie' within the text.<sup>63</sup> Harington exposes the danger of modern art and luxury in the form of 'kinde entertainment' and 'sumptuous building'. The contemporary fear for masculine integrity is expressed through Harington's reference to the effeminising dangers of 'musicke and wanton sonets of love,' 'wanton discourses,' and 'effeminate delicacies, in all which we see the eye, the eare, the tast, the smelling, the feeling, the witte, the thoughts, all fed with their objects of delight, making men quite to forget God and all good counsell'. Luxury and sensuality are depicted as penetrative and corruptive powers over man, the most powerful of which is the contemporary enchantress or fashionable woman through her 'artificiall behaviour and exquisite beautie set foorth with all cunning' (Allegorie, 7–15). Harington pointedly warns contemporary men to listen to the words of good counsel, taking the example of Rogero who believed '[t]he tale Astolfo late to him rehearst, he thinketh false or else by him deserved' (Allegorie, 17). He emphasises the importance of the example of Rogero's neglect of advice for the contemporary male youth who rejects religious and moral lessons in favour of the corruptions of urban political life:

when they come to be advaniced to high favors or to great livings, they despise all that was taught them before and count religion but a pollicie and philosophie but a follie and the admonitions of grave and godly men that reprove their ambition or their sensualitie or their extreme covetousnesse to proceed but of envie to their high estate and felicitie which they would be glad to come to them selves and cannot. (Allegorie, 19–23)

Harington controversially points an accusatory finger at 'speciall persons,' those men who have reached the pinnacle of authority, in government, church, the forces and through lordship over tenants and land (Allegorie, 23). He implicates and encourages fellow

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<sup>63</sup> *Orlando Furioso*, p. 89, VII, Allegorie, 7.

readers to identify such examples of men, their superiors, who neglect honest and godly studies in favour of the corruptions of sensuality, power and wealth. There is a clear distinction between the outspoken and rebuked voices of 'grave and godly men' and those men who are imbued with such privilege that they suspect all critics of jealousy. Harington compares late Elizabethan male government to Rogero's sensual immersion and rejection of good counsel, emphasising the moral danger threatening contemporary men, particularly the young who will follow the poor examples of the present male elite. Harington does not target those corrupt and deaf men who rule, as they are past rescue, like Astolfo, trapped within their transformed states. Instead he seeks to educate men before they encounter the dangers embodied by the figure of Alcina: 'I would this age were barren of examples of this kinde' (Allegorie, 26). Harington directly tackles the contemporary dangers of female allure through false deception:

the inchauntments that bring men into the blindnesse to thinke *Alcyna* so faire a woman, it is nothing but a shew of vertue, of beautie, of graciousnesse, that the foolish lover perswades him selfe that he seeth in the person or idol of his mistresse, of which *Petrarke* saith, *Da questi magi transformato fui*. These are the witches that transformed me. (Allegorie, 27–30)

Devotion of body and soul to a woman is criticised as 'blindness' and a product of sorcery induced by the female arts of cosmetics and seduction. Alcina's immense attractions can only be achieved by a false façade and her all-encompassing performance projecting virtue, beauty and grace, heightens her danger to men and explains Harington's previous advice of avoidance to escape corruption. A rational man and a lover cannot coexist in Harington's concept, and he directly refers to the Elizabethan fashion for the Petrarchan-styled sonneteer who foolishly idolises his cold mistress. All women who inspire such a sacrifice of man's spiritual and rational superiority are witches that should be feared and avoided due to their powers to transform men. Harington through his translation casts himself as one of the good counsels to which men should take note and one who like Bradamant grieves for 'Roger's misspending his time' and male seed. He also like Melissa represents 'preachers and philosophers' who employ the ring of reason that 'makes us see our owne deformities and the deformitie of that we esteeme so dearely as in this booke you see what manner of monster *Alcyna* appeared in her owne likenesse' (Allegorie, 31–36). Harington emphasises the impenetrability of female enchantment to normal men and maintains that a woman's beauty, as espoused by the wise, is a veil for her true monstrosity. Harington equates a false woman's evil essence with an equally deformed exterior; yet clearly the physical reality of the seductress is quite the opposite,

and therefore to emphasise her danger he is forced to assert that their deformity is visible only to those with wisdom, experience and a blind faith in God.

As Harington makes explicit, *Orlando Furioso* offers a denunciation of woman's use of cosmetics, which is applicable and should be applied to his contemporary society. The ring of Book Seven reveals the true deformity of Alcina to Rogero, and criminalizes cosmetics as concealing monstrosity: 'Her borowd beauties all appeared stained, | The painting gone, nothing but filth remained' (VII. 59. 7–8). Alcina's allure is discredited as dissimulation created by her own enchantments. Giamatti describes her as 'an unnatural creature who can suspend or pervert Nature's laws, and thereby counterfeit or falsify Nature's face'.<sup>64</sup> Without the magical façade her purity is transformed to a 'stained' morality, emphasising her lasciviousness. As Rogero is redeemed, Alcina's image worsens: she has become 'so ugly that from East to West | Was not a fowler old mishapen beast' (VII. 61. 7–8). She is no longer a sensual woman but has transformed into an animal, distorted and old. The new description of the true Alcina is in absolute contrast to the previous visions of her conventional beauty:

Her face was wan, a leane and writheld skin,  
Her stature scant three horsloves did exceed,  
Her haire was gray of hue and verie thin,  
Her teeth wer gone, her gums serv'd in their steed,  
No space was there betweene her nose and chin,  
Her noisome breath contagion would breed:  
In fine, of her it might have well bene said  
In *Nestors* youth she was a pretie maid. (VII. 62)

Ironically the reader is warned not to trust outward show; however, in the portrayal of the real Alcina, physical deformity and decay symbolise sin and immorality. The greatest theme of the criticism levelled at Alcina is concerned with her marks of decay and age. Devoid of teeth, Alcina's profile becomes concave and this feature coupled with her deformed height are all stereotypical elements of the old hag. The stanza concludes with a misogynistic jibe, that in Nestor's youth — Nestor lived to three hundred years — she would have been a 'pretie maid'. Harington moves further and extends the case of Alcina to his contemporary scene:

I feare her arts are learned now a dayes  
To counterfait their haire and paint their skin,  
But reasons ring their crafts and guiles bewrayes,

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<sup>64</sup> Giamatti, p. 144.

No wise men of their paintings passe a pin.  
 Those vertues that in women merit praise  
 Are sober shows without, chast thoughts within,  
 True faith and due obedience to their make,  
 And of their children honest care to take. (VII. 63)

Demonising their fashions as the arts of witches, Harington explicitly attacks contemporary women and their use of cosmetics. Modern women are accused of fraud with artificial hair and painted skin, which Harington detects through the 'ring' of masculine reason. Reason is heralded as man's saviour piercing through any female illusion and allowing the wise man to find a true woman. The narrator concludes with a moral instruction for women to present 'sober shows' despite the apparent significance of their internal attributes. These virtuous women are devoid of all desires for the self, most notably sexual desires. They must be modest, devout, obedient, maternal and chaste thus protecting patriarchal rights and interests. Notably Rogero does not seek this female ideal and displays a greater attraction to the painted enchantress. His stay in Logistilla's realm, the antithesis of Alcina's paradise, is of a short duration, which emphasises the role of male desire within the proliferation of female seductive fashions.

#### The Ugly Secrets of Sorcery

*The Faerie Queene* also exhibits a connection between women's mixtures and the occult. Following the earlier analysis of Acrasia, the enchantress of the text, an examination of the witch of Book Three reveals a small yet focused reference to the contemporary discourse upon deceptive cosmetics. The witch creates a False Florimel made from the purest snow, 'fine Mercury, | And virgin wex, that neuer yet was seald,' 'perfect vermily,' and hair of golden wire (III. 8. 6. 6–8). Gareth Roberts observes, '[u]nderneath the artificial and constructed appearance of the beautiful and snowily chaste lady lurks the demonic.'<sup>65</sup> Spenser utilises the image of the False Florimel to illustrate the falsity of contemporary ideals of feminine beauty, and the dangers that are hidden beneath.

The witch figure of Duessa in Book One of *The Faerie Queene* represents the duality of deceit and is identified by her rich appearance, an allusion to the Whore of Babylon, and

<sup>65</sup> Gareth Roberts, 'Women and Magic in English Renaissance Love Poetry', in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 59–75 (p. 74).

the Papacy (Revelation, 12. 4). She is the Roman Catholic mass personified as a whore, suggests D. Douglas Waters, as her instructor is Archimago, 'a Roman Catholic teacher pictured as a conjuring hypocritical whisperer.'<sup>66</sup> Duessa exhibits strong similarities with Alcina as she also fools a knight by means of her appearance, leading him to reject a true lady Frœlissa, whom Duessa has converted into an 'vgly forme' (I. 2. 38. 8). The reality of Duessa's true form is later discovered to be a 'filthy foule old woman', the 'daughter of Deceipt and Shame' (I. 2. 40. 8, I. 5. 26. 9). The knight Fradubio remarks upon her genitals as undisputable proof of her moral corruption:

Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,  
Were hidd in water, that I could not see,  
But they did seeme more foule and hideous,  
Then womans shape man would beleeeue to bee. (I. 2. 41. 1-4)

E. Howell Brunner describes Duessa as one who 'shape-shifts between the Petrarchan ideal of a beautiful woman and the ancient mystery of the goddess as crone'.<sup>67</sup> She identifies Fradubio as a 'virginal male' who through his own idealised fantasies cannot fail to see Duessa's genitalia as foul, moving from 'longing to pornography to horror, just as patriarchal myth-making shifts female sexuality from fertile potential to devouring desire to evil seduction'.<sup>68</sup> Fradubio's fears are confirmed, and while he sleeps she anoints him with 'wicked herbes and ointments' which, in imitation of Alcina, transform him into a tree with his rejected lady in the form of 'treen mould' (I. 2. 42. 3, I. 2. 39. 9). The story of Duessa serves as a warning to potential victims and so echoes the role of Astolfo in *Orlando Furioso*. We are reintroduced to Duessa in canto seven, who again employs the arts of physical deception:

By which deceipt doth maske in visour faire,  
And cast her colours dyed deepe in graine,  
To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faire,  
And fitting gestures to her purpose frame,  
The guiltlesse man with guile to entertaine? (I. 7. 1. 3-7)

She is depicted as a masked creature hiding within a beautiful exterior with the determined aim to entrap innocent men. Redcrosse succumbs to Duessa deception; however, the truth is physically revealed on the fair Una's command:

<sup>66</sup> D. Douglas Waters, 'Error's Den and Archimago's Hermitage: Symbolic Lust and Symbolic Witchcraft', in *Critical Essays on Spenser From ELH* (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 158-177 (p. 159).

<sup>67</sup> E. Howell Brunner, *Slithering Goddesses: Deciphering Reptilian Codes in Book I of The Faerie Queene*, in *UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertation* <<http://www.lib.umi.com>> [accessed 5 December 2008] (p. 7).

<sup>68</sup> Brunner, p. 7.

To do her dye (quoth *Vna*) were despight,  
 And shame t'auenge so weake an enemy;  
 But spoile her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly. (I. 8. 45. 7–9)

The true Una exposes reality by instructing the stripping of Duessa's clothing, a symbol of pride and disguise. Duessa is stripped by all, treated to a form of humiliation, which reconstructs her as 'the witch':

So as she bad, that witch they disaraid,  
 And robd of royall robes, and purple pall,  
 And ornaments that richly were displaid;  
 Ne spared they to strip her naked all.  
 Then when they had despoild her tire and call,  
 Such as she was, their eyes might her behold,  
 That her misshaped parts did them appall,  
 A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill faouered, old,  
 Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told. (I. 8. 46)

Duessa's public stripping of her external falsity is not merely an unveiling of truth. It recreates images of violation and rape. She is an animal under dissection and the final examination of her genitals is an act of humiliation, deemed as an appropriate and most harmful punishment for woman. Duessa serves the function of a witch, uniting the community through a realisation of her difference. Duessa's stripping also evokes the bodily searches exacted upon suspected witches by contemporary Scottish authorities aiming to find deformity. The anonymous pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* presents the case history of Agnis Sampson who was shaved to reveal the devil's mark on her genitals. The mark symbolised a forbidden sexual knowledge and was inspected by the examiners. Sampson claimed knowledge of a private conversation between the King and Queen and was therefore perceived as posing a great threat to royal security. Levine observes that 'she must be made sexually powerless'.<sup>69</sup> Therefore she was shaved and publicly viewed due to her perceived danger. Brunner views the attack on Duessa as more wide-ranging, the 'urological and scatological images, denigrating the source of maternal nourishment and insulting female potency'.<sup>70</sup> Her crime is shown through misshapen ugliness and the ravages of old age. Duessa's sexual deviancy is also alluded to as a 'secret filth' which cannot be written. However, Duessa's real form is further expressed with savour, echoing the unveiling of Alcina in *Orlando Furioso*:

<sup>69</sup> L. Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization 1579–1642* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 125.

<sup>70</sup> Brunner, p. 7.

Her craftie head was altogether bald,  
 And as in hate of honorable eld,  
 Was ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;  
 Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,  
 And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;  
 Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,  
 Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;  
 Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,  
 So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind. (I. 8. 47)

The description of Duessa attacks by exposing her vile appearance, a form of misogyny also expressed in the satires of Marston and Guilpin. Alcina is stripped metaphorically by Rogero's ring, to reveal a similar haggard appearance. Old age is the main focus of the description: Duessa's hair is lost, her skin as 'rough' as tree bark and her mouth is devoid of teeth. However the idea is extended with an emphasis upon the base animalism of Duessa. Her head is smothered with 'filthy scald,' her gums are 'rotten', her breath 'sowre', her breasts produce 'filthy matter' and her skin is 'scabby'. She represents the worst of humanity, that being age, disease, and repulsive filth. Her breasts have dried and are referred to by the derogatory word 'dugs'. They are depicted as 'lacking' of milk, instead secreting a foul 'matter'. The role of the mother, a natural sanctified feminine role to nurture and give life, is inverted to enforce the depravity of Duessa. The foul excretion from her breast may reflect the 'unnatural' practice of maintaining lactation, which Paster describes through 'demand suckling [...] a relatively effective and presumably well-known form of contraception,' to provide sexual independence.<sup>71</sup> She comments, '[m]etonymy transforms these breasts into the lower parts, an oozing, excretory bladder-womb, an image of disease and projected oral frustration and deprivation.'<sup>72</sup> Duessa's breasts become a substitute for a gluttonous womb, which the narrator refuses to describe. She is an outsider, despised for her 'crafty' mind as much as her physicality. Unlike the pious, abiding Una, Duessa is proactive and uses any means to satisfy her desires. 'Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind, | My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write,' illustrates that 'honest' women are ashamed of free sexuality and are chaste (I. 8. 48. 1–2). Duessa in contrast is half-beast, and the freakish animal elements of her body are recited:

A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;  
 And eke her feete most monstrous were in sight:  
 For one of them was like an Eagles claw,  
 With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,  
 The other like a Beares vneuen paw:  
 More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw. (I. 8. 48. 4–9)

<sup>71</sup> Paster, p. 252.

<sup>72</sup> Paster, p. 206.

Duessa is described as a hideous unnatural monster; she is a mismatch of beasts and ultimately not of the natural world. Classical examples of women with animal limbs, including sirens initially depicted as bird-maids and winged harpies, support the connotations with the diabolical and lascivious. ‘Forging associations between the breasts, vagina, and defecation, Spenser deliberately denigrates the childbirth capacity of women,’ maintains Brunner.<sup>73</sup> It is apparent that Duessa is directly attacked and marked as evil through the deformity of her genitalia and breasts, combined with scatological images. However, taken in comparison with the idealistic representation of the beautiful and maternal Charissa with breasts displayed ‘That ay thereof her babes might sucke their fill,’ Spenser cannot be accused of denigrating women’s fertility as a whole (I. 10. 30. 8). The beautiful breast of the Renaissance was seen as ‘delicate and minimal’ whereas in contrast the larger, sagging breast embodied the old woman or witch. Paster notes, ‘[t]he large breast is the female metonymy not only of age but of shame and thus of a specifically gendered form of social and bodily inferiority.’<sup>74</sup> (However, the physical does not always represent the truth within, as seen in the case of the beauty of Acrasia’s idealised breasts.)

Duessa is wounded not physically but by the disrobing of her created identity and her power. Her original beauty, although a façade, is replaced by the degradation of an unveiled aged and deformed body. The ugly form dictates her role as a witch and removes her own control over a body, which generates its own social meanings. Paster proposes that these unconventional ‘female figures [were] made to occupy the cultural space of the other in part because of bodily oddity, specifically the oddity of their breasts in number, size, location, and function, including cross-species suckling’.<sup>75</sup> Duessa is deemed as a common witch and accordingly makes her escape:

Fled to the wastfull wildernesse apace,  
From liuing eyes her open shame to hide,  
And lurkt in rocks and caues long vnespide. (I. 8. 50. 3–5)

Duessa returns in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* at first as a fallen and isolated woman ‘Lurking [...] with greene mosse cou’ring her nakednesse, | To hide her shame’ (II. 1. 22. 3–5). Suddenly without her disguise designed to fool man, she behaves, as she appears,

<sup>73</sup> Brunner, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Paster, p. 205.

<sup>75</sup> Paster, p. 234.

the ostracised witch or creature of the underworld. The First Book concludes with Redcrosse's comments upon his entrapment by Duessa:

Most false *Duessa*, royall richly dight,  
That easie was t' inuegle weaker sight:  
Who by her wicked arts, and wylie skill,  
Too false and strong for earthly skill or might,  
Vnwares me wrought vnto her wicked will,  
And to my foe betrayd, when least I feared ill. (I. 12. 32. 4–9)

Redcrosse admits his weakness; however, Duessa is clearly portrayed as the 'wicked' enchantress who used arts to falsely transform the knight into her lover. Despite the realisation of the error of his ways, he does not remain with the true Una, but returns to the court of the Faerie Queene leaving her to mourn his loss. Yet again the pure and chaste love does not hold the knight's attention or constancy.

Female sexual seduction and witchcraft are closely associated with *Orlando Furioso* and *The Faerie Queene*, reflecting upon two intertwined issues at the centre of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean consciousness. The perception of the enchantress in the face of the fashionable woman informs Guilpin's and Marston's satiric portrayal of contemporary women. The satires attack their female subjects through their appearance, deception and use of potions, as a way of lessening their sexual threat to the patriarchal order. The example of Duessa's physical stripping of appearance and power also exposes the attempts at isolation of the threat of the sexual woman. The return of Duessa in the Second Book in an alluring disguise of 'a chast Virgin,' and a victim of rape reveals, as with the example of Acrasia, that the threat of female deception and seduction cannot be destroyed and must constantly be resisted (II. 1. 21. 5). The threatening undertone of female dishonesty is evident in a range of late Elizabethan and early modern Jacobean writing. The English puritan William Perkins castigates the devils who wear cosmetics: 'thereby making themselves seeme that which, indeede they are not,' and practising what 'is most abominable in the very light of nature, and much more by the light of Gods word'.<sup>76</sup> The stage also exposed a contemporary distrust of female beauty through the menacing hidden cosmetics and hints of sorcery.

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<sup>76</sup> *William Perkins 1558–1602: English Puritanist: His Pioneer Work on Casuistry: 'A Discourse of Conscience' and 'The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience'*, ed. with intro. by Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1966), p. 214.

Numerous critics have identified the role of witchcraft and female sexuality within Shakespeare's plays. Paster claims that in *Antony and Cleopatra* (completed in 1606) 'associations with witchcraft serve to magnify and mystify Cleopatra's sexual magnetism making it both dangerous and excessive'.<sup>77</sup> Orgel observes of *Macbeth* (believed to have been written in 1606) that 'the love of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth eventuates in female domination and effeminacy in a world where witchcraft is naturalized'.<sup>78</sup> In the tragedies threatening women embody the unnatural and polluted, which can be removed to resolve the play as in the example of Regan of *King Lear* and Gertrude of *Hamlet*. Armstrong perceives these women as 'the very poison, which must be purged through the application of another if order is to be restored'.<sup>79</sup> *Hamlet* (1603) echoes the same distrustful and misogynistic ideas concerning women who employ cosmetics. Hamlet chastises Ophelia as a representative of her dissimulating gender: 'I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another' (III. 1. 143–144). These artificial women are suspected of hiding a corruption which will similarly infect man.

Armstrong's study of early seventeenth-century drama exposes the word 'drug' as a contemporary term which could refer to poison, purges, sedatives and the associative terms 'including powder, extract, restorative, potion, cordial, charm, posset, pomander and physic[k]'.<sup>80</sup> The frequent occurrence of lists of ingredients employed by women reveals the conventionality of the idea of the witches' cosmetics. Bianca and Emilia of Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604) are termed by Malevole as Medeas, whose potions arouse the desire of men, while the old courtesan Maquerelle acts as a midwife and witch selling possets, which Paster asserts 'have not just aphrodisiac overtones, but occult ones too'.<sup>81</sup> Maquerelle's posset includes, 'seven and thirty yolks of Barbary hens' eggs, eighteen spoonfuls | and a half of the juice of cocksparrow bones.'<sup>82</sup> The strong association of these women with occult potions emphasises the familiarity of the image of a predatory and

<sup>77</sup> Paster, p. 245. Pompey calls for Cleopatra's destruction of Antony through witchcraft, 'Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both' (II. 1. 22).

<sup>78</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> K. Armstrong, 'Possets, Pills and Poisons: Physicking the Female Body in Early Seventeenth-Century Drama', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, 61:ix (April 2002), 43–56 (p. 53).

<sup>80</sup> Armstrong, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Armstrong, p. 46.

<sup>82</sup> John Marston, *The Malcontent* (1604), with additions by John Webster, ed. by W. David Kay, New Mermaid, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: A & C Black, 1998), II. 4. 7–8.

underhand woman to the contemporary spectator. Cosmetics are a repetitive theme to be scourged within Jacobean drama. In Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, registered October 1607, Vindice, true to the genre of the revenge tragedy, seeks vengeance for the death of his love. During the powerful scene in which he prepares her skull for his trick upon the Duke, Vindice asks, 'Does every proud and self-affecting dame | Camphor her face for this?'<sup>83</sup> He expounds a lesson on cosmetics focused upon the skull and directed to women:

Here might a scornful and ambitious woman  
Look through and through herself. See, ladies, with false forms  
You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms. (III. 5. 96–98)

The female fashion for cosmetics is ridiculed as a vain facade, which ultimately cannot avoid the equalising truth of death. These women which Vindice addresses are formed as a distinct and tangible element of the audience, encouraged to look into the face of death and feel shame for deceiving men with their arts.

Bosola of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612), exposing vice like a satirist, makes explicit the relationship between cosmetics and witchcraft revealing a fear of female sexual independence and power. His words cut through female dissimulation and reveal the contents of the Old Lady's closet:

One would suspect it for a shop of witchcraft, to find in it the fat of serpents, spawn of snakes, Jews' spittle, and their young children's ordures, and all these for the face. I would sooner eat a dead pigeon, taken from the soles of the feet of one sick of the plague, than kiss one of you fasting.<sup>84</sup>

Bosola exposes the true paradox of female beauty, as behind the seductive appearance is the base substances which created the illusion. The ingredients of the Old Lady's closet are depicted as part of a witch's potion, and through her aged appearance their real corrosive effects are illustrated, reiterating the warnings of Marston and Guilpin in their earlier satires. The cosmetic woman is a repulsive disease, whom Bosola would be loath to kiss, due to the unpleasant construction of her visage and also for fear of infection. Calbi compares Bosola and the Old Lady: 'it is not only the Lady with her "painting", but also the malcontent with his disparate masks that adulterates and endlessly defers the highly

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. by MacDonald P. Jackson, in *The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 543–93 (III. 5. 84–5).

<sup>84</sup> *The Duchess of Malfi*, in John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi and other plays*, ed. by René Weis (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 103–200 (II. 1. 32–6).

mystified “truth” of the body he simultaneously upholds.<sup>85</sup> Bosola follows his assault upon cosmetics with an attack upon the Duchess’s concealment of her pregnancy. Armstrong suggests that ‘both reactions draw on a nexus of associated ideas between women, witchcraft, sexuality and drugs which is recurrent in the early modern period’.<sup>86</sup> Bosola’s paranoid fear of the physical female body and its sexual capacity will be analysed in the following chapter.

Jonson’s comedy *Epicoene* (1609), which we have already encountered, places the familiar perception of the artificiality of female beauty in the context of the urban middle-class, creating a wife who is a monstrous artificial concoction. Otter when under the influence of alcohol divulges the origins of Mrs Otter’s visage:

A most vile face! And yet she spends me forty pound a year in mercury and hogs-bones. All her teeth were made i’ the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i’ the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street. Every part o’ the town owns a piece of her. (IV. 2. 81–85)<sup>87</sup>

Otter complains of the financial cost of his wife’s cosmetics and depicts her as a woman literally of the town, artificial and constructed. He also implies her use of witchcraft with sinister remedies and her further deconstruction succeeds in dehumanising the woman:

She takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, into some twenty boxes, and about next day noon is put together again, like a great German clock; and so comes forth and rings a tedious larum to the whole house, and then is quiet again for an hour, but for her quarters. (IV. 2. 87–91)

The reality of life with Mrs Otter is one of subjection for her husband. Her threatening figure is translated through the sense of her chamber as a site of dismantling, and sterile industrial mechanism. Women within Jonson’s play invert the feminine gender particularly through their sexual autonomy and means of birth control, and the depiction of their sexual desire will be analysed in the final chapter. The use of potions and remedies to prevent conception and to create abortions is figured as antithetical to virtuous womanhood. Armstrong identifies in the seventeenth-century drama a fearful emphasis on ‘women’s potential to control their bodies and claim their reproductive rights’.<sup>88</sup> Newman maintains that ‘witchcraft represented an inversion of maternal relations, of maternal body,

<sup>85</sup> Maurizio Calbi, *Approximate Bodies: Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Armstrong, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> Ben Jonson, *Epicoene or the Silent Woman*, ed. by L. A. Beaurline, Regents renaissance Drama Series (London: Edward Arnold, 1967).

<sup>88</sup> Armstrong, p. 53.

and finally, the powerful ambivalence of the mother's body in its double capacity as sexual object and nurturing mother'.<sup>89</sup> Ultimately it is the sexually subversive aims of the women who utilise cosmetics and witchcraft which creates an atmosphere of male anxiety and distrust.

Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) illustrates the extreme use of subversive labels to ostracise these dangerous women and protect man's integrity. As exposed in the third chapter, Burton imagines a potent threat to men which leads him to issue a warning:

A filthy knave, a deformed quean, a crooked carcass, a maukin, a witch, a rotten post, an hedge-stake, may be set out and tricked up that it shall make as fair a shew, as much enamour, as the rest; many a silly fellow is so taken.<sup>90</sup>

Burton refers to Petronius to express the familiar fear of the deceitful allure of women and considers the fine line between adornment and deceit: "To what end are those crisped, false hairs, painted faces," as the satirist observes, "such a composed gate, not a step awry?"<sup>91</sup> The belief in the sinister nature of female beauty, as expressed in the satires, is also evident in Rowley's, Dekker's and Ford's play *The Witch of Edmonton* (first performed 1619, published 1658). Mother Sawyer argues against the condemnation of old women as witches by identifying others who bewitch men including the 'painted things in Princes Courts' and 'City-witches' who sell their husband's wares.<sup>92</sup> By demonising women as witches or enchantress figures, these individuals are placed outside the acceptable, and treated as mythic and rare perversions to form an educative lesson for men and women.

In reality during the early modern period there was an association of women with witchcraft and the making of herbal medicines. Women of all classes were involved in such practices, ranging from the creation of concealing cosmetics to midwives who were suspected of causing abortions from potions made of garden produce. It was not a far leap to associate cosmetic witchcraft with *maleficium* or evil intent and many women were accused and convicted of poisoning men. Real cases of female poisoning were reported

<sup>89</sup> Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 58.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1936), Part. 3, Sect. 2, Memb. 2, Subs. 3, p. 93.

<sup>91</sup> Burton, Part. 3, Sect. 2, Memb. 2, Subs. 3, p. 94.

<sup>92</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton* (1658) in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1958), III, IV. 1. 103, 108.

including Margaret Ferne-Seede, who it was alleged tried to poison her husband before cutting his throat in 1608. Elizabeth Caldwell was another persuaded by her lover Jeffrey Brown, with the aid of the widow Isabel Hall, who tried to poison her husband, yet instead killed a child.<sup>93</sup> The play *A Warning for Fair Women* (1590) is based on the real-life murder committed by Anne Saunders upon her husband in 1573. Alice Arden's attempted poisoning and finally successful murder of her husband in 1551 are dramatised in *Arden of Feversham*.<sup>94</sup> Notoriously Frances Howard was accused of utilising potions to cause impotence in her husband and found guilty of poisoning Overbury. The evidence of her instruction to poison was presented in the form of a letter from Frances to Elwes in which she asked the Lieutenant to change some tarts and jellies for others, 'the tarts or jelly taste you not of, but the wine you may drink, for in it is no letters.'<sup>95</sup> In one version of the most widely circulated satirical epigram on the Overbury murder, Frances is condemned as a 'wife, a witch, a poysoner, and a whore'.<sup>96</sup> When Coke began making the charge to the Grand Jury, he emphasised 'the baseness of poisoning above all other kinds of murder'.<sup>97</sup> Bacon during the final trial also treated the issue of poison: 'For impoisonment, I am sorry it should be heard of in our kingdom.'<sup>98</sup> Poisoning was characterised as a female crime through associations with witchcraft and the relative ease of this method for killing a husband.

Thomas Tuke published in 1616 *A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Women. Wherein the abominable sinnes of Murther and Poysoning, Pride and Ambition, Adultery and Witchcraft are set forth and discovered*. Tuke makes an indictment of cosmetics and, influenced by the Overbury affair, widens the attack to include the evil sorcery of women. Howard elaborates on Tuke's attack of female self-fashioning: '[w]omen are not to do it themselves, for that shows their alliance with the devil, but men are free to shape this

<sup>93</sup> *The Araignement and Burning of Margaret Ferne-seede for the Murther of her Late Husband* (London: E. Allde for Henry Gosson, 1608); Gilbert Dugdale, *A true Discourse of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell, Ma: Jeffrey Bownd, Isabel Hall widow, and George Fernely, on the parson of Ma: Thomas Caldwell* (London: J. Roberts for J. Rusbie, 1604).

<sup>94</sup> *The Lamentable and Trve Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent* (1592), ed. by Martin White (London: Ernest Benn, 1982).

<sup>95</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Willis 58, fol. 234, in Lindley, p. 170.

<sup>96</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Malone 23, fol. 6<sup>r</sup> in Lindley, p. 178.

<sup>97</sup> William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials*, 9 vols (London: T. C. Hansard, 1809), II, 911.

<sup>98</sup> *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II, 970–1.

weaker sex as they may wish.'<sup>99</sup> The image of the fashionable woman carried connotations of rebelliousness, sexual independence and ultimately a threat to man through her innate proclivity towards witchcraft. Scot in 1584 studied the phenomenon of witchcraft and the perceived natural female inclination towards the occult:

As women in all ages have benee counted most apt to conceive witchcraft, and the divels speciall instruments therof: so also it appeareth, that they have been the first inventers, and the greatest practicers of poisoning, and more naturallie addicted and given thereunto than men.<sup>100</sup>

Women are accepted as either real witches or as simply believing and resorting to the use of sorcery as a means of empowerment. Lindley points to the connection 'generated in part by the analogy that could be drawn between the way women's beauty is perceived as insinuating itself into men's hearts and the secret workings of poison'.<sup>101</sup> Scot reveals the perception of the woman as a potion or poison which infiltrates and corrupts man, drawing again from the type of the enchantress: '[h]ir toong, hir gesture, hir behaviour, hir beautie, and other allurements poison and intoxicate the mind.'<sup>102</sup> Women who poisoned or harmed others were the real counterparts of the literary figure of the enchantress. The enslavement of Acrasia or the physical search and banishment of Duessa reflected the real process of witch examination and the trials of monstrous women.

Witch trials and convictions provided evidence of the power of God to enforce justice against those who used sorcery to harm the innocent and to increase their own authority in society. Keith Thomas reveals how 'the trials were at their zenith during the reign of Elizabeth I, when 455 out of the 790 known indictments were made, the majority during the 1580s and 1590s'.<sup>103</sup> Pamphlets reporting the details of real cases responded to a public demand and took advantage of a financial opportunity. Newman notes, '[m]agistrates, playwrights and actors, preachers and pamphleteers, the politically ambitious and village hangers-on, all sought or built reputations on the persecution of women as witches.'<sup>104</sup> Journalistic in style and parading as truth, these texts often project a puritanical approval of God's justice but at heart reveal a voyeuristic and macabre

<sup>99</sup> Jean E. Howard, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality and the Politics of Gender and Rank in *Much Ado About Nothing*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* ed. by Jean E. Howard and Marion O'Connor (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 163–87 (p. 172).

<sup>100</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), with an introduction by the Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), Chapter III, p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Lindley, p. 166.

<sup>102</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Chapter III, p. 67.

<sup>103</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 537.

<sup>104</sup> Newman, p. 64.

obsession with female sexual and moral transgression. Pamphlets concerning the crimes of women, either through witchcraft or poisoning, expressed a contemporary preoccupation with powerful and malevolent women. Female sexual desire is consistently associated with 'evil' women within these texts.

*The Araignment and burning of Margaret Ferne-seede* (1608) concerns a wife found guilty of poisoning her husband. Despite the dubious evidence of confessions from her clients, the Bargemen who testified that she swore to be rid of her husband, the pamphlet convicts Margaret of an evil character due to her sexual history: 'she had been a prostitute whore, but growing into disabled years, to please the loose desires of such customers she after turned bawd, a course of life more hateful in tempting and seducing youth than the other in committing sin.'<sup>105</sup> The narrator is eager to depict Margaret's denial of murder as an astounding example of the devil's deception. She confesses to her sexual crimes, yet stresses: 'for this which I am condemned, Heaven that knoweth best the secrets of our hearts knows I am innocent.'<sup>106</sup> The pamphlet asserts that a lustful woman is capable of all sins including administering poison, as it predisposes her to be an enemy of man. Margaret's danger to men is further implied by the testimony of the Bargemen, who claimed that her now deceased husband described her as a 'devilish woman' and advised them, 'if you be honest men and have a care either of your bodies or souls, avoid this house as you would do poison, lest it be the undoing of you all.'<sup>107</sup> Margaret's sexual appetite and history as a prostitute and bawd condemns her within the journalistic narrative as one who would poison men's bodies and minds. There is no contemplation of her actually being innocent of murder or interrogation as to how she transported her husband's dead body to Peckham Field. Ultimately Margaret fits the type expected of a husband killer and so is condemned to death to reassure the public and authorities. The pamphlet at its conclusion reports, 'about two of the clock in the afternoon she was stripped of her ordinary wearing apparel and upon her own smock put a kirtle of Canvas pitched clean through, over which she did wear a white sheet.'<sup>108</sup> Just like a witch or a heretic, Ferne-seede is killed by fire, she is ritually stripped of her female exterior and its influence, evoking the searches of suspected witches, and her replacement attire becomes a symbol of

<sup>105</sup> *The Araignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seede* (1608), in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy About Women in England, 1540–1640*, ed. by Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 357.

<sup>106</sup> *The Araignment*, p. 358.

<sup>107</sup> *The Araignment*, p. 358.

<sup>108</sup> *The Araignment*, p. 359.

her guilt and the means of her painful death through its saturation in pitch to ensure combustion.

A later pamphlet *The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philippa Flower* (1619) was written only a year after their execution at Lincoln on 11 March 1618, exposing the sensationalist topicality of these texts aimed to appeal to current public interest. Three women were convicted of harming the sons of the Earl of Rutland, malevolently destroying a respected and powerful patriarchal line. Despite the woodcut on the title-page depicting mother and two daughters as ugly and deformed, the texts suggests their unusual yet alluring appearances. Joan Flower, the mother, is described as a spectacle:

Besides, of late days her very countenance was estranged; her eyes were fiery and hollow, her speech fell and envious, her demeanor strange and exotic, and her conversation sequestered, so that the whole course of her life gave great suspicion that she was a notorious Witch.<sup>109</sup>

Joan Flower is constructed as a terrifying witch, not through her physical deformity but due to her unconventional behaviour, particularly her fierce unsociability, which lies as a threatening undertone of her potential powers. She entices interest through her foreign looks, which are described as exotic and strange. The association of witches with prostitution is emphasised by their comparison to the familiar literary image of a fish or whore: '[b]y this time doth Satan triumph and goeth away satisfied to have caught such fish in the net of his illusions.'<sup>110</sup> It is implied that Joan acted as a bawd, maintaining 'certain debauched and base company' at her house. Her daughter Philippa is described as 'lewdly transported with the love of one Thomas Simpson, who presumed to say that she had bewitched him, for he had no power to leave her and was, as he supposed, marvellously altered both in mind and body since her acquainted company'.<sup>111</sup> Philippa is transformed into the figure of the enchantress by Simpson's accusation, which no doubt deflected any taint he may have experienced from being so closely acquainted. She is imbued with the powers to enchant a man and to transform him into an effeminate lover. Philippa confesses to her enchantment of her lover and describes her pact with a familiar, a white rat: 'she gave her Soul to it and it promised to do her good and cause Thomas

<sup>109</sup> *The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philippa Flower* (1619), in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy About Women in England, 1540–1640*, ed. by Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 372.

<sup>110</sup> *The Wonderful Discovery*, p. 374.

<sup>111</sup> *The Wonderful Discovery*, pp. 372–373.

Simpson to love her if she would suffer it to suck her.’<sup>112</sup> Philippa inverts her ‘natural’ physical maternal capacity to nurture her familiar with the aim of quenching her own sexual desires through the subjection of a man. Her sister, Margaret, feeds one familiar from her genitalia: ‘the black-spotted within the inward parts of her secrets.’<sup>113</sup> The devil’s mark was frequently located upon or within female genitalia, cementing the association of female desires with sorcery as a threat particularly directed at men and their male offspring.

The powerful significance of the witch’s mark dominates King James I’s pamphlet *Daemonologie* (1597). The text was one of many including treatises by Henry Holland (1590), William Perkins (1608) and Alexander Roberts (1616), which transmitted the continental concept of witchcraft as the result of a pact with the devil. The potion-making of the literary enchantress figure and her seductive threat are firmly connected with witchcraft. Female sexuality enables the devil to become ‘homelier with that sexe sensine’.<sup>114</sup> *Daemonologie* describes women recruited by the Devil creating concoctions from ingredients provided by their master: ‘[a]s for little trifling turnes that women haue ado with, he causeth them to ioynt dead corpses, & to make powders thereof, mixing such other thinges there amongst, as he giues vnto them.’<sup>115</sup> The Devil provides the ingredients of ‘vncouthe poysons’ to aid the witch in her revenge and harm to others.<sup>116</sup> Levine describes *Daemonologie* as ‘a series of “sperm-stealing” fantasies in which spirits break into the male body and steal out its “nature,” its very essence’.<sup>117</sup> The text exposes the masculine fear of the seductive effeminising powers of the witch, as revealed in the example of the emasculated lovers Rogero and Verdant. The association of the witch with lust is suggested by her lewd relations with the Devil: ‘[w]itches oft times confesses not only his conueening in the Church with them, but his occupying of the Pulpit: Yea, their forme of adoration, to be the kissing of his hinder partes.’<sup>118</sup> The witch is at the start associated with lust in a generalised sense; however, as Levine has noted, ‘this appetite becomes increasingly sexualised, increasingly specific.’<sup>119</sup> Most significant is the

<sup>112</sup> *The Wonderful Discovery*, p. 378

<sup>113</sup> *The Wonderful Discovery*, p. 378.

<sup>114</sup> James I, King of England, *Daemonologie* (1597), *Newes from Scotland* (1591), ed. by G. B. Harrison (London: The Bodley Head Quartos, 1924), pp. 43–4.

<sup>115</sup> James I, King of England, p. 43.

<sup>116</sup> James I, King of England, p. 44.

<sup>117</sup> Levine, p. 109.

<sup>118</sup> James I, King of England, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Levine, p. 113.

emphasis placed upon Satan's need to gain physical 'entresse' with his victim's body and the placing of his 'marke upon some secreit plaice of bodie, which remains soare unhealed,' and acts as a sexual awakening for the witch.<sup>120</sup> Levine describes the mark as 'an eroticised place (in some texts the devil marks them with his tongue), a sexually charged area that keeps them up at night'.<sup>121</sup> Normand expands upon the mark's meaning: '[a] female body with the mark shows that the devil's attentions have transformed its nature from the human to the demonic.'<sup>122</sup> Witch trials commonly relied upon the search of the witch's body for a protuberance, which was insensible to pain and would not bleed, that would sustain the devil's familiar.

*Newes from Scotland* (1591) amplifies evidence of the sexualised pact between witches and the devil on a larger scale. Two hundred witches meeting at the coast of North Barrick in Lowthian for Allhollon do penance by kissing Satan's buttocks. Agnis Tompson apparently stated that the Devil came as a man and they had to 'kisse his Buttockes [...] which being put ouer the Pulpit barre'.<sup>123</sup> The performance mimics a sexual foreplay and empowers, although negatively, women who are normally insignificant. The witches conform to the sexually depraved image with the confession that the Devil 'would Carnallye vse them, albeit to their little pleasure, in respect of his cold nature' (p. 18). Normand analyses the fear aroused within the work: '[t]he terrors that the pamphlet excites center on the idea of women acting together as a group, which seems so fearful that it has to appear as political crime: as insurgency and attempted regicide.'<sup>124</sup> The account of Agnis Sampson further strengthens the association of lust with the witch, as 'the Diuels marke was found vpon her priuities' (p. 13). A sexually charged explanation for her mark is offered: 'the Diuell dooth lick them with his tung in some priuy part of their bodie' (p. 12). The witches are characterised as lascivious and threatening through their free sexual relationship with the Devil. The servant Geillis Duncane due to her master's suspicions is also examined to find a devil's mark on her neck and is accordingly tortured. Physical deformity, especially upon the female genitalia, in literature and real examinations,

<sup>120</sup> James I, King of England, p. 33.

<sup>121</sup> Levine, p. 114.

<sup>122</sup> Lawrence Normand, 'Witches, King James, and *The Masque of Queens*', in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 107–120 (p. 112).

<sup>123</sup> *Newes from Scotland*, in James I, King of England, *Daemonologie* (1597), *Newes from Scotland* (1591), ed. by G. B. Harrison (London: The Bodley Head Quartos, 1924), p. 14.

<sup>124</sup> Normand, p. 110.

confirmed the true abnormality and corruptive threat of a woman. Geillis Duncane is no different from Spenser's Duessa, as both are believed to be witches and both have physical deformities, which support this assertion.

The confession and subsequent torture and execution of women found guilty of employing sorcery or poison exposes the significance of their rebellion to the authorities. Michel Foucault explained confession as involving the penitent to form himself or herself in the language provided by the machineries of power, while execution constituted a state theatre, a demonstration of the power of authority over the body of the guilty.<sup>125</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur claimed that especially in England, the execution was far more anarchic than Foucault allows.<sup>126</sup> Catherine Belsey maintains that 'confessions from the scaffold' illustrated the way 'church and state' protected the people 'from the enemies of God and society,' and 'paradoxically also offered women a place from which to speak in public with a hitherto unimagined authority which was not diminished by the fact that it was demonic'.<sup>127</sup> By playing the role of the enchantress, previously powerless women could gain an authority to speak and intimidate. Normand believes that *Newes from Scotland* 'shows women being forced by violence into becoming actors in a demonic narrative'.<sup>128</sup> Those accused of witchcraft were often poor and female, with only a belief in the power of magic as their source for improvement or justice. Lerner identifies the typical witch as 'an independent adult woman who does not conform to the male idea of proper female behaviour'.<sup>129</sup> Newman shares the view that witches were 'disorderly or unruly women who transgressed cultural codes of femininity'.<sup>130</sup> Women who by their existence threatened both the body of man or the concept of social and gender order were demonised or convicted as examples of evil. Sceptics such as John Donne still believed that those who acted as witches should be punished: '[w]itches think sometimes that they kill when

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<sup>125</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (London: Allen Lane, 1979), I.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Crowds, Carnival and the state in English executions, 1604–1868', in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. by A. L. Beier, David Cannadine and James M. Rosenheim (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 505–56.

<sup>127</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 190–191.

<sup>128</sup> Lawrence Normand, 'Witches, King James, and *The Masque of Queens*', in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 107–120 (p. 109).

<sup>129</sup> Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), pp. 84–5.

<sup>130</sup> Newman, p. 56.

they do not, and are therefore as culpable as if they did.’<sup>131</sup> The witch, alienated from society and convinced of her power, was perceived as a dangerous threat to the community, which was corroborated by the contemporary religious emphasis upon the physical power and presence of the Devil.

#### The Figure of the Enchantress: Enlightening Men and Condemning Women

The previously unexplored invocation of the enchantress figure in the late Elizabethan satires primarily of Guilpin and also Marston has revealed the vast influence of not only past and contemporary literature, but also the context of a national obsession with witchcraft. The rich literary tradition of the enchantress is directly channelled through Guilpin’s labelling of all dissimulating women as replica ‘Acrasias’. Spenser’s *Acrasia*, Harington’s representation of Ariosto’s Alcina and Chapman’s translation of Homer’s original Circe, all represent a type who amalgamates the most feared elements and paradoxically the most alluring qualities of woman from an insecure male perspective. The precedent of the enchantress is classical, yet she is evidently easily applied to the writer’s experience of early Elizabethan and late Jacobean society. The satires, Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Harington’s original translation of *Orlando Furioso* utilise the stories of powerful women who seduce by artificial and magical means to reflect upon the contemporary woman and to enlighten the contemporary man of the dangers to his masculinity and soul. Harington through his own commentary voices a potent frustration at man’s consistent fall for female disguise even when warned. The enchantress embodies the sexual threat of women which effeminates the man who becomes an enslaved lover. She also has the power of poison and metamorphosis to render man’s physical strength redundant. These primary threats of emasculation, subjection and death by woman are all falsely packaged within an image specifically designed to allure and seduce men. Rogero, Verdant and even Cymochles lose their masculine identities after succumbing to female seduction. The loss of seed for pure pleasure, the risk of effeminacy to the security of the realm and society, were prevalent contemporary arguments against immersion in an excessive sexual pleasure with women. The corruption of lust is shown to emasculate, distort the mind and ultimately the body until man is reduced to a beast. The correlation

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<sup>131</sup> John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–1962), IX, 323.

between the literary enchantress and the early modern concept of woman as a creature of artifice, whose sexual appetite effeminates and masters man, was blatant and interpreted as an educative lesson rather than merely coincidental.

The satires of Marston and Guilpin assert the association between the cosmetically enhanced fashionable woman and the sexually rapacious and bewitchingly powerful enchantress. Their interpretation is continued throughout the early seventeenth century particularly through drama, which exercised a general sense of distrust in the images of contemporary feminine beauty and the sinister implications of female sexuality. The abundant sources of contemporary witch trials, pamphlets, and treatises, all responded to and invoked a public interest in the real threat of female sorcery. These influences seep into the satiric and later dramatic focus on potions and deformity. The most powerful expression of the amalgamation of the literary enchantress type with the early modern context of the witch obsession can be observed through Spenser's presentation of Duessa's stripping and the common practice of physical examinations of suspected witches. Both the fictional and the presumed real witch were stripped of their clothing, and thus their rights to humane treatment and respect. The obscene description of Duessa's deformed genitalia, breasts and rear, although extreme and mythological, mirrors the horror and fascination gained from the discovery of the witch's mark, especially if discovered on her genitalia. The deformed female body is an inversion of the ideal maternal woman, and reveals the signs of a life wasted and employed solely in sterile sexual activity. The witch's mark was a symbol representing the heat derived from a sexual penetration by the 'cold' devil, while Duessa's and Alcina's disfigured barren forms equally have only been employed in sterile sexual pleasure. Even the eroticised beauty of Acrasia is devoid of fertility with rich juices like wine emitting from her breasts rather than nourishing milk. The partially veiled ripe beauty and erotic fantasies embodied by Acrasia are ultimately revealed as sterile, focused upon carnal pleasure and power. The bodies of the witch and the enchantress come to represent a transgression of the ideal feminine, through their rejection of maternity and embracement of erotic pleasure at the cost of their true physical image.

By depicting the most threatening female elements within the body of a witch, the writers were expressing a deep anxiety surrounding the outcast female. The ability of women to employ potions and ointments to unnaturally control appearance and body had more

threatening implications upon their sexual freedom. Cosmetics can recreate the old hag as a beautiful enchantress to the detriment of men. Yet more radically they can also provide methods of contraception, or the means for abortion, offering women a sexual autonomy, which prevents any restraint dictated by the threat of pregnancy. Female sexual independence is explored through the figure of the enchantress, and in all the main texts, constancy and chastity are asserted as the virtuous choice. Female procreation is vital to man's survival through the continuance of his family line, although at the same time it is ultimately beyond his sphere of control. Therefore, the sexually liberal enchantress who threatens patriarchal rights is demonised as the hag in disguise, and as a depraved, unloving and murderous monster.

The contemporary trials of women who harmed and killed men, including Frances Howard, Margaret Ferne-seede and the Flowers women, all reflect an innate fear of the enchantress type and an attempt to harness and alleviate that anxiety through masculine forms of order: the court and execution, the real life counterparts of Acrasia's chains and Duessa's banishment. Within the texts the enchantress is contained; Alcina is left behind in her realm and devoid of Rogero, Acrasia is shackled and concealed from sight, and Circe is nullified by a conversion into a useful and devoted lover. However, Marston, Guilpin and their contemporaries do not limit the application of the enchantress figure solely to the woman convicted of murder or who causes harm through witchcraft. The primary target is the fashionable woman who empowered through her enhanced beauty is seen to undermine the mastery of men. It is her threatening powers of seduction within the context of numerous examples of women testing the boundaries of their prescribed sphere within marriage law, clothing, writing and publishing that motivates the condemnation of modern women as salacious, demonic and dangerous. The attack on the modern enchantress is voiced by men for men, and exposes the potency of the anxiety surrounding the integrity of masculinity and the future of their position in relation to women.

## Chapter Six The Empowered Whore

### The Whore and Transsexuality

The satires of Marston and Guilpin feature the figure of the whore. We view their unambiguous and grotesque portrayals as if looking through a window on a tour. The reader's sense of security, enhanced for the modern reader by the safe distance of history, is soon ruptured by fears of the infectious and unrestrained whore. The question arises, 'who is the whore?' in these unashamedly provocative and biased satires. She travels by coach in a vision of gratuitous wealth, which as a literal vehicle of her lust enables meetings. The coach also offers a private space for the use of the dildo and to facilitate other sexual pleasures. The satiric whore is sexually avaricious with a string of lovesick men itching for her company. Typically, as amongst all the women in the satirist's social tableau, she conceals her sexually diseased and aging body with cosmetics and the modern fashions.

The term 'empowered whore' is used throughout the chapter to explore the paradoxical contemporary definition of the sexual woman as sexually empowered yet also restricted by the derogatory label 'whore' as applied by man. In the satires the whore is painted as corrupt, morally and physically, to counter the feared freedom and power she embodies by transgressing women's approved social and productive roles. The chapter will contrast the satirist's unforgiving and aggressive stance with the complex portrayal of the whore in the Jacobean play *Women Beware Women*. The history of the play's early performance is unclear, although it has been dated as either 1613/14 or 1619/23. By employing other contemporary works and historical research, the development of the whore in the context of the theme of transsexuality will be explored. Transsexuality is a term conceived within the debate to reflect the contemporary obsession with the 'reality', not simply the Ovidian myth, of sexual transformation. Within this theme, the role of man and violence in the creation or evolution of female sexuality is paramount, especially how rape acts to advance the virgin into the whore. The investigation will explore the extent of the whore's connection with contemporary prostitution and crime, and discover how the role of wife rather than prostitute is far closer to the contemporary definition of the whore. The validity

of the concept of the castigated whore reaching beyond the boundaries of the feminine ideal to become sexually independent will be examined, with a particular focus upon her image as a figure to be despised yet also admired.

The period spanning the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean years witnessed a discussion of gender roles, which is represented in the printed discourses of the time. It was an era of change or rebellion, in which the concept of femininity as a transforming force inspired excitement or fear. The printed text disseminated ideas of womanhood which prescribe her natural sphere and the meanings of her body. Hutson believes that such texts viewed women as possessions linking men and additionally that their 'claim to be able to "fashion" women by addressing them through persuasive fictions of themselves lent a special social credibility to the masculine activity of authorship'.<sup>1</sup> Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus suggest that the movement of English women publishing works including defences and their unconventional masculine attire, 'may have created widespread concern among men about the possibility of a general female rebellion against male dominance.'<sup>2</sup> Esther Sowernam's *Esther hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answer To a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (1617) counters the misogynist Swetnam. The final poem, 'A Defence of Women against the Author of the Arraignment of Women', signed by 'Ioane Sharpe', emphasises the hypocrisy of men who first seduce and then condemn inconstant women. The defence exposes the contemporary debate of the whore's representation and the role of man in her construction. Habermann perceives women in early modern texts as 'objects' of a male contest to prove manhood through skills of seduction, 'effecting an institutionalization of desire which oscillates between fetishization and deprecation of its object.'<sup>3</sup> Moral judgement of women as a theme is paramount in early Jacobean drama; Callaghan asserts, 'all the female characters [...] are cursed and exiled specifically on the grounds of their sexual behaviour.'<sup>4</sup> She believes the drama expresses 'male fears of being *dispossessed* of wifely goods [...] in terms of demonic possession', which Monticelso's defamation of Vittoria illustrates, moving from

<sup>1</sup> Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*, ed. by Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Ina Habermann, *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Pub., 2003), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Dympna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A study of King Lear, Othello, the Duchess of Malfi, and The White Devil* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 113.

'name-calling, to demonising, to exorcism'.<sup>5</sup> Such an image of the whore as a figure for exorcism of male anxieties is too simplistic a definition for the Jacobean play *Women Beware Women*.

Middleton presents the whore as a complex figure who cannot simply be defined as a demon or the 'other' in relation to man. The progress of the whore is questioned, especially the responsibility of the male lover. Middleton's play contrasts with a strong body of texts, which Newman identifies as conflating 'the sexual and the economic when representing feminine desire'.<sup>6</sup> She cites Bullinger's *The Christian State of Matrimony*, translated by Myles Coverdale, which includes a whore who bluntly informs her client of the rules: '[n]o more money, no more love.'<sup>7</sup> Middleton complicates the concept of female sexuality as a commodity through a reversal of the conventional sex sale. In *Women Beware Women* Leantio hypocritically mirrors his wife and acts the 'whore' by accepting Livia's offer of economic reward in return for sexual services. Middleton's whore also has the allure of strength and human fallibility. Haselkorn claims that the pure and moral woman 'provides the man some excuse to repulse her "good" but objectionable "perfection"'.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the woman of the satires the Jacobean whore is guilty of sexual transgression and yet can also invite pity and even empathy.

The development of a woman into a whore can be interpreted as a number of alterations between defined sexual stages. Transexuality is a term used within this thesis to refer to just such changes between categories of sexuality. Those who defined these categories sought regulation and order of a fluid and intangible force, femininity. Mendelson and Crawford maintain that maid, wife, and widow were the approved stages of progress for a woman's life, '[a] woman was to be defined by her relationships with a man.'<sup>9</sup> The first stage of a woman's life, the virgin or maid, was not natural or instinctive. Conduct books

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<sup>5</sup> Callaghan, pp. 116–117.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony*, trans. by Myles Coverdale (London: 1541), fol. 31<sup>r</sup>, in *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Kate Aughterson (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 106–8 (p. 107).

<sup>8</sup> Anne M. Haselkorn, 'Sin and the Politics of Penitence: Three Jacobean Adulteresses', in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, ed. by Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550–1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 66.

start from the premise ‘that a woman’s strong sexual urges render her chastity a precarious virtue requiring constant protective vigilance’.<sup>10</sup>

To protect the valuable and first crucial stage of a woman’s sexuality, the father was endowed with responsibility. During the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods concern over the sexual immorality of women was expressed in terms of advice and reprimand to the first ‘container’ of female sexuality, the father. Greene’s *Disputation* advises fathers to ‘bridle their daughters, if they see them anyways grow wantons’.<sup>11</sup> Greene features an apparently first-hand story of ‘The Conversion of an English Courtezan’. She recalls of her parents that ‘they so tenderly affected me, and were so blinded with my excellent qualities, that they had no insight into my ensuing follies’. She is spoiled with impressive attire: ‘[a]s my apparel was costly, so I grew to be licentious, and to delight to be looked on.’<sup>12</sup> James I also ordered all parents to control their daughters and prevent an immoral life. The father was legally entitled to arrange a daughter’s marriage and property, and his connections in making wealthier matches were significant despite the low age of consent for women at twelve and men at fourteen until 1604. The insistence on the role of the first patriarch in a woman’s life, her father, emphasised the female need for male guidance and implied social responsibility for the whore rather than any concept of female self-control.

Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* professes to tell the story of a real ‘whore’, the famous Florentine courtesan Bianca Capello, who died in 1587. He employs the idea of a whore’s progress starting from the chaste innocent who we learn has been willingly stolen from her father by her present husband. The elopement represents an illicit transferral of control from the primary to the secondary patriarch, her husband Leantio. His failure to ‘husband’ Bianca results in her final removal to a third and unapproved patriarch, her rapist and adulterous lover the Duke. Despite the social censure of Bianca’s new incarnation as a ‘whore’, her state is still as clearly defined as any of the other ‘honest’ female categories. The play exposes the external dangers awaiting an unprotected woman,

<sup>10</sup> Henderson and McManus, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Greene, *A Disputation* (1592), in *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets, an anthology of Elizabethan Low Life*, ed. by Gamini Salgado (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 269–315 (p. 269).

<sup>12</sup> Greene, p. 292.

whose beauty secures the Duke's 'appetite' for the 'creature' (II. 2. 15, 16).<sup>13</sup> The agents Guardiano and Livia are determined to feed the Duke's appetite for 'wealth and favour' and are fully aware of the future implications for Bianca (II. 2. 22). Guardiano compares the young pure flesh of Bianca to the old and sexually experienced widow Mother: 'A good conclusion follow, and a sweet one, | After this stale beginning with old ware' (II. 2. 32–3). Women are depicted as maids, wives and used widows, and yet all are susceptible to becoming whores if chosen and manipulated.

Women were expected to reach but not to exceed society's definitions of their sexuality. The implications of a woman reaching beyond her boundaries led to her categorisation as a deviant. Habermann discusses the slandered heroine and imagines the construction of the individual in terms of containment: 'the space of the individual's interiority is delineated by what is perceived as a boundary, but not a boundary set from "within", as in the fantasy of the "autonomous subject" of the enlightenment, but from "without".'<sup>14</sup> Virginity, although valuable and idealised in a young maid, was not viable as a fixed state in society. Virginity heightened the appeal of a prospective wife, yet as she aged, losing beauty and productivity, her virginity was no longer prized. Bosola emphasises such a sentiment in *The Duchess of Malfi*: 'give your foster-daughters good counsel: tell them that the devil takes delight to hang at a woman's girdle, like a false rusty watch, that she cannot discern how the time passes' (II. 2. 24–7).<sup>15</sup> A woman's sexual role was highly dependent upon her age and value to society. The aged virgin was as threatening as the whore through her independence and rejection of the use of her reproductive capacity for patriarchal society. 'The "unused" woman festers with time as much as the "over-used" woman decays with sexually transmitted disease', confirms Callaghan.<sup>16</sup> Significantly the counter-movement of female 'defence' writers adopted the ideal of chastity as a sign of women's superiority in comparison with men as the sexual predators. Jane Anger emphasises the difference: 'Our virginity makes us virtuous; [...] and our chastity maketh our trueness of love manifest.'<sup>17</sup> Despite the idealisation of virtuous chastity, early modern medical thought warned of the physical dangers of a woman's stagnation as a virgin. 'Greensickness'

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, ed. by John Jowett, in *The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 1488–1541.

<sup>14</sup> Habermann, p. 136.

<sup>15</sup> John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, in John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi and other plays*, ed. by René Weis (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1998), pp. 103–200.

<sup>16</sup> Callaghan, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Henderson and McManus, p. 57.

manifested itself in the discoloration of the virgin's upper body, due to an excess of unexpended female seed.

The risks of a woman not reaching her designated role as a wife were based in a concept of voracious female sexuality. Marriage served as the legitimate outlet to express a woman's desires. Don John's trick to discredit Hero's sexual reputation is assisted by the belief in the female sexual appetite in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Howard draws attention to the similarities between the categories of woman and bastard: 'Women and "bastards" [...] are figured as the natural and inevitable source of social disruption and evil.'<sup>18</sup> The connection between the woman and bastard can be taken even further, especially if we consider his mother, the 'whore'. She is deemed a whore partly due to her conception of a child outside of wedlock, a physical symbol and product of illicit female desire. The whore, although a category in itself, is a woman who exceeds her prescribed boundaries and complicates the productive society. Her social disruption is continued through the bastard, a strange mixture of the whore's deviance and the man's legitimate blood. Alan Haynes comments that in Elizabethan England 'there was no severe social embarrassment in being born a bastard since aristocratic fathers generally made provision for them, and the blood of parents counted for much more than the social blemish in law'.<sup>19</sup> Yet Haynes refers to illegitimate sons of wealthy families who are recognised for the benefit of the dynastic line. There was a strong movement against illegitimate children, as seen in church court records, due to their financial burden for the parish. The mother would be punished as through her sexual deviance she conceived the unsupported child. Early modern plays reflect this anxiety by demonising the bastard, and yet rarely present the bastard and his mother, the whore, together. *Women Beware Women* represents only the idea of the pregnant whore after Bianca's rape, and through Isabella's inspection. Ultimately the woman's sexual appetite needed to be controlled by dividing her life into stages defined by men ensuring her value to society. Women who exceeded the approved roles, especially the whore, were attacked as economically draining, harmful to men and order. Transexuality informed the understanding of female sexual development and the system of progressive roles showed an attempt to harness and control the threatening excess of women.

<sup>18</sup> J. E. Howard, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality and the Politics of Gender and Rank in *Much Ado About Nothing*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. by J. E. Howard and M. F. O'Connor (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 163–187 (p. 175).

<sup>19</sup> Alan Haynes, *Sex in Elizabethan England* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub., 2006), p. 20.

### From Virgin to Whore: The Role of Male Violence

The actions of the Duke convert Bianca from the chaste virgin wife to a whore. The play presents the sequence of events starting with the Duke's schemes sexually to possess her body. The actual sex scene is not performed and instead the audience view the aftermath of a rape through Bianca's transition. The role of male violence within her conversion from virgin to whore is performed as a threatening undertone emphasised by physical contact and a suppression of will exacted through speech. Callaghan identifies the violent phallus in tragedy and suggests that 'bawdy analogies concerning penis size, erection, ejaculation, and pain produced by venereal disease [...] [create] the phallus as an instrument of pleasure and power-violence to be used *against* women'.<sup>20</sup> The violence of masculine sexuality is evident in early modern drama, and yet it is often overshadowed by female deceit or schemes to confuse the male protagonist. *Women Beware Women* reveals the fearsome determination of male desire offering typical yet unconvincing justification.

Female beauty through one look can enrage a man's desire, which is soon converted into action. Bianca views the Duke's claim to love at first sight as a pledge: 'here's a heart | Can witness I have seen thee' (II. 2. 323–4). She fears his contract of love from a 'look' as a dangerous threat: 'The more's my danger' (II. 2. 325). Bianca's beauty is blamed for capturing men, firstly Leantio and secondly the Duke; one look 'may do as much harm, son, as a thousand', warns Mother (III. 1. 237). Blame for the temptation and man's act of violation is displaced upon female beauty. Leantio is moved by the face of Bianca to steal her, although willingly, from her family and society. His attempts to conceal her visual power are thwarted by the Duke who after viewing Bianca employs his influence and power to secure a forbidden sexual consummation. Despite Bianca's discovery, Leantio is still desperate to steal her beauty away from others to a secret place: 'There will I lock my life's best treasure up, | Bianca' (III. 1. 247–8). Leantio's hoarding is ridiculed, as he never enjoys the sexual pleasures of a husband, yet the imagery of locking away 'treasure' reveals his fear that another will sexually 'unlock' his wife. Male desire is presented as aggressive and powerful, seizing what is desired.

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<sup>20</sup> Callaghan, p. 167.

Middleton represents the struggle between Leantio and the Duke over the sexual possession of Bianca through a game of chess played by their agents, Livia and Mother. The imagery of the chess game reflects the progression of the sexual battle or rape proceeding off-stage. A discussion of male players has obvious sexual innuendo, foreshadowing the sexual battle between Bianca and the Duke: ‘they set us on! Let us come off | As well as we can, poor souls; men care no farther’ (II. 2. 265–6). Bianca is a pawn and manoeuvred by all the characters in the scene. The chess game continues to allude to the real scheme, while Livia’s black pieces signal her dark intentions. Mother aptly complains that Livia’s ‘rook’, also known as a Duke, ‘chokes up all my game’ (II. 2. 292). Livia expresses the intentions of the Duke:

Here’s a duke  
Will strike a sure stroke for the game anon.  
[*She moves at chess*]  
Your pawn cannot come back to relieve itself. (II. 2. 299–301)

Livia’s success at chess alludes to the Duke’s success off-stage. The ‘sure stroke’ takes the form of his sexual penetration of Bianca, the ‘pawn’ that cannot return to her former virginal self, ‘cannot come back.’ The idea of a fatal blow is a powerful and violent image, creating the phallus as an instrument enforcing submission to the masculine will. Livia and Guardiano orchestrate Bianca into a vulnerable position with the Duke. She is immediately aware of the dangers and voices her rejection of any illicit proposal.

Bianca’s exclamation, ‘O treachery to honour!’, reveals her awareness of the Duke’s purpose and the danger to her reputation (II. 2. 319). The Duke physically grasps Bianca, emphasising the overwhelming power she faces. He is aroused by her relative impotence and fragility, comparing her love to an innocent turtledove: ‘I feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting | Under a loving hand that makes much on’t’ (II. 2. 320–1). The Duke employs an aggressive form of Livia’s art of persuasion supported by physical force:

Pish, strive not, sweet.  
This strength were excellent employed in love now,  
But here ’tis spent amiss. Strive not to seek  
Thy liberty, and keep me still in prison.  
I’faith, you shall not out, till I’m released now.  
We’ll be both freed together, or stay still by’t;  
So is captivity pleasant. (II. 2. 326–31)

The Duke attempts to subdue Bianca's physical resistance; 'strive not' is repeated twice with the affirmative 'you shall not out'. He persuades her of the futility of her attempts to escape 'captivity', destroying her resolve to fight. The Duke does not care for Bianca's reputation, marriage and future, either in society or after death. Her liberty cannot be granted, as it would leave him in the 'prison' of an unsatisfied fantasy. He is determined to contain and enjoy her body and to satisfy his sexual appetite in the present. The Duke refuses to relent to her will unless she pays by allowing him to enjoy a physical sexual release and an outpouring of lust: 'you shall not out, till I'm released now.' The Duke eroticises Bianca's resistance and her efforts to escape in his fantasy of her lovemaking: 'This strength were excellent employed in love now.' He is titillated by his position of power over Bianca:

Thou know'st the way to please me. I affect  
A passionate pleading 'bove an easy yielding,  
But never pitied any — they deserve none —  
That will not pity me. (II. 2. 358–61)

The Duke pressures Bianca sexually to comply: 'Thou know'st the way to please me.' He is aroused by her resistance and enjoys the spectacle of a woman's struggle, although 'never pitied any — they deserve none — | That will not pity me'. Any woman who will not yield and respond to the Duke's desires does not deserve mercy as she cares not for his suffering as a woman should. The paradox of the ideal woman cannot be resolved, as she is of great worth if chaste, and yet, similar to the Petrarchan beloved, is perceived as heartless if she does not respond to men.

Significantly, as a Duke he also expects Bianca's submission. The Duke acts above the law of man and God, and disregards the obstacle of Bianca's marriage, pitying the limited sexual enjoyment of a monogamous and sanctioned relationship. His cure for married life is to take a lover: 'That's a single comfort. | Take a friend to him' (II. 2. 346–7). Religious fears are dismissed as neurotic: 'Do not tremble | At fears of thine own making' (II. 2. 348–9). Bianca admits her weakness, stressing that death and ruin scare her: 'me they must fright.' She exposes her fragility, using images of tempests: 'Then wake I most, the weather fearfullest, | And call for strength to virtue' (II. 2. 356–7). Bianca's respect for the moral order increases the Duke's determination to break her connection with husband and God, and to transfer her allegiance to him. Comparably the chaste and silent Celia of

Jonson's *Volpone* (1607) is also left in a vulnerable position at the home of Volpone. She pleads for his mercy to prevent rape by conjuring images of heaven:

If you have touch of holy saints, or heaven,  
Do me the grace to let me 'scape. If not,  
Be bountiful and kill me.<sup>21</sup>

Celia's plea and promise to pray for him spurs Volpone on to rape her; fortunately Bonario saves her. Volpone and the Duke are aroused by their female victims' pleas for mercy and their tangible fear. In contrast Celia has a devout faith in heaven, while Bianca fears the wrath of God. The Duke takes advantage of Bianca's timid nature and employs rape as a violent assertion of his sexual desire and his political authority to enact his lust. Rape in the early modern period was treated ambiguously as a crime against a person and a crime against property. The Duke is a free agent within the economy of women as McGregor observes, 'women's bodies are commodities — and he controls the economy.'<sup>22</sup>

The superior political authority of man is exemplified in *The White Devil* by the legal committal of Vittoria to a house of Convertites or penitent whores, adding a further dimension to the play's representation of male identity as discussed in the fourth chapter. Vittoria is shocked by her sentence and vocalises her anger: 'A rape, a rape!'<sup>23</sup> Monticelso uses law to rape Vittoria's life, role, freedom and reputation; the public perception of her chastity is crushed by his assertion that she is a whore. Vittoria tells Monticelso, 'Yes, you have ravished justice, | Forced her to do your pleasure', accusing him of subjugating justice to his own agenda (III. 2. 274–5). Callaghan maintains that Vittoria's cry of rape 'makes explicit the connection between sexual violation and involuntary silence, a conjuncture which dislocates the dominant alignment of female quiescence with chastity'.<sup>24</sup> Vittoria's sense of violation is contrasted by the charge of her sexual transgression which will be considered later in the chapter. In *Women Beware Women* Bianca's rape is unseen and literally silences her fears and struggles against the Duke. Both 'rapes' represent man's

<sup>21</sup> Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. by Robert N. Watson (London: New Mermaids, 2007), III. 7. 243–45.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine MacGregor, 'Undoing the body politic: representing rape in *Women Beware Women*', *Theatre Research International*, 23:1 (Spring 1998)

<<http://go.galegroup.com/chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA20876880&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w>> [accessed 6 April 2010]

<sup>23</sup> *The White Devil*, in John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi and other plays* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1998), pp. 1–102 (III. 2. 273).

<sup>24</sup> Callaghan, p. 77.

legal use of violence against women as a privilege of gender. The Duke brutally exposes his power over women as man and ruler:

I can command —  
 Think upon that — yet if thou truly knewest  
 The infinite pleasure my affection takes  
 In gentle, fair entreatings, when love's businesses  
 Are carried courteously 'twixt heart and heart,  
 You'd make more haste to please me. (II. 2. 361–6)

The authority of the patriarchal state is manifested to illustrate the futility of Bianca's resistance. As a woman she has no control over her physical body when confronted by the Duke. With the threat of violence, he promises an easier route of 'infinite pleasure' and 'gentle, fair entreatings,' if she is sexually willing and love is acted 'courteously 'twixt heart and heart'. In exchange for her sexual love and at the cost of her reputation, Bianca is promised 'wealth' and 'honour', the superficial privileges and reverence accorded to the powerful (II. 2. 368). The Duke casts himself as the serpent tempting Eve with forbidden fruit:

She that is fortunate in a duke's favour  
 Lights on a tree that bears all women's wishes.  
 If your own mother saw you pluck fruit there,  
 She would commend your wit and praise the time  
 Of your nativity. Take hold of glory.  
 Do not I know you've cast away your life  
 Upon necessities, means merely doubtful  
 To keep you in indifferent health and fashion.  
 (II. 2. 369–76)

The benefit of 'a duke's favour' is illustrated by a symbolic tree, which 'bears all women's wishes'. The plucking of fruit has strong connotations of ripe and fertile sexuality, yet also alludes to Eve's bite from the apple and the consequent fall of mankind. The idea of a mother's approval is an attempt to encourage Bianca's appetite as a natural female instinct. The Duke targets Bianca's weakness, her poverty, with the bleak depiction of her future married life: she will 'weep whole years in wants' (II. 2. 380). As a 'wise wench' the Duke will protect Bianca from her greatest fears: 'Let storms come when they list, they find thee sheltered' (II. 2. 382). He dominates the final nineteen lines, promising to protect her from the storms of God, nature and social condemnation until they exit. Bianca has no choice but to adhere to the will of a man who is physically and politically superior.

By not staging a rape the dramatist momentarily obscures the influence of his masculine perspective and allows the spectator to react to Bianca without the certainty of her

definition as saint or whore. MacGregor asserts that rape in ‘a simplistic treatment runs the risk of forcing the victim into a role of being whiter than white: if she cannot live up to this role then she cannot have been raped’.<sup>25</sup> Dolan claims that the rape occurs offstage, as a violated female body would implicate the audience as ‘sadistic voyeurs’.<sup>26</sup> By not staging the rape doubt is cast upon Bianca’s true agency, which deliberately emphasises the difficulty of defining female desire or consent. Jennifer Heller describes Middleton’s ‘uncomfortable issue: the question of Bianca’s sexual agency in a trade that offers economic gain in return for her virtue’.<sup>27</sup> Critics have argued over Bianca’s agency in the rape or seduction. Biggs assumes that Bianca due to her sexual desire is complicit, and deserves the outcome. She is simplistically ‘vain and ambitious’, while ‘the Duke offers everything likely to appeal to a woman [...] of her disposition’.<sup>28</sup> Biggs is concerned with defining a rape according to female desire: ‘[i]f the consent is indeterminate, then so is the “rape”’.<sup>29</sup> His response reveals the benefit of not staging rape as it allows the issue of female consent and desire to be criticised without commitment, which could result in censorship. Hutchings rebuts Biggs’s position as prejudicial.<sup>30</sup> MacGregor emphasises the dominance of masculine violence when ‘all men have power over all women, irrespective of the woman’s race or class, through the threat of rape’.<sup>31</sup> Writers such as Biggs fail to realise the influence of the Duke’s gender and class upon Bianca. She is compelled to stay by his authority in the house and scheme of his choosing, as she lives in his realm of Florence. Bianca has no choice and the Duke makes this abundantly clear. She can either fight and be raped or submit quietly to the rape; either way he depicts sexual intercourse as her inevitable fate: ‘I am not here in vain’ (II. 2. 333).

<sup>25</sup> MacGregor, p. 14 (10).

<sup>26</sup> Frances E. Dolan, “‘Gentlemen, I Have One More Thing to Say’: Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563–1680”, *MP*, 92:2 (November 1994), 157–178 (p. 167)

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Heller, ‘Space, violence, and bodies in Middleton and Cary’, *SEL*, 45:2 (Spring 2005), 425–441 (p. 425 (17))

<http://go.galegroup.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1420078396&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w> [accessed 6 April 2010]

<sup>28</sup> Murray Biggs, ‘Does the Duke rape Bianca in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women?*’, *Notes and Queries*, 44:1 (March 1997), p. 99.

<http://go.galegroup.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA19417469&V=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w> [accessed 6 April 2010]

<sup>29</sup> Biggs, p. 97 (4).

<sup>30</sup> Mark Hutchings, ‘Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*: rape, seduction — or power, simply?’, *Notes and Queries*, 45:3 (Sept 1998), p. 366 (2)

<http://go.galegroup.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA21274075&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w> [accessed 6 April 2010].

<sup>31</sup> MacGregor, p. 14 (10).

From the critic's perspective there seems uneasiness in committing to the definition of rape. The play exposes this uncertainty of women, even though Bianca is clearly manoeuvred into a situation which leaves her with no independent choice. The play reveals an intrinsic assumption that women in truth want sexual pleasure. Livia disregards Bianca's distress at her rape as a result of short-lived worries and reveals how deep the concept of the insatiable female desire permeated, as even women questioned another woman's denial of sexual appetite. Middleton warns women to beware women, as they are both victims and agents of the patriarchal reductive ideology.

Bianca re-emerges after the rape in a state of transition. Levin identifies her alteration: 'her long opening speech, the most psychologically arresting of the play, traces tortuous interior changes.'<sup>32</sup> Haselkorn points to Bianca's 'ambivalent feelings of guilt and blame, and she faults others for acting as her pander and her bawd'.<sup>33</sup> Bianca immediately presents the effects of rape and deception by man. She expresses the turmoil of a realisation of her sudden and fixed moral fall. Bianca visualises herself as corrupt and diseased, saying, 'mine honour's leprous', the typical image of a diseased whore (II. 2. 423). She blames and rejects her beauty as the inciter of the Duke's unmerciful lust:

why should I  
Preserve that fair that caused the leprosy?  
Come, poison all at once. (II. 2. 423-5)

Guardiano is attacked for his role as a pander:

Thou in whose baseness  
The bane of virtue broods, I'm bound in soul  
Eternally to curse thy smooth-browed treachery,  
That wore the fair veil of a friendly welcome,  
And I a stranger; think upon't, 'tis worth it.  
(II. 2. 425-29)

Anger is displaced upon Guardiano, whose 'baseness' breeds evil that corrupts her 'virtue'. Bianca exacts a woman's revenge by assuming a phallic tongue 'bound in soul Eternally to curse'. Guardiano is the male counterpart of female deception, a confident hypocrite who conceals his 'smooth-browed treachery' behind a 'fair veil of a friendly welcome'. Bianca

<sup>32</sup> Richard Levin, 'If women should beware women, Bianca should beware mother', *SEL*, 37:2 (Spring 1997), 371-389 (p. 371 (19)).

<<http://go.galegroup.com/chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA19587301&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w>> [accessed 6 April 2010].

<sup>33</sup> Haselkorn, p. 128.

usurps the Duke's rhetoric, condemning Guardiano's crime of false 'welcome' to a 'stranger', and commands him ominously to 'think upon't'. Although the Duke has offended 'to th'death,' she rates Guardiano's crime more severely as the creator of a strumpet, he 'that first made 'em so' (II. 2. 436–7). Bianca's poisoned words, intended for Guardiano 'to feed on', do not penetrate his conscience, and yet these barbs do foretell his painful death (II. 2. 438). Bianca attacks Livia as a 'damned bawd', a procuress, in great contrast to her public address of 'virtuous lady'. Livia, like Guardiano, survives in the social world through discretion and a virtuous facade. Bianca's scorn for Mother is implicit within her sarcastic claim to have seen the 'monument and all', a reference to the Duke's lesson in sex and treachery (II. 2. 450). She also refers to her knowledge of the forbidden: 'I have seen that I little thought to see' (II. 2. 455). Bianca transforms from a victim and accepts her situation, marking a crucial stage in her transition following rape:

I'm made bold now,  
I thank thy treachery. Sin and I'm acquainted,  
No couple greater; And I'm like that great one  
Who, making politic use of a base villain,  
'He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor.'  
So I hate thee, slave. (II. 2. 438–43)

Bianca is emboldened by her conversion from the chaste wife to a whore and embraces the role as an empowerment. She despises the agent of her fall and yet appreciates her union with 'sin', a marriage that ironically provides her with independence and an astringent voice. 'No couple greater', is Bianca's epiphany, the realisation through her sexual awakening that women and sensuality are powerful allies. Bianca is torn between contrasting concepts of the whore. It is clear that morally and socially, adultery for women is destructive and irredeemable. In contrast Bianca's sexual awakening is impressively empowering. Unable as a chaste maid to counter the schemes aimed at her destruction, Bianca as a whore reconstructs herself through her own will and agenda as a 'great one'. She is now aware of the economic value of her body and will make 'politic use' of the 'base villain' who introduced her to the 'treason'. Guardiano is no ally and Bianca stands as his master, despising him as a 'slave' and 'traitor'. She rejects conventional morality and follows a female survival principle similar to Livia. From an objective perspective Bianca embodies the misogynist's construction of the female whore, who, once introduced to her sexuality, even if through rape, is morally lost and will immerse herself in her sensual desires. In fact Bianca embraces her only currency, her sexuality and body, in an economy that all the characters within the play insist upon. She has been made a whore by

the Duke and simply follows the pathway designated by men for one who, although no longer chaste, is now valuable to men for her sexual allure. Bianca takes the only role available and excels at it to her advantage.

Livia, outraged by Bianca's attack, attributes her 'bitter' attitude to 'want of use' and 'sea-sick' or 'tender modesty' (II. 2. 469–70). Livia, the voice of experience, perceives Bianca's turmoil as a state of transition between the chaste maid and the whore. All women are rocked by 'the breaking billow | Of woman's wavering faith, blown with temptations. | 'Tis but a qualm of honour, 'twill away' (II. 2. 471–3). Livia casts every woman as Eve, naturally inclined to sexual pleasure and worldly temptations. She declares that the ideals of female honesty, virtue and 'honour' are fictitious 'qualms' created to keep women ignorant of their true desires. Livia describes sin as first tasting 'like wormwood water', although soon changing to 'nectar'. She creates the image of sin as an addictive pleasure, which with experience converts a woman's tastes, dismissing any notion of morality. Sin will corrupt the user with time, yet morality although effective initially is weak and transient.

Guardiano does not attack female immorality but is impressed with the schemes set to trick women. His reference to 'love's flesh-fly', the motivation behind the sport of preying on women, reflects the desire to consume female flesh while decaying her morality (II. 2. 398). A. A. Bromham describes the rape as 'Cupid's feast', voicing a male perspective of 'the male gaze: Bianca has certainly not been "feasting" but the Duke has'.<sup>34</sup> Guardiano has groomed her appetite or 'stomach by degrees | To Cupid's feast, because I saw 'twas queasy, | I showed her naked pictures' (II. 2. 400–2). Bianca's innocence is countered by Guardiano's claims to have ignited a sexual appetite through the visual image, which Bromham clarifies 'as a kind of pornography to condition Bianca'.<sup>35</sup> The strength of the sight of flesh to inspire desire reflects the impression of a female instinctive sensuality.

The general assumption that all women desire sex adds determination to the Duke's scheme of seduction and rape. Anatomical texts reveal the contemporary attitudes towards the woman as primarily a physical and sensual being. The clitoris was identified as the site

<sup>34</sup> A. A. Bromham, "'A Plague Will Come: Art, Rape, and Venereal Disease in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*', *Enter Text* 3.1 <[http://arts.brunel.ac.uk/gate/entertext/3\\_1\\_pdfs/bromham.pdf](http://arts.brunel.ac.uk/gate/entertext/3_1_pdfs/bromham.pdf)> [accessed 26 February 2010] 145–60 (p. 152).

<sup>35</sup> Bromham, p. 150.

of female sexual pleasure. Realdo Colombo called it the ‘love or sweetness of Venus’,<sup>36</sup> Crooke ‘the especiall seate of delight in [women’s] veneral imbracements,’<sup>37</sup> while *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice Enlarged* described the clitoris as ‘the seat of venereal pleasure’.<sup>38</sup> The clitoris represented more than just a site of sensation; it was also treated as the centre of female sexuality and lust. Nicholas Venette calls it the ‘fury and rage of love’ where ‘[n]ature has placed the seat of pleasure and lust [...] there is lechery and lasciviousness established’.<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Culpeper further claims that the clitoris ‘causeth lust in women, and gives delight in copulation, for without this a woman neither desires copulation or hath pleasure in it, or conceives by it’.<sup>40</sup> The theory of the clitoris presumed that the physical arousal of a woman would ensure conception and therefore was a true indicator of female consent. The midwife Jane Sharp exposes the belief, claiming that the clitoris ‘makes women lustful and take delight in copulation, and were it not for this they would have no desire nor delight, nor would they ever conceive’.<sup>41</sup> The female body is separate from the female consciousness, and passion is traced to a physical site, emphasising the animalistic female libido, with pregnancy as proof of female desire and consent. Colombo dismissed woman’s conscious thought, emphasising the possibilities of manual control over female reproduction, as friction with the clitoris ‘causes their seed to flow forth in all directions, swifter than the wind, even if they don’t want it to’.<sup>42</sup>

The assertion of a woman’s innate physical desire is translated through texts that justify force. Ovid refers to forced rape, ‘subita uiolata rapina’ in his *Ars Amatoria*, and Cynthia E. Garrett comments, ‘by asserting that women enjoy such force, Ovid transforms rape into consensual sex.’<sup>43</sup> Ovid’s authority is bolstered by his references to personal experiences with self-deprecating humour. Garrett exposes the significance of Ovid’s work: ‘the idea that women want to be forced into sex gained popular currency in 1590–1610, a period coinciding with the composition, circulation, and unauthorized publication of Heywood’s

<sup>36</sup> Colombo, *De re anatomica* (Venice: 1559), p. 243 in Maurizio Calbi, *Approximate Bodies, Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia* (1618), p. 238 in Calbi, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice Enlarged* (1656), p. 11, in Aughterson, pp. 64–6 (p. 65).

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Venette, *Conjugal Love; or, The Pleasures of the Marriage Bed* (London: 1750; repr. New York and London: Garland, 1984), pp. 18–19.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A directory for Midwives*, p. 28, in Calbi, *Approximate Bodies*, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Sharp, *The Midwife’s Book* (1671), p. 43, in Aughterson, pp. 129–130.

<sup>42</sup> Colombo, *De re anatomica* (Venice: 1559), p. 243, in Calbi, *Approximate Bodies*, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> Ovid, ed. by A. S. Hollis, line 675, in Cynthia E. Garrett, ‘Sexual consent and the art of love in the early modern English lyric’, *SEL*, 44:1 (Winter 2004), 37–58 (22)

<<http://go.galegroup.com/chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1420088095&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w>> [accessed 6 April 2010]

Art of Love.’<sup>44</sup> Rape cases rarely came to trial, and those that were successful often involved a victim who could not consent, a child or wife.<sup>45</sup> The legal definition of rape hinged upon the issue of female consent and pregnancy would disprove a rape as a physical sign of woman’s orgasm and her consent to the sex. Garrett expands upon the attitude to rape: ‘the period belief that pregnancy proves female consent, and so invalidates a rape charge, simply carries to its extreme the notion that women’s bodies may consent when their words and actions deny.’<sup>46</sup> Again we encounter the belief and fear of the obscurity of the female body, which can desire illicit sex despite the conscious woman refusing.

*Women Beware Women* refers to the assumption of pregnancy as evidence of female desire. Bianca’s rape carries the subsequent fear and expectation of conception. Guardiano is certain of Bianca’s sexual transformation and imagines the physical proof with glee. He ridicules Mother’s gratitude for his kindness to her daughter: ‘Much good may’t do her! — [*Aside*] forty weeks hence, i’faith’ (II. 2. 460). He enjoys contemplating the social scandal that Bianca’s pregnancy, as a sign of illicit desire, will bring. Bianca also fears the implications of her new sexual familiarity with the Duke, which Leantio describes as ‘mischief’. Bianca’s aside, ‘If you call’t mischief; | It is a thing I fear I am conceived with’, suggests that ‘mischief’ has literally conceived a child within her body, and formed her character after the rape (III. 1. 234–35). She is psychologically and externally altered by illicit forced sex, which will taint her reputation. As previously discussed, Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene* also emphasises the belief in a woman’s inherent desire. Truewit claims that all women can be conquered and that a man must persist:

A man should not doubt to overcome any woman. Think he can vanquish ’em and he shall; for though they deny, their desire is to be tempted. [...] They would solicit us, but that they are afraid. Howsoever, they wish in their hearts we should solicit them. Praise ’em, flatter ’em, you shall never want eloquence or trust; even the chastest delight to feel themselves that way rubb’d. With praises you must mix kisses too. If they take them, they’ll take more. Though they strive, they would be overcome.<sup>47</sup>

He advocates the action of the man on the basis that a woman is ‘afraid’ to express ‘desire’. There is no exception as ‘even the chastest’ enjoys the attentions of a man and

<sup>44</sup> Garrett, p. 37 (22).

<sup>45</sup> Nazife Bashar, ‘Rape in England between 1550 and 1700’, in *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men’s Power, Women’s Resistance, London Feminist History Group* (London: Pluto, 1983), pp. 28–42 (42).

<sup>46</sup> Garrett, p. 37 (22).

<sup>47</sup> Ben Jonson, *Epicoene or the Silent Woman*, ed. by L. A. Beaurline, Regents renaissance Drama Series (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), IV. 1. 67–77.

any sign of weakness should be seized, 'they'll take more.' Truewit even claims that if they 'strive' force is acceptable:

It is to them an acceptable violence, and has oftentimes the place of the greatest courtesy. She that might have been forc'd, and you let her go free without touching, though she then seem to thank you, will ever hate you after; and glad i' the face, is assuredly sad at the heart.

(IV. 1. 79–83)

'Violence' is a 'courtesy' for a woman restricted by decorum. Truewit paints the falsity of women as their gratitude is in fact hate, and so a lover who respects her words is no man. Truewit advocates a strategy to deal successfully with women: a man must imitate them, 'i' their own height', and show cunning to win their affections (IV. 1. 88). Women are different creatures to men and so must be manipulated to the man's aims:

Nor will it be out of your gain to make love to her too, so she follow, not usher, her lady's pleasure. All blabbing is taken away when she comes to be a part of the crime.

(IV. 1. 117–20)

Once a woman is persuaded or forced into sexual relations she is 'part of the crime' and all past 'babbling' or resistance is irrelevant. The Collegiate ladies confirm the impression of women consistently desiring sexual relations, warning: 'she that now excludes her lovers may live to lie a forsaken beldam in a frozen bed' (IV. 3. 39–41). The play presents further male assumptions concerning female sexuality which we will return to discuss later in the chapter.

The Duke in *Women Beware Women* also adopts a strategy to capture Bianca. Bromham sees the Duke constructed as a God, a 'monument' amongst the mythological renaissance art, who attempts to transform Bianca into a Venus, a 'figure from a painting, to idealise and construct her as a goddess'.<sup>48</sup> Her beauty and gentility are 'such as bless the faces | Of figures that are drawn for goddesses' (II. 2. 339–40). The Duke moulds Bianca into a sensual goddess of his own fantasy through flattery and the threat of violence: 'I should be sorry the least force should lay | An unkind touch upon thee' (II. 2. 342–3). From the moment Bianca is left on the stage balcony alone with the Duke, her fate, as a 'whore', seems sealed. Lisa Hopkins asserts that 'the framing balcony inscribes on this Bianca [...] that of future ducal bride', and similarly Bianca inadvertently frames herself and 'her

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<sup>48</sup> Bromham, p. 150.

meaning for others'.<sup>49</sup> It appears predestined that she will be his lover and that her resistance is futile. A comparison with Theseus's treatment of Hippolita in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows the assumption that an illicit rape can be transformed into a respectable marriage:

I woo'd thee with my sword,  
And won thy love doing thee injuries;  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.<sup>50</sup>

Theseus 'turns to theater, to "pomp [...] triumph [...] and revelling" to turn something like a rape into a legitimate marriage', suggests Levine.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the Duke and Bianca, marriage is employed by the man and society to repair the shame of rape. Similar to pregnancy, marriage acted as a proof of the true consent of the woman, and suggests that rape is not irredeemable as sex is natural to women.

Bianca's ease with her new sexual awakening is expressed through frustration with the insular domestic home of her husband. Calbi observes that the Duke's rape 'instigates the re-emergence of that unsatisfied desire which is ostensibly banned from the private realm of the conjugal couple'.<sup>52</sup> Bianca performs the role of the vain whore, proving to an extent the misogynist's belief that all women are licentious. Mother observes how Bianca has 'strangely altered' and 'grown so cutted', alluding to her sharp tongue and the idea of forced entry by the play on the word 'cunt' (III. 1. 3–7). Bianca's disobedience is a 'plague' or a product of sexual 'disease', which her son has 'brought home with him' (III. 1. 13, 172–173). Mother hits upon Bianca's loss of virginity: 'She's no more like the gentlewoman at first | Than I am like her that ne'er lay with man yet' (III. 1. 66–7). Bianca's illicit sexual experience has changed her whole outlook, and ignited her desire for luxury and sensual excess. The Duke's penetration, like the devil, leaves her insatiable: 'the devil's in her, | Nothing contents her now' (III. 1. 72–3). Bianca expresses her frustration after experiencing the sexual prowess of the powerful Duke: 'I have had the best content' (III. 1. 121). She desires a better home near 'court' to watch 'gallants' from

<sup>49</sup> Lisa Hopkins, 'Art and Nature in *Women Beware Women*', *RENAISSANCE forum* 1:2 (September 1996), <<http://www.hull.ac.uk/renforum/v1no2/hopkins/htm>> [accessed 6 April 2010], p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *The Arden Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pp. 889–912 (I. 1. 16–19).

<sup>51</sup> Laura Levine, 'Rape, Repetition and the politics of closure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture, Emerging Subjects*, ed. by Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 210–228 (p. 210).

<sup>52</sup> Calbi, p. 91.

her 'window', all emblems of sexual freedom (III. 1. 129, 131). Bianca was previously unaware of the power of her beauty from a window, although now she wishes to see and be seen like a prostitute selling her wares. Leantio even imagines Bianca as a strumpet. He misdirects the Duke's messenger to another street of sexual immorality, gallants and new buildings:

I saw gallants there  
In the new houses that are built of late.  
Ten to one, there you find her. (III. 1. 200–2)

Leantio alerts Bianca to the Duke's knowledge of her name, she answers, 'Ay, and my good name too; | That's the worse o'th' twain' (III. 1. 208–9). Bianca is self-reflective and holds the Duke responsible for her moral fall by taking her 'good' reputation.

Bianca's acid tongue compensates for her moral demise through demands of luxury and fashion, emphasising their association with fallen women. She desires 'cushion-cloth drawn-work', 'fair cut-work', a 'silver and gilt casting-bottle', 'a silver basin and ewer', all of which Bianca feels 'one of my fashion looks for of duty' (III. 1. 19–24). She asserts her 'copy', her legal right of birth to 'wrangle' and force her due (III. 1. 59, 57). In complete contrast to her former silent and chaste self, Bianca demands the wealthy lifestyle of the Duke. She claims that in reward for a wife's 'free gift | Of their whole life to a husband' they look to be 'Higher respected, and maintained the richer' (III. 1. 50–3). Heller identifies the ideal woman contained in the domestic sphere of 'chastity, silence, and obedience', while 'women in the revenge tragedy often violate these social boundaries'.<sup>53</sup> Bianca's cold indifference to Leantio expresses her discontent with married domesticity.

Leantio takes note of Bianca's new articulate tongue, a symbol of loose morality and the scold's defiance, remarking, 'You make your lip so strange' (III. 1. 157). Her artful tongue is employed to avoid wifely obligations, for example when she forbids her husband to 'kiss me before company' (III. 1. 137). Kissing is 'idlest fondness', 'a disease', and inspired by a 'French curtsy' (III. 1. 160–4). She strips the kiss of all sentimentality and it becomes part of over-elaborate manners with connotations of the 'French' disease of syphilis. Bianca is now beyond her husband's control, and desires the world instead of the original plan to 'gaze upon you always' (III. 1. 142):

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<sup>53</sup> Heller, p. 425 (17).

'Tis full as virtuous  
 For woman's eye to look on several men  
 As for her heart, sir, to be fixed on one. (III. 1. 146–8)

Bianca advances the argument that looking is not the same as enjoying another man, yet the audience are aware of her preference for the Duke as opposed to her husband. Bianca's forbidden knowledge is reflected in her desire to explore the material world outside the marital home: 'Think of the world, how we shall live' (III. 1. 165). She imposes Leantio's enforced fast to support her argument:

'Tis time to leave off dalliance: 'tis a doctrine  
 Of your own teaching, if you be remembered,  
 And I was bound to obey it. (III. 1. 168–70)

Her bitter remark reproves Leantio for his over zealous practice of a physical fast, and also emphasises his sexual double standards, as he now desires 'dalliance' on his own terms while she is expected to 'obey it'. Now that Bianca has broken the yoke of marriage she is sexually empowered and can equally restrict Leantio's sexual pleasure.

Middleton's representation of a victim of rape contrasts with other contemporary literary depictions. One prominent type is the innocent woman who, persecuted by man's violent passion, endures her suffering. She chooses death rather than violation, like Lady Isabella when threatened by Rodomonte in Harington's *Orlando Furioso*. Harvey's study of the female voice in the complaint tradition reflects the same issues highlighted by Bianca's transformation. She observes the complaint's use of 'a feminine voice that warns of the consequences of seduction or rape, that implicitly or explicitly counsels chastity, or that forecasts the bitter aftermath of erotic pleasure'.<sup>54</sup> Alternatively Bianca is the mouthpiece for virginal chastity, the victim resisting rape and yet also the woman who embraces her sensuality. Both the complaint and *Women Beware Women* create female sexuality in response to masculine aggression. One notable difference is the complaint's restriction of the expression of female sexuality, which Harvey describes as 'a kind of cultural imprisonment of feminine erotic experience', with a 'narrowness of experiential

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 141. Harvey refers to the following examples of complaint: Churchyard's 'The Tragedy of Shore's Wife', Daniel's 'The Complaint of Rosamond', some letters in Drayton's *England's Heroicall Epistles* and his 'Matilda', Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece: A Lover's Complaint*, Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis', and Marvell's 'The Nymph Complaining on the Death of her Fawn'.

possibility'.<sup>55</sup> Middleton's Bianca acts as a point of discussion for the effects of a violent male sexuality without restricting her role to the eternally pure and suffering woman. Bianca rejects her rapist's advances and immediately after her sexual experience is racked with guilt and anger; however, significantly she does not commit suicide but explores the possibilities of her role as the whore.

### The Whore, Contemporary Prostitution and Crime

The popularity of the 'whore' in literature and drama reveals an obsession with illicit sexual relations and the commercial sex trade. Does the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century representation of the 'whore' have any real connection with contemporary prostitution? The previous discussion of Bianca's development into a whore in *Women Beware Women* discovered her ambiguous depiction. A whore who reaches the evil depths of murder and yet who also assumes the advantages of a role thrust upon her, Bianca is converted by the violent actions of a man, rather than the Cardinal's later belief that a whore corrupted the man. Both attitudes towards the whore are presented in texts and theatre. Archer identifies the literary interest: '[t]he Elizabethan reading public was saturated in the image of a deviant counter-culture.'<sup>56</sup> Anti-theatricalists actually characterised the theatre as a den of prostitution with obscenely educative plays. Prynne in *Histrionomastix* expresses his concern: '[b]ut this our publicke lewdnesse is acted in the open viewe of all men: the obscaenity of common whores is surpassed, and men have found out how they may commit adultery before the eyes of others.'<sup>57</sup>

The increasing interest in sexual transgression and its prosecution is evident in Vittoria's trial in *The White Devil*, a process earlier noted for its bias towards male authority. The trial is originally intended to prove Vittoria's guilt as a husband killer, and yet with limited evidence Francisco advises that she is tried for 'incontinence' (III. 2. 189).<sup>58</sup> As evidence, Monticelso supplies an incriminating letter from the Duke soliciting Vittoria to a meeting from which he divulges the preliminary and least shameful entertainment of 'wanton

<sup>55</sup> Harvey, p. 141.

<sup>56</sup> Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 204.

<sup>57</sup> William Prynne, *Histrionomastix*, ed. by Arthur Freeman (New York & London: Garland Pub., 1974), p. 331.

<sup>58</sup> John Webster, *The White Devil* in *John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi and other plays*, ed. by R. Weis (Oxford and New York: OUP), pp. 1–102.

bathing and the heat | Of a lascivious banquet' to the court (III. 2. 196–7). Vittoria admits temptation although she stresses that the letter only represents Bracciano's request and not her 'frosty' rebuttal (III. 2. 202):

Condemn you me for that the Duke did love me?  
O may you blame some fair and crystal river  
For that some melancholic distracted man  
Hath drown'd himself in't. (III. 2. 203–6)

Vittoria strikes at the heart of the trial, her lone arraignment for 'incontinence', as the Duke is untouchable for such a charge. Vittoria is condemned for the Duke's love, as ultimately her involvement in the murders is purely speculative. She compares herself to a clear and honest river unfairly blamed for the drowning of a man. Monticelso converts the image to suggest that the Duke was intoxicated and corrupted by Vittoria, he was 'Truly drowned indeed' (III. 2. 207). Vittoria feels victimised for her instinctive 'beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart, | And a good stomach', which are interpreted as markers of sin (III. 2. 208–209). She attacks Monticelso's unfair persecution of one woman and advises that he 'go pistol flies, | The sport would be more noble' (III. 2. 211–12). Monticelso retorts with further evidence of Vittoria's prostitution, the Duke's payment of 'interest for his lust' (III. 2. 224). Vittoria eloquently exposes the injustice of her trial especially Monticelso's assumption of the contradictory roles of prosecutor, witness and judge: 'If you be my accuser | Pray cease to be my judge' (III. 2. 225–6). The difficulty of proving murder is contrasted by the ease of proving a woman a whore with dubious evidence. Vittoria's trial reflects the real case of Margaret Ferne-seede, as discussed in the previous chapter, who was burned at the stake for killing her husband. In addition to her act against 'male supremacy', Ferne-seede was also depicted as sexually immoral. Reportedly a prostitute who then progressed to a bawd, while also keeping a young man in an illicit affair, Henderson and McManus perceive her sexual history as 'evidence used to convict her of her husband's murder'.<sup>59</sup> The conviction of a 'whore' was easy to believe and often was interpreted as a sign of further sin. The sexual reputation of a woman is significant as a marker of her whole character and despite the lack of evidence, her 'black lust' is enough to incriminate and make her infamous.

For, sir, you know we have nought but circumstances  
To charge her with, about her husband's death.  
Their approbation therefore to the proofs  
Of her black lust shall make her infamous

<sup>59</sup> Henderson and McManus, pp. 68–9.

To all our neighbouring kingdoms. (III. 1. 4–8)

The attack on Vittoria as a whore is an indirect assault upon her male lover by convicting and removing his object of desire and his possession. Monticelso is not concerned with Marcello and Flamineo who are set free; however, Vittoria draws his attention by her ‘public fault’ which extinguishes ‘all noble pity’:

For you, Vittoria, your public fault,  
 Joined to th’condition of the present time,  
 Takes from you all the fruits of noble pity.  
 Such a corrupted trial have you made  
 Both of your life and beauty, and been styled  
 No less in ominous fate than blazing stars  
 To princes. Here’s your sentence: your are confin’d  
 Unto a house of convertites, and your bawd. (III. 2. 257–64)

Monticelso claims that she has ‘corrupted’ the trial with her ‘life and beauty’, while he as legally corrupted the trial by acting as prosecutor and judge. She has been upheld like ‘blazing stars to princes’, held to a height of luxury and position from which he will tear her down. A fallen star also signalled a great death, and by implication Monticelso emphasises his hope that Vittoria’s downfall will herald that of Bracciano. Monticelso stresses the privileges of Vittoria’s life as Bracciano’s whore, which the Duke also promises to Bianca in *Women Beware Women*. Drama and literature displayed an obsession with the pampered mistress, a whore who parades as a member of the privileged elite: ‘[b]awdes, that now sit no longer upon the skirtes of the Cittie, but iett up and downe, euen in the cloake of the Cittie, and giue more rent for a house, then the proudest *London* occupier of them all.’<sup>60</sup> The sexual history and immorality of a wife is a potent anxiety. Monticelso talks of Vittoria when Camillo sought to secure their union:

He spent there in six months  
 Twelve thousand ducats, and to my acquaintance  
 Received in dowry with you not one Julio.  
 ’Twas a hard pennyworth, the ware being so light.  
 I yet but draw the curtain. Now to your picture:  
 You came from thence a most notorious strumpet,  
 And so you have continued. (III. 2. 239–45)

Camillo is a victim who spent a great deal to purchase Vittoria and in turn received a morally ‘light’ wife with no dowry. Vittoria is cast as faulty goods and a traitor to the marriage contract through loose morality prior to and during her marriage. Monticelso’s evidence and the scene of her crime are purely a construct of his language:

<sup>60</sup> T. Dekker, *Newes from Hell* (1606), in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by F. Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1953–61), II. 391, sig. Bii.

Who knows not how, when several night by night  
 Her gates were choked with coaches, and her rooms  
 Outbraved the stars with several kind of lights,  
 When she did counterfeit a prince's court? (III. 2. 72–5)

The only evidence of a trading whore within the play is created from Monticelso's imagination, revealing his own frustrations as a cardinal. He manipulates language to prove to the court that a woman is a whore, and the perceived consequences of her sexual transgression will be considered later in the chapter. As previously noted, Leantio in *Women Beware Women* also creates an imagined site of strumpets and gallants at a new house. The fascination with the whore who is pampered, privileged and courted by the rich avoids the unpleasant social reality. Prostitution when confined to the home or apartment, although threatening, is distanced from the violence and 'dirt' of the sex trade. The dramatisation of wives and virgins on the precipice of becoming whores is close to the domestic world of the spectator and yet not based in the gritty reality of prostitution. The recurrent motif of the woman in the window embodies the performance of a 'whore'. Barry's *Ram-Alley* depicts Mistress Taffeta calling to gentlemen from her window; a prostitute sits at the window in *How a Man May Choose*, and Mall Berry of *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* applies her cosmetics before a window.<sup>61</sup> 'Sitting in a window, like sitting in a doorway, often allied a woman with prostitution in the popular imagination', observes Woodbridge.<sup>62</sup> In *Volpone* Corvino interprets Celia at a window as a whore presenting her wares:

You smile,  
 Most graciously, and fan your favors forth,  
 To give your hot spectators satisfaction! (II. 3. 7–9)

A jealous husband perceives the whore as an actor, and 'action' can be interpreted sexually or theatrically. The window is a breach of the domestic sphere, and Bianca was taken from her father's window in *Women Beware Women*. Men interpret wives at windows as advertising their sexual bodies.

*The Roaring Girl*, previously analysed in the second chapter, and Field's *Amends for Ladies* situate their action within a more local and 'realistic' setting. Field's *Amends for*

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Faire Maid of the Exchange* (1607), The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: OUP, 1962).

<sup>62</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540–1620* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), p. 176.

*Ladies* features the wine-drawer in the tavern who warns the boys not to disturb 'poor gentlewomen' in the surrounding chambers.<sup>63</sup> The roaring boys comprehend his meaning and order a 'whore' with their wine (III. 4. 22). The wine-drawer exclaims, 'Why, what d'ye think of me? am I an infidel, a Turk, a pagan, a Saracen' (23–24). The brothel trade is imagined in an exotic context, drawing on contemporary ideas of foreign sexual freedom in harems presided over by an 'infidel'. The playhouse is also identified as a favourite haunt of the women when the wine-drawer comments, 'I have been at Bess Turnup's, and she swears all the gentlewomen went to see a play at the Fortune, and are not come in yet, and she believes they sup with the players' (24–27). The association of the theatre as a centre for prostitution and entertainment emphasises its perceived social threat of disorder. *The Roaring Girl* constructs the city with visions of criminal and sexual spaces. Beyond the City's jurisdiction, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, a coachman beckons to a gallant 'all your famous whores have to Ware', while Laxton tells Moll that she, like other whores, is 'suited for the Three Pigeons at Brainford' (III. 1. 16–17, 52). Both plays strive to represent the disorder of female sexuality in the streets of London, and yet the emphasis on the erotic and comic distances the audience from the poverty of commercial prostitution.

Robert Greene's *A Disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher, whether a Theefe or Whoore, is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Commonwealth* takes a step closer to exploring the criminal world of prostitution, interpreting it as a social problem for man. *A Disputation* claims to enlighten the reader to the secret danger of the strumpet. The persona addresses himself to all gentlemen, merchants, apprentices and country farmers, and feels drawn to the 'inconvenience' experienced by such men 'through the lightness of inconstant wantons, who, being wholly given to the spoil, seek the ruin of such as light into their company'.<sup>64</sup> Those who converse with the harlots not only risk the loss of goods and name, they also 'fish for diseases, sickness, sores incurable, ulcers bursting out of the joints, and salt rheums, which by the humour of that villainy, leapt from Naples into France and from France into the bowels of England'. The pain of syphilis and the physical reality of its lesions and scars are evidence of sin: it 'makès many

<sup>63</sup> N. Field, *Amends for Ladies in Nero & Other Plays*, ed. by Herbert P. Horne, Havelock Ellis, Arthur Symons & A. Wilson Verity (London: Bradbury, Agnew, 1888), pp. 413–488.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Greene, *A Disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher, whether a Theefe or Whoore, is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Commonwealth* (1592), in *Conny-Catchers and Bawdy Basket: An anthology of Elizabethan Low Life*, ed. by Gāmini Salgādo (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 265–315 (p. 267).

cry out in their bones, [...] [and] engraves a perpetual shame in the forehead of the party so abused'.<sup>65</sup>

The image of the enchantress returns as the persona reveals the devices of the harlot:

What flatteries they use to bewitch, what sweet words to inveigle, what simple holiness to entrap, what amorous glances, what smirking ceillades, what cringing curtsies, what stretching 'adios', following a man like a bloodhound, with their eyes white, laying out of hair, what frowning of tresses, what paintings, what ruffs, cuffs and braveries — and all to betray the eyes of the innocent novice.<sup>66</sup>

These women are the exotic hunters and men are their naïve prey. The strumpet employs the enchantress's magical powers through a lover's glance. She is also painted as a fashionable woman, using cosmetics and costumes to entrap and deceive. Like an animal on the scent, displaying the 'whites' of her eyes, she ruthlessly hunts the innocent novice. The social causes for her existence are not considered. Even Greene's case study of the reformed courtesan is couched in terms of her personal failings and her love of flattery; her first 'fop' lover is treated as an extra in the tale of her own downfall. Mythical horror furthers the dehumanising process of the text:

The crocodile hath not more tears, Proteus more shape, Janus more faces, the hieria more sundry tunes to entrap the passengers, than our English courtesans — to be plain, our English whores — to set on fire the hearts of lascivious and gazing strangers.<sup>67</sup>

The 'strumpets, whose throats are softer than oil, and yet whose steps lead unto death', remind the reader of the siren luring men to their doom.<sup>68</sup> Greene depicts the young man as a victim of prostitution. Archer records the comments of Fulk Mounslow, a client of prostitute Jane Harding, who similarly alleged that she 'allureth and entyceth many yonge men to their utter ruine and decay, not only in expendinge & consumynge their goodes & good name but also in entisinge them to such inconveniences that are & be abhomyneable & detestable before the face of god'.<sup>69</sup> The enticement of apprentices who steal from their masters to feed their illicit desires was a standard argument against brothels. Greene evokes the dangers of the whore with the same emphasis of warning to naïve men.

<sup>65</sup> Greene, p. 267.

<sup>66</sup> Greene, p. 268.

<sup>67</sup> Greene, p. 268.

<sup>68</sup> Greene, p. 268.

<sup>69</sup> GL, MS 3018/1, fols 11<sup>v</sup>, 35<sup>v</sup>, in Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, p. 207.

The disputation takes place between Laurence, 'a Foist', and fair Nan, 'a Traffic', to debate whether a whore or thief is more dangerous? Nan asserts that 'women, I mean of our faculty, a traffic, or, as base knaves term us, strumpets, are more subtle, more dangerous in the commonwealth, and more full of wiles to get crowns, than the cunningest foist'.<sup>70</sup> She offers proof with the example of a whore who 'Cony-Catched a Foist'. After flattering the foist with 'a little nice loving and bidding, she was content for her supper and what else he would of courtesy bestow upon her, for she held it scorn, she said, to set a salary price on her body'.<sup>71</sup> The strumpet is presented as a false merchant who teases her client by refusing to set the price for her body. The victim distrusts the whore and conceals money in his doublet. Despite his precautions the whore with accomplices succeeds in stealing his clothes and money while he is hiding in the closet.<sup>72</sup> Nan's tales emphasise the revelry in the whore's cunning tricks to impress the reader, which undermines the pamphlet's claim to warn against the evil dangers of the strumpet. Nan's whore is mercenary and premeditative, far worse in her use of man than a thief: 'she flatters him, she inveigles him, she bewitcheth him, that he spareth neither goods nor lands to content her, that is only in love with his coin.'<sup>73</sup> The wider impact of the whore is exposed:

If he be married, he forsakes his wife, leaves his children, despiseth his friends, only to satisfy his lust with the love of a base whore, who, when he hath spent all upon her and he brought to beggary, beateth him out like the prodigal child, and or a small reward, brings him, if to the fairest end, to beg, if to the second, to the gallows, or at the last and worst, to the pox, or as prejudicial diseases.<sup>74</sup>

England is the home of syphilis, and the 'whore' its corruptive source. Nan offers an analogy of murder and theft to depict the whore's danger to man's essence. In comparison with the male thief, 'the woman is most bloody, for she always urgeth unto death, and though the men would only satisfy themselves with the party's coin, yet she endeth her theft in blood, murdering parties, so deeply as she is malicious.'<sup>75</sup> The whore is bloody in nature and bloody in sex, as suggested by the subtext of innuendo. She 'selfishly' desires orgasm or 'death' and so the man is forced to penetrate 'deeply'. The whore steals his blood and leaves him vulnerable to disease and death. Such an attitude is based upon the contemporary myth that woman physically sucks man dry of seed and life during sexual

<sup>70</sup> Greene, p. 271.

<sup>71</sup> Greene, p. 279.

<sup>72</sup> Greene, p. 280.

<sup>73</sup> Greene, p. 287.

<sup>74</sup> Greene, p. 287.

<sup>75</sup> Greene, p. 288.

intercourse. Greene presents prostitution as a crime against the health and prosperity of men and society. Greene's treatment is closer to the reality of the common prostitute in comparison to *Women Beware Women*. Despite the apparent realism, Greene creates a 'characterisation' of low life, reminiscent of the base elements of Marston's and Guilpin's satires. Greene's text is a familiar cautionary tale to warn men, while also enjoying the illicit nature of the underworld.

Social historians offer an alternative perspective of early modern prostitution. The most sophisticated establishments appeared to house up to nine prostitutes who would pay the keeper a high rent (4s. to 6s. a week) often in addition to a portion of their earnings (as much as three-quarters). At the poorer extreme of the spectrum, the lodging and alehouse keepers rented out chambers in alleys where more mobile prostitutes traded. Some rented themselves independently and privately as mistresses in long-term relations, which appear most familiar in *Women Beware Women* and *The White Devil*. Others whose profits were tied to the volume of their clients were more likely to depend upon a keeper. Casual prostitutes were independent yet vulnerable to their landlords and lacked access to the wealthier clients. Gradual change in the authorities' regulation of prostitution encouraged a re-evaluation by some of the idea of the empowered whore. The exciting literary portrayal of the dominant and relatively autonomous prostitute, Frances, in Nashe's *The Choise of Valentines*, presented the brothel as a site of masculine submission and female sexual and financial freedom, as revealed in the fourth chapter. The movement to suppress disorderly female sexuality exposed an alternative side to the prostitute.

After 1546 attempts to officially regulate the stews were abandoned and from 1570 the London brothels were targeted for suppression. The London mayor Rowland Hill was instrumental in the founding of Bridewell. During the 1570s sanctions were increased and its governors employed warrants to arrest keepers and clients named by pimps. Traditional punishments of carting and banishment were supplemented with Bridewell's incarceration, labour and whipping. Records of the Middlesex sessions and the King's Bench also expose establishments in the notorious Clerkenwell, St John's Street, Whitechapel, and Shoreditch, and surprisingly other areas under the City's jurisdiction. Despite the movement there is evidence for at least one hundred bawdy houses still in operation during the late 1570s. One keeper commented, 'men come to those houses and have harlottes as

redely and comenly as men have vittelles honestlye in vittelinge houses for ther money.<sup>76</sup> Archer blames court connections for the ultimate failure of the civic campaign against prostitution. Many brothels and notorious offenders such as Black Luce of Clerkenwell were immune from prosecutions. Bridewell only applied slight sanctions in other cases, often simply enforcing a relocation of the offender to another area of the city. Significantly some keepers were protected by court figures, as ‘London’s bawdy houses were another of the capital’s service industries directed towards gentry visitors’.<sup>77</sup> Depositions of pimps and keepers reveal that many clients were drawn from the foreign merchant community, Embassy staff, gentlemen of the Inns of Court, servants of prominent court or government figures and sometimes from these higher ranks as well. Archer suspects that ‘these patterns of clientage meant that Bridewell’s investigations often stirred muddy waters near the centre of power’.<sup>78</sup> The court immunity bestowed upon brothels revealed a concerning element of corruption amongst the higher ranks of men in authority. In January 1579 Gilbert Periam revealed to governors how he pimped for Sir Horatio Palavacino, luminary of Elizabeth’s court, diplomat, and financier, who required ‘some mayden to abuse who had not been dealte with all before’. Unable to find such a girl in London, Periam was dispatched to Guildford with a horse and ten shillings.<sup>79</sup> Archer records numerous counts of prosecutions dismissed due to the influence of powerful men protecting their interests. These include Lord Robert Dudley who in 1559 intervened on behalf of Helen Andrewes indicted by the wardmote inquest of Cheap; the earl of Pembroke and other privy councillors who wrote on behalf of John Thrush similarly indicted in 1564; and John Hollingbrig, gentleman, who wore the livery of Lord Ambrose Dudley and ran a brothel in Holborn in the mid 1570s.<sup>80</sup> ‘When the authorities attempted to take action against wealthy or well-connected offenders, the controversies surrounding Bridewell were openly acted with highly embarrassing consequences to the City’, concludes Archer.<sup>81</sup> The public failure of the campaign exposed how men owned women; they could keep them afloat as prostitutes or like judges convict them and yet those men supporting the trade were rarely caught due to their privileged position. It revealed that powerful men were at the root of ‘female’ crime and were untouchable.

<sup>76</sup> BCB. III, fol. 318, in Archer, p. 215.

<sup>77</sup> Archer, p. 231.

<sup>78</sup> Archer, p. 232.

<sup>79</sup> BCB. III, fol. 377, cf. BCB. II, fol. 235, in Archer, p. 232.

<sup>80</sup> CLRO., Rep. 14, fol. 149<sup>v</sup>; Rep. 15, fols 306<sup>v</sup>, 338; BCB. II, fol. 117<sup>v</sup>; *Middlesex County Records*, 1. 94–5, in Archer, p. 232

<sup>81</sup> Archer, p. 232.

Bridewell, the main apparatus of the campaign against commercial sex, was discredited by its failure to convict those protected by the influential and also through the scandalous methods of its treasurer Robert Winch. The pimp Henry Boyer claimed that he was imprisoned for five days with no bed ‘other than the bare earth and the meate he then had was onely such thynne porredge and black breade as a dogge would skarse eate’; he was forced to witness the lashing of a prostitute, and threatened with the same until he confessed.<sup>82</sup> Despite his guilty plea before aldermen in 1581, Archer notes, ‘he was able to convince many influential people that the Bridewell establishment was corrupt, and the controversies convinced others that the campaign against prostitution was a misdirected effort.’<sup>83</sup> The failure of the moral movement publicly appeared to be the result of corruption amongst high-ranking men who had a vested financial interest in the sex trade of women. I propose that the flawed process of the campaign encouraged the gradual realisation or view that the women in prostitution were not necessarily the ‘empowered whore’ of Nashe’s imagination, but were also victims. Such an attitude is reflected in the portrayal of Bianca in *Women Beware Women* as a woman converted into a whore by a man for a man’s purpose. Vittoria’s conviction for ‘black lust’ in *The White Devil* also reflects the belief that the man involved in her sin was immune to the law. The powers of Bridewell signalled a willingness to prosecute clients of prostitutes and although the campaign did not succeed it did contribute to a change or at least understanding that the whore could be the victim of a man.

Henderson and McManus observe an alteration in attitudes at the turn of the century, whereby ‘Puritan preachers and conduct books began to challenge the double standard of sexual morality’.<sup>84</sup> William Heale also protests in *An Apology for Women* (1620):

Yet so injurious are the censures of these our times, that if a *Jove* vanquish but, or vitiare, or in vanquishing, viciate a silly *Io*, a graue *Cato* a light or tender *Virgin*, black infamy shall ouercloud, and brand her reputation, not once touching his.<sup>85</sup>

He attacks the condemnation of women and not men in cases of sexual immorality. The risks to the prostitute included sexual disease, condemnation as a whore, whipping or

<sup>82</sup> CLRO, Rep. 20, fols 115<sup>v</sup>–16 in Archer, p. 233.

<sup>83</sup> Archer, p. 233.

<sup>84</sup> Henderson and McManus, p. 57.

<sup>85</sup> William Heale, *An Apology for Women; or, Women’s Defence* (London: E[dward] G[riffin] for Ri. Whittakers, 1620), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 18508, Huntington Library <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010] (p. 15).

imprisonment. 'Their clients seem to have been invisible to the authorities, and to have escaped punishment altogether', claim Mendelson and Crawford.<sup>86</sup> A woman accused of whoredom and bastardy was threatened with social exclusion. Women who repeatedly gave birth to illegitimate children were often poor, possibly prostitutes, whereas the fathers could derive from a wider social spectrum. Ecclesiastical and secular courts targeted unmarried sex, especially when illegitimate children were involved, and Martin Ingram emphasises that 'women were more likely to be censured than men'.<sup>87</sup> The financial cost of bastardy motivated the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century bills, which were diluted to protect men of quality from suffering for their sexual transgressions. Poverty and an increase of illegitimates, recorded in parish registers at the end of Elizabeth's reign, encouraged the punishment of mothers of illegitimate children by whipping, stocks and after 1620 a year in a house of correction. There was an increased concern that influential men who either profited from or enjoyed feminine deviant sexuality were immune to the prosecution of sin by the authorities. Women were punished and as the plays *Women Beware Women* and *The White Devil* show, they could be seen as guilty yet also victims of a biased system of moral order and justice.

### The Whorish Wife

The drama of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period prominently sites the issue of the whore and female sexuality in the context of marriage. Why is the wife consistently compared or condemned as a whore? Evidently the prospect of the sexual transgression of a wife was an unnerving threat to husbands, sons and social order. The ideal family represented the state in microcosm with the patriarch at the head regulating those who fulfilled specific roles. The dissemination of Protestant ideas of marriage, in which husband and wife were equal partners, conflicted with traditional beliefs in a woman's submission to a man. Callaghan suggests that the denial of paternal authority in marriage would undermine one traditional purpose, 'the transfer of power from one male to another.'<sup>88</sup> Hutson emphasises the role of guidance books to educate wives and also to

<sup>86</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 296.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Ingram, 'The Reform of Popular Culture? Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Barry Reay (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985) pp. 129–165 (p. 152).

<sup>88</sup> Callaghan, p. 21.

‘legitimate [...] a new version of masculinity’.<sup>89</sup> ‘Women were offered examples of conduct to imitate, or take warning by, while men were asked to identify with male protagonists who used such examples flexibly and pragmatically, as resources for the plotment of prudent undertakings and persuasive discourses’, writes Hutson.<sup>90</sup> Between 1541 and 1575 Miles Coverdale’s English translation of Henry Bullinger’s marriage guide, *Der Christlich Eestand* (1540), reached nine editions. John Dod’s and Robert Cleaver’s *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (1603) sourced sections and metaphors from Coverdale’s Bullinger:

The dutie of the Husband is to get money and prouision: and of the wiues, not vainely to spend it. The dutie of the Husband is to deale with many men: and of the wiues to talke with few. The dutie of the Husband is to be entermedling: and of the wife, to be solitary and withdrawne. The dutie of the man is, to be skilfull in talke: and of the wife, to boast of silence. The duetie of the husband is to be a giuer, and of the wife, to be a sauer. The duetie of the man is, to apparell himselfe as he may: and of the woman, as it becommeth her. The duetie of the husband is, to dispatch all things without doore: and of the wife, to oversee and giue order for all things within the house.<sup>91</sup>

The extreme assertion of the wife and husband as harmonious opposites exposes the contemporary fears of a wife’s transgression. Later writers continued to enforce ideal female attributes. Nicholas Breton’s *The Good And The Badde* (1616) presents the positive figures of ‘A Good Wife’, ‘A quiet Woman’ and ‘A Virgin’, in contrast to ‘A wanton Woman’ and ‘An Vnquiet Woman’. A ballad, *The Country Lasse* (1620), glorifies the country girl in contrast to the city wanton.<sup>92</sup> Significantly, the ‘good’, ‘quiet’, and ‘virginal’ associated with country honesty are sharply opposed to the city wanton. The city’s association with sexual temptation and the bold emergence of the middle-class wife as an assertive public figure combined in dramatic characterisations to ridicule and suppress her threat.

Jacobean city comedies present women who shop and socialise together with gallants at plays and taverns. Coaches in the satires and drama symbolise idle luxury, as in *Westward Ho* when a wife comments, ‘O fie vpon: a Coach? I cannot abide to be iolted,’ prompting

<sup>89</sup> Hutson, p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> Hutson, p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government for the ordering of priuate families* (London: Thomas Creede for Thomas Man, 1603), STC (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) / 5385, Folger Shakespeare Library <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 January 2010] (sig. L5<sup>v</sup>–6).

<sup>92</sup> *A Century of Ballads*, ed. by John Ashton (London, 1887), pp. 36n in Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1958)

the sexual punch-line, 'Yet most of your Citizens wiues loue iolting.'<sup>93</sup> Boating on the Thames to secluded spots with lovers inspired this play's title, *Westward Ho*, and the titles of *Northward Ho* and *Eastward Ho*, named after the calls of the waterman. Wives' adultery dominates *Westward Ho* (II. 1. 214–18), Beaumont's and Fletcher's *The Woman-Hater* and Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (V. 2. 169–182). Dramatists adopted the image of the wife sitting outside her shop to reflect its similarity with the selling technique of the prostitute. Both were welcoming and visited at strange hours by gallants. Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* of the private theatre depicts the vintner's wife asserting the benefits of the sexual lure: '[i]ntroth a fine-fac'd wife, in a wainscot carved seat, is a worthy ornament to a Tradesman shop, and an attractive I warrant, her husband shall finde it in the custome of his ware, Ile assure him.'<sup>94</sup>

Women who were economically independent were discredited as sexually and verbally loose. Woodbridge observes, 'if woman was made for man, then any female-only, or female-directed activities were potentially subversive,' and '[s]atire about women's gossip [...] illustrates men's conviction that women talking together undermined male authority'.<sup>95</sup> She attributes the popularity in private plays of the promiscuous citizen's wife, as for example *Epicoene's* Collegiates, to 'a reaction against the liberty of city women'.<sup>96</sup> Woodbridge focuses upon the private theatre's patronage of this image as a form of 'literary revenge on the affluent London citizenry which was gaining so much power at the expense of the aristocracy'.<sup>97</sup> The city wife embodied the threatening aspects of early modern women. They were sexually and economically independent, able to find entertainment and arrange their own sexual liaisons. The downtrodden husband encapsulated the male anxieties concerning the new possible freedoms for women and the effects her behaviour would have upon his masculinity.

*Women Beware Women* takes the familiar issue of the 'whorish' wife and begins a debate upon the traditions of marriage and expectations of the wife. Two women are by Jacobean dramatic definition 'whores' and yet their development reflects more upon those around them. Leantio opens the play presenting his prized wife Bianca whom he has stolen from

<sup>93</sup> *Westward Ho*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1955), II, 311–404 (II. 3. 69–70).

<sup>94</sup> John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*, ed. by Peter Davison (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), III. 3. 9–12.

<sup>95</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 253.

<sup>96</sup> Woodbridge, p. 173.

<sup>97</sup> Woodbridge, p. 174.

her father. Hutson, referring to Shakespearean drama, observes how the daughter who has willingly eloped ‘becomes the focus of audience suspicion regarding her fidelity as a wife’.<sup>98</sup> The male lovers are dually positioned as ‘successful suitors for social advancement through clandestine marriage, and as anxious policemen, apprehending the implications of their exploitation of clandestinity in fantasies of jealousy that displace their share of culpability onto women’.<sup>99</sup> Hutson’s comments are equally applicable to the scenario of Leantio and Bianca. Even if the audience does not suspect Bianca, Leantio’s paranoid concern over her concealment suggests his own anxious fears of losing her to another man.

Leantio first introduces his wife as a jewel which he has to possess: ‘I look upon that treasure | And know it to be mine’ (I. 1. 14–15). He introduces Bianca not by name but as a ‘purchase’. Leantio cherishes her appearance and is most anxious yet excited by his exclusive rights to ‘that treasure’, which is ‘mine’. She becomes a fetishized spoil of war that wields power over Leantio through sight, a ‘beauty able to content a conqueror’ (I. 1. 26). Leantio believes in the male competition to possess and secure the most beautiful woman through marriage, and admits his guilty means of obtaining his bride: ‘But that I glory in. ’Tis theft, but noble | As ever greatness yet shot up withal’ (I. 1. 35–8). Leantio excuses the theft with Bianca’s promise of greatness, insisting that the ends justify the means. His belief in Bianca as a good omen is ridiculed by the sexual undertone of his image of erection, ‘greatness yet shot up withal.’ Leantio is aroused by the fear of losing her and of his secret ownership: ‘And here’s my masterpiece; do you now behold her. | Look on her well, she’s mine. Look on her better’ (I. 1. 41–2). He is proud to display his wife and even commands the observance of *his* purchased beauty, an economic wealth in its own right:

View but her face, you may see all her dowry,  
Save that which lies locked up in hidden virtues  
Like jewels kept in cabinets. (I. 1. 54–6)

Bianca’s physical form suffices as dowry and Leantio’s reference to hidden virtues betrays his ignorance of her character and a sexual fantasy of exploring the hidden ‘virtues’ of her body. Her physical beauty is Leantio’s obsession and as a result Bianca is not named during the opening scene and only speaks at line 125. Her beauty intoxicates all men:

<sup>98</sup> Hutson, p. 161.

<sup>99</sup> Hutson, pp. 161–2.

Oh fair-eyed Florence,  
 Didst thou but know what a most matchless jewel  
 Thou now art mistress of, a pride would take thee  
 Able to shoot destruction through the bloods  
 Of all thy youthful sons. But 'tis great policy  
 To keep choice treasures in obscurest places. (I. 1. 161–6)

The efficacy of Bianca's beauty threatens Leantio's own private pleasure. It would enable Florence to 'shoot destruction through the bloods' of young men. As Bianca's beauty caught Leantio's heart, it will equally evoke desire in Florence's youth. Leantio counters his feared loss of Bianca to other men with a plan to conceal his 'treasure' in his humble home, one of the 'obscurest places' away from 'all men's eyes' (I. 1. 170). His anxiety over the possession of his wife is rooted in the belief in a woman's susceptibility to corruption. Leantio's reaction to this fear takes the form of an enforced regime designed to contain his 'ideal' wife.

Female sexuality was acceptable if contained within productive marriage; Henderson and McManus assert, 'it was expected that a good woman would want and enjoy intercourse.'<sup>100</sup> Bianca desires sexual intimacy with her husband, and yet he interprets her 'lust' as a negative and rebellious threat to marriage. 'It seems likely that in seeing the opposite sex as lustful Renaissance men and women were dealing with their own unruly sexual feelings by projecting them onto each other', suggest Henderson and McManus.<sup>101</sup> Leantio enforces an unnatural sexual fast upon Bianca, which reflects fears of his own lust. He is unwilling to stay with his wife and follows his concept of wholesome procreative marriage to counter the threat of lust:

'Tis like an insurrection in the people,  
 That, raised in self-will, wars against all reason;  
 But love that is respective for increase  
 Is like a good king that keeps all in peace. (I. 3. 45–8)

Lust in marriage is rebellious and dangerous to future productivity. Passion is feminine as it is born of 'self-will' as opposed to 'reason' and requires a husband's discipline. Leantio attempts to mould marriage to his concept of love, casting himself as a king holding the realm or wife in a stasis of peace to nurture children and 'increase'. He distrusts the effects of female 'flesh' upon man:

<sup>100</sup> Henderson and McManus, p. 55.

<sup>101</sup> Henderson and McManus, p. 56.

Alas I'm in for twenty if I stay,  
 And then for forty more. I have such luck to flesh  
 I never bought a horse but he bore double.  
 If I stay any longer, I shall turn  
 An everlasting spendthrift. (I. 3. 50–4)

Leantio boasts of his virility and sexual stamina and yet fears the corroding effect of lust upon his ability to provide and master as a good husband. One night of lust would lead to 'twenty' and 'forty more', while Bianca's attempts to keep Leantio at home would make him an 'ill husband', one dominated by lust and disease (I. 3. 59). Fears of inadequacy or indifference are alleviated by his claims of sexual prowess. Leantio's image of his horse that 'bore double', emphasises his virility and is also predictive of Bianca's future additional lover, the Duke. Leantio abstains to avoid becoming an 'everlasting spendthrift', reserving his efforts and semen for procreation and earning rather than lust. Leantio's management of his wife adheres to a traditional doctrine of marriage, and yet the play charts the consequences of his absence, her treatment as a 'whore' and his as a cuckold.

During his absence Leantio is sustained by fantasies of his ideal chaste and clinging wife, in strong contrast to the real Bianca, now a strumpet. He emphasises the pleasure of a pure wife untainted by any other man and compares 'Honest wedlock' to a banquet house in a 'garden' of 'chaste flowers' and 'modest odours' (III. 1. 89–92). Alternatively he describes 'base lust' as vain and artificial with 'all her powders, paintings, and best pride' much like the altered Bianca (III. 1. 92–3). Leantio ironically casts the 'glorious dangerous strumpet' as an antithesis to his concept of Bianca (III. 1. 95). The whore's body is 'a goodly temple | That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting' (III. 1. 98–9). Deception is key to the idea of the strumpet; her beauty is enchanting and inspires worship, yet it conceals her corrupt and sexually diseased reality, like the temple of Matthew 23. 27. Bromham interprets the temple vaults as suggestive of 'the vagina as a source of disease and death'.<sup>102</sup> Leantio expresses his lust for the female body, and his ability to 'quench desire' by 'cool meditation', allowing him to almost physically withdraw: 'little and little I shrink back' (III. 1. 100–1). Leantio's self-mastery of his sexual appetite contrasts with Bianca's submission to passion through rape. His mistake in forcing abstinence is marked by Bianca's conversion, which presupposes a woman's vulnerability to sexual temptation and her requirement of special care. Leantio anticipates her sexual frustration created by

<sup>102</sup> Bromham, p. 155.

his enforced fast with glee: 'She'll be so greedy now, and cling about me, | I take care how I shall be rid of her' (III. 1. 107–8). Leantio treats Bianca unsympathetically as an inferior dominated by her sensual passions, and yet he underestimates the resourcefulness of other men and the power of her appetite once awakened. It is Leantio's superior attitude and lack of companionate love that left Bianca in a vulnerable position with no obvious escape for a woman taught to respect the authority of men.

Leantio is not only concerned with the sexual corruption of his wife, he also fears her susceptibility to 'feminine' material appetites. He is convinced that a woman is naturally inclined to disobedience and so needs to be shielded from external influences. Mother blames her son for eloping with a wife of high expectations, claiming that he has wronged her:

What ableness have you to do her right then  
In maintenance fitting her birth and virtues? —  
Which ev'ry woman of necessity looks for,  
And most to go above it. (I. 1. 65–8)

Leantio is unable to maintain her lifestyle according to her 'birth and virtues', a significant problem considering that 'ev'ry woman' seeks greater material comfort than she is accustomed to. Leantio is determined to prevent Bianca's discovery of such female desires, fearing that Mother's words will teach her to be disobedient:

To rise with other women in commotion  
Against their husbands for six gowns a year,  
And so maintain their cause, when they're once up,  
In all things else that require cost enough. (I. 1. 76–9)

Leantio imagines a legion of women rebelling against 'husbands'; motivated by vanity they demand 'six gowns a year' and other luxuries at the expense of the husband. Leantio hypocritically values women on their beauty while also despising a female 'commotion' over the inadequacy of material allowances made by her husband. He fears female influence arming Bianca with a tongue to voice her complaints. Bianca holds 'an honest love, | Which knows no wants, but, mocking poverty, | Brings forth more children' (I. 1. 95–7). Leantio wishes to preserve his ideal of Bianca in stasis, beauty, chastity, silence and productivity, creating a woman who lives to serve her husband. Poverty is virtuous in his eyes as a fertile and 'honest' condition for a wife, warning that providence fills the rich man's 'bed with barren wombs' (I. 1. 100). Virility is the true proof of a husband and

Leantio promises to make adequate 'provision' to impregnate his wife. He promises to 'follow my business roundly, | And make you a grandmother in forty weeks' (I. 1. 107–9). Leantio warns Mother not to corrupt his wife's innocence with 'too much openness' and yet also employs her as Bianca's keeper (I. 1. 102):

Old mothers know the world; and such as these,  
When sons lock chests, are good to look to keys. (I. 1. 175–6)

Mother's knowledge of the world is both dangerous and valuable as a safeguard to Bianca's innocence and virtues. She is utilised by Leantio as an agent of his desires, reflecting upon the play's theme of betrayal between women.

Levin identifies Mother as an agent of Bianca's transformation into the Duke's mistress. She positions Bianca at the window, advertising her 'licentious wishes' and is motivated by 'her son's interests [...] or Bianca's', 'living her own life again', or 'enjoying the intellectual challenge of bringing Bianca's youth, beauty and breeding into contact with the corrupt life of the city'.<sup>103</sup> Levin emphasises the importance of Guardiano's reference to Mother as a 'stale', yet such a derogatory description of an old widow is not surprising (II. 2. 33).<sup>104</sup> Levin cites Mother's insistence on secrecy as evidence of her complicity in the rape, although caution is not extraordinary considering her son's paranoia over Bianca's purity. Mother is susceptible to persuasion by those with wealth, as Bianca scoffs at the hypocrisy of Mother, who 'would trot into a bawd now, | For some dry sucket or a colt in marzipan' (III. 1. 269–270). Bianca is enticed to Livia's banquet by carnal pleasure, while Mother is keen to eat as much as she can. Levin's concept of the Mother is strongly dependent on the performance of the text; she can also be portrayed as loyal yet ignorantly enabling Bianca's moral fall. Middleton frequently plays upon a character's ambiguity and often confuses moral judgements by depicting bad decisions in very extraordinary situations. Vindice's mother in *The Revenger's Tragedy* does not premeditate the prostitution of her daughter to Lussurioso, yet from her impoverished position she is soon persuaded, by the art of her son, to act as a bawd: 'If she be still chaste, I'll ne'er call her mine.'<sup>105</sup> Levin depicts Mother as intentionally prostituting her daughter-in-law for material benefit and entertainment. In contrast I perceive Leantio as a greater agent in

<sup>103</sup> Levin, p. 371 (19).

<sup>104</sup> Levin, p. 371 (19).

<sup>105</sup> *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. MacDonald P. Jackson, in Thomas Middleton, *The Collected Works*, pp. 543–593 (II. 1. 132).

Bianca's demise through his mismanagement of his wife and his overpowering fear of Bianca's potential for sexual excess.

The impracticality of Leantio's idealised marriage and husbandry is soon confirmed by Bianca's rape and conversion into a whore. Leantio realises the misery of his condition as a husband:

O thou the ripe time of man's misery, wedlock;  
 When all his thoughts, like overladen trees,  
 Crack with the fruits they bear, in cares, in jealousies.  
 Oh that's a fruit that ripens hastily  
 After 'tis knit to marriage. It begins,  
 As soon as the sun shines upon the bride,  
 A little to show colour. (III. 1. 271–7)

He is consumed by self-pity and a pessimistic belief in the inevitability of the corruption of a wife and a husband through the tie of marriage. Bianca's moral decay begins 'as the sun shines upon the bride' while the imagery of overripe fruit alludes to Eve and the female appetite for the forbidden. Leantio imagines himself as an 'overladen' tree, which aptly contrasts with the Duke's earlier image of his tree of safety and temptation. Instead of offering wealth and power, Leantio breaks under the strain of marriage's fleshy fruits of 'cares' and 'jealousies'. He envies the quiet solitude of the eternal bachelor, the Duke, who uses women indiscriminately on his own terms:

Nay, what a quietness has he 'bove mine  
 That wears his youth out in a strumpet's arms,  
 And never spends more care upon a woman  
 Than at the time of lust; but walks away,  
 And if he find her dead at his return  
 His pity is soon done. (III. 1. 286–291)

After his verbal debacle with Bianca he idealises the single life as free from an unruly wife. The gallant can expend all his 'youth' through 'lust' with a strumpet without the emotional cost of love or 'pity'. The Duke enjoys the sexual pleasure of a woman without any responsibility for her comfort or behaviour and his freedom starkly contrasts with Leantio's life sentence of marriage. Married life only brings obligation:

But all the fears, shames, jealousies, costs and troubles,  
 And still-renewed cares of a marriage bed  
 Live in the issue, when the wife is dead. (III. 1. 293–5)

Leantio must continue to endure the misery of wedlock through its 'issue', the children. In *The White Devil*, continuing the earlier discussion of Vittoria's 'incontinence', Francisco declares that her 'issue, should not providence prevent it, | Would make both nature, time, and man repent it' (II. 1. 349–50). He asserts that any offspring would entice and cuckold men, in imitation of their mother, assuming the belief that a child would follow the imprint of a parent, especially if the mother was a whore. Beneath the negative concept of 'issue' lies the fear of a wife's promiscuity, and later analysis will reveal its extension to incorporate the widow in *The White Devil*. If a wife were chaste, the child would belong to the husband, whereas a 'whore' would burden her husband with other men's offspring. Leantio treated marriage as an assertion of his possession and control of Bianca; however, the realisation of his inability to be the master leaves him with a sense of loss and foolishness. Marriage now ensures a husband's shame when tied to an independent wife until death. Leantio despairs at the worthlessness of marriage, when another man can own his wife's affections and body: 'then what's marriage good for?' (III. 2. 322). The Bianca he married and concealed is no longer: 'She's gone for ever, utterly' (III. 2. 329):

I cannot love her now but I must like  
Her sin, and my own shame too, and be guilty  
Of law's breach with her, and mine own abusing;  
All which were monstrous. (III. 2. 335–8)

Leantio is ashamed of his role as an accomplice to 'law's breach' of marriage, yet 'cannot love' a whore despite the realisation that her flesh purchased his preferment. Leantio admits 'abusing' his position as a husband by leaving Bianca vulnerable to the Duke's advances. He is the cuckolded husband publicly unmanned by the 'monstrous' sin of female infidelity.

The Duke in strong contrast appreciates and enjoys the sensuality of women. At the banquet the intimacy between the Duke and Bianca forces Leantio's recognition of the cause of her alteration: 'I see 'tis plain lust now, adultery boldened' (III. 2. 35). The Duke rewards Leantio's 'good parts, sir, which we honour | With our embrace and love' by the gift of captainship of Rouans (III. 2. 38–9). He enjoys ridiculing Leantio as the cuckold, commending his 'good parts', his wife, with an 'embrace and love'. Leantio is powerless to repel his designation as the cuckold:

A fine bit  
To stay a cuckold's stomach! All preferment

That springs from sin and lust, it shoots up quickly,  
 As gardeners' crops do in the rotten'st grounds.  
 So is all means raised from base prostitution. (III. 2. 47–51)

Leantio casts himself as a horse mastered by the Duke with his promotion, 'a fine bit' to pacify his 'cuckold's stomach'. As the malcontent, Leantio despises the system of authority, which rewards with 'preferment' the 'base prostitution' of his wife. He paints the whole court system thriving upon the 'rotten'st grounds' of 'sin and lust', an accurate interpretation of Bianca's procurement by the court figures Guardiano and Livia.

The Cardinal shares Leantio's contempt for the whore and her role in marriage. He views the prospective marriage of the Duke and his mistress Bianca, as a guarantee of his brother's damnation. Marrying is worse than keeping a strumpet, 'Is not sin sure enough to wretched man, | But he must bind himself in chains to't? Worse' (IV. 3. 12–13). The Cardinal pleads to his brother not to tie himself to Bianca's eternal damnation, as he can still escape God's censure, despite his sexual conversion of Bianca into a strumpet. The Cardinal's hypocrisy undermines his precious image of marriage, 'that immaculate robe of honour' (IV. 3. 14). The play exposes marriage as a facade concealing Leantio and Bianca's separation and the farce of Isabella's sale to the Ward. Marriage within the play is far from 'immaculate'. The Cardinal sees the union of the Duke and Bianca as a 'garment | Of leprosy and foulness', sourced from the immoral woman (IV. 3. 16–17). The Cardinal finally scrutinises the Duke's actions: 'Is it enough to use adulterous thefts | And then take sanctuary in marriage?' (IV. 3. 36–7). Echoing Leantio's concept of marriage, he imagines their union 'When lust usurps the bed that should be pure' (IV. 3. 46). Bianca considers marriage as a chance for redemption, 'When lives that are licentious are made honest', while the Cardinal cannot see past bold 'Lust' and predicts God's inevitable 'vengeance' (IV. 3. 66, 71–2). The Cardinal's attempt to save the soul of the Duke reflects a contemporary attitude towards femininity as a space of excess in which the ultimate responsibility of the sin is displaced upon the woman. The whore Cataplasma in *The Atheist's Tragedy* encourages Levidulcia's adultery:

Methinks 'tis unjust  
 That a reproach should be inflicted on  
 A woman for offending but with one,  
 When 'tis a light offence in husbands to  
 Commit with many.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, in *Four Revenge Tragedies* ed. by Katharine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 249–330 (IV. 6. 28–32).

She exposes the unfair double standards of sexual immorality, emphasising the attribution of depravity as inherently feminine. Cataplasma's own sexual transgression conceals her proto-feminist expression beneath the dismissive label of whore. Emilia in *Othello* blames the husband for a wife's adultery, reflecting a reaction to the concept of a woman's lustful nature:

But I do think it is their husbands' faults  
If wives to fall. Say that they slack their duties  
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;  
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,  
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,  
Or scant our former having in despite,  
Why, we have galls: and though we have some grace  
Yet have we some revenge.<sup>107</sup>

Directly, she refers to Othello's jealousy and public striking of Desdemona, yet her emphasis upon the responsibility of the husband reflects the representation of Leantio's treatment of his wife. Emilia identifies the husband's failings as the cause of a woman's adultery, which conforms to the patriarchal idea of the man's possession of the woman. Sexual transgression is a revenge exerted by women and reveals how the only valuable commodity a woman can wield against men is her sexual body. The husband either protects or prostitutes her sexuality, while the woman can also find opportunity to punish or devalue his wealth by contaminating her sexual value.

The economic and political value of the woman's body is exposed in Isabella's sale as a wife in *Women Beware Women*. Guardiano describes Isabella as a product 'of excellent workmanship' and negotiates her betrothal to his Ward with her father Fabritio (I. 2. 70). Fabritio commands her to 'Like what you see' and to conceal her desires: 'On with the mask, I'll hear no more; he's rich' (I. 2. 77, 84). Both Isabella and the Ward are the pawns of their patriarchs in a commercial contract. Even their future roles are prescribed; the husband will be 'getting lawful heirs' while Isabella should be 'a-breeding on 'em' (I. 2. 79). Livia asserts the authority of the father to force his daughter to marry:

You may compel, out of the power of father,  
Things merely harsh to a maid's flesh and blood;  
But when you come to love, there the soil alters.  
(I. 2. 135-7)

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<sup>107</sup> *The Arden Shakespeare, Othello*, pp. 941-78 (IV. 3. 85-93).

Fabritio has the power to affect the physical body of his daughter, and yet has no authority to command her 'love'. Throughout the play the impenetrability of female desire and thought is consistently associated with the suppressed Isabella. Isabella understands her submission to her father's will as an obligation of gender: she was 'born with that obedience' (II. 1. 86). Guardiano's plan for their introduction exposes the commercial reality of their scheme:

Let her be sent tomorrow before noon,  
And handsomely tricked up; for 'bout that time  
I mean to bring her in, and tender her to him.  
(II. 2. 58-60)

Isabella will be presented to the Ward for his inspection before approval. She is a creature for sale that must be 'tricked up' with dress and artifice before Guardiano plans to 'bring her in and tender her to him'. Fabritio is eager to style his daughter to Guardiano's specifications, and imitates his late wife's example:

FABRITIO	She'd dress her head o'er night, sponge up herself, And give her neck three lathers —	
GUARDIANO [ <i>aside</i> ]		Ne'er a halter? (II. 2. 66-7)

Guardiano ridicules Fabritio, suggesting that a 'halter' would complement his treatment of Isabella as a creature to be groomed, paraded and finally sold. Isabella is a token in the political and economic machinations of Fabritio and Guardiano. The Ward is also manipulated by his guardian although at least holds the pretence of being able to choose his wife.

Sordido advises the Ward in his choice of bride. He itemises in rhyme the various parts of a woman's body as a standard to test all women against. His misogynist strain inverts the medieval catalogue of beauty:

The wife your guard'ner ought to tender  
Should be pretty, straight, and slender;  
Her hair not short, her foot not long,  
Her hand not huge, nor too, too loud her tongue;  
No pearl in eye, nor ruby in her nose,  
No burn or cut but what the catalogue shows.  
She must have teeth, and that no black ones,  
And kiss most sweet when she does smack once.  
Her skin must be both white and plumped,  
Her body straight, not hopper-rumped,  
Or wriggle sideways like a crab.  
She must be neither slut nor drab,

Nor go too splay-foot with her shoes  
 To make her smock lick up the dews.  
 And two things more, which I forgot to tell ye:  
 She neither must have bump in back, nor belly.  
 (II. 2. 100–15)

Female beauty is of prime importance and the guardian by duty must 'tender' physical perfection, no cataracts or blemishes, 'pearl in eye, nor ruby in her nose.' Sordido's test is posed in negatives and female excess; she should not be 'short,' 'long,' 'huge,' 'loud', and 'hopper-rumped'. Ugliness is treated as excess, which symbolised a woman's expansion into the masculine territories of self-assertion and independence. Appearance also indicates health and immorality. That she must not have 'burn or cut' is a crude reminder of the symptoms of syphilis and a guide for the ignorant Ward that she should only have one genital orifice: 'but what the catalogue shows.' The physical effects of age are important to note when choosing a wife; her skin must be 'white and plumped', her teeth with 'no black ones, | And kiss most sweet'. Old age was associated with sexual experience and decay. A sexually promiscuous woman, 'slut' or 'drab', is entwined with the image of the physically deformed witch who will 'wriggle sideways' with 'splay-foot' causing her smock to 'lick up the dews'. The final warning unites the two feared formations of female transgression, the witch and whore: 'She neither must have bump in back, nor belly.'

The misogynist rhyme presents women as diseased and excessive flesh, although rarely healthy and demure; however, it also reflects the ignorance and hypocrisy of those espousing it. The Ward is eager to examine Isabella's naked body and yet will not present his own due to his concealed physical deformity: 'I were in a sweet case then. Such foul skin!' (II. 2. 124). The rhyme is motivated by Sordido's anxiety concerning female deception. Women conceal their true form through fashion, including the farthingale which deceives with 'false light'; it 'Is like the buying of ware under a great penthouse' (II. 2. 132, 130). Sordido is anxious concerning the disease lying beneath the costumes and warns that if his words are not heeded, 'He may have a diseased wench in's bed, | And rotten stuff in's breeches' (II. 2. 133–4). The contagion of female excess, both sexually and in physical deformity, is believed to infect the husband's site of masculinity, his genitalia. Sordido relies on the physical representing true character and morality; this is a flawed philosophy in *Women Beware Women*. Middleton opposes the idea of clothing

symbolising the morality and status of a person, a sign of the effects of social change at the turn of the century.

Isabella appears to be the obedient daughter, a silent and chaste wife, and yet the audience are aware of her turmoil and incestuous affair. The Duke surveys Isabella, voicing his approval through an allusion to sexual arousal: 'here's some stirring' (III. 2. 106). Isabella is silent and defined by others; her father owns her 'qualities of a gentlewoman' that were 'dear to my purse' and designed to 'stir her husband' (III. 2. 108–112). Fabritio does not wish Isabella to know of her talents: "'twould make her swell straight; | And maids of all things must not be puffed up' (III. 2. 127–8). He fears that pride would lead to pregnancy, both undesirable traits in a maid. Bianca pities Isabella's match with the Ward, and hopes she has 'laid in more provision for her youth', a lover (III. 2. 118). Bianca's adulterous remedy for an unhappy marriage and Isabella's incestuous affair reveal a cynical female outlook upon love. Leantio's criticism that wives will not keep 'From whores in winter' highlights how marriage constructed by patriarchs within the world of the play places women in untenable positions from which sexual transgression offers an escape (III. 2. 121). Isabella expresses her sense of degradation during the Ward's inspection:

What an infernal torment 'twere to be  
Thus bought and sold, and turned and pried into, when, alas,  
The worst bit is too good for him! And the comfort is  
He's but a cater's place on't, and provides  
All for another's table. Yet how curious  
The ass is! — like some nice professor on't,  
That buys up all the daintiest food i'th' markets,  
And seldom licks his lips after a taste on't. (III. 3. 35–42)

Isabella voices the 'torment' of being 'bought and sold' as a commodity and violated by the Ward's invasive inspection, 'turned and pried into.' She despises the Ward as unworthy of 'the worst bit', her unchaste state. Isabella enjoys his role as a 'cater' who 'seldom licks his lips' in sexual enjoyment as he buys her body for her lover Hippolito's table. This is Isabella's revenge upon the Ward for presuming to buy her, and upon the system, which enforces man's right to sell and buy women into loveless marriages. She mocks the Ward by sarcastically referring to her skill at ball sports with Hippolito: 'I have caught two in my lap at one game' (III. 3. 93). Isabella vocalises her forced transformation from chaste and obedient to a 'whore' due to her external pressures.

Isabella's vocal protest against the objectification of women and the concept of marriage as a financial exchange is proto-feminist, as her words are not cancelled by her actions. Incest is a sin, and yet Isabella is unaware of the extremity of her deviance, believing that she is promiscuous only in desperation against the actions of the men who control her life. A future with the ridiculous and foolish Ward inspires sympathy for Isabella. He talks to Isabella merely to test her wares, inspects her with his senses ('Oh most delicious scent') and checks her sexual health ('is that hair your own'), relieved with the affirmative as, 'I shall have the less to pay when I have married you' (III. 3. 61–70). The Ward asks Sordido, 'how shall we do to make her laugh, that I may see what teeth she has?' (III. 3. 81–2). He has no need to woo Isabella, as she has no autonomous voice in this one-way transaction. The final humiliation sees Isabella forced to parade while the two male characters peep under her skirt. The voyeuristic examination of her genitals reduces her to a physical animal purchased for his lust. She is a 'clean-treading wench', one who walks straight and can cleanly copulate or 'tread' (III. 3. 128). Isabella's correct and healthy genitalia confirm her visual value, 'I see the sweetest sight to please my master' (III. 3. 130). The Ward tells Isabella "'Tis enough', echoing Leantio's clinical sexual contract with Livia, and he decides, "'Tis so, we are both agreed' (III. 3. 133, 141). The inspection of Isabella betrays the fear of what a wife is and will become sexually, a dread of misplaced male authority in a woman's body. Her physical inspection reflects contemporary developments in medicine and anatomical studies, partly driven by the prospect of an unknown female interior, both her physical secrets and desires.

Middleton in *Women Beware Women* presents the vulnerability of Isabella's predicament. Livia and Hippolito convert her desperation into a forbidden illicit affair. Incest, one of the most taboo sexual sins, does not condemn Isabella due to her ignorance and also her impotence in the marriage arrangements. Isabella is a victim of the ideals of love and of her father, imbued with the authority to marry her to any rich man:

Marry a fool!  
 Can there be greater misery to a woman  
 That means to keep her days true to her husband  
 And know no other man? So virtue wills it.  
 Why, how can I obey and honour him,  
 But I must needs commit idolatry? (I. 2. 161–6)

Isabella is resigned to the marriage as her obligation, and yet she cannot resolve her duty with her desires. The real cause of her misery is the prospect of her sexual future limited

purely to the Ward. Isabella controversially expresses her desires and cannot understand how the rules of chastity can contain them in a loveless match. She questions the strength of a wife's oath to 'honour and obey' when a woman is married against her will. The mask of deceit, which her father urged her to employ, sits uncomfortably upon Isabella. She is confused by the ideology of an obedient, chaste and honest wife, when in reality her father whom she is born to obey encourages her to perform a lie. Isabella's distress emphasises the deceit which women in marriage are compelled to enact.

Isabella expresses a cynical reality of marriage from a woman's perspective. Middleton employs the subjection of women in marriage to explain female sexual transgression:

When women have their choices, commonly  
 They do but buy their thraldoms, and bring great portions  
 To men to keep'em in subjection;  
 As if a fearful prisoner should bribe  
 The keeper to be good to him, yet lies in still,  
 And glad of a good usage, a good look.  
 Sometimes. By'r Lady, no misery surmounts a woman's.  
 Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters.  
 Yet honesty and love makes all this happy  
 And, next to angels', the most blest estate. (I. 2. 171–80)

Isabella's stance is influenced by her enforced marriage to a fool and the manipulation of her affections for her uncle. Surprisingly Isabella dismisses matrimony ruled by woman's choice. Marriage is a commercial act in which women 'buy their thraldoms', and it is only the female dowry or 'great portions' that prevent any ill treatment by keeping men 'in subjection'. Isabella's image of the wife as a prisoner bribing the guard is from a masculine perspective, which emphasises the authority behind her theory. The wife is depicted as fearful and attempts to procure 'good usage, a good look' through her wealth. Women who have the means and freedom of choice 'buy their masters' in marriage, and the subordination of a woman by a husband is treated as an inevitable fact of female life. Despite Isabella's uncomfortable notion of reality, she still fantasises about marriage when sweetened and made 'happy' by 'honesty and love'.

Hippolito's confession that he loves Isabella as 'a man loves his wife' disrupts her idealised faith in the honesty of love (I. 2. 219):

I'll learn to live without ye, for your dangers  
 Are greater than your comforts. What's become  
 Of truth in love if such we cannot trust,

When blood that should be love is mixed with lust?  
(I. 2. 227–30)

Her uncle's protestation of sexual love disturbs Isabella's foundations. Faced with the prospect of a loveless marriage, Isabella is at her most fragile dreaming of the bliss of love, 'the most blest estate.' Hippolito's desire not only undermines her sanctuary of familial love, it also tempts her with an inverted illicit version of her fantasy. Her faith in the 'truth of love' is undermined, as her only prospect of a loving sexual relationship is also incestuous. Isabella's emotional desperation and trust in love contradicts social and religious warnings of the 'dangers' of 'blood [...] mixed with lust'.

Isabella is bound by moral and social conventions and will not utter Hippolito's desire, sensing the shame of realising the incest by 'tongue' rather than simply to 'grieve the thought' (II. 1. 78). Isabella's role as a chaste virgin is emphasised to show how the pressures of marriage rather than innate desire drive her to become a whore. The machinations of others are equally significant. Livia tempts Isabella with the very thing that as a maid she lacks, 'liberty' (II. 1. 93). Livia frees Isabella from any obligations of daughterly obedience to Fabritio's wishes. She employs the fictional representation of her adulterous mother to teach Isabella that 'indiscretion' rather than the illicit act is sinful (II. 1. 164). Isabella's mother acted 'So carefully and so discreetly [...] | That fame received no spot by't, not a blemish' (II. 1. 150–1). It is Livia who serves her niece as a gift to Hippolito, saying 'She's thine own'; however, controversially Isabella's conversion of affection to desire for Hippolito suggests that it was social custom and morality which prevented her from committing incest (II. 1. 179):

Would I had known it  
But one day sooner! He had then received  
In favours what, poor gentleman, he took  
In bitter words: a slight and harsh reward  
For one of his deserts. (II. 1. 184–8)

Livia's role in altering Isabella's perception of Hippolito from an immoral danger to true love is paramount. Isabella now feels ashamed of rebutting Hippolito and instead is indebted to his 'honest' devotion. Isabella's transformation from the naïve maid to a sexually assertive woman is immediate. She now employs Livia's art of language and seems an expert in flirtation:

I did but chide in jest. The best loves use it  
Sometimes; it sets an edge upon affection.

When we invite our best friends to a feast,  
 'Tis not all sweetmeats that we set before them;  
 There's somewhat sharp and salt, both to whet appetite  
 And make 'em taste their wine well. So methinks  
 After a friendly sharp and savoury chiding.  
 A kiss tastes wondrous well, and full o'th' grape. [*Kisses him*].  
 (II. 1. 196–203)

Isabella through the skills of persuasion initiates a sexual intimacy with Hippolito. Images of commodity act as an analogy for the sensual delights she can offer him. Her previous rebuke is painted as flirtatious, 'somewhat sharp and salt [...] to whet appetite' and to set 'an edge upon affection'. Isabella constructs a narrative of seduction in which she has deliberately taunted Hippolito with harsh words to heighten the sensual 'taste' of her love, rich and intoxicating like 'wine'. She seals the illicit affair with a kiss, 'full o'th' grape', tempting Hippolito with a promise of physical pleasure. Isabella welcomes any fool her father supplies for marriage: 'I have content sufficient' (II. 1. 216). Marriage to a fool will shield her illicit relationship with Hippolito, adhering to Livia's advised 'discretion' (II. 1. 215). Isabella is 'content' with the love of Hippolito, while her loss of innocence is suggested by the lewd hint at Hippolito's physical capacity to satisfy her desires. Isabella follows the theme of food again to refer to sensual delights:

Like a young waiting-gentlewoman in service;  
 For she feeds commonly as her lady does —  
 No good bit passes her but she gets a taste on't —  
 But when she comes to keep house for herself,  
 She's glad of some choice cates then once a week,  
 Or twice at most, and glad if she can get'em.  
 So must affection learn to fare with thankfulness.  
 Pray make your love no stranger, sir; that's all —  
 [*Aside*] Though you be one yourself, and know not on't;  
 And I have sworn you must not. (II. 1. 219–228)

Isabella paints her future as one of hardship, in which she must secure her rationed pieces of affection when she can, 'glad if she can get'em.' She will receive Hippolito's affection with 'thankfulness' as if divinely sent. Isabella betrays her dependency upon Hippolito as her saviour from a loveless marriage, pleading without artifice, 'make your love no stranger, sir.' The final aside reminds the audience that Isabella, although articulating her forbidden desires, is still convinced that he is not her uncle. In her mind the relationship is adulterous rather than incestuous. It is an attempt to reassure as, although Livia is prepared to enable the illicit affair, she herself does not partake in incest, and Isabella only does so under the misconception that it is a true and natural love. Isabella embodies the dangers of the conflict between romantic love and marriages designed by patriarchs.

Susan Wiseman emphasises that incest was unlike other crimes proven by signs: '[w]ithout confession the meaning of incestuous sexuality remains hidden.'<sup>108</sup> She explores the social taboo of incest, which was not made a felony until 1650, in the play *'Tis pity she's a whore*. Wiseman maintains that the Cardinal's final words of the play substitute 'a crime which allows the meanings of femininity to remain stable', as Annabella is returned to the less threatening whore, a 'dangerous (but less dangerous) general category for the desirous female'.<sup>109</sup> Incest was most unnerving as there was no visible evidence of the moral crime. The female body could signal promiscuity through pregnancy and yet it could not name the father. Wiseman explains that there was an implicit belief that 'what was perceived as sexual laxity or deviance was associated with monstrous births'.<sup>110</sup> Livia expresses the belief in physical symbolism and defines incest as a heinous crime: 'the black lust 'twixt thy niece and thee' that may produce a child, 'Unless the parents' sins strike it still-born' (IV. 2. 66, 70).

Monstrous births and 'molas' signified female sexual transgression and accordingly dominated Renaissance medical works. Monstrosity acts as a delayed form of truth and justice, which disrupted procreation. Women's insatiable lust, menstrual blood and self-insemination were believed to cause the 'mola'. Calbi suggests that these discourses view false conceptions as 'the disruption of a male-centred and teleologically orientated economy of reproduction'.<sup>111</sup> The seventeenth-century English anatomist Helkiah Crooke imagines procreation as a process cloning man to secure immortality. His image of procreation is a reassuring one for the male body, and contrasts with the feared creation of a mola or offspring, which emulate the female body. Jacques Guillemeau's *Child-Birth, or The Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612), Paré's *The Workes*, Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia*, *The Expert Midwife*, a 1637 translation of *De Conceptu et generatione hominis* by Jakob Rueff, all contributed to the discourse on the mystery of female reproduction and the creation of the mola. Pregnancy was a fascination especially of the wealthier classes, and women of these groups had frequent births due to a combination of wet nurses and the pressure of a high infant mortality rate. 'Poets and

<sup>108</sup> Susan J. Wiseman, "'Tis Pity Shes's a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body', in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture, c. 1540–1660*, ed. by Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 180–197 (p. 185).

<sup>109</sup> Wiseman, p. 195.

<sup>110</sup> Wiseman, p. 184.

<sup>111</sup> Calbi, p. 57.

playwrights eulogized their fertility. Artists painted them caressing their big bellies. Monuments proudly depicted their numerous boys and girls. Even their priests and physicians do not seem to have discouraged their productivity', asserts Dorothy McLaren.<sup>112</sup> Pregnancy within marriage was an accepted expression of natural female sexuality, while early modern contraception techniques, barriers and spells were widely advocated although not by the church. Mendelson and Crawford observe, '[p]eople puzzled over why prostitutes, who had frequent intercourse, were barren, and suggested that too much sex had made their wombs too slippery for conception.'<sup>113</sup> Prostitutes clearly had an interest in preventing conception, and were demonised as meddling with the natural work of God with deceitful contraceptive potions and spells.

Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* expresses a contemporary fear of the female internal capacity to create, which relates to his suspicion of cosmetics as analysed in the previous chapter. Bosola emphasises the 'monstrous desire' of women to 'know what strange instrument it was should swell up a glass to the fashion of a woman's belly'.<sup>114</sup> He associates pregnancy with the sexual pacts of women and the devil: 'Hell is a mere glass-house, where the devils are continually blowing up women's souls, on hollow irons, and the fire never goes out' (IV. 2. 77–9). Impregnation is treated as a sinister action desired by women. The physical reality of the Duchess's pregnancy inspires Bosola's revulsion:

I observe our Duchess  
Is sick o' days, she pukes, her stomach seethes,  
The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue,  
She wanes i' th' cheek, and waxes fat i' th' flank;  
And, contrary to our Italian fashion,  
Wears a loose-body'd gown: there's somewhat in't!  
(II. 1. 59–64)

Bosola perceives the pregnant Duchess as a body of orifices and fleshy sensuality. She 'puke,' 'seethes' and projects a gruesome physical honesty, concealed with a 'loose-body'd gown'. Her body is bloated and 'fat i' th' flank' as if the foetus is a parasite, a subhuman that threatens the ordered world beyond her womb; Callaghan notes, '[t]he young springal cutting a caper in her belly is, at the very least, a precocious sprite' (II. 1. 151).<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Dorothy McLaren, 'Marital fertility and lactation 1570–1720', in *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, ed. by Mary Prior (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 22–53 (p. 27).

<sup>113</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* in *John Webster*, II. 2. 4, 7–8.

<sup>115</sup> Callaghan, p. 145.

Reproduction and the hidden internality of women were met with suspicion and also a movement to rationalise female anatomy through male-dominated medical science. Calbi interprets Paré's insistence on man's interference in childbirth as 'an aggressive "removal" of the "cloak or cover" mistakenly bestowed on women'.<sup>116</sup> The female body is a vessel and man is advised to take control of reproduction: 'To conclude, whatsoever resembles being with child, if it not be excluded at the due and lawfull time of child birth by its own accord or by strength of nature, then must be expelled by art.'<sup>117</sup> Paré advocates invasive tools such as the 'Gryphons Talons', which embody masculine knowledge and aggressive intervention within a female sphere.

Men gradually invaded the English female sphere of childbirth during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>118</sup> Many of the midwifery books published in the period include illustrations of births and the uterus often based on traditional beliefs, whereas William Harvey was one of the first English men to dissect a female body and observe the reproductive organs. Elizabeth D. Harvey maintains that these works 'point the way toward the economic and scientific dimension of the struggle to control childbirth'.<sup>119</sup> She illustrates the popularity of the metaphor of labour and midwifery in works such as Donne's 'Elegy 19: To His Mistress Going to Bed' and concludes that they mark 'the beginnings of a cultural change, both in the management of childbirth itself and in the epistemological and medical discourses surrounding the understanding of gestation and birth'.<sup>120</sup>

The midwife, licensed by the church since approximately 1512, ascertained virginity and pregnancy, certified a child's legitimacy or death, and ensured stillborn children were baptised. In *Malleus Maleficarum* the midwife is a witch who controls sexual intercourse,

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<sup>116</sup> Calbi, p. 62.

<sup>117</sup> Paré, *The Workes*, p. 928, in Calbi, p. 63.

<sup>118</sup> The first English textbook for midwives, *The Birth of Mankind*, was translated from the 1513 German text of Eucharius Rosslin, published thirteen times from 1540 to 1654. Other English works followed including the translation of Guillemeau's *Childbirth, or the happie deliverie of women* (1612), Jacob Rueff's *The Expert Midwife* (1637) translated from the Latin text of 1554, Nicholas Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives* (1651), and for an alternative audience William Harvey's *De generatione animalium* (1653) translated from the Latin 1651 text. *The compleat midwife's practice enlarged* (1656) was published anonymously.

<sup>119</sup> Harvey, p. 79.

<sup>120</sup> Wiseman, p. 81.

conception, abortion, birth and the sacrifice of newborns to the devil.<sup>121</sup> In England men supplanted midwives only in the eighteenth century, although the term ‘man-midwife’ enters the language in the early 1600s.<sup>122</sup> The scientific study of the female body, with the patriarchal emphasis upon legitimate heirs, prefigured the change to male midwives. The male medical profession criticised midwives as ignorant and dangerous and yet Harvey reveals a perception of a man’s presence as ‘a violation of both modesty and nature,’ while the ‘forceps and obstetrical instruments [...] function as metonymical expressions of male intrusion into the birthing chamber and indeed into the secret recesses of the female body’.<sup>123</sup> Man’s scientific intrusion into the female sexual body was a form of penetration to discover her hidden secrets.

The female body physically represented change, as Mendelson and Crawford stress: ‘[h]er body assumed so many forms, as milk, foetal nourishment, and menstrual discharges, all of which seemed, by their very nature, mysterious.’<sup>124</sup> Medicine attempted to explain the fluidity and excess of the female body as impurity and prescribed consequent treatments. Ferdinand advises the letting of blood to purify the Duchess:

Apply desperate physic —  
We must not now use balsamum, but fire,  
The smarting cupping-glass, for that’s the mean  
To purge infected blood, such blood as hers. (II. 5. 23–6)

The power of the physical woman seemed to reside in her genitalia and reproductive capacity, which was hidden from man’s eye and control. Maus perceives the womb treated as a ‘container, itself concealed deep within the body, with something further hidden within it: an enclosed, invisible organ, working by means unseeable by, and uncontrolled from, the outside’.<sup>125</sup> She claims that woman’s hidden nature was translated as ‘a *resistance* to scrutiny’ and pinpoints the reason for male anxiety: ‘[t]he female interior encloses experiences unappropriable by an observer: adultery, orgasm, and so forth are

<sup>121</sup> Henricus Institoris, O. P. and Jacobus Sprenger, O. P., *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. by Christopher S. Mackay, 2 vols, The English Translation (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), II, Question 11, pp. 162–4.

<sup>122</sup> Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of the Struggle for the Control of Childbirth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Historical Publications, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> Harvey, p. 87.

<sup>124</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 30.

<sup>125</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus, ‘A womb of his own: male renaissance poets in the female body’, in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. by James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 266–88 (p. 271).

both unseeable and possible.’<sup>126</sup> Contrary to the theories of ‘containment’ and the innate deception of the female body, anatomists discovered a means of penetration through dissection and the dissemination of works as ‘authorities’ on women, claiming the female rebellious space. Callaghan describes anatomists through their science marking boundaries, ‘a form of containment, delineating category of woman in terms of wombs, fecundity, frailty, etc., in a remarkable fusion of the ideological and the physiological.’<sup>127</sup> Sawday charts the ‘anatomical renaissance’ in England flourishing in the mid-seventeenth century when Harvey’s work gained recognition, although the earlier foreign printed anatomy textbooks ‘were widely available in England in the form of translations, re-issues and compendiums’.<sup>128</sup> Newman believes the male anatomist attempted to control female disorder by managing women through their bodies: ‘the male voice instructs [...] femininity.’<sup>129</sup> Newman’s interpretation of the woman depicted on the title page of Helkiah Crooke’s *Microcosmographia* (1615) as ‘a sexed body,’ whose ‘lower torso is open to expose viscera, particularly her reproductive organs,’ reveals a sense of containment or grounding of the female ‘in her shame’.<sup>130</sup> Traub views the anatomist Estienne’s representation of female reproduction in *Du corps humain* as highly sexualised: ‘female anatomical figures are composed as sensual goddesses, offered up for visual and erotic pleasure.’<sup>131</sup> The science of anatomy and the cultural associations of the sexual female are conflated within his work. Johann Remmelin’s *Catoptrum microcosmicum* (1619), a lift and look picture book, Traub suggests, ‘also constitutes anatomy as pornography [...] the reader is coerced into an experience of sin and transgression’ in which the female generally is an ‘object of knowledge.’<sup>132</sup>

The anatomists shared the curiosity of the Ward and Sordido, the desire to know the woman inside, which when acted upon is a violation. ‘The academic revelation of bodily interiority depends upon the physical violation of bodily integrity’, remarks Traub.<sup>133</sup> The

<sup>126</sup> Maus, pp. 273–4.

<sup>127</sup> Callaghan, p. 141.

<sup>128</sup> Jonathan Sawday, ‘The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body’, in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture, c. 1540–1660*, ed. by Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 111–135 (p. 111).

<sup>129</sup> Newman, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> Newman, pp. 3–4.

<sup>131</sup> Valerie Traub, ‘Gendering Mortality in Early Modern Anatomies’, in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: emerging subjects*, ed. by Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 44–92, (p. 80).

<sup>132</sup> Traub, pp. 82–5.

<sup>133</sup> Traub, p. 53.

anatomists attempted to define female sexuality through science by objectifying the woman's body. She is again ostracised as the 'other' and treated suspiciously as an unknown entity to be explored. *Women Beware Women* holds the concept of the whore to scrutiny, especially in its relation to the wife and male anxieties concerning the sanctity of marriage. Middleton exposes the corrosive nature of male control of women through marriage, driven by a fear over the indefinable inner truth of a wife. The contemporary anxiety concerning the sexual desire concealed within the opaque shell of a woman is reflected in the anatomical studies of women. When considering the dramatic portrayal of marriage, Hutson holds the all-male cast to be of great import: '[t]he exclusively male stage [...] enables and contains the representation of fantasies of sexual liberation in which both men and women are implicated, because it always maintains a hypothetical distance from the oppressive patriarchal structure of marriage.'<sup>134</sup> The controversial attack upon the patriarchal authority over wives was sufficiently contained within the mode of the play, as a woman's desire was contained within her body, to prevent any official repercussions.

#### The Whore: Transcending Boundaries

The satires of Marston and Guilpin express a contemporary definition of the prostitute as a social parasite empowered through her profession, one that incorporates money for sexual disorder. Female sexual transgression was a political threat as it embodied a revolt of a useful yet highly contained member of society, woman. Does the whore in *Women Beware Women* reach beyond the boundaries of the feminine ideal to become sexually independent? Are Livia and Bianca women living in a repressive patriarchy, forced into situations, which often leave limited opportunities for survival?

Livia is the most powerful woman in *Women Beware Women* and at the start of the play she exists as an individual from whom men seek advice. Livia immediately establishes her unconventionality by exposing the double standards of sexual morality. She advances an argument for women's freedom to explore their desires:

'Tis enough for him.  
Besides, he tastes of many sundry dishes  
That we poor wretches never lay our lips to.

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<sup>134</sup> Hutson, p. 158.

As obedience, forsooth, subjection, duty, and such kickshaws  
 All of our making, but served in to them;  
 And if we lick a finger then sometimes,  
 We are not to blame; your best cooks use it. (I. 2. 39–45)

Livia insists that men's sexual freedom to taste other 'sundry dishes' ensures their contentment in marriage. She justifies a call for sexual emancipation of women, who are never permitted to 'lay our lips to' such delights, by assuming the equality of the genders. The idealised feminine qualities, 'obedience [...] subjection, duty', are dismissed as self-inflicted barriers. Livia eroticises her argument comparing women's sampling of sexual experiences to the lick of a finger and so reducing the threat of a claim to sexual independence. Hopkins suggests that Livia here 'presents women, as cooks, as the artists, and the male feaster as the consumer'.<sup>135</sup> Livia knows the power of female sexuality and couches her controversial opinion in the patriarchal concept of women as the consumable purchase. Fabritio reduces Livia to 'a sweet lady, sister, and a witty' and counters her contentious proposal. Livia marks the insult, 'Fit for a girl of sixteen', while she, twice widowed, 'should be wise by this time' (I. 2. 46–9). Fabritio confirms Livia's undervalued superiority: 'I have paid often fees to a counsellor | Has had a weaker brain' (I. 2. 53–4). Accordingly Levin classes Livia as 'a superior spirit in an inferior world'.<sup>136</sup> She is restricted and frustrated by her gender and her intellect is consequently relegated to serving the desires of significant men.

Livia's status as a wealthy widow informs her liberal attitude to female sexuality. The widow became a popular type, including Valeria in Dickenson's *Fair Valeria*, Eudora and Cynthia in *The Widow's Tears*, Mistress Taffeta in *Ram-Alley*, Lady Plus in *Puritan: or, The Widow of Watling Street*, Gertrude in *Hamlet* and the heroine in Marston's *The Insatiate Countess*. Todd identifies the comic value of the widow on stage 'as a woman who anxiously sought a husband at any cost'.<sup>137</sup> Livia, far from comic, embodies the widow's independence and sexual appetite. Mendelson and Crawford perceive the type of the widow as 'rampantly sexual, calculating, disorderly, and knowing: "The rich Widow weeps with one eye and casts glances with the other"'.<sup>138</sup> As a single woman with disposable wealth the widow undermined the theoretical order, yet her remarriage

<sup>135</sup> Hopkins, p. 6.

<sup>136</sup> Levin, p. 371 (19).

<sup>137</sup> Barbara J. Todd, 'The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered', in *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, ed. by Mary Prior (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 54–92, (p. 54).

<sup>138</sup> M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950), p. 722, in Mendelson and Crawford, p. 68.

emphasised the mortality of man and the likelihood of his replacement by another. Flamineo in *The White Devil* expresses anxiety over the dishonesty of the widow, which corroborates the earlier analysis of Francisco's views on whores and their issue.

O men  
That lie upon your death-beds, and are haunted  
With howling wives, ne'er trust them: they'll re-marry  
Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider  
Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs. (V. 6. 154–8)

Women are ruled by passion with no devotion or loyalty to their dead husbands. Flamineo voices a strange contradiction in which he attacks the freedom of women to choose a replacement husband, while later criticising women's dependence on men, when man and society enforced the submission of women. Flamineo imagines wives and widows as 'horse-leeches' draining husbands of vitality and wealth, and as treacherous throat cutters, all beliefs which fuel Vittoria's trial and her defence which will shortly be analysed (V. 6. 165).

Anxiety over the independent power of the widow is evident in Todd's Abingdon study. She reveals that widows in the sixteenth century were the inheritors of wealth and were responsible for supporting their families, although the seventeenth century saw 'the widow's tenure [...] as a temporary custody, and the way she was to use the property was more circumscribed'.<sup>139</sup> The change was a reaction to the contemporary strengthening of the widow's legal rights to her estate and a fear of her remarriage. The Duchess is cast as a lecherous widow by her brothers in *The Duchess of Malfi*, which Calbi attributes to the 'male anxiety regarding the widow's liminal position *vis-à-vis* the marital paradigm, and her relative economic independence in early modern society'.<sup>140</sup>

The church and Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman* advocated the remarriage of young widows to prevent sexual transgression. Yet Todd claims that due to 'the widow's economic circumstances and the implications of matrimony' during 'the early modern period widows came to be less likely to remarry'.<sup>141</sup> Marriage removed the widow's legal identity as an individual, and as the 'Homily on Matrimony' preached, by remarrying

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<sup>139</sup> Todd, p. 74.

<sup>140</sup> Calbi, p. 8.

<sup>141</sup> Todd, p. 83.

widows would 'relinquish the liberty of their own rule'.<sup>142</sup> Livia's argument for sexual liberty reflects a common assumption that the widow was sexually avaricious, a response to the widow's reluctance to jeopardise her wealth and independence through marriage. Livia as an independent, rich and intelligent widow is established immediately as a threat to conventional gender order and one who adheres to her own philosophy, a product of life experience.

The independent Livia is imbued with the 'phallic tongue', a power of words and persuasion which usurps masculine authority to manipulate others according to her own schemes. Livia realises Hippolito's incestuous desire even though she condemns it as sin, 'Must thy eye | Dwell evilly on the fairness of thy kindred' (II. 1. 8–9). Livia boasts of her powers of persuasion, through the phallic 'tongue', to undermine Isabella's moral resolve:

Sir, I could give as shrewd a lift to chastity  
As any she that wears a tongue in Florence.  
Sh'd need be a good horse-woman, and sit fast,  
Whom my strong argument could not fling at last.  
Prithee, take courage, man. Though I should counsel  
Another to despair, yet I am pitiful  
To thy afflictions, and will venture hard. (II. 1. 36–42)

Livia swears to serve male illicit desires and impersonate a man to penetrate chastity wearing 'a tongue' instead of a penis. Her 'strong argument' will break Isabella's resolve to be a 'good horsewoman'. The image of horsemanship was a traditional representation of reason controlling the passions, which underpins Livia's allusion. Livia suspects that Isabella's reason will not maintain her chastity when confronted by her forceful argument, revealing her own belief in the female natural proclivity to sensuality. Livia's autonomous power in corrupting a maid and disregarding social mores is weakened by her subservience to Hippolito's desires. She admits her 'fault', devotion to her brother, 'you've few sisters | That love their brothers' ease 'bove their own honesties' (II. 1. 73, 70–1). Livia's love of Hippolito quashes all concerns for Isabella and the immorality of incest, which she fully comprehends, 'would I loved you not so well' (II. 1. 63). Livia resists her own incestuous desire for her brother and arranges the affair to live vicariously through Isabella. Despite her skill of persuasion she is bound by a sense of moral or social constraint to enable and yet stay apart from the incest.

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<sup>142</sup> *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches*, ed. J. Griffiths (Oxford, 1859), p. 505.

Livia is also headhunted to devise a 'course' to feed the Duke's desire for Bianca (II. 2. 19). Unfulfilled as a widow, Livia welcomes the stimulation of implementing her schemes. Her success enables the Duke's rape, and leads a shocked Leantio to blame 'some close bawd's working' (III. 2. 268). Livia rejects her title of bawd and asserts Bianca's personal responsibility, ('most assuredly she is a strumpet') and his own flawed base for marriage, ('love for beauty') causing the 'destruction of affection' (III. 2. 276, 283–5). Livia also advances Mother's argument that poverty induced Bianca's appetite: 'It brings on want, and want's the key of whoredom' (III. 2. 286). Her perception is accurate: Livia exposes the foundation of Leantio's affection and shares Bianca's belief in fate and Mother's emphasis on wealth.

Livia's 'tongue' enables her to implement schemes that conflict with social and moral beliefs. She pimps her niece's body and heart to an incestuous relationship and ensures Bianca's vulnerability to the Duke's sexual assault. Undoubtedly Livia is an empowered woman and her actions carry the warning of the title, *Women Beware Women*. Yet Livia is not the only agent of corruption; Hippolito's acquiescence in the prostitution of his niece is just as dangerous to Isabella as her aunt's machinations. Leantio also leaves his wife alone, and the Duke with Guardiano enact Bianca's corruption and rape.

The tongue in early modern culture embodied female sexual and political threat as it represented excess beyond the contained role of the woman. Pauline injunctions for women's silence and the attacks on scolds associated the female voice with loose sexuality and behaviour; in contrast silence was linked with chastity. The scold or loud woman was punished with the cucking stool, or the 'nastier, but illegal [...] iron device, the scold's bridle, over her head and tongue', comment Mendelson and Crawford.<sup>143</sup> Jardine stresses the common correlation between the scold and lust: 'the literature of the scolding husband-beater is closely shadowed by that of the sexually predatory, lewdly dominating woman.'<sup>144</sup>

Thomas Becon's *Catechism* (1564) paints voracious female sexuality as an oral greed: '[t]he whore is never satisfied, but is like as one that goeth by the way & is thristye: even

<sup>143</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 70.

<sup>144</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and drama in the age of Shakespeare* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), p. 123.

so does she open her mouth, and drink of every next water, that she may get. By every hedge she sits down, & opēs her quiver against every arrow.’<sup>145</sup> Newman notes Becon’s emphasis on ‘her rampant sexuality [...] making her genitals a thirsty mouth roaming the countryside in search of water,’ while ‘an open mouth and immodest speech are tantamount to open genitals and immodest acts’.<sup>146</sup> The mouth of the woman embodies oral transgression through both incontinent speech and promiscuity.

The original sin of woman, Eve’s persuasion of Adam, confirms the connotations of transgression with the female tongue. Callaghan claims that the talking Eve figure as a ‘speaking woman becomes an anomaly – a woman with a phallus in her head’.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, in *Epicoene* Morose interprets female noise as indicative of sexual incontinence, which is based upon an assumption of women’s innate desires as previously discussed (III. 5. 59–60). The female gossip, scold and shrew are familiar figures whose outspoken behaviour assumes a masculinity and often promiscuity. Arabella Stuart, who preferred solitary study, objected to *Epicoene*, as she believed that it alluded to herself. ‘The play attacks “hermaphroditical” talking women, women who transgress the culturally constructed codes of behaviour believed appropriate to them in early modern England’, states Newman.<sup>148</sup> Talk by women represented a usurpation of masculine authority as it enabled them to express controversial ideas and desires, manipulate or dominate men and explore society.

Livia’s mastery of language as a phallic power is comparable with Vittoria’s vocal defence at her trial in *The White Devil*, which attempts to combat the male sexual fantasies and nightmares discussed earlier in the chapter. She demands her trial proceeds in English, a transparent language against man’s ‘justice’:

By your favour,  
I will not have my accusation clouded  
In a strange tongue. All this assembly  
Shall hear what you can charge me with.  
(III. 2. 17–20)

<sup>145</sup> *The Catechism of Thomas Becon, with other pieces*, ed. by Rev. John Ayre (Cambridge: CUP, 1866), ‘An Homily against Whoredom and Uncleaness,’ pp. 642–50 (p. 342).

<sup>146</sup> Newman, pp. 10–11.

<sup>147</sup> Callaghan, pp. 168–9.

<sup>148</sup> Newman, p. 142.

Vittoria understands the power of language for a woman, and her quest for clarity continues against the Lawyer's legal jargon. He dismisses Vittoria as a woman ignorant of 'the academic derivation | Of grammatical elocution' (III. 2. 41–2). Female language is more elemental and powerful than man's political and legal prose. Despite her limitations, Vittoria safeguards language as her only weapon for freedom and wins support through verbal wit and courage. Vittoria cautiously asserts her right to speak 'just defence', aware of the negative connotations of a woman's tongue:

VITTORIA [*bowing*]

Humbly thus,  
 Thus low, to the most worthy and respected  
 Lieger ambassadors, my modesty  
 And womanhood I tender; but withal  
 So entangled in a cursèd accusation  
 That my defence of force, like Perseus,  
 Must personate masculine virtue.

(III. 2. 130–5)

Vittoria's defence is a contradiction; she humbly bows in submission to men, whilst impersonating 'masculine virtue' in speech. Isolated, she assumes the power of speech and 'defence of force' in opposition to the ideals of chaste womanhood. Monticelso labels her defence as 'scorn and impudence' while the English ambassador in tune with the spectator admires her 'brave spirit' (III. 2. 121, 140). Everything is dependent on man's interpretation of Vittoria, which explains her caution in assuming speech.

Monticelso condemns Vittoria's eloquence as a 'most prodigious spirit', a usurpation of masculine assertion. She is attacked for using her language to conceal and serve the prostitution of her body: 'O your trade instructs your language!' (III. 2. 62). The female tongue despite its phallic representation is futile against men and law, and yet Vittoria's speech exposes injustice:

That the last day of judgement may so find you,  
 And leave you the same devil you were before.  
 Instruct me some good horse-leech to speak treason,  
 For since you cannot take my life for deeds,  
 Take it for words. O woman's poor revenge  
 Which dwells but in the tongue. I will not weep.  
 No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear  
 To fawn on your injustice. (III. 2. 279–86)

The deeds of Vittoria's life are inconsequential, while man's words can condemn. She defies her sentence by verbally altering her prison, 'It shall not be a house of convertites. | My mind shall make it honest to me.' Livia reigns as the supreme Machiavellian in

*Women Beware Women*; however, she is fated to a painful death as a woman whose disorderly tongue must be silenced. Similarly, Callaghan suggests that Vittoria's public speech betrays her 'public sexuality, like that of a prostitute'.<sup>149</sup> A woman may gain temporarily from language yet ultimately the dramatist shows that they are but words: 'O woman's poor revenge | Which dwells but in the tongue.' Vittoria has a powerful tongue and is desired for her sexuality, all symbols of rebellious power. Nevertheless she is dependent upon Bracciano and her true impotency is expressed by her masculine substitutes; her tongue is phallic, and her tears are weapons: 'I now weep poniards' (IV. 2. 128–33). Flamineo praises Vittoria's phallic strength and expresses how the esteemed female 'silence' conceals the truth of women:

Know many glorious women that are famed  
 For masculine virtue, have been vicious:  
 Only a happier silence will betide them.  
 She hath no faults, who hath the art to hide them.  
 (V. 6. 243–6)

Flamineo declares that women admired for masculine reason and courage are also 'vicious', the true threat of their monstrous natures concealed by a 'happier silence'. Flamineo asserts that the only woman who has no faults is the one who conceals them through 'art'. He condemns the persecution of women with the phallic tongue, while others survive by hiding their masculine monstrosity. The play's portrayal of the whore's allure and concealed threat will be explored later in the chapter.

Livia's main flaw as the autonomous woman is her enslavement to desire. Her weakness for Hippolito translates through her initiation of his illicit affair, while her desire for Leantio seals her fate. Livia's chess move forecasts her future: 'I give you check and mate to your white king — | Simplicity itself — your saintish king there' (II. 2. 304–5). Mother's white king Leantio becomes Livia's infatuation. Despite her successful manipulation of others to sexually act in an illicit manner, which she views as 'Simplicity itself', Livia also becomes the slave to forbidden desire.

Bianca perceives Livia's desire as a just punishment for her sexual scheming, 'a bawd plagued home' by the lust she conjured in others (IV. 1. 76). Livia's female weakness is

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<sup>149</sup> Callaghan, pp. 76–7.

shown through her susceptibility to insatiable desire, although she initiates the relationship from a position of authority comparable to the Duke:

Couldst thou love such a one that, blow all fortunes,  
 Would never see thee want,  
 Nay, more, maintain thee to thine enemy's envy? —  
 And shalt not spend a care for't, stir a thought,  
 Nor break a sleep unless love's music waked thee;  
 No storm of fortune should. Look upon me,  
 And know that woman. (III. 2. 302–8)

Livia's proposal of quiet comfort and shelter from the realities of the world resembles the Duke's promise of wealth and security to Bianca. Livia desires Leantio and is willing to purchase his 'love' like a man. She is assertive with an understanding of the economy of love and sex, which she succeeds in buying. Ironically Livia makes a whore of Leantio offering her money and body to shape him into her gallant: 'see my wealth; take what you list. | The gallanter you go, the more you please me' (III. 2. 369–70). Livia conforms to the threatening image of the widow who manipulates men and purchases their bodies to feed her insatiable desire. Even in her apparent female weakness Livia is the patriarch quenching her own sexual appetite as she pleases.

Haselkorn comments, 'in this drama women are set against women and exploited for men's purposes,' and Middleton 'seems more often to apply the idea of treachery and lack of loyalty to the female sex'.<sup>150</sup> She interprets Livia's actions and views as misogynistic. In contrast, I propose that Middleton exposes the subjection of women within a restrictive patriarchal society. Livia survives and excels in a world where she is dismissed or demonised by usurping male traits. She transcends the woman's limited sphere by manipulating others for her own gain. Significantly she is not the only character who harms or betrays women; there are three male characters that are complicit in the corruption of Bianca and Isabella, yet due to the title critics focus upon the treachery of women, as if caught within the misogynist's perception.

Livia is impressively powerful, imbued with a phallic tongue that can penetrate the chaste and instil 'courage' in a man. She acts as a goddess, choosing who will suffer 'despair' and whom she shall pity, for which Isabella later punishes her. Livia's machinations adversely affect two women although she is not a misogynist. MacGregor notes, 'all the

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<sup>150</sup> Haselkorn, p. 128.

women, Livia included, are facilitators of masculine desire.<sup>151</sup> Livia is a realist and takes advantage of the patriarchal system. She acts amongst the ruling echelons and with other players uses those less powerful, notably Isabella and Bianca, as pawns. Livia is remarkable as she operates in a playing field of men and is approached to assist their needs. Morality is easily pushed aside and she acts according to her fancies, until at her death she typically repents, a gesture to those disconcerted by her threatening power.

A feminist rebuke would criticise the reduction of women to infantile victims and passive male constructions, although in fact Middleton presents women who find their constructed position restrictive and uncomfortable, they therefore adapt and manipulate the system in an attempt to escape their social imprisonment. Yet it is doubtful whether they do escape: Bianca becomes a whore and dies an alienated murderess, while Livia gains prestige as an agent for men, although still falls to an insatiable desire for Leantio and dies.

Lesbian love and sexual self-gratification embodied a concept of female sexual autonomy, which the 'whores' of *Women Beware Women* never experience. Janel Mueller proclaims, 'lesbianism transmutes to utopianism as a figuration of all-sufficient love.'<sup>152</sup> In contrast to heterosexual love, idealistic lesbian unions are equally consenting and do not violate or impregnate. Mueller cites Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis' as opposing the prevailing homophobia of the period through the 'arts of female sexual gratification'.<sup>153</sup> Harvey interprets Donne's image of the lesbian Sappho as 'slightly ridiculous in her lonely passion and finally enclosed within a symmetrical, almost tautological sterility'.<sup>154</sup> Lesbianism, whether a sterile male construct or a utopian vision, symbolised a female rejection of man through self-sufficiency.

The sexual autonomy of utopian lesbian love and the self-gratification of the dildo are notably absent from *Women Beware Women*. There is no alternative sexual experience or outlet for the woman, she has only man. Sexual experience and knowledge is presented as a violation: Bianca is raped, Isabella is fooled into an incestuous relationship, while Livia is weakened and suffers death as a consequence of insatiable desire. Livia weakens her

<sup>151</sup> MacGregor, p. 14 (10).

<sup>152</sup> Janel Mueller, 'Troping Utopia: Donne's brief for lesbianism', in *Sexuality and gender in early modern Europe, institutions, texts, images*, ed. by James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 182–207 (p. 184).

<sup>153</sup> Mueller, p. 199.

<sup>154</sup> Harvey, p. 136.

masculine independence, her wealth, widow status and phallic tongue. Independent sexual pleasure has repercussions through pregnancy and social castigation. The whore is offered empowerment, although only temporarily as premature death is her destined fate.

### The Whore: A Figure of Hate, Allure or Inspiration

The whore of Jacobean drama was a focus of female disorder in terms of her sexuality and her rejection of woman's approved role in society. Is the whore simply a hate figure designed to draw male anxiety and female scorn, or does she occupy a role of allurements or even acts to inspire? Ambiguity in the presentation of the whore has confused critical judgements, and it is apparent that she exists as a figure both demonised and to a certain extent admired. The difficulty lies in the ability of the viewer to clarify these different attitudes and gain an overall sense of the dramatist's intention. The discord of opinion concerning the whore may be deliberate, revealing her value to different people and allowing the spectator to decide. The title of *The White Devil* expresses the paradox between good and bad, and their inextricable connection. Does the whore serve to illustrate that no woman is simply good or evil, or does she represent the worst devil in disguise?

Her enemies, the majority of whom are men, powerfully express the whore as a hate figure. Callaghan maintains that man's authority was 'precarious,' and to keep women 'suppressed, the category of woman as the lower term must constantly be *negated* [...] this means that woman is brought to the surface of social consciousness only to be repudiated'.<sup>155</sup> The whore is a desirable commodity and yet she is a passing possession transferred between men. Callaghan interprets woman as 'only ever temporarily incorporated into the male body'.<sup>156</sup> Leantio's last words are focused upon his loss of Bianca. He realises that his death will free her to marry another man: 'Rise, strumpet, by my fall; thy lust may reign now' (IV. 1. 43). Leantio perceives himself as a moral corrective of Bianca, both through his earlier attempts at fasting, and his existence; she is lust personified, not a real woman. Men are drawn to female beauty as victims, and Leantio considers the Duke 'near kin' due to their shared attraction to Bianca (III. 2. 91):

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<sup>155</sup> Callaghan, pp. 9–12.

<sup>156</sup> Callaghan, p. 106.

First the hard-conscienced worldling, he hoards wealth up;  
 Then comes the next, and he feasts all upon't.  
 One's damned for getting, th'other for spending on't.  
 O equal justice, thou hast met my sin  
 With a full weight. I'm rightly now oppressed.  
 All her friends' heavy hearts lie in my breast.  
 (III. 2. 93–8)

Bianca is the treasure, which the 'hard-conscienced worldling' Leantio 'hoards' while the Duke is the consumer who 'feasts' upon her. Bianca is the source of man's damnation: Leantio is 'damned for getting' another's kinswoman, whereas the Duke is damned for 'spending on't' money and lust. Leantio constructs Bianca as a precious vessel in a world which is dominated by men compelled to steal her away or to pour their energies and wealth into her. Her allure is her danger, enchanting men who are not responsible for their actions. Returning to the discussion of *The White Devil*, women to Flamineo are passing pleasures that circulate amongst men: "'Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden: the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out' (I. 2. 41–3). Men are cast as foolish birds enchanted by the whore, while her lovers are eager to escape her snare. The whore is constructed as a powerful goddess or demon, a figment of masculine anxiety and blame. In *The Duchess of Malfi* whores are demonic, they are 'witches, ere they arrive at twenty years; | Ay: and give the devil suck' (I. 1. 301–2). Callaghan notes how 'the mother figure becomes a monstrosity'.<sup>157</sup> Similarly Leantio's attack upon Bianca in *Women Beware Women* conjures the image of her suckling the Duke as a devil's familiar: 'There's no harm in your devil, he's a suckling; | But he will breed teeth shortly, will he not?' (IV. 1. 80–1). The whore is an inversion of the feminine ideals of nurture within Jacobean drama as her milk nourishes evil. In *The White Devil* Bracciano threatens Vittoria due to his fear of her infidelity, 'Ud's death, I'll cut her into atomies' (IV. 2. 41):

Your beauty! O, ten thousand curses on't.  
 How long have I beheld the devil in crystal?  
 Thou hast led me, like an heathen sacrifice,  
 With music, and with fatal yokes of flowers  
 To my eternal ruin. Woman to man  
 Is either a god or a wolf. (IV. 2. 84–9)

Vittoria as a whore suffers the full vent of his anger; she is an all-powerful and vicious figure, a 'god or a wolf'. Bracciano is immediately the victim of her deception; she is a

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<sup>157</sup> Callaghan, p. 107.

‘devil in crystal’ who leads him to his ‘eternal ruin’. His definition is too simplistic and Bracciano attributes his error to the common opinion: ‘I was bewitched, | For all the world speaks ill of thee’ (IV. 2. 98–9). The misogynist attack on the whore is a conventional response to her alluring transgression. Vittoria points to men in authority as the creators of the ‘whore and murd’ress’ and her demonic image: ‘These are but feignèd shadows of my evils. | Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils’ (III. 2. 149, 146–7). She instead considers her nonconformity as precious: a ‘mine of diamonds’ amongst ‘glassen hammers’ (III. 2. 144–5). She is not a feminist, but a rarity, which man must negate to ensure the conformity of women and the protection of men against her influence. Women consume the definition of the whore; the wronged wife Isabella in *The White Devil* imagines the anatomical torture of her rival Vittoria:

To dig the strumpet’s eyes out, let her lie  
 Some twenty months a-dying, to cut off  
 Her nose and lips, pull out her rotten teeth,  
 Preserve her flesh like mummia, for trophies  
 Of my just anger; hell to my affliction  
 Is mere snow-water. (II. 1. 245–50)

Ironically she exhibits the passion of the whore and imagines physically gouging, cutting and pulling at Vittoria’s alluring features to reap the distilled ‘mummia’ from the corpse as a trophy to her anger. The whore is an unknown entity, and her dissection is termed as a fit punishment for an immoral woman, as executed criminals were the cadavers for anatomical study, undeserving of a Christian burial. Monticelso shares Isabella’s appetite for dismembering Vittoria’s body. He evokes the mystery of the empowered whore and desires to dissect and disarm her body and her threat:

What are whores?  
 They are those flattering bells have all one tune,  
 At weddings, and at funerals; your rich whores  
 Are only treasuries by extortion filled,  
 And emptied by cursed riot. They are worse,  
 Worse than dead bodies, which are begged at gallows  
 And wrought upon by surgeons to teach man  
 Wherein his is imperfect. What’s a whore?  
 She’s like the guilty counterfeited coin  
 Which, whosoe’er first stamps it, brings in trouble  
 All that receive it. (III. 2. 91–101)

The ‘rich’ whore taps into the scorned concept of the widow content ‘at weddings and at funerals,’ outliving men and reaping financial wealth from their death. She embodies death, decay and otherworldliness, as she is ‘worse’ than dead bodies at the gallows and

anatomy classes. As a counterfeit coin the whore is fake, and brings 'trouble' both for man's body and soul:

They are first,  
Sweet-meats which rot the eater; in man's nostril  
Poisoned perfumes. They are cozening alchemy,  
Shipwrecks in calmest weather! What are whores?  
Cold Russian winters, that appear so barren,  
As if that nature had forgot the spring.  
They are the true material fire of hell. (III. 2. 79–85)

The whore is a goddess imbued with the inestimable powers of nature and hell, as barren as a 'Russian' winter, while also the 'true' fire of Hell. She is constructed as everyman's pleasure and nightmare, embodying sexual delight and its consequent infection; her 'sweet' flesh will rot and poison those that consume. Callaghan observes that women are 'embodiments of decay, exuding contaminating menstrual fluid, harbouring diseases and disguising their rottenness with cosmetics'.<sup>158</sup> In *The White Devil* Flamineo warns that even 'perfum'd gallants' will not be spared from infection:

Their satin cannot save them. I am confident  
They have a certain spice of the disease,  
For they that sleep with dogs shall rise with fleas.  
(V. 1. 160–2)

In *Women Beware Women* the whore as an emblem of decay is common. Leantio's curse, 'A plague will come', alludes to Bianca's damnation and punishment by sexual disease, while the Cardinal condemns the Duke's immoral example with an image of fire associated with the pox: 'Every sin thou commit'st shows like a flame' (IV. 1. 105, 208). Bromham explains the correlation of fire and the pox as an image of the 'spread of syphilitic contagion'.<sup>159</sup> The Ward describes Isabella as rotten or overripe fruit, a remark reflecting upon her incestuous affair:

Nay, there's a worse name belongs to this fruit yet, an you could hit on't, a more open one; for he that marries a whore looks like a fellow bound all his lifetime to a medlar-tree—and that's good stuff: 'tis no sooner ripe but it looks rotten; and so do some queans at nineteen. A pox on't, I thought there was some knavery abroach, for something stirred in her belly the first night I lay with her. (IV. 2. 96–103)

The Ward is a victim of the whore, bound to her moral decay through his betrothal. Isabella is the 'open' fruit of a 'medlar-tree', emphasising her 'open' orifice and her 'meddling' with other men. The paradox of her youth and her 'rotten' flesh like other

<sup>158</sup> Callaghan, p. 105.

<sup>159</sup> Bromham, pp. 156–7.

young 'queans' conveys the effects of sexual disease and knowledge. He is dismayed by Isabella's penetrability and suspects the hidden female womb of holding 'something' monstrous. The misogynist Sordido characteristically blames female fashion for concealing her loose sexual state: 'how would you have me see through a great farthingale, sir? I cannot peep through a millstone, or in the going to see what's done i'th' bottom' (IV. 2. 116–18). Despite the evocation of the contaminated whore, we do not pity the Ward; instead Isabella is portrayed as the victim.

The whore's demonic and corruptive threat to man's privileged position in patriarchal society was countered by her repentance and ultimate death. In *Women Beware Women* the whore transforms into a murderess, undermining her inspirational value. Isabella vows to punish Livia, to 'teach a sinful bawd to play a goddess' (IV. 2. 226). Livia promises to cause 'destruction' to avenge Leantio (IV. 2. 235). Bianca plans the Cardinal's murder to protect the Duke and herself: 'Beware a brother's envy; he's next heir too' (V. 1. 57). The extreme leap from sexual immorality to a cold killer, although characteristic of the misogynist diatribe, clashes with Middleton's presentation of the whore as a victim of patriarchal society and individual men.

Many critics view the death and repentance of the whore as a convention to restore the patriarchal order and suppress female rebellion, a way of appeasing male anxiety and the authorities' concerns over the insurgent quality of the work amongst women. MacGregor claims that the conclusion ends on 'a pessimistic note of the triumph of moral ideology over individual desires'.<sup>160</sup> Callaghan perceives death as a way of neutralising the threat of the heroine: 'the female body becomes at once the unthreatening object of desire subject to the penetration of the gaze as the focus of dramatic attention, and the fantasised locus of power.'<sup>161</sup> Vittoria's defiance in *The White Devil* is commended as noble because it no longer threatens society. Haselkorn asserts, 'the repentance leitmotiv [...] reinforces the ideological message of the plays: unorthodox female behavior must be exorcised.'<sup>162</sup> She interprets the male dramatist's ending as 'the final act of contrition for making forays into

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<sup>160</sup> MacGregor, p. 14 (10).

<sup>161</sup> Callaghan, p. 94.

<sup>162</sup> Haselkorn, p. 129.

the reality outside the circumscribed female orbit', while 'the repentance redirects the audience's sympathies toward socially sanctioned views of the female'.<sup>163</sup>

The repentance of the whore followed by her death is a stock reaction. Repentance strikes Bianca with the realisation that she has poisoned her Duke: 'O, the curse of wretchedness! | My deadly hand is fall'n upon my lord' (V. 1. 223–224). Bianca accepts her fate as the doomed strumpet with a sensuous kiss on the poisoned lips of her lover, 'wrap two spirits in one poisoned vapour' (V. 1. 235). She proclaims her inner 'deformity' to match the facial scarring caused by the toxin: 'A blemished face best fits a leprous soul' (V. 1. 245–246). A Venetian in Florence, Bianca recovers strength from rape and later dies alone: 'These are all strangers to me, | Not known but by their malice now thou'art gone' (V. 1. 247–248). Hopkins emphasises her isolation: 'she [...] does not interact with anyone else even to the extent of being killed by them, and has in fact to commit suicide.'<sup>164</sup> Bianca is punished for the sins of female sexuality ('I feel the breach of marriage'), and laments 'the deadly snares | That women set for women' (V. 1. 251–255). Similarly the impressive, independent and Machiavellian Livia is uncharacteristically defeated: 'My subtlety is sped: her art has quitted me; | My own ambition pulls me down to ruin' (V. 1. 170–171). The play cannot blatantly present the triumph of a woman who usurps masculine authority and sexual autonomy. Some critics consider the death of the woman rebel as a restoration of the authority of the husband in marriage. Callaghan sees dysfunctional relationships 'resolved and petrified in death'.<sup>165</sup> Levin praises Bianca's dignified death, as she resolves, 'never to betray her second husband as she betrayed the first.'<sup>166</sup> Bianca's guilty 'betrayal', however, does not correlate with her story. Leantio neglected his wife's sexual needs and her fornication was exacted by the Duke's premeditated sexual assault. The repentance speech through its bias emphasises the role of man in her 'corruption' by his notable absence, while also on the surface presenting conformity to the conventional treatment of the whore.

The conclusion of the play blames women for crimes against women: 'Like our own sex we have no enemy, no enemy' (V. 1. 256). The repentance speeches of the whores are so extreme in their bolstering of the patriarchal order that they completely contrast with their

<sup>163</sup> Haselkorn, p. 126.

<sup>164</sup> Hopkins, p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> Callaghan, p. 91.

<sup>166</sup> Levin, p. 371 (19).

former characterisation. The facts of the plot remain for all to note, most notably the actions of male characters that prostitute women, rape and murder. The Duke is a rapist and arranges Leantio's death, Guardiano prostitutes Bianca and plans the death of Hippolito, while Fabritio prostitutes his daughter in marriage. Hippolito kills Leantio and commits himself to damnation, a fate 'worse' than death, for his incestuous lust and murder (V. 1. 182). The only man who has a true repentance speech is Hippolito, a mark of the severity of his sexual sin against religion and society. The notable lack of repentance of the equally damned male characters encourages the spectator to overlook their moral journeys. The whores' repentance serves to uphold the oppressive society that affected their transgression, and this incongruity forces the viewer to consider their development and the fairness of their treatment.

Middleton's uneasy ending deliberately emphasises falsity, especially through the role of the Cardinal. Levin describes him as, 'a grotesque phoenix — the cardinal — rising from the ashes.'<sup>167</sup> The Cardinal is too devout, one who vocally attacks the sinners for their planned marriage, and yet is present at the celebration and masque. The use of the Cardinal as a mouthpiece for the final words of the play is significant as it undermines the blame of female lust (V. 1. 266). The Cardinal's apparent moral simplicity is unnerving and the audience cannot help but question his judgment when compared to the other morally complex figures of the play.

The death and repentance of the whore acts as a hollow parade of conformity, while the real power of the whore as an alluring and inspiring figure who transcends boundaries remains and cannot be exorcised. Callaghan claims, 'only death, not words, can vindicate an accused female tragic protagonist.'<sup>168</sup> The penitent death of the whore superficially enforces the play's adherence to traditional values of femininity and yet it does not revoke the impressive image of the whore created throughout the play. It is simplistic to assume an enforced and uncharacteristic repentant death will supplant a spectator's experience of the whore's transformation by male force, inner struggle and empowerment in a restrictive world. Heller refers to Senecan tragedy, in which characters have free will and are still pitied despite their guilt, to explain the audience's relationship with Bianca, Isabella and

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<sup>167</sup> Levin, p. 371 (19).

<sup>168</sup> Callaghan, p. 77.

Livia.<sup>169</sup> All three display cunning and follow their desires, while still retaining the audience's compassion and empathy. Female will and desire are too powerful to be prevented by morality and the institution of marriage; this is the overriding sense at the end of the play, not the false and predictable repentance speeches.

There are no ideal women in Middleton's play for the spectator to displace his sympathies upon. The misogynistic conclusion that all women will betray and are subject to the demise of lust is incongruous with the sympathetic portrayal of Bianca and Isabella who by others' actions are unfairly portrayed as whores and so destined for destruction. Even Livia is presented as an impressive figure suppressed by the restrictions of a patriarchal society for a woman. The repentance speech of the whore is a convention, and by its familiarity, in plays that are less ambiguous in their portrayal of the immoral woman, it enforces how even in death the whore is pushed to conform in order to alleviate masculine intimidation. Middleton's whore is more than an 'evil' woman, and her repentant death is comparable to a public execution in which the guilty hollowly utter the official line and their loyalty to the current order.

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<sup>169</sup> Heller, p. 439.

## Conclusion

The investigation has explored the anxieties aroused by female sexuality and the concept of gender in the period spanning the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras from the starting-point of Marston's and Guilpin's turn-of-the-century perspective. The study has incorporated contemporary literary expressions, which through close analysis have served to polarise the issues of gender and sexual transgression that posed the most potent threats. Social historical research has successfully been juxtaposed against the main literary analysis to establish the social context which created and nurtured these feelings of anxiety. The investigation has offered a new perspective and approach to understanding anxious voices and attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

The pervasive threat and power of female sexuality and its role within the sphere of gender to ignite sexual transformation and deviancy have dominated and shaped the argument of the chapters. The satirical attacks upon deviants of gender, sexuality and social order are all motivated by a fear of change and subsequent chaos. The five key figures exposed by the satirical portraits of Marston and Guilpin all are either products of or examples of a deviant female sexuality, which has in the current culture been unleashed and started to wreak havoc in society. The masculine woman, the enchantress and the whore are all types directly compared to real female counterparts and epitomise female sexuality and its dangers to man when released from the patriarchal controls. These women do not reproduce the patriarchal line through a maternal capacity, they do not obediently serve and love a husband, and they also notably are not confined to the domestic security of a household ruled by a patriarch.

Even more threatening is the attribution of corruptive powers to female sexuality, which the enchantress and whore successfully employ to ensnare, subject and harm men. The masculine woman threatens to usurp man's dominant position and presents the image of a contemporary militant proto-feminist, interpreted by some as a sign of imminent change. The remaining two figures of anxiety are, despite their biological male gender, the most potent embodiments of the sinister powers of female sexuality. The effeminate man and the impotent man are the constructions of an anxious and paranoid masculinity. They are ostracised as inadequate perversions of men, corrupted by a female sexuality that converts

them into beasts and castrates them of masculine authority through the process of transexuality. The effeminate man is most disturbing through his own innate feminine nature, which the influences of women and their associated vain, luxurious, and sensual society seem to magnify and release. The concealed female anatomy designates women as physically menacing, particularly through the body's threatening yet incomprehensible powers of creation and excess. Effeminacy is a process of mutation transforming man into the 'other' who mirrors woman through his excess, while the impotent man is a victim of her appetite for the flesh. He is literally drained of his essence, his semen and his spiritual soul through a sexual union with woman. Female sexuality is figured as a power which can dually mutate masculinity from within yet also harvest the inner masculine source. Clothing, luxury, modern entertainment and sensual pleasure are all reflections of the perversion of man's rational occupation by a pervasive female sexuality, which is treated as the treachery within man and society.

Individually the chapters highlight the complexity and also the unity of expression amongst contemporary writers of the anxieties concerning female sexuality and its conversion of gender. The first chapter establishes the originality of the investigation by removing the satires of Marston and Guilpin from their restrictive critical background, which was dominated by a concern with censorship, and treating them as late Elizabethan expressions of anxiety over contemporary issues of sexuality and gender. The detailed analysis of Guilpin's *Skialetheia* is original and reveals not only a new literary appreciation of his satiric writing but also emphasises his equal significance with Marston's more familiar volumes of satires. The satirists' code of appearances utilised to interpret a person's identity is unanimously recognised by contemporaries, which exposes the intrinsic understanding of order as a system enforced and presented through visual definitions of social identity. However, the realisation that such symbols could be misappropriated and employed to break free of social restrictions created a danger to the order, particularly in terms of gender and sexual expression. The role of fashion and appearance as an enforcer of the status quo is altered by changes in wealth, court fashions aimed at attracting favour and the influence of early modern arts. The way to self-fashion was visually evident in the style choices of real people, which confused the system and caused concern. The study from this point moves beyond the conventional literary criticism of the satires to an analysis of the works according to their use of the aesthetic code, based upon the interpretation of appearance, to expose contemporary anxieties through their depiction of

deviants and vices. The investigation reveals a deeper understanding of the satirists' perception of the world, a perspective which is compared with other, sometimes more familiar accounts.

The satirists reveal the concept of gender transgression and transexuality as innately feminine, a realisation that dominates all the texts explored within the thesis. Furthermore their expression is not purely classical or mythological; they directly associate the extreme satiric portrayals with real contemporary counterparts. The literary expression of the fear of female transgression directly relates to the perception of the contemporary woman, while effeminacy and impotency are placed in the context of national fears for security, and also expose the living embodiments of these satiric portraits circulating in London. Fashion becomes a mark of the feminine corruption dominating society and is represented by the satirists as a means of severing man's rational and spiritual connection with God. The satires expose five areas of masculine and feminine deviancy, and yet, as the thesis has established, these loci of anxiety are not just peculiar to the satirists but also are reflected in contemporary literature and other historical evidence. The satires draw on all the effeminising traits of modern society; for example, the reference to the ingle associated with the early modern stage could not be more topical. They convert the classical form and influence to reflect upon current social issues and anxieties concerning sexuality and its transformation. There is a potent sense of comparison with the doomed Rome, by the depiction of the late Elizabethan world as decaying through its own stagnant prosperity, which sounds typical of satire but is reflected in other contemporary texts. The sexual and gender deviance marked by a subversive use of clothing and appearance signalled a new and disturbing movement towards the expression of the individual over and above what was perceived to be the general good of society.

The masculine woman, characteristic of her usurped authority, dominated the second chapter through an exploration of her contemporary representation, from her emergence as located by the satirists to her full development during the early Jacobean period. The masculine woman embodied the reality of the misappropriated visual symbol through her masculine dress. She discredited the order prescribed through clothing by her representation of an ambiguous gender, and instilled fear by presenting female desire released through masculine privileges and freedoms. The reactions of the authorities and direct condemnation by James I reveal the threat she posed to the sense of gender order and

masculine superiority. By shaping the boundaries of her own existence, the masculine woman threateningly revealed gender and sexuality as malleable and unstable entities.

The threat of proto-feminism was also evident through the reality of her female genitalia, which fairly or unfairly imbued a political meaning to her masculine display. Proto-feminist arguments are combined within *Haec-Vir*, and the stage Moll Cutpurse advocates a manifesto for the defence and equality of women. Man is controversially identified as the architect of gender as a containment of female potential. The weaker and passive arguments espoused by *Hic Mulier* for a return to traditional genders reveal the diversity of agendas amongst masculine women. The claim of female equality instilled fear and her masculine presence was heralded as a sign of impending chaos. Cultural and social influences, including a past androgynous queen, limited work opportunities, and changes in continental fashions also created the masculine role as a viable choice and opportunity of expression for some women. The pamphlets *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* reveal the topicality and furore inspired by the existence of women usurping masculine imagery and rights.

The masculine woman directly conflicted with the ideal mastered woman who was conventionally secured through restrictive clothing. A fear of sexual perversion incited by her appearance evoked condemnation and was shown to be a reality in *The Roaring Girl*. Commentators feared the release of the dangerous expression of female sexual desire through the illegal assumption of male freedoms. The potency of the sexual threat of the masculine woman is epitomised by Frith's censorship of all reference to sexual desire and relations in her autobiography. The stage Moll similarly is also devoid of sexual desire, revealing a deliberate containment of the sexual threat which would undermine her moral characterisation. Moll's rebellion within the confines of marriage would not have been so tolerable in the comic world of the play. The masculine woman embodies a masculinity which is lost in contemporary society and, as was the case for her real counterparts, the stage Moll is attacked by the insecure Sir Alexander and Laxton who attempt to castrate her usurped masculinity.

The third chapter investigates the preoccupation with the effeminate man as expressed by the satirists, who castigate him as a product of his age, weakened by the feminine culture and carnal pleasures. Ironically the masculine woman in *Haec-Vir* attacks the effeminate man as the thief of femininity and the cause of the gender and sexual disruption currently

plaguing Jacobean society. In contemporary debate female sexuality is the primary effeminate force as established by the early debate begun in Sidney's *Arcadia*. The perception of carnal female pleasure as innately corruptive is a constant theme which weaves through the contemporary accounts of effeminacy. In contrast, the bond between men is established as a rational rival that can protect men from the threat of effeminacy; however, the later satirists and moralists qualify this saving grace. They condemn the popular sexual trade of ingles amongst the gallants as part of the feminine sphere of transforming carnal pleasures. All sensual excess is imbued with the force of transforming man into the equivalent of a child, a woman or a beast. Masculinity is disturbingly reflected as a malleable essence which is not fixed and therefore must be maintained. The boy actor epitomises the malleable nature of masculine gender through appearance and performance, and so became a focus for fears concerning effeminate sexuality. The mythic idea that Pyrocles' Amazonian clothes inscribe effeminacy became a real prospect in the satirist's time.

The male essence is revealed to be the cause of fear through its conceptualisation as changeable and so posing an innate threat of inner treason within every man. Effeminacy inverts the bastions of order dictated by gender and God while also representing the expression of an individual's desires and perversities to the detriment of society. Contemporary sermons and literature displace the deep-seated anxiety over man's decline upon a fear for national security. Man is figured as a realm, and his effeminacy reflects upon his own and his nation's weak and penetrable feminine borders. Effeminacy is treated as a public problem due to its implications for the health of a whole patriarchal nation.

Motivated by the same desires as the effeminate man, the impotent man is metaphorically castrated of his masculine identity by overexertion with the ever-insatiable female lover. Impotency demolishes the concept of the masculine and virile ideal, and jeopardises a man's involvement within society and marriage. The tradition of writing on the subject of impotency consistently warns of the inevitable defeat of man in a sexual contest with the avaricious woman. Marlowe, Campion and Nashe reflect upon the same anxiety whilst still recognising the lure of sexual pleasure characteristic of the Ovidian trope. Within these texts man's sense of inadequacy is frequently displaced upon the female sexual protagonist, fears of witchcraft and hemlock, and finally his treacherous member. Nashe's

prostitute embodies the nightmare of male inadequacy by replacing man with the dildo, which purely satiates her desires.

Impotent soldiers and cuckolded husbands are sources of revulsion and humour in the satires. The cuckold of early Jacobean drama is either unwilling or unable to master and sexually satisfy his wife, and is thus replaced by another eager to assert his prowess. Camillo of *The White Devil* is a victim of other men who facilitate his wife's adultery. Examples of impaired masculine virility are categorised as abnormal, which by implication establishes and protects the virile man as the ideal. In *Epicoene* Morose is symbolically castrated by male usurpers, who are intent upon appropriating his status, authority and wealth. The play is dominated by male social competition, which is spearheaded by Morose, who attempts to sever his nephew's inheritance by creating an heir. Morose's public designation as cuckold and impotent are fictions constructed by a male pretender, Dauphine, who succeeds in symbolically castrating Morose, banishing him to silence and usurping his masculine position of authority. Masculine identity is conceived as a fragile and transferable commodity, which is emphasised by the proceedings of the annulment of the Earl of Essex and Frances Howard. The accusation of impotency undermined Essex's masculine identity, which was deemed too fragile to be examined, and also reflected Frances as an insatiable woman whose sexual honesty thus had to be physically confirmed.

Female insatiable lust permeates the satiric representations of contemporary women who employ the arts of seduction to ensnare men. The enchantress figure is evoked directly by Guilpin and by Marston to reflect upon these women who manipulate and corrupt men through dissimulation. The essence of the anxiety is based upon the concept of an imbalance of sexual power between the genders. The satirists demonise modern female beauty as an artificial sorcery derived from a tradition of potion-making, which drugs man and converts him into the enslaved lover. The enchantress is employed to educate the contemporary man and to discredit the powerful allure of women.

Acrasia and Alcina embody the literary type of the enchantress as derived from Circe, and they, like their late Elizabethan and early Jacobean counterparts, pervert the natural female form and maternal capacity by artificial means. The male victims of Acrasia are killed, subjected and effeminised by an artificial beauty created through sorcery and drugs. The beautiful erotic form of the enchantress is distinctly sterile and her love is expressed by

physically consuming her lovers and transforming men into beasts. The excessive enchantress figure cannot be destroyed and can only be contained, emphasising her constant threat to man, which is epitomised in the example of Grille, who refuses to reject Acrasia's artificiality. Alcina is similarly motivated by a sexual desire and utilises feminine wit, sorcery and deception to ensnare her male victims, who are then transformed into effeminate lovers. Harington's commentary emphasises the contemporary threat through the example of elite men who have succumbed to false luxury and utilises them as an illustrative lesson for younger men.

The topical association of false female seduction and the deceptive witch played a tangible role in the expression of anxiety through the enchantress figure. Spenser's fictional witch Duessa is stripped of her apparel and her deceptive powers in *The Faerie Queene*. Her physical search evokes the same practice employed upon contemporary women who were accused of witchcraft. Duessa shares the physical, notably genital deformity with the women who were found guilty in numerous witch trials. Physical female monstrosity is held as the ultimate proof of deviancy and signifies the danger of female sexuality. The sinister connotations of female lust appear in plays and reports depicting real lascivious women who poisoned husbands and committed crimes of witchcraft. Ferne-seede, due to her sexual history and her role as a rebellious wife, is convicted of her husband's murder with only circumstantial evidence, which also justifies the dismissal of her subsequent denial as further proof of female dissimulation. Margaret Flower's crime of bewitching her lover is confirmed by a mark on her genitalia. The power of female allure over men is incongruous with the concept of man as the rational superior and therefore can only reassuringly be blamed upon witchcraft. The treatises *Daemonologie* and *Newes from Scotland* portray outcast women rejecting productive heterosexual relationships for perverse unions with the Devil. Both the enchantress and the witch are presented as sterile, concealing deformity, and motivated by sexual lust rather than procreation.

The final chapter, the 'empowered whore', encapsulates the concept of the lustful woman as reflected in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period. She is a paradox within contemporary texts: both empowered with favour, wealth and sexual autonomy yet also labelled and ostracised as corruptive and damned. The satires condemn the sexual woman as lust-driven, diseased, and the creator of effeminacy. In contrast, the dramatic representation of the sexual woman in *Women Beware Women* reveals the 'whore' as the

product of the process of transexuality. Female sexual development is imagined through culturally prescribed roles, and Bianca's creation as a mistress is activated by male aggression and rape. Productive femininity is created through male management from the father to the husband, while the whore is cast as a deviant who transgresses the boundaries of the ideal feminine. Yet the labelling of the sexual deviant as a 'whore' or mistress reflects a recognition of her sexual role with men while also containing her threat by a negative social reputation. Bianca, left with little choice, embraces her role as a sexual woman, and Isabella, forced into a loveless match, also transgresses sexually. Isabella's incest is undetectable although there is the threat of a still or 'monstrous' birth. The hidden sexual internality of women evokes an anxiety, which was expressed through the development of female anatomy and male midwives.

Livia is another powerful woman who initiates illicit affairs, calls for equal sexual rights, is wealthy and widowed, and yet she employs her wit to enable male illicit sexual desires at the cost of women. The sexual connotations of a witty woman are reflected in Vittoria of *The White Devil* whose only defence at her trial of lust is language. Greene's *A Disputation* presents the whore as a social problem by means of her trickery, the threat of transmitting disease and inflicting poverty. Historical evidence, however, reveals a change in attitude towards prostitutes and whores. The failure of the movement to criminalize clients and suppress brothels was partly due to the influence of powerful men, which revealed their financial role in what was conventionally assumed as a female sexual crime. Within *Women Beware Women* the domestic home, rather than the brothel, is frequently the site of male anxiety over the sexual excess of women. Marriage is predominantly flawed, from Leantio's misguided sexual fast to the sale and purchase of Isabella by her father and her soon to be father-in-law. Female sexuality is at its most unnerving when it can transform the husband into the cuckold, as Leantio soon discovers. The potent threat of female sexuality is superficially suppressed by the death and repentance speech of the 'empowered whore'. The device is a stock containment strategy of her threat to masculinity and order; however, it actually emphasises the social restriction and unfair chastisement of women. Middleton creates women restricted and manipulated by society who adapt and survive by transgressing prescribed feminine boundaries, although this sexual transgression, despite the role of man within their vice, is condemned and feared within society.

All five areas of gender and sexual transgression discussed within the thesis are closely entwined and interlinked by an overarching concept of the masculine and feminine as part of one alarming spectrum of gender and sexuality. The anxieties examined throughout the study are a reaction to the cultural friction caused by the remains of an archaic and artificially constructed definition of gender. The attempt to contain women and men within the bounds of their ideal spheres of femininity and masculinity proves difficult, with the conspicuous appearance of rebels in society who are perceived by their very existence to undermine social order and the healthy roles attributed to each member, which ensure a fruitful contribution to society and the family. Female sexuality appears throughout the research as a threatening force which can corrupt all positive sexual and gendered contributions to society. The woman embodies and translates this corruptive element during her interaction with others and is therefore restrained by an ideal concept incorporating chastity, maternity, and obedient and companionate wifely duties. Her power is manifested in her sexuality and her reproduction of this influence through illegitimate offspring, thus explaining her social and domestic confinement. Women who transgressed these ideal definitions by means of sexual independence and expression of appetite, the assumption of masculine privileges and authority, to women who subjected men through their erotic allure, were attacked as unnatural, innately deformed and sinister ill-willed witches. Similarly men who had transgressed into a form of the feminine, the effeminate and the impotent man, were ostracised as examples of unnatural monstrosity, which by implication asserted the true and idealised image of masculinity. The potent attempt to assert the true vision and integrity of man reveals an innate and ever-present fear concerning the real essence of man. The clue to understanding the fear of masculinity lies in the feminine means of its corruption. Masculinity is ultimately feared to be at its base feminine, which thus explains the effect of women to convert the beloved into images of themselves through effeminacy. Men represent in the ideal philosophy the human rational connection to God, yet the sexual influence of women reduces them to animals and severs that integral link which differentiates them from animals and significantly women.

The literary expression of the fear of deviants corrupting the ideal definitions of gender and transgressing the boundaries through unnatural means including clothing, excess of luxury, sexual promiscuity, cosmetics and sorcery, suggests a futile defence of an essentialist concept of the two genders. But the literary protest and expression of anxiety reveals the fracture between belief and reality. These writers fear the threat of transexuality and the

malleability of gender as a real consequence of the actions of a subversive minority. Furthermore, the texts record and thus bring to life these gender corruptions and sexual deviances, and even though Marston and Guilpin wrote satires, the depictions correlate with other contemporary works and through the creation of words incarnate gender malleability as a reality. In essence the feminine is shown to be the most powerful and ever-present element of gender. The masculine, through the fear of malleable nature, is construed as a creation of man to reach and enable a spiritual contact with God that must be maintained, which the texts examined insist upon to their male readers. The feminine is embodied in women as an inevitable negative, although it has its nurturing and reproductive uses, but integrally it is an ever-pervasive threat. Compared, by its associations with witchcraft and seduction, to the devil, it also acts as an antithetical figure to the ideal masculine, which encourages man to strive and improve.

The satires of Marston and Guilpin have been the subject of over-categorisation and subsequently were examined as just one of many examples of late Elizabethan satire. However, a closer examination reveals an access to an alternative contemporary expression shaped by the satiric genre yet also by other cultural and literary influences. The debates concerning gender, female sexuality and transexuality exposed by the satires do not represent a mass perspective yet are valuable for their own treatment of topical issues. The satires provide an original opportunity to follow a tangible response to the contemporary perception of change in the field of gender and sexuality which is traceable through divergent texts. Passionate and self-engrossed, the satires are a product of their society and, typically of writers of the period, they employed a recognised and respected mode to express the angst and anxieties of their particular world. This investigation has set out to be original from its inception and has conveyed a sense of the anxieties derived from concepts of gender and sexuality in a process of destabilising change. The study moves beyond the definitions of feminism or other specific movements and reflects a concern with exploring the masculine anxieties that reflect a realisation of gender as one spectrum influencing women and men. The prospect of man's true essence as innately feminine is too destabilising a threat and therefore provokes attack on those sexual and gender corruptions as 'other', 'excess', inadequate or simply monstrous. This area of study has been illuminated by the thesis as a tangible area for future literary and social historical research rooted in a focus on gender, sexuality and cultural beliefs.

The investigation has selected various potent examples of literature that expose unnoticed connections between the influence and expression of anxieties, but there is still more to be done. The further exploration of literature, medical treatises and historical documents of real cases of sexual deviance prosecuted on the ground level of the ecclesiastical and secular courts would greatly add to our understanding of the permeation of these anxieties within late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England. The social historian Ingram has identified a movement by the authorities to suppress sexual and moral transgressions during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Therefore further examination of records of court cases against sexual misdemeanours would provide a greater understanding of contemporary attitudes through its comparison with the literary anxious voices discussed within this thesis. An examination of the deviant's recorded response may also provide an insight as to whether they were castrated of dangerous significance or acted as an embodiment of the negated 'other' to reinforce the concept of natural behaviour and conformity.

An unusual area of further research lies in a consideration of artefacts of clothing to expose an original insight upon the implications and intentions of those importing, making and designing these garments in response to the contemporary demands and criticisms of fashion. A more conventional yet highly illuminating area of investigation is the exploration of literary manuscripts within commonplace books to discover evidence of similar contemporary anxieties concerning female sexuality and gender deviancy. Theoretically the expression of such anxieties should be more extreme than in printed texts due to the limited implications of censorship for manuscript culture. The manuscripts would also shed light upon the effect of an alternative readership and type of writer. How would the method of transmission of the text reflect in the writer's treatment of these issues? The majority of the literature examined within the thesis reflects upon the urban contemporary environment, and through the location of many of the writers and the printers that place was undoubtedly imagined as London. Characters such as the masculine woman and the effeminate man are closely entwined with the concept of the life of London; its innate paradoxical world of luxury and sexual freedom confronted by a sense of poverty permeated with sexual disease and moral decay. This association of

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Ingram, 'The Reform of Popular Culture? Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Barry Reay (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 129–165 (p. 140).

transexuality with the city is an area which with future research of court depositions and literature would add a further facet to the concept of the threat of the city to the integrity of genders and sexuality.

The investigation of the anxieties concerning female sexuality, gender deviancy and transexuality from the original perspective of the satirists and throughout other contemporary works has been expansive and consuming. It has involved an approach centred upon the written text with the aid of diverse supportive evidence which has served to polarise the literary attitudes and introduce challenging interpretations of the belief systems of gender and sexuality. The thesis provides an integral contribution to an understanding of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean fears evoked by the pervasive yet enticing spectre of female sexuality and its menacing ability to metamorphose man.

Appendix

Illustrations



Illustration I: Sandro Botticelli, *Mars and Venus*, c.1485 (69.2 x 173.4 cm, NG 915) National Gallery, London.

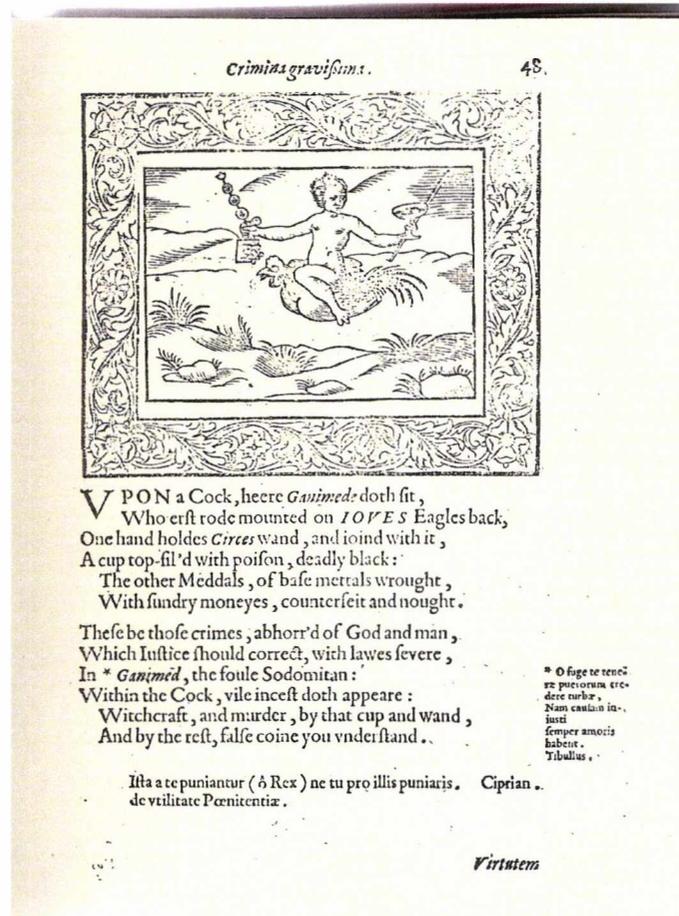


Illustration II: Henry Peacham, Emblem no. 48 *Ganimede in Minerva Britanna* (1612).

*HIC MULIER;*  
OR,  
**The Man-Woman:**  
Being a Medicine to cure the Coltish Disease of  
*the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines*  
of our Times.  
Expressed in a briefe Declamation.  
*Non omnes pro suis omnes.*  
Mistris, will you be trim'd or truss'd?



Illustration III: woodcut title pages of *Hic Mulier; or The Man-Woman* and *Haec-Vir; or The Womanish Man: Being an answer to a late booke intituled Hic Mulier* (London: 1620).

*HÆC-VIR;*  
OR  
**The Womanish-Man:**  
Being an Answer to a late Booke intituled  
*Hic-Mulier.*  
Expressed in a briefe Dialogue betweene *Hæc-Vir*  
the Womanish-Man, and *Hic-Mulier* the  
Man-Woman.



London printed for J.T. and are to be sold at Christ Church gate. 1620.



MOLL CUTPURSE,  
*See here the Professed old pilfing Trade  
 Mercurys friend Venus's enemy - My d  
 Doublet and breeches in a Uniform dress  
 The humors Humourist a Kickshaw meke  
 Here an attraction that you may see  
 But my PLATHIES playe not ad her BEATS*

*By W. Fishburne Esq. Street Lincoln Fields.*

Illustration IV: original frontispiece to the *Life and Death of Mal Cutpurse* (London: 1962).

The Roaring Girl.  
 OR  
 Moll Cut-Purse.

As it hath lately beene Acted on the Fortune-stage by  
 the Prince his Players.

Written by T. Middleton and T. Dekker.



Printed at London by Thomas Archer and are to be sold at his  
 shop in Popes head-palace, neere the Royall  
 Exchange. 1611.  
 First Edition

Illustration V: title page to *The Roaring Girl*.

82 *Homines voluptatibus transformantur.*

Virgil, *Aeneid.* 7.  
Ouid, *Metam.*  
lib. 14.

SEE here *V I S S E S* men, transformed straunge to heare:  
Some had the shape of Goates, and Hogges, some Apes, and  
Asses weate.

Who, when they might haue had their former shape againe,  
They did refuse, and rather wist'd, still brutishe to remaine.  
Which shoves those foolish sorte, whome wicked loue dothe thrall,  
Like brutishe beastes do passe theire time, and haue no fence at all.  
And thoughbe that wisdome woulde, they shoulde againe retire,  
Yet, they had rather *C I R C E S* serue, and burne in theire desire.  
Then, loue the onelic crosse, that clogges the worlde with care,  
Oh stoppe your eares, and shutte your eyes, of *C I R C E S* cuppes beware.

Horat. 1. *Epist.* 4.

*Sirenem voces, & Circes pocula nosti:  
Qua si cum sociis stultus, cupidusq; bibisset,  
Sub domina meretrice fuisset turpis, & excors,  
Vixisset canis immundus, vel amica luto sus.*

*Iudicium*

Illustration VI: Geoffrey Whitney, Emblem 'Homines voluptatibus transformantur', in *A Choice of Emblemes, and other deuises* (1586).

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