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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Susan Neal Mayberry entitled "The Adulterous Wife in Renaissance Drama." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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THE ADULTEROUS WIFE IN RENAISSANCE DRAMA

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Susan Neal Mayberry

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ABSTRACT

Although the adulterous wife is a familiar character in English drama, there has been no study devoted to her nature and function. This tragic character finds full development on the English stage during the final years of the sixteenth and the first third of the seventeenth century, when she figures in approximately thirty plays written by virtually all of the major dramatists. The present study examines the use of the character in tragedies, tragi-comedies, and history plays written between 1590 and 1640.

Because the Renaissance stage adulteress has roots in the life of the era, the study begins with a chapter establishing her legal and social status and the way this position is reflected in the non-dramatic literature. The primary concern of the study follows with an examination of the dramatic functions of the adulteress--as a representation of a violation of honor in the wife falsely accused of infidelity (Chapter II), as a vehicle for homiletic or domestic tragedy in the repentant adulteress (Chapter III), as a symbol of feminine villainy in the deliberate adulteress (Chapter IV), and as the central metaphor for the vision of evil depicted in The Changeling (Chapter V).

The commanding presence of the adulterous wife in English drama written from about 1590 to 1640 is remarkable in that the tragic character is simply not to be found in plays of the previous age. There were forces emerging during this period which might have given rise to the complexity of a heroine whose tragic flaw lies in her

sexuality. The years before the Renaissance saw a view of women as irrational, sexually tempting creatures of passion. With the new awareness of women in the Renaissance, however, with increased emphasis on education and the rise of humanism, women came to be considered rational beings, able, like men, to control their passion with reason. The definition of a tragic character as one that, by some flaw in his nature, creates his own downfall implies a degree of free will. And for the first time in the Renaissance, women were believed to have free will, to be able to control their passions by the exercise of reason. It is not until women are viewed as responsible for their own sexuality that the possibility could arise for a tragic heroine who brings about her own downfall by a conscious choice to commit the sin of adultery.

PREFACE

Like the usurer, parasite, prodigal, and fop, the adulterous wife is a familiar character in English drama, and it is surprising that no study has been devoted to her nature and function. The character of the tragic adulteress was fully developed on the English stage during the last decade of the sixteenth century and particularly during the first third of the seventeenth century when the tragic emphasis was expanded to include not only hero but heroine. Figuring in approximately thirty plays written by virtually all of the major dramatists of the period, the fallen woman is, interestingly enough, "discovered" at a time when serious concern was developing outside the drama about the nature and role of women in contemporary society. In spite of the adulteress' frequent appearance in Renaissance tragedy, commentators have been content merely to mention the presence of the character rather than define her nature and demonstrate her various functions. She has become a facet of a genre, the murder-play or domestic tragedy, in Henry H. Adams' English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy and Andrew Clark's Domestic Drama, an historical or sociological phenomenon in Doris Stenton's The English Woman in History, Carroll Camden's The Elizabethan Woman, and Jean Gagen's The New Woman: Her Emergence in English Drama 1600-1730, and a force reflecting or contributing to the chaos and immorality of the age in Robert Ornstein's The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy and Irving Ribner's Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order. The different

types of, motivations for, or responses to adultery are hardly ever considered in the criticism of individual plays or in general studies.

Renaissance dramatists, even at their worst, rarely fail to assimilate disparate formulae into a unified whole, to make stock characters, situations, or parts function within the entire theme of the play. This study proposes to examine the different roles of the tragic adulteress in the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in order to show what functions the character serves, what part she plays in the overall effect of the tragedy; and it is hoped that the result of such a study will be of value in the complete critical exploration of the dramaturgy of the period.

The scope of the study has been limited to the years 1590-1640, a period of fifty years which includes the last decade of Elizabeth's reign and the entirety of James'. It has been restricted further in genre specifically to tragedies, tragi-comedies, and histories in which the adulterous wife figures in either a major or minor role. The plays include those written by major playwrights such as Marlowe, Peele, Heywood, Chapman, Dekker, Marston, Tourneur, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Middleton, Ford, Shakespeare, and the anonymous creator of Arden of Feversham.

The fact that the tragic adulteress was of such interest to these writers is in many respects due to the increasing awareness during the period of the "woman problem." Because the stage adulteress has roots in the religious, economic, and social life of the era, the study of her various dramatic functions will be preceded by an introductory chapter establishing the social and legal position

of the adulterous wife in Renaissance England and also the way in which these positions are reflected in the non-dramatic literature. These portraits of the real and literary adulteress will be drawn from such non-dramatic works as letters, diaries, verse and prose satire, domestic conduct books, characters, ballads, as well as historical, legal, and social documents.

The primary concern of the study will be developed in Chapters II through V, in which the adulterous wife is considered in terms of her dramatic functions: the character who is actually a model of feminine virtue and fidelity but who, as a result of obsessive concerns about honor and female chastity combined with the occasional catalyst of an outside force, is falsely accused (Chapter II); the woman who does break with societal morés but who serves as a didactic example by repenting and returning to the fold (Chapter III); the adulterous wife who moves fartherest away from society's dictates on female sexuality because of her lust or attraction to power and whose sexuality is presented as a symbol for feminine villainy (Chapter IV); and the adulteress who is not only the most fascinating individualist of the drama, Beatrice Joanna of The Changeling, but who is also central in the only tragedy in which feminine adultery is completely explored as the metaphor for evil in the play (Chapter V).

The plan of the study--the classification of adulterous wives into types--is not intended as an end in itself but as a means of providing a frame of reference for discussion of characters and plays. Some tentative conclusions will be drawn in the last chapter concerning the effects of forces which might have given rise to a heroine whose tragic flaw

lies in her sexuality. The years before the Renaissance saw a view of women as irrational, sexually tempting creatures of passion. However, with the new awareness of women in the Renaissance, with increased emphasis on education and the rise of humanism, women came to be considered rational beings, able, like men, to control their passion with reason. The definition of a tragic character as one that, by some flaw in his nature, creates his own downfall implies a degree of free will. And for the first time in the Renaissance, women were believed to have free will, to be able to control their passions by the exercise of reason. It is not until women are viewed as responsible for their own sexuality that the possibility could arise for a tragic heroine who brings about her own downfall by a conscious choice to commit the sin of adultery.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE ADULTEROUS WIFE IN THE LIFE AND LITERATURE OF RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

The social currents of any age will have considerable influence on its artistic output. There are certain periods, however, when these developments are particularly striking in the literature produced, especially when the most distinguished genre of that age is the visible and visual medium of drama. Such an age in England, during which man's inner and outer worlds seem to have been in a permanent state of flux, is the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As Douglas Bush points out, "in 1600 the educated Englishman's mind and world were more than half medieval; by 1660 they were more than half modern. It is the impact of modernism upon medievalism that gives the age (and its literature) its peculiar character."[1] Among the many questions to be raised and concepts to be redefined in light of these various complicated traditions are those concerning women and marriage and their representation in art, particularly the problem of female sexuality and its connection with morality; thus the adulterous wife, a woman whose very character is measured by sexual and marital morés, becomes of major interest. She is in part a product of earlier attitudes towards femininity, sexuality, and

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[1]Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century: 1600-1660, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 1-3.

chastity while at the same time, because of the awareness attached to the nature and status of women in the Renaissance, she emerges as a novel tragic figure. Ideas concerning what woman should be were evolving, and it is not surprising that there would be a reevaluation of what she should not be. The changes in attitudes towards the negative ideal of the adulteress are evident in a comparison of the most famous literary adulteress of the Middle Ages with her Jacobean counterparts. The marital fidelity of the Wife of Bath is certainly questionable, but her adulterery is not the focus of her portrait. Rather Chaucer is concerned with presenting her sexuality as a life force, as an alternative or counterpart to the idealization of the Virgin Mary. The focus alters, however, in the seventeenth century when writers like Webster concentrate on the sin of adultery as a vehicle for exploring evil and amorality. Like any era, the Renaissance is a complicated amalgam of traditions, both old and developing, which collectively influenced man's world view, including his vision of women. It is important then to examine how each of these forces, religious, economic, and social, affected the legal and social position of the adulterous wife, for such attitudes will operate on her presentation in the drama of the age. It is the "accumulated and irresistible pressure of old and new traditions in potent combination and interaction" which created a particular society, a particular drama, and a particular concept of the fallen woman.[2]

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[2]Bush, pp. 1-2.

One of the major forces which survived to influence the Renaissance definition of woman is the tradition of misogyny maintained by the early Church, affected significantly by the Church fathers. Because of questions being asked during the seventeenth century about feminine sexual morality, the traditional Christian view was being reevaluated. Christianity has been one of the dominant forces shaping Western civilization, and naturally the attitudes expressed by the early writers have greatly influenced Western attitudes. Although some of the chief tenets espoused by Christ and his followers are those of love, charity, and forgiveness, Christianity also has a tradition of renunciation and asceticism. And "asceticism quite early was equated with celibacy and thus morality became identified with sexual purity."[3] In order to understand the fascination with and the treatment of the adulteress in major Renaissance dramas, as the woman who violates a sexual code which was traditionally identified with morality, it is essential to understand the early value placed on chastity, reflected in the actual worship of virginity in the cult of Mariolatry, and the threat that women appeared to be. For sex in the early Christian church was equated with women, and thus women became sources of temptation for men. The degree to which religious men who were trying to overcome their sexual urges feared women who kept reminding them of these desires is expressed in the words of Abbot Conrad of Marchtal who spoke for the inhabitants of a twelfth century monastery:

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[3]Vern L. Bullough, The Subordinate Sex: A History of Attitudes Towards Women (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 97-98.

> We and our whole community of canons, recognizing that the wickedness of women is greater than all the other wickedness of the world, and there is no anger like that of women, and that the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less dangerous for men than the familiarity of women, have unanimously decreed for the safety of our souls, no less than for that of our bodies and goods, that we will on no account receive any more sisters to the increase of our perdition but will avoid them like poisonous animals.[4]

Here is the same association of women with "asps, dragons, and poisonous animals," with man's baser or animal nature, that Hamlet will later make with his mother and Albany will make with his unfaithful wife in King Lear. The connection of sexuality with evil and virginity with the overpowering of evil is further apparent in medieval iconography. Eve, sexual woman, is traditionally pictured with the upright snake (symbolic of both phallus and Satan and here actually fusing sex and evil) while Mary crushes the snake's head with her foot. Because sexual intercourse, except for the purpose of procreation, was believed to be a sin equal to murder and heresy and because it was woman who awakened man's desire to sin, she was in some way the Eve figure--an eternal temptress. This medieval Christian attitude sometimes resulted in such an extreme view of female sexuality that it was believed that a woman who even unconsciously tempted a man into sin should be held responsible for his lost soul.

Fear of female sexuality by Christian writers of the early Church was projected into the idea that woman was morally weak.[5]

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[4]R. W. Southern, trans., Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 314.

[5]Doris Mary Stenton, The English Woman in History (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), pp. 11-12.

Even Christianity's most important convert, St. Paul, felt that women were temptation, marriage was a means of preventing sin, and because of their lack of moral strength, women must be controlled by men. Some of these ideas survived into the sixteenth century, resulting in the continued belief in the female lack of moral character and epitomized in Hamlet's impassioned cry, "Frailty, thy name is woman." For example, until the Reformation, marriage was still viewed as simply a means of propagation and a way to avoid promiscuity, and the attitudes of the Church, drawn chiefly from Genesis and the Apostles' writings about Genesis, continued to promote the idea that woman was responsible by her fall for bringing sin into the world. Because Eve initiated the downfall of Adam, many early Church writers could not believe that there was any of the divine nature in woman, and the debate over whether or not woman had a soul continued well into the seventeenth century. The attitude expressed by a character in John Marston's The Insatiate Countess (1613) that "women are made of blood, without souls"[6] is reflected in a sermon preached by John Brinsley in 1645:

> Adam was not deceived, viz. immediately by the Serpent. So was the Woman deceived, giving eare to Satan, speaking in and by the Serpent, she was deceived. . . . Deceived indeed Adam was; but it was by means of the Woman, handing those suggestions unto him, which she had received from the Serpent: withall, soliciting, and inticing him; to whom he yielded, partly . . . out of a loving and indulgent affection towards her, and so was overcome, even as Sampson was by his Delilah and Solomon by his Wives. . . . Adam was not deceived, viz. so as the Woman was deceived; not firstly, not immediately, so was the Woman deceived; and being so deceived, she was the Instrument to deceive her Husband;

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[6]John Marston, The Insatiate Countess, in The Plays of John Marston, vol. 3, ed. H. Harvey Wood (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), p. 51.

> So it followeth; But the Woman being deceived, she was in the Transgression.[7]

Here it is the husband who is the innocent and injured party and who, out of his very innocence and affection for his wife, is led to his doom. This view of woman as a sexual being of questionable moral nature tempting man into her sinful ways which was part of the doctrine of the early Church continued to concern the moralists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries--many of whom were playwrights. Out of the humanist debate about the nature of female morality, partially a reaction to the traditional Christian view, arose a new type of play, becoming popular in the first quarter of the seventeenth century and presenting as its central character the adulterous wife whose lust leads to her tragedy and frequently to that of others.

Another of the surviving forces which influenced the attitude toward adultery in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the connection of wives with property and lineage. Although in Anglo-Saxon England men and women apparently lived on terms of rough legal equality with each other, some of the laws suggest that wives were regarded as valuable pieces of property whose virtue was protected by an elaborate scale of penalty fines:

> . . . if a free man lies with the wife of another free man he shall pay the husband his wergild and buy a second wife with his own money, and bring her to the other man's home.[8]

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[7]John Brinsley, A Looking-Glasse for Good Women, cited by Chilton Latham Powell, English Domestic Relations, 1487-1653 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), pp. 150-51.

[8]F. L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., The Laws of the Earliest English Kings (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), p. 31. The wergild

While this practical rather than fanatically moral attitude toward female virtue in Anglo-Saxon England gave women some flexibility, Anglo-Norman society, whose laws were still on the English lawbooks until the restoration of Charles II, limited the legal rights of women. With the Norman Conquest came the rule of primogeniture which emphasized a pure family line, and thus a high value was placed on the wife's chastity. The chief interest of the feudal noble was in his fief and his desire to have an heir worthy to inherit this land, and it was common belief that a father's traits would be passed on to his heir. This belief probably influenced the laws to regard a wife's adultery, particularly with a social inferior, as a terrible offense.

The emphasis on property, heirs, and inheritance which grew out of the rule of primogeniture during the Middle Ages would continue to increase in importance in the seventeenth century. As explained in a recent study by Lawrence Stone, a major factor contributing to the importance of property was the rise of the nuclear family.[9] During the Middle Ages, the nuclear family of landowners was generally no more than the unstructured center of a complicated network of kinship relations, and thus property had something of a collective quality despite the rise of primogeniture. Kinship declined in the sixteenth century,

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was the price the family of a slain man could demand from his slayer, contingent upon the dead man's social position. The usual atonement for a serious offense was payment of the sum at which the offender's own life was valued. Here the adulterer must buy the wronged husband a new wife. Also cited by Stenton, p. 8.

[9]Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage: England, 1500-1800 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 243. The connection of family and property and its effect on the status of women are described at length by Stone.

however, and those heads of more tightly knit households which had accumulated property for generations, had survived the economic crisis of the late sixteenth century and the political turmoil of the early seventeenth century became convinced of the importance of the continuity of family and were anxious to insure family perpetuity. Hence they looked on private property, denied value in early Christian doctrine, as a necessary protection of the individual family and its rights.[10]

The chief factor influencing all families of property was primogeniture. A practice unknown to antiquity, the passing of property to the eldest male child gained acceptance in Europe with the spread of feudalism. It survived into the sixteenth century because of the growing familiarity with Roman law which knew no conditional ownership and because of economic growth which enabled younger sons to earn a living without necessarily inheriting a share of the parental estate. The interest in primogeniture is evident in the development of legal treatises on the subject, a completely new form of document in the sixteenth century.[11] This interest resulted partly from the tightening of the family unit, partly from the Renaissance fear of extinction which competed with the medieval dread of judgment, and partly from the elevation of property as an ideal to be worshipped.

The renewed interest in property and primogeniture in the Renaissance contributed to the trend towards greater patriarchy in the

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[10]V. G. Kiernan, "Private property in history," in Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800, ed. Jack Goody et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 374-76.

[11]Joan Thirsh, "The European debate on customs of inheritance: 1500-1700," in Family and Inheritance, pp. 177-78.

husband-wife relationship, especially in the first half of the sixteenth century when the woman's right to dispose of property was limited to her claims in the marriage contract. The legal subjection of women to husbands or fathers, evident in the fact that until the end of the seventeenth century, the widow's medieval common-law right to a share of the personal estate was effective only in Wales, York, and London, is reflected in the denial of her voting power. Lack of economic and legal power is seen also with women in the agricultural and labor markets, as many women were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, paid at most only one half the salary of men.[12] In essence, the decline of kinship which left wives exposed to exploitation by their husbands and the rise of patrimonial control of property and of primogeniture resulted in a decline in the status and rights of women. Thus the inextricable connection of the wife's chastity with the preservation of property for the male line, seen earlier in feudal law, continued to affect the legal and social position of the Renaissance adulterous wife. To the Renaissance revival of the argument used by the Church to champion celibacy was added the rhetorical expression of those who would preserve chastity to insure the legitimacy of their progeny and of those who would have their wives subject to their husbands according to Paul's teaching. In addition to the stigma of immorality placed on adultery by the Church, there was renewed in Renaissance England an even more practical prohibition--the desire to assure a legitimate heir.

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[12]Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 195-96.

A final "survival" tradition to influence the attitude toward the adulteress in the Renaissance is the worship of virginity--originally focused on the Virgin Mary but later on the Virgin Queen. The myth of the woman on the pedestal implied that "the true lady was a sort of passive goddess who was adored whether she wished to be or not, and while the knight was expected to adore with every fiber of his body, his service primarily consisted of fidelity and worship. Love was not to be mutual; the lady was to feel no great passion. She was a vision of love and like the Virgin Mary, unattainable."[13] The worship of the ideal lady as cold and chaste can be seen in the fashion of lyric poetry and sonnet sequences written in the Elizabethan period while the negative ideal was presented, sometimes as a warning and sometimes in reaction, in many Jacobean tragedies. The value placed on purity is extended even to the ideal wife in the Middle Ages, the Griselda who, despite her wretched treatment by her husband, remains patient and faithful. In the seventeenth century marriage was so glorified by Protestant reformers that the definition of chastity was broadened to include fidelity in marriage. The Griselda of this period was elevated to the level of virgin, and the fallen wife doomed with Eve.

The cults of Virgin and courtly love in medieval Europe were intimately connected, both influencing and reinforcing each other, and the result bred a new attitude toward adultery. According to C. S. Lewis, the transference of vassalic devotion from lord to lady was intensified in part by the confusion with the concurrent revival in

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[13]Bullough, p. 182.

religious devotion to the Virgin Mary. And at the same time the Church felt bound to discourage a cult that worshipped secular woman, with its espousal of love contrary to marriage, and provided a satisfactory alternative to the search for a feminine ideal in the cult of the Blessed Mary. Lewis in the Allegory of Love and Denis de Rougemont in Love in the Western World agree that courtly love brought with it a new conception of the relationship between men and women, including an image of woman as superior to man, and that it located this relationship outside the bounds of Christian marriage. Lewis argues that adultery logically followed from the concept of courtly love because courtly love idealized passionate sexual love which, as has already been established, was regarded as suspect by the Church even in marriage. Thus the idealization of sexual love, in a society in which marriage was a utilitarian affair, had to begin by the idealization of adultery.[14]

The implications of the medieval tradition of courtly love are pursued further, however, by de Rougemont who views it as an attempt to contain the fatality of passion. In Love in the Western World, he uses the Tristan and Yseult myth to illustrate that passion is related to death, bringing about the destruction of those who give way to it completely. The yearning for passion and death pulls on the individual in spite of himself, but this longing threatens the order of society which must, to protect itself, strive to contain it. De Rougemont believes that when the desire for another's wife became so prevalent as

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[14]C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 13.

in the theory of courtly love, society attempted to combat these forces which threatened to destroy the social and moral order, especially the institution of marriage, in the very rules of chivalry themselves. His theory asserts that courtly love implied a desire for love for its own sake and not for the sake of the beloved. However, if love is to be forever sought, it must never be attained. Therefore, there was implicit in this desire for love a quest for the obstruction that would perpetuate the love. This quest then actually contained a love of obstruction which symbolized a longing for the ultimate obstacle--death.[15] Thus it is suffering and death for which passion yearns--not the fulfillment of love. By this definition passionate love is radically opposed to marriage, emphasizing idealism over earthly satisfaction and finally denying life itself. Whether or not the literary ideal reflected real practice is today still a controversial critical issue. Some critics challenge the existence of the theory itself. But there does seem to be enough interest in courtly love by writers of the Middle Ages that the movement would indicate some real psychological needs and emotions of the period. A change in this attitude is reflected by its defeat, primarily by the Church, resulting in a new concept of romantic love in marriage. This decline, illustrated in the two parts of the Roman de la Rose, reveals the triumph of Christianity, reason, and marriage over passion.

The relation between adultery and passion, passion and death continues, however, through Renaissance drama and into the nineteenth

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[15]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, rev. ed., trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Pantheon, 1956), pp. 42-46.

and twentieth-century novel. So what most critics view as an eleventh-century phenomenon reveals itself to have universal significance. But in particular it reemphasizes the underlying menace of the adulteress:

> From having first been the traitor who betrayed the family religion, then the cuckoo threatening to deprive the true offspring of their rightful inheritance, she is now seen to be the invitation to passion, death, and the destruction of society. The transcendant fear of the adulteress will always be translated by the individual society into terms more immediately assimilable by its members. But the de Rougemont theory provides a haunting background to the more overt reasons cited for the condemnation of adultery by those who fear it most: the overlords who see their property threatened, the lawmakers apprehensive of the undermining of the social order, and the church leaders excoriating the souls who deviate from the conjugal path to heaven.[16]

Thus the misogynistic attitude of the early Church, the connection of women with property and a pure family line, and the worship of virginity are the surviving major religious, economic, and social traditions that will combine with forces affecting the definition of woman in the Renaissance, including the enclosure of nunneries, the glorification of marriage by Protestants, and the humanist debate about women, to create an atmosphere in which the adulteress, no longer simply a type character, a shrewish or worldly contrast to her fumbling, cuckolded husband in comedy, is a subject for serious drama.

Although there are twelve plays written before the death of Elizabeth in 1603 which contain the figure of the tragic adulterous wife, six of these are history plays where the character generally

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[16]Judith Armstrong, The Novel of Adultery (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 11-12.

functions less importantly as an adulteress than as an accident of history, two are revenge tragedies, two are "murder plays" based on sensational events of the day, and one is a poor and relatively minor work. Most of the great drama, featuring some twenty plays written between 1603 and 1640, which presents as a major focus a complex psychological portrait of the tragic adulteress occurs in the Jacobean and Caroline periods. Certainly the forces which encouraged a heightened awareness of the adulterous wife in Stuart drama did not simply appear in full bloom in 1603, nor do those traits which characterize the period necessarily disprove the maxim that there's nothing new under the sun. Yet emphases growing out of seeds planted in the sixteenth century and making themselves felt in the literature can be discerned in the first half of the seventeenth century.

One of the forces which must be examined along with the traditions already discussed in order to understand the emerging English attitude is change in traditional religious and philosophic orthodoxy. As Bush points out, "The seventeenth century was a world in which man's every thought and act are of vital concern to God and to his own eternal state, a world interpenetrated by spiritual potencies. . . . The consciousness of the immediate presence and active intervention of God in all the affairs of life and the universe was even stronger in the seventeenth century than in the sixteenth; it was heightened by Puritanism and by various forms of more or less mystical thought."[17] Thus the religious developments of the age, the

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[17]Bush, pp. 37-38.

attitudes of both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches toward adultery, as strongly influential as they are on the everyday life of the individual, will have a direct bearing on the social position of the adulterous wife. The Catholic Church continued its misogynistic attitude toward women and marriage with its postulates on the supposed sinfulness of marital intercourse and the evil nature of woman. However, the Renaissance Catholic Church began to impose strict enclosures upon its female religious orders so that the alternative of a religious career for females was limited and more women were restricted to a career in marriage. This, combined with the Protestant glorification of marriage, put more emphasis on and called more attention to the behavior of women in marriage.

The Protestant revolution against the medieval church cut so deeply that no serious moral or social question, including marriage and adultery, escaped its effects. The reformed church began to break with the conservative attitude held by the Catholic Church towards all sex relations and gave greater dignity to the married woman, no longer idealizing virginity but a chastity in marriage. Though possessing some of the asceticism of his ancestors, the Puritan "regarded marriage as a God-given expedient for evading the damnation of sexual indulgence. Thus he began to concentrate upon preserving the purity of the married state rather than the psychological purity of the individual."[18]

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[18]Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 203.

The place where the orthodoxy of the Church toward adultery was engrained, where typical sixteenth and seventeenth century religious attitudes toward the adulteress found expression, was the pulpit, and the medium was the sermon. Like their medieval predecessors, Renaissance sermons continued to surpass "any other medium for moulding public opinion. . . . all problems of life, including important considerations of matrimony, are treated in the official homilies in such a simple direct style that any man however unlearned--or sleepy--might understand."[19] Since royal authority had been established over the Church, a real effort had been made by leading Church officials to impress upon the masses the moral rules which should govern society. Church and state alike were working to legislate morality, and in order to do so a set of twelve official sermons was published in 1547 with Edward VI's seal of approval. The preface of the edition instructed all those "having spiritual care" to deliver one each Sunday to their parishioners and, the set having been completed, to begin again. The only sermon having to do with matrimony in the group is a long one in three parts entitled "A Sermon against Whoredom and Adultery." It begins with scriptural admonitions against fornication and continues to illustrate its evils, connecting and equating fornication and whoredom with adultery: "Hitherto have we heard how grevious a sin fornication and whoredom is, and how greatly God doth abhore it throughout the whole Scripture." The sin of whoredom and adultery is "the most filthy lake, foul puddle, and stinking sink, whereunto all kinds of sins and

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[19]Wright, pp. 269-73.

evils flow, where also they have their resting place and abiding.[20] The author then goes on to reflect the Renaissance belief in the incremental nature of sin, asserting that adultery leads to other sins such as idleness, theft, envy, wrath, and even murder. He warns that fornicators may be punished with unwanted bastards and other direct actions by Providence, ultimately ending in damnation. The speaker offers illustrations which represent God's punishment for adulterers such as the examples of Sodom and Gomorrah and the times of Noah. Then he refers to punishments dealt out to fornicators by God's agents, the princes and magistrates.

These homilies were reissued by Elizabeth in 1562 with the same instructions but with twenty-one additional sermons, the eighteenth of which was entitled "Of the state of matrimony." After dwelling on the evils of fornication, referring to Paul's admonition that "Neither whoremongers, neither adulterers, shall inherit the kingdom of God," the sermon explains how Satan will encourage disharmony between husband and wife. It emphasizes that in marriage full moral responsibility rests with the husband because women are "weak creature[s] not endued with like strength and constancy of mind; therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of the mind, more than men be; and lighter they be. . . ." Woman

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[20]Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches, 1547 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 48), pp. 108-23; also cited by Henry Hitch Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 118.

is "the weaker vessel, of a frail heart, inconstant, and with a word soon stirred to wrath."[21]

Subjects for some Renaissance sermons were medieval exempla, international property in origin and use and altered to suit the immediate purpose of the speaker or writer. These alterations reveal the moral code of the period and the attitude toward any deviations from it. In one of the best known collections of exempla, the Gesta Romanorum,[22] is cited an instance of a woman who schemes to murder her husband in order to marry her lover, a plot which will occur with all its variations in Renaissance drama. Since the husband is on a Crusade, the woman's plan is to have the lover stab an effigy of the husband, an act which was believed to have been fatal. Warned of the plot by a wise man, the knight manages to have the spell reversed so that the paramour himself is killed. The wife tries to hide the body but is exposed by the knight upon his return and is condemned to be burned. Adams believes that, taken with the sermons of the age, the purpose of this exemplum is homilitic and the wise man is one of God's agents.[23] But more importantly for this study, it is obvious that in spite of and perhaps because of the Protestant glorification of marriage and the resulting positive attitude toward wifehood, any deviation from the strict moral code of female chastity in marriage resulted in the severest of punishments both in this world and in the next. The warnings of the sermons

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[21]Certain Sermons or Homilies, pp. 446-58; also cited by Stenton, pp. 104-105.

[22]Wynnard Hooper, ed., Gesta Romanorum, trans. Charles Swan (New York: AMS Press, 1970).

[23]Adams, p. 27.

are clear and uncompromising. Adulteresses are promised that "swifte destruccion shal fal on them, if they repent not, and amende not: for God wyll not even suffer holy wedlocke, thus to be dishonored, hated and dispyced. He wyl once punyshe thys carnall & liscencious maner of living."[24]

Although the Catholic and Protestant reformations in the Renaissance caused a positive decline in the social status of the adulterous wife, the reign of Elizabeth did little to change the legal status of women. The law under which they lived was still essentially feudal, and wives remained firmly under the control of their husbands. Legally a woman was almost submerged in her husband. The two became one, and the one was the husband. In her Some Reflections upon Marriage written in 1694, Mary Astell offers a summary of the legal status of women in the seventeenth century. The wife did not have the right to own property or make a will, and any goods that she held became her husband's property upon marriage. If she worked, he could claim her wages. If he attacked her, she could not give evidence against him in court. There were even cases, such as that of Frances Coke, where the husband could take away a woman's children, place them in undesirable hands, and forbid her to see them. While after 1697 divorce became possible, though extremely expensive, for a man, it was

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[24]Certain Sermons or Homilies; also cited by Andrew Clark, Domestic Drama: A Survey of the Origins, Antecedents and Nature of the Domestic Plays in England, 1500-1640, 49 in Jacobean Drama Studies, ed. James Hogg, vol. 1 (Saltzburg: Institut Fur Englische Sprache und Literature, 1975), p. 39.

still forbidden the injured wife. Her only alternative was legal separation without permission to remarry.[25]

This English legislation (most of which developed from feudal law), firmly subordinating wives to husbands, certainly placed the adulterous wife in a precarious legal position. The economic growth of the country and the renewed connection of women with property and chastity with lineage, resulting from the rise of the nuclear family and the adherence to primogeniture already discussed (see Stone's analysis from The Family, Sex and Marriage on pp. 5-6), further damaged her position. The later Elizabethan age was literally a "golden age" in that "gold was the national divinity, and God and Mammon were by both high and lowly served with a zeal for which many of their descendants have cause to be grateful."[26] Jacobean society, composed of wealthy descendants of the preceding age and their rivals, made its most persuasive force purchasing power and its temporal ideal luxury. The leaders of society were becoming capitalists, men who "owed their power . . . to their business ability."[27] With the emergence of people who realized that wealth could be gained by their own efforts and that money would exalt their positions, 'Put money in thy purse' echoed in

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[25]Mary Astell, Some Reflections upon Marriage, 1700 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 128); also cited by Jean Elizabeth Gagen, The New Woman: Her Emergence in English Drama 1600-1730 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1954), p. 130.

[26]Hubert Hall, Society in the Elizabethan Age (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1902), pp. 119-20.

[27]L. C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (New York: George W. Stewart), p. 88.

the ears of every tradesman. It was these men especially, with their pride in ownership and property rights, their connection of family protection with property and primogeniture, that became inspired, like earlier feudal nobles, to add a feeling of sanctity for all property, even the virginity of their wives. In essence, chastity had taken on the value of property; the tradesman combined the Church's teachings on chastity with his own idealization of property to formulate a doctrine that the woman who strained her honor was of no further value to herself or to society.

This emphasis on property can be seen in the number of "arranged marriages," sometimes between members of the same aristocratic rank and sometimes between an aristocrat and one of the new rich, allying an old name with new money. It can also be seen in the "letter of advice to a son" which fathers were in the habit of composing for the edification of their children. The letters make it clear that though men sought companionship, an alternative to fornication, and a male heir from marriage, these objectives could be attained by any random association of male and female; it was the preservation and increase of patrimony that made selection in marriage important. It should be clarified, however, that the letters of advice reflect the prevalent marital theories of the day; in practice, the association of intimacy and marriage is not a modern invention. Despite the patrimonial concern with and control over the child's marital choice and the number of marriages arranged for financial reasons, legislation on matrimony indicates that marriage did have a personal or sentimental dimension in the Renaissance. In practice couples married out of inclination

despite parental attempts to contain them. In theory, though, Renaissance marriages were regarded with more cold calculation than they are today; marriages based on love took second place to those determined by interest.[28] The most extreme statement of concern for the financial benefits of marriage was printed in the mid-seventeenth century in a letter of advice by Francis Osborne and reissued seven times in two years. The author maintains that "as the fertilitie of the ensuing yeare is guessed at the height of the river Nilus, so by the greatnesse of a wive's portion may much of the future conjugall happiness be calculated."[29]

Even though the rights of an Englishwoman in the Renaissance were severely limited in the ownership[30] and disposal[31] of property, the wife was inextricably connected with the increase, maintenance, and inheritance of property, and the legal position of the woman who violated her marriage suffered accordingly. These limitations and penalties were infrequently so severe that there was some sympathy with

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[28]David Hunt, Parents and Children in History (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 55-79. Hunt's findings on family life in seventeenth-century France are important for this study.

[29]Francis Osborne, Advice to a son, ed. Edward Abbott Parry (London: Nutt, 1896), p. 66; also cited by Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 612-13.

[30]Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman (Houston: The Elsevier Press, 1952), pp. 103-104. Camden points out that "even the jewelry and clothing which a man gives to his wife are still his own to dispose of as he wills."

[31]Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 229. These authors discuss the restraints placed upon women in disposing of their own property.

the position of women even among the conservative lawyers of the time. In a book published in 1632 entitled The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights or The Lawes provision for Women, probably written during the last years of Elizabeth's reign, the author describes laws relating to marriage, inheritance, and doweries and warns the wife to "take heed to elopement" because "a woman that leaves her husband, goeth away and abides with her adulterer, if she be convicted thereof, loseth for ever her command of dower etc." He offers as example a case famous in its day where "R. H. and Anne his wife" sought her dowery, but the plea was denied when it was proven that "the said Anne in the life of Lord Powes

> Frankly of her own accord
> Left her husband and her Lord
> And from Bednall Greene she ran
> With Mathew Rockler Gentleman.[32]

Sympathetic toward women in this kind of situation the author states,

> me thinkes here wanteth equality in the law. . . :
> A poor woman shall have but the third foote of her
> Husbands lands when he is dead, for all the service she
> did for him during the accouplement (perhaps a long time
> and a tedious) and if she be extravagant with a friend
> this is elopement and forfeiture etc. But as the saying
> is, men are happy by the masse, they may goe where they
> list I warrent yer, and because they are enforced to travell
> in the world, they will pay deare abroad for that which they
> esteeme of no value at home. Their adultrous soiournings is
> not forfeiture, but as soone as the good wife is gone, the
> badman will have her land, not the third, but euery foote
> of it.[33]

One of the few seventeenth-century laws that diverged from the feudal legal code, divorce law, also indicates a decline in legal status

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[32]The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 883), p. 145; also cited by Stenton, pp. 62-63.

[33]The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights, pp. 145-46; also cited by Stenton, pp. 62-63.

for the adulterous wife. It was not difficult to get a marriage annulled in the Middle Ages, if the expense of going to the Church courts could be met.[34] However, in 1602 the English courts decided that "remarriage after judicial separation was null and void" and that in essence marriage could only be escaped by death. The emphasis placed on marriage and the consequent legal and social condemnation for the adulteress are apparent. The Church of England even included adultery as one of the impediments preventing marriage which also banned any subsequent marriage of the woman involved. The Puritans, who saw marriage as a spiritual bond and thus did condone divorce when that bond was broken, still considered only two actions as severe enough to justify divorce--adultery and desertion.

Finally, the negative legal position of the adulterous wife in Renaissance England can be seen in the actual punishments prescribed for the woman caught in the act. The view that a husband rules over his wife was far more than a literary commonplace. It was enacted in the law that a woman who plotted against the life of her husband, which generally was the result of adultery, was not simply guilty of murder but of "petty treason" and was therefore burned alive. With immolation being the common form of punishment for females in all capital crimes in the later Middle Ages, the last woman to be burned at the stake for this particular crime was Catherine Hayes, executed in 1726 in Tyburn. The author of The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights offers as a warning and example of this law a situation occurring in the reign of Edward II:

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[34]Stenton, p. 46.

> A woman compasseth with her adulterer the death of her husband, they assailed him riding on the highway beating, wounding, leaving him for dead, and then they fled: The husband got up, levied hue and cry, came before the Justices, they sent after the offenders, which were gotten arraigned, and the matter found by verdict, the adulterer was hanged, the woman burned to death, the husband living, the will shall be reputed as the deed.[35]

Here the punishment of being burned to death is exacted on an adulteress who simply attempts, though unsuccessfully, to be rid of her husband. And while the woman suffers the more horrible death of burning alive, the male paramour is allowed the more humane method of hanging. In actual practice, punishment for adultery in the Renaissance varied. It ranged from the husband completely ignoring the act, to his beating the lover or wife, to his being monetarily compensated by the lover, to the most severe recrimination in the legal sentencing of the wife's death. The concern for this and other crimes by both Church and state continued to be evident, however, witnessed by the sermons and by the Commonwealth's 1650 Act "for the suppressing of the abominable and crying sins of Incest, Adultery, and fornication, wherewith this land is much defiled and Almighty God highly displeased.[36] The death penalty was again introduced for incest and adultery. A man could escape death for the latter if he did not know the woman was married, and a woman was exempt from the capital provision if her husband had been absent from her for the space of three years.

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[35]The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights, pp. 208-209; also cited by Stenton, p. 65.

[36]G. R. Quaife, Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 41.

Though universally condemned, adultery was most severely censured by legal and civil authorities and moralists alike when it resulted in the questionable legitimacy of children. Again a double standard of punishment is seen since adulterous mothers were sentenced to more severe punishment than their partners in sin. Numerous Puritan divines make statements concerning the necessary actions to take involving a woman caught in adultery. William Perkins insisted that a husband should notify Church and legal authorities if he became aware of his wife's adulterous involvement. And Henry Bullinger believed that the wife should even accept responsibility for her husband's adultery since it was either her scolding or desire for dominance that drove the man to other women. In the last part of the sixteenth century Phillip Stubbes criticized the action taken by the Church for guilty adulteresses, merely forcing them to appear in a white sheet before the congregation for two or three days, a punishment so light that it had become a matter for laughter. He would require the adulteress to "suffer death by drinking the Moyses cup or to be branded on cheek or forehead" to make the world aware of her sin.[37] Bullinger explains in The Christian State of Matrimony why the adultery of a wife was so much more damnable than that of a husband and why her punishment should be accordingly more severe. He states that if a man's goods "were stolen, they could be returned with interest, but if his wife was taken in

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[37]William Perkins, Christian Oeconomie, 1609 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1113); Heinrich Bullinger, The Christen state of matrimonye, trans. M. Couerdale, 1541 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 29); Phillip Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses, 1583 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 357); also cited by Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethans at Home (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 301.

adultery, he could not be pacified . . . for if a wife secretly had unlawful children, they might inherit her husband's goods. Then she not only defiled herself but produced bastards that removed the family goods from the lawful heirs." In addition, she dishonored her husband and made him question the legitimacy of his children, dishonored her kindred, and most horribly dishonored her lawful children, making them question their own legitimacy. Eventually her husband, "though a virtuous and honest man, became despised and scorned."[38]

The penalties a woman might suffer if she broke from an impossible marriage are evident in the case of Frances Coke, youngest daughter of Sir Edward Coke, champion of English common law. Frances' mother tried in vain to prevent Coke, who needed the support of the king's favorite, the Duke of Buckingham, from arranging a marriage between the fourteen-year-old Frances and Sir John Villiers, the Duke's eldest brother. Lady Elizabeth tried to hide her daughter, but Coke seized Frances by force and put the mother into custody, forbidding her to attend the wedding which took place in 1617. Villiers was of poor intelligence, inclined to fits of insanity, and thought to be impotent, so when Frances became intimate with Sir Robert Howard and gave birth to a child in 1624, she was charged with adultery, sentenced to a heavy fine, imprisonment, and forced to do public penance barefoot and wearing a white sheet. Her own money and property were awarded to her husband, a penalty described in The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights, and

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[38]Bullinger, The Christen state of matrimonye; also cited by Pearson, p. 302.

she escaped more severe punishment only by virtue of her social rank.[39] This single case illustrates a great deal about the attitude towards the adulterous wife in Renaissance England which will influence her depiction in drama: her lack of legal rights, the difficulty of divorce, and the punishments she is threatened with if she steps outside the bounds of marriage.

Perhaps the combination of forces which influenced the portrayal of the adulteress in drama is most telling in the social currents which give shape to the Renaissance concept of woman in general and of the adulterous wife in particular. A survey of the popular literature of the day indicates that two schools of thought about women were being formed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. One, epitomized by Richard Brathwaite in The English Gentlewoman (1631), presents the ideal English lady as a pious, unselfish, obedient wife and housekeeper, submissive to the rule of her husband, without much being of her own. In his tract, Haec Homo wherein the Excellency of the Creation of Women is described by way of an Essaie, William Austin takes the other point of view, arguing that homo stands for both sexes and that both have souls which are equal in the eyes of God.[40] Women were still in subjection under the law, but the rise of humanism with its

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[39]Bullough, p. 222. Further information on the Frances Coke case can be found in Stenton, p. 67 and in Laura Norsworthy, The Lady of Bleeding Heart Yard (London, 1935), who worked out the story from the original documents.

[40]Richard Brathwaite, The English Gentlewoman (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 628); William Austin, Haec Homo (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 820); also cited by Stenton, p. 149.

ideas about education for women and the question of female moral responsibility for her own sexuality mingled with some of the more misogynistic traditional ideas to stimulate a renewed debate about women. The increasing boldness of women, especially of educated aristocrats and of wives of burghers during Elizabeth's reign, aroused the ire of conservatives in both the Elizabethan and Stuart periods. The renewed debate over the nature and role of women, referred to as early as the late fourteenth century as the "querelle des femmes" found its way into popular literature, including the drama, and influenced the social position of the adulterous wife in Renaissance England.

The strongest factor producing this conflict over women is perhaps due to the changes in the concept of education created by the growth of humanism; the key to virtue in this intellectual movement was education, and by the sixteenth century education for women became a popular topic, both in literature and in practice. The important figures in the humanist movement, such as Vives, Erasmus, and Sir Thomas More, advocated education for women, with Erasmus maintaining that a learned woman would make a better wife since intelligence implies reason and More putting his theories into practice in the case of his own daughters. Most of the theorists asserted that education was to encourage a love of goodness in women, particularly of chastity, and a hatred of evil. For this reason, feminine reading was expected in general to be pious--although some, generally aristocratic, women did receive a classical background--with a prominent part of it composed of devotional books. Other women were receiving an education in order to be able to read the Bible. In essence, education for women was

encouraged to "insure proficiency in domestic affairs, to give [the wife] her moral and religious training to remain chaste, obedient, and run a well managed household."[41]

The "querelle des femmes" became so popular that each side became a kind of cult arguing over female sexual morals, wisdom, and reason; even a work presenting basically the ideal gentleman such as Castiglione's The Courtier concerns itself with the debate, offering both sides of the issue. A favorite treatment of the question in popular literature was the itemizing and discussion of key feminine virtues. In such discussions chastity figures largely. In The Royal Exchange Greene lists four female attributes, including beauty, decorum, and good character, but names chastity as the chief ornament of women. Both Vives and Heywood incorporate in their writing a fact they got from Pliny that proves even Nature "recognizes that chastity is women's chief virtue, and strives to protect it after death; . . . when a man drowns he floats belly up, while a drowned woman floats on her stomach."[42]

In contrast, a cult of anti-feminist writers in the Renaissance dwell on what they consider the varied faults of women, including obstinancy, perversity, talkativeness, vanity, frivolity, and an ability to lie. But by far the most frequently cited vice is eroticism.

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[41]Bullough, pp. 209-15.

[42]Robert Greene, The Royal Exchange, 1590 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 546); Luis Vives, Instruction for Christian Women (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 158); Thomas Heywood, A Curtaine Lecture (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1416); also cited by Camden, p. 32.

These writers begin by quoting Proverbs (xxxi. 10) "Who shall find a virtuous woman?" and go on to call women "incontinent," "insatiable and unsatisfied," and "more desyrous of carnall lust than men." Apparently their earthly function was more to "entertaine and nourish voluptuousnesse and Idleness" than to use intelligence or reason. Both Lear and Edgar comment on the erotic nature of women in King Lear, and in Chapman's Bussy d'Ambois, Monsieur refers to the "unsounded sea of women's bloods," claiming that even Cerberus is unable to see "the damned looks hid with the veils of women's virtuous looks" (III.ii. 312-29). Spenser remarks in the Faerie Queene (I.iv.24) of the fascination that Lechery holds for women, and a character in Swetnam, the Woman-hater describes the fondness that young female children had for playing house "in imitation of the wanton ends their riper yeeres will ayme at" (III.i). The wave of diatribes harping on women's lust such as "The Naturall Disposition of Most Women" (1616) and the growing hostility against her lack of chastity in ballads that read "as lovers trewe/Euery Daye a newe," which were the result of a backlash to a favorable image of women, finally reached its peak in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with the mythology about witchcraft.

The period from 1450 to 1750 was the great age of witchcraft. It was in the late Middle Ages that a new belief was added to the European concept of witchcraft which distinguished it from other witch beliefs--the notion that the witch owed her powers to having made a deliberate pact with the Devil, so that the essence of witchcraft became its heretical character. This resulted in a series of edicts culminating in the Papal Bull of Innocent VIII in 1484 and in the book

which codified popular belief about witchcraft into Church dogma, the Malleus Maleficarum (1486). The Malleus charges that women are more likely to be witches than men because they are more feeble-minded, susceptible, and carnal: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust which in women is insatiable."[43] However, because of the independence of the English Church, medieval England was less vulnerable to the intellectual and judicial trends which encouraged witch prosecution. It was left to the Protestant writers of the later Elizabethan period to convey to English readers the contents of the Malleus. In a tract written in 1584 which James I condemned as too lenient on witches, James Scot reveals the typical folklore of the time:

> The cause why women are oftener found to be witches than men: it is said that they have such an unbridled force of fury and concupiscence naturally that by no means is it possible for them to temper or moderate the same. . . . Hereby it comes to pass that women, having a marvelous fickle nature, when grief so ever happens upon them, immediately all peaceableness of mind departs.[44]

The people and their fear of maleficium, or the damage a witch might do, were the driving force behind the witchcraft craze, not the courts. The wording of the witchcraft statutes suggested that in England witchcraft was prosecuted primarily as an anti-social crime rather than as heresy. Charges of devil-worship were rare; most people convicted of witchcraft were accused of harming people or property. The increase in the belief in witches, particularly menacing during the one hundred

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[43]H. Kramer and J. Sprenger, Malleus Maleficarum, trans. Montague Summers (Arrow Books Ltd., 1971), pp. 112, 116-17, 119, 122.

[44]R. Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, ed. B. Nicholson (London, 1886), p. 227.

and twenty years or so after Elizabeth's accession, can be explained by the decline of the old manorial system during the Elizabethan and Stuart periods. Since accusations of witchcraft usually took place as the result of a disagreement between a wealthier victim and a person refused some kind of favor from him, there were more reports of witchcraft when the decay of traditional arrangements resulted in more elderly and poor people dependent upon neighborly support. Although most witches were accused of anti-social behavior, with the more blatantly sexual aspect of having relations with the Devil being an uncommon feature of the trials, the mythology of witchcraft was unquestionably at its height when women were generally believed to be more sexually voracious than men; the disappearance of the belief that there were witches who satisfied their sexual appetites by congress with the Devil coincided neatly with the change to the notion in the eighteenth century, illustrated by Pamela, that women were utterly unlascivious.[45] In a culture that reveals a suspicion of female sexuality so extreme that women could be executed as a result, the adulteress was likely to be damned even further.

One of the movements which contributed to the dispute about women and clearly influenced the attitude toward the adulterous wife in Renaissance England is the new idealization of home and family, for a total understanding of a culture's ideas on adultery implies an understanding of its ideas on marriage. Marriage customs and family patterns underwent a profound change between the early sixteenth and late

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[45]Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 438-569.

seventeenth centuries, and the most striking feature is the emergence of a sense of family responsibility for personal harmony and moral virtue. In the Middle Ages marriage was viewed as secondary to a life of celibacy, and it was the "ethical exaltation of marriage by protestant divines that began the transformation."[46] Paradoxically, however, one of the primary results of the Protestant emphasis on the sanctity of holy matrimony was a strengthening of the husband's authority over his wife and the increased subordination of women, an attitude adhered to by pious women as well as men. Wives were taught that it was their sacred duty to love and cherish their husbands after marriage, a belief which facilitated their real, internalized acceptance of submission to their husbands, advocated by the preachers, and which made the position of the disobedient wife all the more precarious.[47] In addition to the sermon, the medium by which citizens of the age received their knowledge of the importance of the family and its governance was the popular handbook or domestic tract. From 1528 to 1633, over thirty works were published which dealt with the organization of the household and with the duties of wife and husband. Over half were issued in more than one edition, and five appeared in four or more editions. No aspect of the Elizabethan and Stuart interest in literature is more of an oddity than this zeal for "good books." The invention of printing made feasible the publishing of cheap materials, and increased literacy gave such materials as collections of pious aphorisms, religious guidance, prayers,

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[46]Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, p. 669.

[47]Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 202.

printed sermons, and moralized allegories a greater usefulness than in earlier periods. These books on morality no doubt contributed more than the schools in guiding the populace, for they were recognized as second only to the keys of salvation. Since women, it was believed, were susceptible to error, handbooks and domestic tracts, which offered advice on the varied and intricate questions of domestic relationships became prized works. As a pious prerequisite to their practical topics, however, comes a discussion of the marriage institution from both secular and religious viewpoints and a eulogy on the dignity, sanctity, and lawfulness of wedlock. For example, nearly half of the lengthy treatise by Thomas Becon called the Book of Matrimony is devoted to extolling "the excellency and dignity of holy matrimony." Other writers of domestic books which assert that "wedlocke is an hye and blessed order ordeyned of God in Paradyse whych hath euer bene had in greate honoure and reverence" (Dekyn) are Hans Dekyn, Miles Coverdale, and William Harrington.[48]

The corollary of the handbook's very emphasis on the sanctity and godliness of matrimony is a condemnation of carnal sin. Most of the handbooks maintain repeatedly that the purpose of marriage is partly to avoid adultery. Becon asserts that God instituted the "holy order of

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[48]Thomas Becon, The booke of Matrimony both profitable and comfortable for all them, that entende quietly and godly to lyve in the holy state of honorable wedlocke, in Collected Works, 1560-64 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 913); Hans Dekyn, trans., A briefe and playne declaration of the dewty of maried folkes, gathered out of the holy scriptures, and set forth in the almayne tonge by Hermon Archbyshop of Colayne (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 465); Bullinger, The Christen state of matrimonye, trans. M. Couerdale; William Harrington, The Commendations of Matrimony (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 44); also cited by Clark, pp. 75-77.

honorable wedlocke" to avoid such sin since "marriage is the only remedy for unclennes." He goes on to say that God's abhorrence of adultery is not only stated in his commandment but seen in his punishment for offenders; "to avoid fornycacion let euery man have his owne wife, & euery woman her owne husband." Dekyn agrees that one reason for marriage is "to avoyde fornicacyon and all unclennes," and in a lengthy discussion of the subject, Coverdale points out that "innumerable confusuns, shame, hurt, dishonoure, & fylthynesse, follow out of abhominable adoutry."[49]

Writers other than those of domestic tracts contrast the ideal of marriage and chastity with their negative counterparts. In The Good and the Badde (1616), character writer Nicholas Breton contrasts favorable portraits of "A Good Wife" and "A quiet Woman" with "A wanton Woman" and "An Vnquiet Woman." W. Fennor satirizes the chastity of merchants' wives in Pasquils Palinodia, And His progresse to the Taverne (1619), and Thomas Tuke reveals the evils associated with adultery in the title of his work, A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women: Against Murther and Poisoning: Pride and Ambition: Adulterie and Witchcraft, which was in two editions by 1616.[50] But the ideal of

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[49]Becon, The booke of Matrimony; Dekyn, trans., A briefe and playne declaration of the dewty of maried folkes; Couerdale, trans., The Christen state of matrimonye; also cited by Clark, p. 78.

[50]Nicholas Breton, The Good and the Badde (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 629); W. Fennor, Pasquils Palinodia, and His progresse to the Taverne (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 969); Thomas Tuke, A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1191); also cited by Wright, pp. 491-92.

marriage and chastity is perhaps best captured in the lines of Jeremy Taylor's The Marriage Ring: "For this is the marriage ring: it ties two hearts by an eternal bond." For Taylor this ring was symbolic of "life's most binding duties; to all who reverenced family life as mankind's most precious heritage, it was indeed the symbol of the founding of a home with its indissoluble ties and affections."[51] Marriage, in essence, involved a kind of mystery whereby two individuals could achieve a more perfect state of being than is possible in any other human relationship.

There was also a practical side to this ideal of marriage and the home. For it was the home which provided the citizen with a structured society in which his goods might remain safe and his property and possessions might have continuity. Hence he was concerned that the members of his family, especially his wife, who was the factor determining the success of his home, maintain a code which would enable the household to function efficiently without friction and waste, either material or emotional. If the wife were faithless, the domestic efficiency and happiness desired by the husband would be jeopardized. Both ideal and practical considerations of marriage seemed to render it the best means of fulfilling one's duty to society and to posterity. Thus a number of writers such as Stubbes in The Anatomie of Abuses began to criticize those who had remained single. Marriage was so idealized that it came to be the institution, solemnized in public and ratified by

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[51]Jeremy Taylor, The Marriage Ring, in The Whole works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, rev. ed., ed. Charles Page Eden (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847-54); also cited by Pearson, p. 279.

the Church as a sacrament, around which Stuart society was structured. And with the elevated image of marriage, chastity was no longer a virtue by itself, becoming instead an aspect of fidelity. In The Allegory of Love, C. S. Lewis maintains that in the sixteenth century the fashion of courtly adultery, which allowed passionate sexual love only outside marriage, gave way with the rise of Puritanism to the flower of "monogamic idealism,"[52] implying the celebration of romantic love in marriage and an extension of the definition of chastity to include marital fidelity. For the Elizabethans and Jacobeans "chastity" and "constancy" became almost interchangeable so that a faithful wife remained chaste. This idea is illustrated in a tribute to Queen Elizabeth in which Lady Diana Primrose states that:

> whether [chastity] be termed virginal
> In virgins, or in wives styl'd conjugal
> Or vidual in widows, God respects
> All equally, and all alike affects.[53]

The veneration attached to "blessed matrimony" and its importance as the stronghold of societal solidarity help to explain its position in domestic drama. These plays reflect a kind of "adultery nausea" which was shared by the nation. Perhaps the passage which best captures this Renaissance social theory is the invocation to wedded love found in John Milton's Paradise Lost. The widespread emphasis on the essential godliness of marriage and the wickedness of carnal desires

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[52]Lewis, p. 360.

[53]Diana Primrose, A chaine of pearle, or a memoriall of Queene Elizabeth, 1630 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 971); also cited by Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 227-28.

results in a hatred of adultery, and hence of the adulteress, so extreme as to become almost fanatical:

> By thee [marriage] adultrous lust was driven from men
> Among the bestial herds to range; by thee,
> Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,
> Relations dear, and all other charities
> Of father, son, and brother first were known.
> (IV.753-58)

Additional evidence indicating the social position of the adulterous wife in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may be found in the treatises, domestic books, pamphlets, and religious tracts which discuss the training for young girls, who will later become wives, in the virtue of chastity. The qualities that Renaissance writers praised most frequently as constituting perfection for young women involve the more passive aspects of human nature and consist of humility, sweetness, simplicity, kindness, piety, temperance, obedience, patience, and beauty. But the quality most frequently praised is chastity. Even those writers who concentrate on beauty associate it with chastity. They generally do not refer to physical attraction but rather to an inward beauty or chaste virtue which can actually produce outward beauty. In The Compleat Woman (1639), Du Bosc's belief that "modesty is a potent charm and without it beauty has no soul" follows the Platonic view that the fact that a woman is beautiful is a guarantee that she is chaste and has a fair soul.[54] Because aristocratic women, with their delicate constitution and aphrodisiacal diet, were more vulnerable to temptation, chastity was especially emphasized among the

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[54]Jacques Du Bosc, The Compleat Woman (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 988); also cited by Camden, pp. 22-23.

ranks of nobility. The first lesson every little girl must learn is "to love goodness, particularly chastity, and to hate evil." Credit for chastity was even ranked according to circumstances, ranging from the most imperfect chastity of those who have never been tested to that of women chaste in reputation but lustful in speech and bearing to the more perfect chastity which goes beyond that of ordinary women.

Scholars and divines debated over the best methods with which to inculcate chastity in young girls, with Vives and Bruto arguing that total isolation from evil is a more certain and profitable state and prescribing confinement at home. Vives felt that learning should be directed toward chastity and purity so that books should be restricted accordingly while Bruto maintained that reading offers too much opportunity for young girls to be exposed to the adulteries of others and should be banned entirely. It was believed that the main assurance of chaste behavior among the young, however, was the impulse to fear shame. The quality which defines this impulse, called shamefastness or bashfulness, is described by Barnaby Rich in The excellencie of good women (1613):

> Nature hath ordained in all good and vertuous women this affection of shamefastnes, which serveth as a restraint to withhold them from those artificiall abillimentes that do either smell of vanite or breed suspect of honesty: for Bashfulnes is it that moderates their thoughts, makes them modest in their speaches, temperate in their actions, and warie in all there deliberations.

Belmonte even equates female shamefastness with male reason. He affirms that reason "makes a man reasonable and sociable; if he loses

it, he merely ceases to be reasonable. But if a woman loses shame, she ceases to be a woman."[55]

Every consideration of the training of young women turned upon the central demand of chastity, the great virtue of woman, so judged by women as well as men. An example of this occurs in a book of advice written by Mrs. Dorothy Leigh, one of the few women who did reveal her attitudes, for her three sons. The book, entitled The Mothers blessing, was first printed in 1616 and had reached a seventh edition by 1621. Facing an early death, Mrs. Leigh was concerned that her small children have in written form her views on the rearing of children, and in a discussion of the importance of the choice of good names, she includes a digression on the value of chastity:

> Whoso is truly chaste, is free from idleness, and from all vaine delights, full of humility, and all good christian virtues; who is chaste is not given to pride in apparell, nor any vanity, but is always either reading, meditating, or practicing some good thing which she hath learned in the Scripture.

She goes on in a book written for her sons to warn women to beware of the lures of men, affirming once again the double standard of sexual behavior:

> [M]en lye in waite every where to deceive us, as the elders did to deceive Susanna. Wherefore let us bee, as shee was, chast, watchfull, and wary, keeping company with mayds. Once Judas betrayed his Master with a kisse, and repented it: but now men, like Judas, betray their Mystresses with a kisse and repent it not: but laugh and rejoyce, that they have brought sinne and shame to her that trusted in them. The only way to avoid all which, is to bee chaste with Susanna,

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[55]Barnaby Rich, The excellencie of good women (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 858); also cited by Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), pp. 43, 100.

> and being women to imbrace that virtue, which being placed in a woman, is most commendable.[56]

Not only were moral leaders concerned about the quality and methods of education used in training young girls, but they also set up strict guidelines on the choice of teachers. Renaissance society was still strictly paternal, but it was frequently the mother of a hired gentlewoman who was directly responsible for educating female children. In The Christian mans Closet (1581), Bartholomew Batty urges fathers to place their daughters into the hands of a wise matron who herself will be an exemplar of chastity, prudence, temperance, and generosity and who will transfer these virtues to her charge. He goes on to assert that of all the qualities important in the education of girls, chastity is most essential for it is "the flower of manners, the honour of the body, the ornament and splendour of the feminine sexe, the integrity of the bloud, the faith of their kinde, and the proclaimer of the sincerety and candour of a faire soule."[57] As can be seen in the references made again and again about the necessity of bringing up girls into the virtues of chaste behavior, the prejudice towards women who violate that code of behavior has been drilled into young minds from childhood.

Sexual behavior was also strictly prescribed in the domestic books for sixteenth and seventeenth century wives. Since the married

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[56]Dorothy Leigh, The Mothers blessing (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1455); also cited by Kelso, p. 42.

[57]Bartholomew Batty, The Christian mans Closet (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 376); also cited by Camden, pp. 39-41.

state was accepted as the most conducive to the living of a godly, happy, and productive life, the choice of a wife, who particularly determined domestic success, was one of the most important decisions that the Renaissance male had to make. In his work, His Wife (1632), Sir Thomas Overbury acknowledges that a man can do little about the kind of person he was created, but he can improve himself through posterity in his choice of a wife:

> Myself I cannot chuse, my wife I may
> And in the choise of Her, it much doth lye,
> To mend my self in my posterity.[58]

Much of the advice contained in domestic handbooks involved the kind of wife a man ought to select. Dekyn states that a "wyfe ought to be dyscrete, chaste, huswyfelye, shamefeste, good, meke, pacyent and sober, not lyght in countynans nor garyshe in apparall . . . but wyth a comelye gravytye and a sadde behavoure of a constante mynde, true tongued and of fewe wordes." The author of A Godly Form of Household Government, published in 1598 and realizing seven editions by 1624, advises prospective husbands to look for virtue above wealth in choosing a wife, a commonplace of the Protestant moral ethic.[59] As Vives states in The office and duetie of an husband, "A love is a certeyne affection to a thing that is goodly & fayre, there is nothing more goodly then virtue . . . it is seene with the inwarde eye of the

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[58]Sir Thomas Overbury, His Wife (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1110); also cited by Camden, p. 61.

[59]Dekyn, trans., A briefe and playne declaration of the dewty of maried folkes; Robert Cleaver, A Godly Form of Household Government (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 953); also cited by Clark, pp. 81-83.

mind, and drawth those that beholdeth it to benevolence & to embrace and love it."[60]

Next to simple obedience, the virtue of chastity is mentioned as being required in a wife more often than any other quality, and it is frequently alloted first place. According to Vives, the two chief gifts that a wife can offer are love and chastity. Love will come after marriage because the wife owes love to the man who has become the center of her world. But chastity, which implies both virginity and fidelity to the husband, the woman brings with her as her greatest gift. To the wife chastity becomes a more important thing than to the unmarried woman, for "if she is unchaste the offense multiplies, now not only against God and her parents, but against her husband and her children, her vows and the church, the laws, society, and her country."[61] This chastity is fidelity to the spouse not only in act but in thought, appearance, and reputation. Immodest behavior, loud laughter and speech, lewd body movements, seductive looks or clothing encourage desire in other men and incur serious blame no matter how innocent the intention. The most effective means for a woman to maintain a chaste reputation is to rid her mind of all lascivious thoughts and to avoid any situation in which she might be tempted to err, keeping herself busy with household duties, praying, reading only pious material, and in general setting her mind in such a habit of chastity that she

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[60]Luis Vives, The office and duetie of an husband, trans. T. Paynell (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1013); also cited by Camden, p. 68.

[61]Vives, Instruction for Christian Women; also cited by Kelso, p. 97.

would be oblivious to any unchaste behavior around her even if she is unable to retire. The chaste wife is never forward but maintains a modest demeanor at all times, refusing to consort with any women whose reputations are suspect. Men are counseled to observe whether or not a woman is the subject of other men's conversations, for the most honest woman and the most chaste wife are least spoken of. As Barnaby Rich notes in Faultes, Faults, and nothing else but Faultes (1606), a virtuous wife is seldom the subject of any discussion, not even one in her favor:

> I have seldome seene an honest woman to have many frinds that will take hir part, that will speake for hir; there be not many that wil bestow giftes on her, that will lend her money . . .: you shall not see an honest woman supported vnlesse by a father, a brother, or by a husband.[62]

In addition, a wife should be chaste in her attitude and behavior toward her own husband. If she does not exhibit restraint and modesty even in the most private of moments, she will arouse the suspicion of her husband and will risk losing his respect. The concern with and tremendously high value placed on chastity among wives can perhaps be explained in the Renaissance connection of it with honor. In women chastity (or fidelity for wives) and honor were synonymous. In this age the value of a person lay in his honor, and for men this meant virtu or a reputation for excellency in many areas. Unlike men, however, about whom chastity is infrequently mentioned, for women honor meant one thing only--chastity. Benvenuto Italiano's "exquisite

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[62]Barnaby Rich, Faultes, Faults, and nothing else but Faultes (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 858); also cited by Camden, p. 68.

dialogues in Italian and English," printed in 1612 to teach Italian to English speakers, reveal the difference in standards of chastity for men and women. In the case of a married man consorting with an unmarried woman, he "deserves blame but does not lose honor since he injures no one except his own wife." In the case of a man, whether married or unmarried, who becomes involved with a married woman, he is dishonored "since he sins against temperance and justice by injuring another man's honor--a thing more precious than any other outward good." After conceding that adultery should be punished more heavily than theft, the listener in the dialogues asks whether a married woman deserves censure only when she consorts with a married man. The speaker replies that the sexual violations of a married woman are worse than those of a man because she would stain her husband's honor as well as her own, because, subject to a man, she inflicts the greater injury of an inferior upon a superior, and because "shee may bring into her Husbands house strange children, to wipe her husbands own childrens nose of their share in his goods, and falsifie all whatsoever."[63] It can be seen, then, that a wife who is unfaithful to her husband in the Renaissance is not merely viewed as a woman of loose sexual morals, but in much more far-reaching terms, as a person who threatens the very strongholds of society--the faith in family, marriage, church, law, and the faith in a personal code of honor.

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[63]Benvenuto Italiano, The Passenger, containing the "exquisite dialogues" (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979, reel 1505); also cited by Kelso, pp. 98-99.

A final area in which the social position of the adulteress in Renaissance England can be discerned is in the attitudes toward fashion. During the sixteenth century, with the interest in the nature and character of woman, female clothing became increasingly associated with status. The clothes which were developed, such as the "busc," "farthingale," and hooped petticoat, were confining, limiting movement and activity, and moralists became attracted to the fearfully elegant style of Elizabethan dress, associating chaste and pure maids with simple apparel and extravagant costuming with courtesans. By the seventeenth century, with the approval of King James, clergymen and lay people alike were censuring women's dress as the symbol of the evils of the day. It was believed that the fashionable short hair, face painting, and extravagant dress brought women to perdition. After praising modest women who were conscientious of their virtue, pamphlets such as Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman (1620) associate liscentiousness with fashionable dress. Using images of bartering, the author states, "[s]hee that hath pawned her credit to get a Hat, will sell her Smocke to buy a Feather: Shee that hath given kisses to have her hayre shorne, will give her honestie to have her vpper parts put into a French doublet."[64]

There is even more vigorous opposition in the seventeenth century to the use of cosmetics--a practice which was directly associated with adultery. It was argued that since a painted face was

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[64]Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 839); also cited by Wright, pp. 493-94.

the traditional sign of the prostitute, virtuous women no longer maintained their chaste reputations if they indulged in the practice. It was thought particularly immoral for wives to participate, and those who did were simply revealing their inward evil. In a lecture delivered in 1608, John Downame speaks of how "common this sin of adultery and vncleannesse is in our times, wherein the signes and means thereof do so abound; seeing not only those who are harlots by profession, but even such as would be reputed pure virgins and chaste wives shew these outward signes of their inward filthinesse, and vse these baits to catch the foolish in the nets of vncleannes. . . ." In The Excellency of Good Women (1613), Barnaby Rich argues that the "paintinge of shameles faces and these inticing showes" are really "vauntcurrers of adultery."[65] Thomas Tuke agrees with this conclusion in his A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women (1616). Here the wife is seen as actually using cosmetics to indicate her availability to other men. The husband asks:

> What should I doe with such a wanton wife,
> Which night and day would cruciate my life
> With Ieloux pangs? Sith euery way shee gets
> Her borrowed snares, not her own haires, for nets,
> To catch her cuckows with aloof, light attires,
> Opens the doore vnto all leaud desires,
> And with vile drugs adultering her face,
> Closely allures the adulterers imbrace.[66]

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[65]John Downame, Foure Treatises, Tending to Dissuade all Christians from foure no less hainous than common sinnes (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976, reel 1270); Rich, The Excellency of Good Women; also cited by Camden, pp. 200-201.

[66]Tuke, A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women; also cited by Camden, pp. 208-209.

Here the hostility toward the adulteress in the seventeenth century is revealed in that not only were women severely censured for the actual act of adultery, they were criticized if they gave the appearance of promoting or enjoying their sexuality or of even entertaining the thought. The old association and fear of women, sex, and evil is still apparent, and any woman who called attention to herself as a sexual being, much less the adulteress, suffered accordingly.

One of the clearest ways for the twentieth-century reader to understand the legal and social position of the adulterous wife in Renaissance England is to view the careers of women who did violate their marriage vows, most of whom became sources for domestic tragedy. The most prominent historical adulteress whose life of crime was not captured in drama is Frances Coke (already examined in detail). Her importance for this study lies in the fact that even a woman who, at fourteen years old, is forced by her father against her mother's wishes to marry a nobleman having limited intelligence, suffering fits of insanity, and suspected of impotence, is expected to honor her marriage vows for a lifetime and is punished according to law when she does not. The unbending attitude toward the adulteress by law and moralists alike is seen in this case about which there is every reason, at least to the twentieth-century mind, to be sympathetic. The same laws, which frequently make no allowance for child brides or arranged marriages, and thus seem to leave adultery as the only alternative, are unfailingly relentless in their punishment of those who take that alternative.

There was sufficient public interest in other adulteresses whose careers figured prominently in the history of the age for dramatists to

write plays about them. One adulteress, Jane Shore, whose story initiated the literary fad of the "sinning woman" did not live in Renaissance England but nevertheless deserves some note here. This mistress of Edward IV, whose seduction is captured in Renaissance ballads, poems, and plays, is perhaps the only fallen woman treated at all sympathetically. Her seduction is as much the result of compulsion and prerogative exercised by Edward as anything else. Jane accedes to the sovereign right of kings. Helpless yet no less aware of her sin, she reluctantly succumbs to Edward's entreaties. However, the sympathy she is shown in much of the popular literature cannot mitigate the author's strict sense of morality. All of the works reveal the stern Renaissance code in which death is the only atonement for adultery. The story of Jane Shore first appears in literature in Sir Thomas More's The History of King Richard the Third (1513). After Edward's death, Jane is reduced by Richard III from a position of power as the King's mistress to poverty and begging, imprisonment, and public penance, walking barefoot, wrapped in a sheet, and carrying a taper. More, whose version is repeated almost verbatim by Holinshed, treats Jane as a moral example, as a woman whose good deeds offset her sins and whose great troubles win her universal pity. The lesson that power and riches won by sin and lust will perish in time is offered both in Churchyard's version of Jane's story in The Mirror for Magistrates (1563) and in Thomas Heywood's two-part play, Edward IV. Even though there is sympathy for a young woman who is manipulated by power and who shows pity and kindness for others, the unmitigating attitude toward the adulterous wife is revealed in the sense of justness surrounding her fall.

The three other historical adulteresses, whose careers are of interest, lived in the second half of the sixteenth century and provided the dramatists of the age with material for their works. In actuality, their sensational crimes, publicized in chronicles, pamphlets, moral tracts, broadside ballads, were the motivation behind the fad of "murder plays," a term used to designate a specific kind of domestic tragedy which appeared in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and which realistically dramatized sensational crimes of violence committed in England. The crimes of Alice Arden, whose adultery, as it generally does in these plays, leads to the murder of her husband, are dramatized in Arden of Feversham (1592). The events, as described in Holinshed's Chronicle, occurred on February 15, 1551/2. The wife of a landowner at Feversham, Alice Arden falls in love with a tailor, Mosbie, and in order to continue their love affair, they conspire to murder the husband. Alice's attempt to poison her husband fails when he detects an unusual taste in the broth and pours it out. The lovers enlist Greene and Michael in their plot, Greene because he resents Arden for taking his land and Michael because he is in love with Mosbie's sister. They hire two highwaymen to commit the murder, and, after several failed attempts, Arden is killed while playing at tables. The conspirators carry the body to a field where it is discovered that evening by guests which Arden had invited. Alice Arden and her partners in crime are charged with murder, convicted, and executed. Alice receives the traditional punishment of burning at the stake assigned to the adulterous wife who commits "petty treason" by murdering or conspiring to murder her husband.

Finally, two historical adulteresses whose careers provide sources for plays in the late sixteenth century, one extant and one non-extant, are Anne Sanders and Eulalia Page. The murder of George Sanders by one George Browne, who kills the husband in order to free the wife, is described in a literary descendant of The Mirror for Magistrates, a work by Anthony Munday entitled A View of Sundry Examples (1580). The sensational story appeared at least twice in nondramatic prose, in Stowe's Chronicle and in a pamphlet called A Brief Discussion of the late murder of Master George Saunders a worshipfull citizen of London: and of the apprehension, arraignment, and execution of the principal accessories of the Same (1573), and was dramatized in A Warning for Fair Women. Although the wife, Anne, is led into both adultery and complicity in the murder of her husband by Browne and a bawd, Mistress Drury, she is still punished by being executed with the others; here again the thought is the deed. The author reveals in his play the traditional view that adultery leads to greater sins, ultimately holding his adulteress responsible for murder. Another case of adultery and murder is described in a quarto pamphlet and in several broadside ballads. Two such ballads on the murder of Page of Plymouth find the wife, Eulalia, repentant upon her execution:

> Farewell false world, and friends that fickle be;
> All wives farewell; example take by me:
> Let not the Devill to murder you inspire,
> Seek to escape such foul and filthie mire.
>
> And now, O Christ! to thee I yeeld my breath,
> Strengthen my faith in bitter pangs of death;
> Forgive my faults and folly of my times,
> And with thy bloud wash thou away my crimes.

Another version has her state, "Methinkes the heauens crie vengeance for my fact."[67] The details of the murder are dramatized in a work by Dekker and Ben Jonson, of which the title alone has been preserved, called The Lamentable tragedie of pagge of plemoth. In this case the wife of a wealthy gentleman of Plymouth had been forced against her will to marry him. Because of his desire for connection with Page's money, Eulalia's avaricious father had forbidden her marriage to a young man with whom she was in love named Strangwidge. After her marriage, the love affair with Strangwidge continued, and the two hired assassins who strangled Page in his bed. When the crime was discovered and tried, Eulalia declared in court that she would prefer to die with her lover than live with her husband. The execution took place on February 20, 1591.[68] Thus the negative legal and social position of the adulterous wife in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England is apparent in the histories of these unfaithful wives and in the treatment, fall, and punishment of those whose lives provided material for plays. Up until the appearance of these plays, the dramatic representation of the domestic life of the period had been captured only in a comic light. The genre of the murder play reveals for the first time the possibilities for tragedy in a domestic situation, and at center stage stands the adulteress whose violation of the sacrament of marriage threatens the accepted moral and personal

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[67]Cited by Adams, pp. 38-39.

[68]Wilhelm Creizenach, The English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare, trans. Cécile Hugon (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1916), p. 208.

codes of honor, economic security, the institutions of state, church, and family, in effect the basic structures upon which Renaissance society was founded.

As is apparent from the number of books and pamphlets issued on the subject, there was an avid interest in women in Elizabethan and Stuart England. Books are seldom published about perfectly understood and accepted reality. Women were still a mystery, and, as they moved into the economic and intellectual spotlights, questions about their moral and sexual nature drew them even further attention. The controversies about the "woman problem," whether she was inherently evil or virtuous, whether or not she was fit to rule, indicate a real concern, as both sides attempted to evaluate her status and position in society. Women were not yet viewed as distinct individuals since writers concentrated basically on woman as lover, woman as submissive and chaste wife, woman as mother, criticizing them for in any way usurping the role of men. But the new awareness of the nature and habits of females does indicate a new way of thinking about women and an attempt to appraise their situation in a rapidly changing society. Because in drama, as in life, the negative ideal is often more interesting in its deviations from the norm than the norm itself, the villain more interesting than the hero, the role of the adulteress began to fascinate sixteenth and seventeenth century audiences. And the responses are no longer merely comic. Imbued with all that woman is not supposed to be, the adulteress violates the entire social order, and for the first time in English drama, a female character is held as responsible for actions that have far-reaching consequences as her male counterparts.

CHAPTER II

ADULTERY AS A VIOLATION OF HONOR: THE FALSELY ACCUSED ADULTERESS

It is evident that, like any age, the Renaissance period in England had its own biases in and attitudes towards social and moral behavior. There did exist very definite ideas about a wife who committed adultery, and late sixteenth and seventeenth century tragedies which dramatize this "type" of woman express these concerns. Such plays, arising from a vision that is morally aware, search to come to terms with the disorder of experience and the presence of evil in the world. For Renaissance dramatists, the adulterous wife provided a vehicle for exploring what might be called feminine evil, a part of life intertwined with female sexuality and with the violation of a code of honor. As feminine evil was explored by these dramatists, an entire spectrum of woman's responses to the accepted code of honor was discovered, ranging from a strict adherence to traditional morality to a deliberate violation of sexual morés. It is not entirely speculative to propose that the dramatic presentation of the adulteress reflects the conflict over societal and moral values that we feel in the drama of the period.

Certainly a character who figures prominently in tragedies involving the idea of female adultery is the woman who is actually a model of virtue and fidelity but who, as a result of an obsessive concern with a code of honor, is falsely accused. These women fall

into two categories: the one who is wrongly accused by her husband and the one who accuses herself, the effect being tragic in both situations. Since it is essential to comprehend the emphasis on the concepts of both male and female honor in order to understand the social background and tragic dilemmas of Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and Othello, the Renaissance code of honor will first of all be examined, revealing its connection with a wife's fidelity. The discussion will then turn to the men and women of the plays in order to show how the social forces create complications that are conceived by the playwright in terms of plot and character to produce jealousy and violence in tragi-comedy and tragedy. Finally, in the second part of the chapter the tragic "type" of woman who accuses herself of adultery because of betrothal or rape will be examined as evinced in Antonio's Revenge, The Lover's Progress, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, The Broken Heart, Appius and Virginia, and The Tragedy of Valentinian. In essence, because of the inextricable bond between honor and feminine fidelity, it is necessary to understand Renaissance honor in order to comprehend the implications of adultery in these dramas, the motivations of these husbands for accusing their wives wrongly of infidelity, and the reactions of the women to their accusations. Thus an analysis of the social background and the artistry of selected plays in this chapter will reveal exactly why and how the audience's emotions are intensified for these wives who are wrongly accused of adultery.

In turning to the social background of the falsely accused heroine, it is first necessary to realize that for the Renaissance aristocrat--upon whom the heroes of Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and

Othello are modeled--honor, good name, credit, reputation, and glory are at the very center of his ethical system.[1] That honor was a pervasive concern, even a societal norm during the Elizabethan period is without question. Honor as man's most valuable asset, honor as the reward of virtue, honor as the emblem of virtue, honor as the sign of the good opinion of others, and dishonor as a fate worse than death are commonplaces so popular and so widespread in the Renaissance that they pass into the literature with almost as little comment as does the notion of democracy into American literature. Yet precise definitions of honor are evident in most of the standard works of moral philosophy of the age. These ideas stem basically from Aristotelian, not Platonic, concepts of honor as explained in Renaissance textbooks in which the idea becomes almost a religion. In Cassio's words, to lose one's reputation is to lose "the immortal part of oneself."[2] Here reputation means not simply the good opinion of others but the self-esteem without which social beings cannot function well in public or private life.

Important to an understanding of the plays containing a wife falsely accused of infidelity is the idea that honor was viewed as a social value, reflecting the Greek sense of public conscience. Patterned after the codes of Aristotle and Cicero, explained in Renaissance grammar books, the Renaissance code teaches that man values

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[1]The concept of honor is explained at length in Curtis Brown Watson's Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

[2]William Shakespeare, Othello, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), II.iii.263-64.

himself according to his honorable behavior and that it is one of his basic obligations to act so that he wins the esteem of his fellow men. For example, in his advice to the courtier, Castiglione recommends that he attend court for one major purpose--to win honor, reputation, credit, and esteem. Not only is there a basic assumption by Renaissance philosophers that virtuous behavior will be rewarded by public esteem, but there is also an emphasis on the inextricable bond between virtue and honor. This connection is maintained in Robert Ashley's Of Honor, produced between 1596 and 1603, the most succinct work on the subject found in the Renaissance. Ashley represents the view of the age when he argues, "For how can vertue stand if you take away honour." This relationship between honor and virtue, which is even more extreme than Aristotle's precepts, conflicts with the Thomistic assertion contained in the Summa Theologica that "he is not truly virtuous, who does virtuous deeds for the sake of human glory." Ashley is proposing that public testimony, not private conscience, is the more reliable judge of a man's virtue. He states that honor is to be desired so that "we may behold the Testimonie which good men and wise have geven of our vertue and be delighted therwith, as having not so much confidence in our selves herin as in the judgment of others."[3] The emphasis on social approval, reflected in much of the literature of the age including Shakespeare's plays, explains the keen sensitivity of the Renaissance nobleman, and dramatic hero, to public opinion, his resentment of a public affront, and his desire to win great honors. The entire code of

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[3]Cited by Watson, p. 67.

honor results from an ethics which stresses the moral value of social recognition. This kind of attitude would have been defined as pride by St. Thomas, but Della Casa's description of pride inverts this notion, explaining that "to contemne the honoure and renoune, which other men gape for so much, is but to glorie and magnify himself above others."[4] Here social opinion is an integral part of the ethics, and the person who ignores the collective judgment of the community is wrongheadedly assuming the superiority of his personal conscience.

However, there were two definitions of honor in the Renaissance, reflecting a difference between public and personal conscience. Honor is a social virtue, one's credit, reputation, rewards, good name. But it was also used to mean a person's private assessment of his own actions, his inner conviction of moral rightness, and here is where self-esteem is connected with public approbation. This type of honor, in contrast to public esteem, is an unshakable, priceless possession which cannot be taken away. The two types of honor, though distinct, are inseparable. Ashley writes that "neither to be praised, nor to be reverenced, nor to be esteemed is for it self to be desired; but that we may behold the Testimonie which good men and wise have geven of our vertue and be delighted therwith, as having not so much confidence in our selves herin as in the judgment of others."[5] Here honor as an inner quality and honor as a sign of community respect are inextricably joined. Public opinion offers satisfaction by affirming one's personal

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[4]Cited by Watson, pp. 67-68.

[5]Cited by Watson, p. 94.

sense of honor. This connection is reflected in a metaphor favored by the moralists of the age. The bond between honor and virtue is compared with that of the body and its shadow. While pursuing honor for its own sake would be folly, if a person seeks virtue, honor will follow like a shadow.

In addition to the notions that the virtuous person must look for public recognition to confirm his belief in his own moral worth, expressed by the metaphor of the body and shadow and the truism that honor is the reward of virtue and that the person indifferent to public opinion is lacking in humility, a final precept important to the Renaissance code of honor and to an understanding of much of its literature is that posthumous reputation is a means of achieving immortality. In sharp contrast with the medieval idea of glory, summed up in its term vain-glory, for Renaissance writers immortality meant Christian immortality and also, as is reflected in many of Shakespeare's sonnets and in the last speeches of various tragic heroes, posthumous fame. Honor becomes important, then, not only with respect to one's attitude toward this life but also toward life after death.

In looking toward Shakespeare's plays in which the theme of honor is central and in which an obsessive concern with a code of honor contributes to the false and tragic accusation of virtuous wives, it is important to ask just how knowledgeable the playwright might have been about the systematic Renaissance code of honor. He may or may not have been aware of the numerous treatises on moral philosophy which offered the standard definitions, primarily in terms of restatements of Aristotle and Cicero, of the moral virtues, including honor.

But Cicero's Offices were generally read in the grammar schools, and there were so many informal accounts in biographies, letters, and journals of the importance to Renaissance aristocrats of reputation that it would have been difficult for him to have missed some acquaintance with the behavior of the Renaissance gentleman regarding the code of honor. The concept of honor was also apparent in books of etiquette and in treatises on the dueling code, of which the playwright makes use in the dueling scenes between Hamlet and Laertes.[6] As is recounted in Greville's life of Sidney, in which the famous incident of the insult to Sidney by Oxford before the French ambassador on the tennis court is described, and in Robert Nauton's Fragmenta Regalia, which relates the lives of Elizabeth's favorites, the Aristotelian concept of honor was an integral part of the life of the nobleman and was expressed in hundreds of works on ethics and etiquette. Shakespeare's heroes reflect a code of honor--moral worth dependent on the public acknowledgment of virtue--whose roots lead back to Aristotle and Cicero and in which honor is regarded as innate, as an instinct toward virtue and an almost instinctive shrinking from vice. To fail to gain due public approval, to be held in low esteem is not only morally intolerable for Posthumous, Leontes, and Othello, but also for numerous other heroes such as Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Antony. The ideal of honor is so closely interwoven with the hero's sense of personal identity that the two become almost fused, and Cassio speaks for Posthumous, Leontes, and

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[6]Dueling was especially prevalent in England during the first years of the reign of James I.

Othello when he laments the besmirtching of his reputation, saying that what remains with its loss "is bestial" (II.iii.264).

In turning to the implications of honor for the women of the period, we find that it is equally as important, although differently defined, as it is for the men. While the ideal of honor is implicitly intertwined with identity for men, a woman's honor, and by extension her identity, is inextricably bound to chastity. For example, a woman's honor or honesty, the term used often in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, consisted almost exclusively of the preservation of her virginity until she is married and then of her fidelity to her husband. All of the synonyms used to refer to honor--good name, opinion, integrity, reputation--are generally used in the specific sense of chastity when the virtue of a woman is being described. Thus a double standard of sexuality has been continued from the Renaissance, and earlier, to the present since a man's honor would not be affected in the same way by a lack of sexual purity. Although female honor was judged almost entirely by the degree of this purity, the moralists emphasized the same incentives for a woman as in a discussion of male honor. Virtue, desire for a good report are "bridles" on female sexual activity, as is shame, "the fortresse and defense that nature hath given to a woman for the preservation of hir reputation, chastitie, and honour." Shakespeare, without fail in his dramas, makes use of these moral precepts, especially the commonplace found in the Courtier's Academie that "Honour feminine is preserved by not failing onely in

one of their proper particular vertues, which is honestie."[7] However, his technique is to avoid heavy moralizing or philosophizing, but rather to weave philosophical ideas in as part of the complete texture of a realistic drama.

Hermione, for example, affirms the commonplace found in The Courtier's Academie that "honour is the most precious of all goods externall,"[8] but the maxim functions dramatically as part of her courageous defense against her husband's accusation of adultery."[9] Leontes and Othello both use the terms "honesty," "honorable," and "honor" to mean their wives' chastity, with Othello referring to Desdemona's responsibility for her chastity by saying, "She is protectress of her honor too" (IV.i.14).

A second Renaissance commonplace concerning women and honor that must be considered in light of these plays is the predisposition of females to be frail. Suspicion of feminine faithfulness is a major subject in Renaissance plays as expressed by Webster's Flamineo, for example. His decision that women can never be trusted incorporates a generalized attitude:

> --O men
> That lie upon your death-beds, and are haunted
> With howling wives, ne'er trust them! They'll re-marry

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[7]Cited by Watson, pp. 159, 437-48.

[8]Cited by Watson, p. 215.

[9]William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Hallett Smith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), III.iii.38-46.

> Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider
> Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.[10]

A main theme of Hamlet is captured in these lines, and Cleopatra is this character epitomized. Though Shakespeare is as ambivalent as most writers of the age on the issue, many of his female characters reflect this belief in woman's frailty. The tragic flaws of male characters result almost invariably from some deep-seated non-sexual vice as with Lear's pride or the ambition of Claudius, Macbeth, or Iago. But the flaw of female characters is frequently sexual and does not require some overpowering motive; mere temperamental weakness can lead them almost blindly to betray their men. Women like Gertrude and Cressida are not morally vicious (although Shakespeare does present this type in a female character like Goneril or Regan) but simply are not strong enough to resist the temptation of the moment. Fickleness and weakness are viewed in Shakespeare's plays as typically feminine. Even when a woman like Hermione is exceptionally strong, she feels the need to point it out by saying that she is not prone to the tears typical of her sex (II.i.108-109). The husbands who falsely accuse their wives of adultery are certainly encouraged to jump to this conclusion by the prevailing attitude toward female morality. Posthumus' belief that his wife is unfaithful to him causes him to say with Hamlet "failty, thy name is woman" and to question the legitimacy and virtue of all mankind. He would like to destroy the "woman's part" in himself, for

> [T]here's no motion
> That tends to vice in man, but I affirm

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[10]John Webster, The White Devil, in Drama of the English Renaissance: The Stuart Period, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976), V.vi.153-57.

> It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
> The woman's; flattering, hers; revenges, hers;
> Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
> Nice longings, slanders, mutability,
> All faults that name, nay, that hell knows,
> Why hers, in part of all; . . . .[11]

Leontes' view of this "bawdy planet" is just as grim as he takes comfort in his knowledge that he has not been the first to have been cuckolded:

> There have been
> (Or I am much deceived) cuckolds ere now,
> And many a man there is (even at this present,
> Now, while I speak this) holds his wife by th' arm,
> That little thinks she has been sluic'd in's absence,
> And his pond fish'd by his next neighbor--by
> Sir Smile, his neighbor. Nay there's comfort in't,
> Whiles other men have gates and those gates open'd,
> As mine, against their will. Should all despair
> That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
> Would hang themselves.
> (I.ii.189-200)

This attitude toward woman is most prevalent, however, in the numerous cynical speeches of Iago who inevitably views love as mere bestial sexuality because he sees women as mere creatures of lust and whose attitude is so infectious that the images associated with him begin to color Othello's dialogue in the second half of the play.

Succumbing to the weakness characteristic of women and forfeiting her own honor was not only the most serious moral offense that a woman could commit, loss of her honor in turn affected that of her husband since society would, as The Courtier's Academie puts it, "judge him ignorant, of small worth, and worthy of that contempt his

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[11]William Shakespeare, Cymbeline, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Hallett Smith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), II.v.20-28.

wife and the adulterer procure him."[12] Renaissance males were haunted by this fear of cuckoldry, a fear expressed by Ford in The Merry Wives of Windsor when he suspects he has been betrayed by Falstaff:

> My bed shall be abused, my
> coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at, and
> I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but
> stand under the adoption of abominable terms and
> by him that does me this wrong. . . .
> Fie, fie, fie! cuckold, cuckold, cuckold.[13]

Posthumus, Leontes, and Othello reflect this same suspiciousness and the same connection of their wives' honor with their own. Leontes cannot rest because he is so disturbed at what he believes to be his wife's affront to his honor:

> It is but weakness
> To bear the matter thus--mere weakness. If
> The cause were not in being--part o' th' cause,
> She the adultress; for the harlot king
> Is quite beyond mine arm, out of the blank
> And level of my brain, plot-proof; but she
> I can hook to me--say that she were gone,
> Given to the fire, a moi'ty of my rest
> Might come to me again.
> (II.iii.1-9)

Here Leontes even looks to immolation, the punishment for treason, which a queen's adultery would amount to, to give him solace. Othello is even more articulate in his association of his wife's dishonor with destroying what he is. He tells Iago that his love for Desdemona is so great that he could bear any affliction, any insult or ridicule that her behavior would bring to him, but, using the images associating lust with uncleanness found also in Hamlet, he states that what he cannot

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[12]Cited by Watson, pp. 438-39.

[13]William Shakespeare, The Merry Wives of Windsor, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Anne Barton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), II.ii.292-314.

abide is the corruption of that where he has "garner'd up [his] heart," where "either [he] must live or bear no life" (IV.ii.57-58). He has so closely associated the honor which he holds for his marriage with that which he feels for his role as a soldier, which has provided him with his entire code of ethics, that when he feels that his marriage has been destroyed, so is his occupation:

> O now, for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
> Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
> That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell! . . .
> Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone.
> (III.iii.347-57)

The effects of a wife's disloyalty threaten not only the honor of her husband but also that of her entire family. Husband and wife, parents and children, brother and sister were bound by a common allegiance to the honor of the family name. Because of this powerful sense of family loyalty, "one identified oneself completely with other members of one's family. Hence the pollution of one member seemed to involve the others in a like corruption."[14] Posthumus feels that his wife's disloyalty has so tainted him that the corruption extends to his own mother and father. Leontes feels that the corruption extends to his children. When he is convinced of Hermione's infidelity, he refuses to allow her to be around their son; he even questions the boy's parentage, observing his features closely to see how like his own they are. When Camillo doubts the truth of his accusations, Leontes asks furiously if Camillo thinks he would "Give scandal to the blood o' th'

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[14]Watson, p. 445.

Prince [his] son" if he were not certain (I.ii.330). And when the boy becomes ill, Leontes attributes his decline to the dishonor of his mother. The King also believes that his daughter, born in prison, is the result and symbol of Hermione's infidelity, and he calls the child a bastard, wants her burned, and then decides to have her exiled to some desert island. Considering this importance attached to honor in the Renaissance, the connection of female honor with chastity, the belief in the characteristic frailty of women, and the effect a woman's dishonor will have on the honor of her husband and of her entire family, it is understandable why the fear of a wife's adultery was so great and how easily outside forces or the very nature of the husband could lead to the tragic situation of a wife who is falsely accused of disloyalty.

With the importance of honor to the Renaissance mind firmly established, it is obvious how the strenuous demands placed upon honor and fidelity by the society led playwrights to explore the implications of such codes of behavior both for the individual and for his culture. In turning to examine the dramatic presentation of the complexities of honor leading to a false accusation of adultery by the husbands in Shakespeare's plays, Posthumus Leonatus of Cymbeline, Leontes of The Winter's Tale, and Othello of Othello, we must first understand the connection of an aristocratic or noble background with a code of honor. Then we will be able to trace the full implications of the concept of honor and its association with the sin of adultery for the artistic representation of Renaissance society in the dramas. In essence, the tragic dilemma of the wife wrongly accused of adultery in these works is dramatically parasitic on her husband's obsession with honor.

The actual sexual behavior of the women does not provide the evil in the play universe, for they are mere victims of their husbands' distortion of character. Thus to understand fully the concern with a wife's adultery being depicted, it is necessary to delineate the husbands' obsession with honor.

Like all of Shakespeare's heroes who are descended from a noble background, Posthumus, Leontes, and Othello meet the Aristotlelian requirement that the hero be of a family of note. This stemmed from the belief that an aristocratic ancestry implied nobility. In aligning his tragic heroes with a Renaissance code of honor and nobility, Shakespeare could not ignore the feelings of an audience which would wholeheartedly agree with a typical moral treatise, The French Academie, that "Nobilitie (as Aristotle saith) is a glittering excellence preceding from ancestors, and an honour that cometh from an ancient lineage and stock."[15] Implicitly, honor is more important to an aristocrat in that he is an exemplar of the audience's moral system. His is the set of behavioral patterns we are to follow if they are admirable and are to reject if they are self-serving. With this in mind, let us establish the aristocratic backgrounds of Shakespeare's three noblemen and the implications that their birth has on their reaction to their wives' adultery.

The nobility of Posthumus Leonatus is quite explicit in the staging of the play itself. As with Othello and Leontes, the audience is aware of the character's greatness before he appears, thus lending a

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[15]Cited by Watson, pp. 176-77.

sense of expectation. Our anticipation is heightened by the choric commentary of the two gentlemen in the opening of the play as they doubt that "So fair an outward and such stuff within/ Endows a man but he" (I.i.23-24). When we find that, though Leonatus' background, including his parentage, is unquestionable, his judgment errs when he accuses Imogen of adultery, we wonder if nobility alone can make a moral man. Hence, the artistry with which Shakespeare opens the play poses a central question to the audience regarding the equation of nobility and morality.

Posthumus' heritage of honor and nobility and his supposedly intrinsic worth are reinforced throughout the play. For example, it is apparent in the defense of the man, banished from Britain by Cymbeline for eloping with his daughter and forced to go to Italy, by the Italian Philario, a natural enemy of the British as a result of his nationality and created by Shakespeare as the most admirable of the courtiers Posthumus meets in Italy. The striking contrast involving the clever, artful Jachimo and the nasty Frenchman, both of whom set out verbally to provoke Posthumus, and Leonatus' quiet but forceful response also highlights the protagonist's mettle. His standing up to the bullying of the young courtiers and his willingness to wager on his wife's virtue reveal the concern with honor expected of an aristocrat. The motif of the wager, popular in medieval literature, is best known in Boccacio's Decameron. Modern scholars have frequently criticized the situation: "Nowadays we feel that to give a villain a chance to attempt to seduce one's wife for the sake of proving to him and to others her unassailable chastity would be the height of folly and cruelty to her. But the Middle Ages thought otherwise; they believed that a virtue

exaggerated, as it seems to us, beyond reason, was a virtue magnified."[16] When viewed in a chivalric context, Posthumus' actions, until he is deceived by Jachimo, are fully worthy of the esteem he enjoys in Britain and abroad. The hero's connection with nobility, and thus honor, is further emphasized by his behavior and skill in battle. His confidence in his manhood is revealed by his treatment of the arrogant, bumbling Cloten, the man his wife's father would have chosen for her husband. When challenged by the foolish lord, Posthumus chooses not to hurt him but "rather play'd than fought / And had no help of anger" (I.ii.63-64). This disdain to hurt someone so inept as Cloten merely serves to heighten the honorable and valorous actions Posthumus does perform when faced with a real enemy. Though exiled, he chooses to fight with his homeland against the Romans, and, together with Belarius and Cymbeline's two lost sons, turns the tide in a losing battle.

Leontes of The Winter's Tale, another husband who falsely accuses his wife of adultery, is also highly concerned with honor. His position as king, most noble of nobles, immediately connects him with the notion accepted in the Renaissance that the regent was God's representative on earth, the symbol of unity in the state, and the repository of an exalted moral character. As the sovereign ruler of a sovereign state, a Renaissance monarch never accepted orders from a foreign nation and frequently just as quickly resented challenges to his authority within his own kingdom. Leontes illustrates the close guarding of his royal honor in the choice of his language as his subjects close around him

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[16]Cited by Smith, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1518.

while asking questions about Hermione's infidelity. Shifting into the royal "we," thus distancing his inferiors, he proclaims:

> The matter,
> The loss, the gain, the ord'ring on't, is all
> Properly ours.
> (II.i.168-70)

Royally, he takes the burden of the question of his wife's infidelity unto himself. Yet, we know he can only assume the language of a ruler; when Leontes makes a common error resulting from the human passion of jealousy, his role as king deepens the tragedy of his fall. The connection of honor with Leontes' characterization is also emphasized structurally in the descriptions of him by others. Camillo responds to the better side of his lord's nature rather than to his present passionate distortion, and because Camillo is "charg'd in honor" and by him that he thinks honorable, he warns Polixenes of Leontes' jealousy. Even the concern with hospitality at the beginning of the play indicates Leontes' attitude toward his honor. Not only does he want to shower Polixenes with the gifts and attention befitting an old and dear childhood friend but also those justly due a king; it is Leontes' zealous desire to serve both the honor of Polixenes and his own with his hospitality that initiates the conflict of the play.

With both Posthumus Leonatus and Leontes, we come to understand that, despite the commonplace, birth and nobility alone do not provide innate judgment; appearance can be misleading. This point is again reinforced with Shakespeare's insights about the illusory nature of appearance and the deceptiveness of good and evil in the Moor of Othello. Although to a Renaissance audience the Moor was "of all that

bears man's shape, likst a divell," a strange creature "fearful in sight and bearing," Shakespeare, always seeing beyond the appearance, describes his Moor as acting strictly in accordance with Renaissance codes of princely behavior.[17] Ironically, it is the seemingly honest Iago who is an "emblem of hell and damnation" in the play.[18]

Both Othello's bearing and his noble language throughout the drama reinforce his concern with honor. Like Posthumus Leonatus and Leontes, we are made aware of Othello verbally before he comes onstage. Although we have been encouraged by Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio to look askance at the Moor, his first appearance belies their opinions. Threatened with the ire of his new father-in-law and the violence of his followers, Othello responds with the composed, self-assured language of the professional soldier, recalling his services to the signiory and confronting Brabantio with the soldier's scorn toward the civilian brawler:

> Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them. . . .
> Hold your hands,
> Both you of my inclining, and the rest.
> Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
> Without a prompter.
>
> (I.ii.59,81-84)

Although Brabantio threatens the career, reputation, and life of a man he believes to have used magic to entice away his daughter, Othello,

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[17]John Holloway, in The Story of Night (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), offers evidence that Othello's actions follow the Renaissance code of aristocratic behavior.

[18]Norman Sanders, "An Introduction to Othello," in Interpreting Literature, 5th ed., ed. K. L. Knickerbocker and H. Willard Reninger (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), p. 870.

always the complete soldier, refuses to retreat, confident that his "parts [his] title, and [his] perfect soul / Shall manifest [him] rightly" (I.ii.31-32).

It is this very refusal to retreat that causes Othello's downfall. For a soldier, the ruling passion of defense is of foremost importance. When, for example, Othello leaves on his wedding night to defend Cyprus, the last outpost of civilization, we expect no less. We fully understand when he explains his life in terms of battles, sieges, and fortunes, poetically associating his being with his career (I.iii.127-146). He even vaunts to the Venetian court in the heroic tradition of Beowulf, explaining the experiences which make him who he is. We pause, however, when we realize that Desdemona falls in love with Othello for his autobiography, for the dangers that he had passed, and that she loved him out of "pity" (I.iii.167-68). Although their marriage is a "triumph over appearances," we must disagree with Frank Kermode when he states that it is "grounded in reality."[19] The union of Othello and Desdemona is not a triumph over human nature, and it is grounded in illusion. She is not his equal but is a victim of his soldier's nature, and her fate is dramatically dependent on him and his obsession with honor. Even though Desdemona sees beyond the appearance of "the Moor," it is still Othello's reputation, his experiences that attract her. And Othello can be only what his experiences make him. As the soldier with his unswerving code of honor, he cannot relent or compromise. He is a man skilled in action not in reflection, at home

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[19]Kermode, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1201.

with the absolutes of the battlefield but not with the complexities of the bedroom. He is condemned by his lack of vision and his obsession with honor to destroy innocence itself.

With the emphasis on honor as a social value established, as well as the depiction of honor as it fails in Shakespeare's noble men, let us now turn to the falsely accused wives. Because of their great concern with honor, and therefore with the chastity of their wives, Posthumus Leonatus, Leontes, and Othello all choose extraordinarily virtuous wives. Ironically, of course, the nobility of the husbands is a vision that narrows instead of expands; consequently, virtue is turned into pitch because the nobility of these men, in its rigidity, does not include a penetrating moral vision.

In turning to Imogen, we find that she is "one of Shakespeare's good women, loving and faithful, patient to an almost incredible degree, but sharp at seeing the flaws in a seducer's arguments and vigorous in defense of the dignity of a princess."[20] In other words, she is an individual of vision and discernment while her husband, Posthumus Leonatus, is not. Technically, the virtue of Imogen is thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the ugliness of the rest of her family: the Queen, a reminder of the allegorical "type" of the cruel stepmother of fairy tales, the foolish bully Cloten, and the father who promises the already married Imogen to Cloten, telling him:

> The exile of [Imogen's] minion is too new,
> She hath not yet forgot him. Some more time

20Smith, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1519.

> Must wear the print of his remembrance on't,
> And then she's yours.
> (II.iii.41-44)

Imogen's goodness is also emphasized by choric comments on her virtue made throughout the play. For example, she wins the admiration and encouragement of the "2. Lord," a character who is never given a name but who, through his commentary on Cloten's absurdity, carried out completely in asides, acquires a distinct personality. This lord echoes the sentiments of the audience when he states of Cloten,

> That such a crafty devil as his mother
> Should yield the world this ass! a woman that
> Bears all down with her brain, and this her son
> Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart,
> And leave eighteen. Alas, poor Princess,
> Thou divine Imogen, what thou endur'st,
> Betwixt a father by thy step-dame govern'd,
> A mother hourly coining plots, a wooer
> More hateful than the foul expulsion is
> Of thy dear husband, than that horrid act
> Of the divorce he'ld make. The heavens hold firm
> The walls of thy dear honor; keep unshak'd
> That temple, thy fair mind, that thou mayst stand
> T' enjoy thy banish'd lord and this great land!
> (II.i.51-65)

In addition to this lengthy praise combining the homespun and the heroic is praise from Posthumus Leonatus, a man of generally few words, for his lady as "more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, and less attemptable" than the rarest lady in France, followed by a wager to that effect (I.iv.59-61). When Posthumus Leonatus is tricked by Jachimo into believing he has lost the wager and sends a message to his servant to murder Imogen, Pisano reacts violently in her defense, saying:

> She's punish'd for her truth, and undergoes,
> More goddess-like than wife-like, such assault
> As would take in some virtue.
> (III.ii.7-9)

He then acts on his words by warning Imogen of Posthumus Leonatus' intent.

The audience is also encouraged to view Imogen positively because of her intelligence, her high-spirited independence, and her actual acts of faithfulness. Not only does the princess see through the solicitude of her stepmother, declaring to Posthumus before he leaves, "O Dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant / can tickle where she wounds," but, despite a letter of recommendation from Posthumus, she is able to see through Jachimo's flattery and his accusations about her husband's disloyalty, responding to a flaw in his seductive argument with:

> Away, I do condemn mine ears that have
> So long attended thee. If thou wert honorable,
> Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
> For such an end thou seek'st--as base as strange. . . .
> The King my father shall be made acquainted
> Of thy assault.
> (I.vi.141-50)

This fiery defense of what she believes to be right is illustrated earlier when she stands up to her father on behalf of the man she has married. She responds to Cymbeline's fury that she disregarded his wish for her to marry the sole son of the queen by replying:

> It is your fault that I have lov'd Posthumus:
> You bred him as my playfellow, and he is
> A man worth any woman; overbuys me
> Almost the sum he pays.
> (I.i.144-47)

Her independence is also emphasized by her refusal to return to court after leaving with Pisano and learning of Posthumus' true intentions and by her willingness to travel through Britain alone and in disguise in order to hear reports of Posthumus. Though she reacts to hardship

and distress with a "prince's courage," she is endearingly human and feminine when she complains of being tired and sleeping on the ground, swearing charming oaths such as "'Od's pittikins!" (IV.ii.293). Imogen's most outstanding trait, however, is her unswerving faithfulness, apparent even in the emblematic name she chooses for her disguise--Fidele. Her reaction to her husband's exile reveals her devotion to him, for she tells Pisano:

> I would have broke mine eye-strings, crack'd
> them, but
> To look upon him, till the diminution
> Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle;
> Nay, followed him till he had melted from
> The smallness of a gnat to air, and then
> Have turn'd mine eye and wept.
> (I.iii.17-22)

Her loyalty to Posthumus is put to two tests, both of which she passes splendidly, with her vehement and outspoken invection against Cloten, who so repels her that he makes her "forget a lady's manners," and her rejection of Jachimo's seductive proposals (II.iii.105). She is ecstatic when she thinks she is to meet Posthumus at Milford-Haven, wishing, "O for a horse with wings!" (III.ii.48). Her reaction when she learns that Posthumus thinks her false includes amazement, rage, and grief:

> False to his bed? What is it to be false?
> To lie in watch there, and to think on him?
> To weep 'twixt clock and clock. If sleep charge nature,
> To break it with a fearful dream of him,
> And cry myself awake? That's false to 's bed? is it?
> (III.iv.40-44)

And her despair when she sees what she thinks is the body of her dead husband underscores the strength of her love and devotion to him.

Along with Imogen, Hermione is another of Shakespeare's "good women," delightfully witty, friendly, and charming. It is Hermione who, upon her husband's request, is able to persuade Polixenes to visit with them in Sicilia a bit longer, impatient though he is to make sure that Bohemia has fared safely in his absence. She is so appealing in her jesting threat that Polixenes shall stay either as her prisoner or as her guest that he smilingly accepts the latter offer. Yet she is just as teasingly charming to her husband, chiding him, "cram's with praise, and make's / As fat as tame things" (I.ii.91-92). But like Browning's Duke, Leontes feels that Hermione had a heart "too soon made glad," "Too easily impressed." Certainly she smiled at him, but who passed without "much the same smile?". However, it is obvious to all but Leontes that her affection lies with him. Like any doting wife, she wants to talk to her husband's childhood friend about what her husband was like as a boy, asking fondly, "Was not my lord / The verier wag o' th' two?" (I.ii.65-66). Thus the tragedy of Leontes' mistaken charge of adultery, coming as it does after such obvious shows of affection from his wife and for no apparent reason except the passion of jealousy, is magnified. Hermione is stunned. Her usual light-hearted talkativeness completely gone, she can only deny the charge in a measured tone:

> There's some ill planet reigns;
> I must be patient, till the heavens look
> With an aspect more favorable. Good my lords,
> I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
> Commonly are, the want of which vain dew
> Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have
> That honorable grief lodg'd here which burns
> Worse than tears drown.
>
> (II.i.105-112)

After having been delivered of Leontes' child in prison, a child that he rejects as his and dooms to exile, and having listened publicly to a formal prose accusation of her sexual infidelity in which adultery is connected with treason, Hermione's response to the court audience is just as dignified:

> For behold me,
> A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
> A moi'ty of the throne, a great king's daughter,
> The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
> To prate and talk for life and honor 'fore
> Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it
> As I weigh grief, which I would spare; for honor,
> 'tis a derivative from me to mine,
> And only that I stand for.
> (III.ii.37-45)

The reaction of others in the court to the charge of her adultery also supports the view of Hermione as a "good woman." Various nameless lords beg Leontes to reconsider his decision, with one declaring to the King that his wife is "spotless / I' th' eyes of heaven and to you" and vowing that he would lay down his life for his Queen. The two named lords, Antigonus and Camillo, both of whom are loyal in service to Leontes, protest that Hermione is honorable. Antigonus is certain that Leontes has been duped by some villain and vows that if Hermione is false, no woman, including his own wife and daughters, is to be trusted. Camillo berates Leontes himself for even considering such a thing about his wife:

> Shrew my heart,
> You never spoke what did become you less
> Than this; which to reiterate were sin
> As deep as that, though true.
> (I.ii.281-284)

But there is no character in the play who is as outspoken and fiery in her resistance to Leontes' tyranny and in her assertion of her

mistress' innocence as Paulina. The dignified patience of Hermione makes necessary the creation of another character to speak fearlessly for her, and Paulina does so in a way similar to that of Emilia at the end of Othello. Bringing Leontes' daughter to him in hopes of softening his position, Paulina responds to his rejection of the child by calling him a traitor to his family's honor and goes on to say:

> I'll not call you tyrant;
> But this most cruel usgae of your queen
> (Not able to produce more accusation
> Than your own weak-king'd fancy) something savors
> Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
> Yea, scandalous to the world.
> (II.iii.116-21)

But despite Paulina's passionate tirade, Hermione, like Imogen, is made to suffer as a result of unwarranted jealousy, another victim of the moral blindness of the so-called noble man.

Finally, Desdemona is a combination of innocence and spirited individualism that makes her also one of Shakespeare's most appealing heroines. Her kind of pristine innocence is celebrated by various other characters in the play. Brabantio is not only shocked that his daughter has eloped, but he simply cannot believe that she did so of her own volition, that "a maid so tender, fair, and happy" who was so opposed to marriage that she shunned the "wealthy curled darlings" of Venice could marry "such a thing" as Othello (I.ii.66-71). He asks the senators to be reasonable, to consider how such a marriage could possibly take place:

> A maiden, never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blush'd at herself; and she, in spite of nature,
> Of years, of country, credit, every thing,
> To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
> (I.iii.94-98)

Even Cassio, the handsome ladies man, views Desdemona as a kind of Petrarchan ideal who should be celebrated in sonnets. He describes her as a maid

> That paragons description and wild fame;
> One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
> And in th' essential vesture of creation
> Does tire the [ingener].
> (II.i.61-65)

Desdemona's innocence is such a part of her that when she tries to tell Iago that Othello called her a "whore," she cannot even bring herself to say the word much less to commit the act that would earn her the title. Technically, the qualities that separate Desdemona from other women, that make her somehow a paragon of virtue, are most apparent to the audience when she and Emilia debate the question of adultery. Emilia admits to the ordinary human temptation to commit a small sin for a great reward while Desdemona is completely beyond temptation, avowing plantively, "Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong / For the whole world" (IV.iii.78-79).

It is important to remember that Desdemona is not, however, merely a naive simpering female. She does have a kind of exalted purity of mind and soul, but she is not weak. On the contrary, she reveals on various occasions a spiritedness and commitment to a code of honor as strong as that of her husband. For example, the audience's first exposure to the young woman described as tender and modest by her father occurs when she is called upon to explain publicly the state of her marriage. She reveals her skill at diplomacy when she indicates that she loves and honors her father, but, like Imogen, she is firm in her assertion that her allegiance now lies with her husband, that it is her

duty as a wife to support her husband. Her dignity and poise are apparent in her language:

> My noble father,
> I do perceive here a divided duty:
> To you I am bound for life and education;
> My life and education both do learn me
> How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
> I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;
> And so much duty as my mother show'd
> To you, preferring you before her father,
> So much I challenge that I may profess
> Due to the Moor, my lord.
> (I.iii.180-89)

She reveals a strength of mind and purpose usually accompanying far more years and experience than she possesses. It is Desdemona, not Othello, who requests that she be allowed to accompany her husband to the war in Cyprus. She is resolute in her defense of Cassio, whose drunken behavior has incurred Othello's wrath, indicating that friendship to her is not merely lip-service. Iago relies on her loyalty and generosity to make his plan work to have Othello believe that his wife committed adultery with Cassio. He knows that Desdemona is "fram'd as fruitful / As the free elements" (II.iii.341-42). Desdemona unknowingly seals her own doom as she faithfully carries out her promise to help Cassio win Othello's love again, assuring him, "If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it / To the last article" (III.iii.21-22) and "What I can do, I will; and more I will / than for myself I dare" (III.iv.130-31). But the action that by far sets Desdemona apart as an exceptional woman, revealing her generosity, loyalty, and high-minded spirit, is her last effort to protect her husband even after he has tried to murder her. The tragedy of Othello's accusation of his wife's adultery is that her

dying words are an act of fidelity. When Emilia asks her "who hath done this deed?" she responds,

> Nobody; I myself. Farewell!
> Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell.
> (V.ii.124-25)

When Desdemona is murdered at the hands of her husband, we realize that the themes of love and honor as they fail when tested in a crisis are dramatically less important than the emotional impact of a realistic enactment of life, through character and plot, on stage. Yet Shakespeare is able to infuse his dramatized story with pertinent issues for his audience to judge morally and evaluate artistically. It is not a belief in the immorality of adultery that is being questioned in any of these plays, but an obsession with extrinsic honor that can result in moral blindness and tragic suffering. For despite the obvious virtue of the heroines, there are certain distortions of character and other forces of evil that create a situation in which the wives are falsely accused of adultery. And when the virtue of the women is so obvious and so emphasized to the audience, the resulting reaction is a tragic one.

Having discussed the social implications of honor for the Renaissance citizen, its strong association with female chastity, the attitudes towards honor depicted in Shakespeare's heroes and their selection of virtuous wives, it is necessary to explain just how tragedy or near-tragedy is effected in these dramas. The bond between male honor and female chastity has been established, both in Renaissance society and in the world of these plays. But what are the technical devices that Shakespeare uses to create drama out of a social

convention, just what dramatic dilemma can be achieved out of a relationship between honor, adultery, and suffering? The relationship, and thus Shakespeare's plot, is basically one of cause and effect: honor is integral to the identity and integrity of Shakespeare's heroes; a flaw in their own natures and/or outside circumstances result in a belief in the infidelity of their wives and thus the loss of their own honor; their reactions of attempted or actual revenge bring about tragedy. In Cymbeline Shakespeare presents a situation in which Posthumus' tragic error is basically the result of circumstances beyond his control. He is tricked by the villainous Italian Jachimo into believing Imogen has betrayed him. In The Winter's Tale, a flaw in character causes the tragedy; Leontes is torn with apparently unmotivated jealousy, a kind of mental disease. The jealous husband is a stock Renaissance character, especially in comedies but is also seen in Bassanes of The Broken Heart, whose emblematic name represents vexation. Shakespeare's characterization, however, is much more complex than the mere type. He ranges from study of the gradual poisoning of a mind in Othello to Leontes' suspicion which is sudden, inexplicable, and complete. Possible justification for Leontes' jealousy, which can be found in Shakespeare's source, is totally eliminated. The only apparent motivation is that Hermione is able to persuade Polixenes to postpone his departure for a bit longer. Eventually the diseases of jealousy and paranoia so overcome Leontes that he believes Polixenes and Hermione, together with Camillo, had constructed a plot against his life and crown; it is so complete that he denounces the holy oracle as a liar. He discusses his own passion or "affection" as he calls it

(used in the Latin sense of "affectio," a sudden change in mind and body):

> Affection! Thy intention stales the centre.
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams (how can this be?),
> With what's unreal thou co-active art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent
> Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost
> (And that beyond commission), and I find it
> (And that to the infection of my brains
> And hard'ning of my brows).
> (I.ii.138-46)

Here we have the speech of an increasingly unreasonable tyrant whose disease prevents him from believing anyone. Shakespeare is implicitly asking if this man is fit to judge the virtue of his wife as well as again questioning the connection of nobility and morality.

Like Leontes, Othello also becomes maniacal with his irrational belief in his wife's infidelity. However, his situation is more complicated than that of either Leonatus or Leontes, for it is a combination of his own nature and forces beyond his control that result in his tragic error. It is certainly necessary to examine the Moor's character--his simplicity, his soldier's belief in absolutes, his emotionalism, his need for order, his love of honor--if we are to understand how the tragedy takes place, how the virtuous Desdemona is wrongly accused of adultery. For her situation in the play is at least partly the result of her husband's nature.

The critical debate about Othello ranges from A. C. Bradley's contention that he is the "noble Moor" to F. R. Leavis' belief that

he is a "depraved egotist."[21] Yet perhaps the best place to begin is to understand with Dr. Johnson that Othello has the soldier's ethics of "fiery openness . . . magnanimous, artless, credulous, boundless in his resolution, and obdurate in his revenge."[22] In short, he is a professional soldier, a man of action, not of reflection. Like most career soldiers, Othello is basically a simple man who views life in the absolutes dictated by an adherence to a military code of honor. Iago, astute observer of human nature that he is, describes him as being "of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (I.iii.399-400) and "of a constant, loving, noble nature" (II.i.289). Because of this simplicity, this need to view life in terms of black and white, the Moor cannot abide uncertainty. In fact, the worst mental state that such a man can imagine is one in which a person tells o'er "damned minutes," "dotes yet doubts suspect's yet [strongly] loves" (III.iii.169-70). Othello tells Iago, "I swear 'tis better to be much abus'd / Than but to know 't a little" (III.iii.335-36). For such a person, "the feverish reaching out for truth, even painful truth, is natural." He demands "ocular proof" of Iago, and in this state of mind, "any kind of proof will suffice that will obviate the necessity for thought and the doubt it brings."[23] Thus a handkerchief, in truth a "trifle light as air" is, as Iago well knows, to the man torn with

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[21]Roger Stilling, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 156.

[22]Cited by Sanders, p. 872.

[23]Sanders, p. 872.

jealousy confirmation strong as "proofs of holy writ" (III.iii.322-24). And once such a man is convinced that he knows the truth, he will never change his mind, becoming just as inflexible in his decision as to what to do about it. He tells Iago:

> Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Nev'r [feels] retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall nev'r look back, nev'r ebb to humble love,
> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up.
> (III.iii.453-60)

These lines reveal not only Othello's inflexible, absolute code of honor, but another trait which leads to his tragic error, his extreme emotionalism. Usually a model of self-control, the man reverts to savagery when his honor and reputation, which are at the core of his very being, are at stake. This is first evidenced in his reaction to the street brawl in Cyprus for which he thinks his own lieutenant is responsible, an action which reflects badly on him. Othello becomes so incensed that he warns those involved:

> Now by heaven,
> My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
> And passion, having my best judgment collied,
> Assays to lead the way.
> (II.iii.204-207)

He responds in kind when Iago has given him "proof" of his wife's infidelity and paints a graphic scene for him, becoming so emotionally uncontrolled that he falls into a trance and is mocked by his own ensign. His concern for honor and fear of shame are such that he loses his majestic poise and dignity.

However, Othello's nature is not the sole cause of the tragic error of the play, of Desdemona's dishonor and death. The study of jealousy in Othello is a combination of man's nature as presented also in The Winter's Tale, and, as in Cymbeline, the outside forces which work on it. First of all, the setting of the play has an effect on its outcome. For the sixteenth and seventeenth century Englishman, Italy had a dual reputation. It was notable for its wealth, power, and justice, was a romantic world of refinement, wit, and pleasure, but it was also a fallen world, the home of Nicolai Machiavelli and of the criminal intrigue that accompanied his politics, a vanity fair of the most sophisticated of human vices.[24] This double image is reflected in the play. For example, the order in which we are allowed to view occurring events is important. Before we are aware of the total honesty of the love that Othello and Desdemona have for each other, they are depicted to us as an old black ram tupping a white ewe. This description by Iago is the more worldly view of the lovers' actions. Brabantio expresses the same attitude when he perceives Desdemona's recognition of Othello's virtue under an appearance conventionally taboo as less the result of the integrity of her response than some witchcraft on the part of Othello. It is precisely because such a union must appear to the cynical worldly eye ridiculous or perverse that Iago can destroy it.[25] The shift of place from Venice to the tiny, isolated island of Cyprus also contributes to the final outcome. The island,

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[24]Sanders, p. 870.

[25]Kermode, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1200.

still in a state of fear and domestic upset where actions are more noticeable and circumscribed and the atmosphere more claustrophobic, provided Shakespeare with an ideal setting for a domestic drama. The new wife is separated from her home environment; the new husband is burdened with the responsibility of an important command, and the villainous ensign is camouflaged by his own professional world. "'A town of war / Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear' is the perfect backcloth to a 'private and domestic quarrel' between a man and wife whose love is seen poetically in terms of the husband's occupation."[26]

The concept of time in the play, a technique which critics have referred to as Shakespeare's use of "double time," also influences the Moor's descent into jealousy. In order to make plausible the motivations for Othello's suspicions and murder of his wife, the playwright needed an intense concentration of event. Sometimes Iago's improvisations are so absurd that for Othello merely to question Cassio would halt the entire scheme. But there is no time; from the reunion at Cyprus to Desdemona's murder, the entire story takes place in one and a half days. However, as Shakespeare realized, the difficulty with this compressed time is that there has been no opportunity for Desdemona to have had repeated liaisons with Cassio. In his allusions to adultery, then, Shakespeare shifts from Short to Long Time which allows the audience to accept the possibility of Desdemona's infidelity even though we know she was not unfaithful. The technique here depends on

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[26]Sanders, p. 870.

the episodic treatment of time in Renaissance drama. In the immediate absence of Shakespeare's reminders that only a short time is passing, we assume, as with a novel, that only significant moments of action have been focused on. Thus both systems are used to their advantage, and Shakespeare achieves the effect of shocking contrast, of white suddenly darkened to black.[27]

The most significant outside force at work in the poisoning of a virtuous mind, however, resulting in the false accusation of Desdemona's infidelity, is obviously the fascinating maneuvers of Iago. Although modern audiences often find fault with extremely distrustful men such as Othello, we must remind ourselves with Coleridge that Othello kills Desdemona "in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago's honesty as Othello did. We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain from the beginning; but in considering the essence of the Shakespearean Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation and under his circumstances."[28] Iago represents the worldliness of the Venetian intellectual sophisticate. He is hindered by no code of honor, believes in nothing, takes pride in his disregard for illusions, and thus has the objectivity and power to manipulate the illusions of others, including the way they perceive him. Iago's code of living is totally self-centered, a matter of using the will and intellect to satisfy the ego; human beings have no value

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[27]Kermode, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1198.

[28]Cited by Watson, p. 443.

in his perception of the world. Love becomes lust; truth is a vehicle for telling lies; reputation is an unnecessary imposition; virtue is a camouflage for vice; and men are to be used for whatever the will desires. As A. C. Bradley so astutely observes, Shakespeare's idea of a truly evil man is often one in whom evil is "comaptible with and even appears to ally itself easily with, exceptional powers of will and intellect."[29] Like Conrad's Colonel Kurtz, Iago is aware, knowing evil. The object of his will and knowledge is to make Othello see Desdemona as bestial and deceitful, to persuade him to perceive the world not by assumptions of honor but through the eyes of the worldly cynic. Othello is led suddenly into an area of human experience about which he knows nothing and where his innocence merely increases the shock and pain. Iago's power over Othello is that the ensign is intellectual rather than emotional and with his intellectual perceptions can exploit Othello's emotional weaknesses. Othello's judgments are always correct when he responds instinctively; however, Iago manages to prevent Othello from reacting emotionally but rather to aim at cerebration as Iago does. And when Othello acts what he takes to be rationally, his rightness deserts him. Thus Iago manages to infuse Othello with his own spirit, apparent in the latter's adoption of Iago's language and his attempts to persuade himself that he is being intellectually just. Iago also makes use of the conventional stereotype of women as morally inferior. His technique, both with Brabantio and Othello, is first to plant doubts and then to impose his stereotype of women. In essence, in Othello

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[29]Cited by Kermode, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1200.

Shakespeare "persistently sets destructive theory against living intuition."[30] Because of the male ego and the belief that female weakness threatens it, there are no male characters in the play with a generosity of love equal to that of their women, including Emilia and Bianca. Iago, Brabantio, Roderigo, and Othello turn on the women as soon as the traditional view of female immorality begins to weigh on them. Thus Othello's fall into jealousy is concurrent with the other male attitudes in the play. Iago simply capitalizes on the male fear of betrayal, and one of the dominating ironies of Othello is "the way in which men debate, question, rave about their stereotype of women while at the center of it is Desdemona, an uncomprehending denial of the whole tradition of masculine myth."[31] Here perhaps Shakespeare is not only scrutinizing the validity of male myths about women, he is also examining a code of honor which associates female chastity with virtue, whose construct is made uncertain by the variables of time and circumstance, yet which is so absolute and inflexible that tragedies such as that of the falsely accused adulteress could occur. It is not the husbands' code of honor that leads to truth, goodness, or moral enlightenment in these plays; in effect, their obsession with honor becomes, ironically, a force of evil. It is the goodness of their wives that endures, regardless of time, place, or situation.

Thus, we must see that a certain tragic condemnation is implicit concerning the strenuous codes of honor and fidelity with their very

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[30]Stilling, pp. 156-59.

[31]Stilling, p. 159.

enactment in these plays. Because honor, as the most precious of man's possessions, was sometimes valued more than human life itself, there was cause for violent reaction when its loss was threatened, especially by a wife's infidelity. In fact, revenge for adultery by the murder of both wife and adulterer was tolerated in the early laws of virtually every European country. In Renaissance England, the killing of an adulterer was viewed as an act of manslaughter which would almost certainly be pardoned.[32] Thus when Othello agrees to let Iago slay Cassio for him, the error is basically a fault in judgment. If adultery were actually committed by Desdemona and Cassio, Othello's fierce hatred of his betrayer and his desire to kill both wife and lover would have been understandable.

All three of the husbands in these plays turn on their wives with extreme violence when they believe them to be unfaithful. Posthumus exclaims, "O that I had her here, to tear her limb-meal!" (II.iv.147). Unable to get at Polixenes, Leontes contents himself with the thought of taking present vengeance on Hermione, putting her in prison great with child, hoping to burn her at the stake for treason, and wishing to tear out the brains of his baby daughter. Othello threatens to chop Desdemona into messes, but, his former dignity and composure returning when he actually goes to her room, he does not murder her out of vengeance but rather mercifully as an agent of justice. The penalty that he enacts on his wife is the same one that he demands of himself when he must choose between life and honor.

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[32]Watson, pp. 443-46.

While each of the plays in question exhibits a degree of this violent reaction to dishonor in the form of a wife's supposed adultery, the overall tones or effects of the dramas are different: Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale are tragi-comedies, and Othello is a tragedy. Although there is this difference in genre, the basic structure of all three is a kind of cause and effect relationship; in each case, the husband must suffer atonement for a tragic error in judgment concerning his wife's honor. However, the degree and treatment of that atonement and the emphasis it is given in each play create a tone in the tragi-comedies vastly different from that in the tragedy. Theodore Spencer contrasts the late plays with the tragedies: "In the tragedies the appearance might be good, but the reality--the lust of Gertrude, the hypocrisy of Goneril and Regan, the crown of Scotland, and to Timon, all mankind--was evil. In the last plays the appearance may be evil but the reality is good."[33] The evil in Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale is not so profound as that explored in the tragedies. The villains Cloten and his mother and Jachimo are frequently ridiculous and easily disposed of by the natural forces which pervade to bring about eventual peace and the triumph of virtue. Cloten is a vain, boorish bully. The Queen, a kind of wicked stepmother, practices with her poisons on dogs and cats, and, unlike Iago whose reputation for honesty hides the deepest evil, Jachimo is a silver-tongued, cavalier stage "Italian" who repents and is offered forgiveness. Leontes' evil is presented as a curable disease. As is indicated by the term tragi-comedy, there is a

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[33]Cited by Smith, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1519.

combination of tones in each play, a mixture of tragic waste and renewed hope of life, with a resolution effected by means of omens and magic. And the contrast in tones is in part created by the treatment of the husband's error and atonement. Posthumus and Leontes certainly bring havoc, ruin, and senseless waste upon themselves with their false accusations of their wives' adultery, but unlike Othello in which the error is committed and recognized too late, these husbands commit their tragic mistakes early in the plays, quickly discover the error of their ways, and suffer for their faults during most of the action so that reconciliation, reunion, healing, and harmony become possible and justifiable at the end.

The emphasis in Cymbeline is on Imogen's adventures, not on Posthumus' atonement, but he still suffers remorse shortly after he has accused his wife of adultery early in the play. Although news of his change of heart is delayed because of the story of Belarius, Guiderius, and Aviragus, after his diatribe against women in general, Posthumus is next seen carrying a bloody handkerchief to remind himself of how many men "murther wives much better than themselves / For wrying but a little" (V.i.4-5). Believing his wife to be dead by his own direction, he declares that after killing Britain's mistress, he will not fight against the nation but will take off his Italian clothes, dress as a British peasant, and fight for the kingdom that banished him:

> [S]o I'll die
> For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
> Is every breath a death; and thus, unknown
> Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril
> Myself I'll dedicate.
> (V.i.25-29)

Longing for death, he flings himself recklessly into battle, disarming Jachimo, rescuing Cymbeline, and turning the tide of war in favor of Britain. Unable to find death and still seeking atonement for his sins, he changes back to the dress of a Roman soldier and deliberately allows himself to be taken prisoner under sentence of death.

Posthumus' atonement and the reward it brings him in a reconciliation with the vindicated Imogen all take place in Act V. In The Winter's Tale, however, Hermione disappears at the beginning of Act III, and Leontes is left to suffer remorse for the remainder of the play, which covers a period of some twenty years. The disease of jealousy has so clouded the King's mind that he rejects the message of the oracle deeming Hermione chaste and is immediately staggered with news of the death of his son, anxious for his mother's safety. Though he repents, begs forgiveness from Apollo for profaning his oracle, and promises to be reconciled with Polixenes, Hermione, and Camillo, he is then shocked with news of his wife's death, Hermione having swooned after hearing of the death of her son. Here, unlike in Cymbeline in which Shakespeare uses the techniques of awareness and anticipation, even the audience must believe Hermione is dead in order to produce the theatrical effect of the living statue at the conclusion. Leontes is fully aware of his tragic error and the results it has had on his family, and he vows in penance to visit once a day the tomb of his wife and son. However, Leontes is not left alone to deal with his grief and remorse. Shakespeare keeps his wounds constantly open with the reminders of his jealous blindness by Paulina, a character whose

function in this way is reminiscent of the role of Lear's fool. She declares to Leontes:

> A thousand knees,
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
> Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert.
> (III.ii.210-14)

While others sympathetic to his long-term suffering tell him that he has done enough, has performed a "saint-like sorrow," Paulina refuses to allow him to forget that he killed an "unparallel'd" woman and makes him promise never to marry without her consent. Under the direction of Paulina, Leontes is dramatically reconciled with Hermione, but twenty years have passed, and they have both aged. Thus there are mixed feelings at the end of the play. There is much joy in the reunion, but a great deal of suffering has taken place, and husband and wife have been needlessly separated for many years. Yet the possibility of love and goodness, of what could have been, is captured in the young lovers Perdita and Florizel. They illustrate both what Leontes has wasted and what can be.

Unlike the tragi-comedies in which the effect of a tragic misconception is emphasized, the penance done, and the outcome positive, in Othello the cause is emphasized--the play is the process by which evil, in the form of Othello's distorted emotionalism and Iago's icy rationality, runs its course. Othello's occupation, marriage, his entire being are tied up with his dedication to a code of honor which, when he understands its loss, threatens his very being. His atonement is the recognition that he has brought about his own destruction. The connection of honor with virtue and valor is so firm in Othello's mind

that when he realizes the loss of one, he knows all are lost. He responds to the knowledge that he has been wrong in his accusations of Desdemona's adultery and has destroyed a virtuous woman by saying:

> I am not valiant neither,
> But every puny whipster gets my sword.
> But why should honor outlive honesty?
> Let it all go.
> (V.ii.243-46)

He knows that there is nowhere for him to go, that his soul is damned. And he is cognizant that it is his very dedication to honor that contributed to his destruction, telling Lodovico that he is an "honorable murderer," having done nothing in hate but all in honor. He knows that he "lov'd not wisely but too well," that he has lost what was most precious to him--his wife, poetically associated with his occupation and his honor. As a result, for him "'tis happiness to die" (V.ii.290). But he must die by the code that he has lived, and he does to himself what he did to Desdemona believing her dishonored. In his final speech Othello identifies himself with the Turk, symbol throughout the play of treachery and disorder.[34] Othello has become the Moor in the sense used by those who objected to his marriage to Desdemona. He has beaten a Venetian and traduced the state, so, acting for the city which he has long served and for his own code of honor, he punishes himself as he punished the Turk. He sees in his self-execution not only atonement for his wife's murder but the only honorable course of action he could take. For Shakespeare's audience, a fearless facing of

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[34]Kermode, in The Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1201.

death could redeem in large part the misdeeds of a lifetime.[35] Even though suicide conflicted with the Christian values expressed by Augustine, for Othello the taking of his own life was a sign of magnanimity and greatness of spirit. As Cassio exclaims afterward, "This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon / For he was great of heart" (V.ii.360-61).

Thus the false accusation of adultery against a virtuous woman is cause for tragedy in these great Renaissance plays. Shakespeare explores fully the various motivations for such an accusation, revealing the Renaissance emphasis on honor, its connection with female chastity and fidelity, and the effect it has on actual attitudes towards an adulterous wife and on her presentation in the drama. However, there are other plays written during the period in which the tragedy does not result from a wrong accusation of adultery by the husband but by the woman's own code of honor. Because of society's beliefs concerning betrothal and rape, the women of these plays, even though innocent victims of circumstance, accuse themselves of adultery, stubbornly adhering to a moral code which places them in a kind of no-win situation. Here again it is an obsession with extrinsic honor that causes these women, unable to bear what they consider dishonor, to die of a broken heart.

Such a woman appears in Marston's Antonio's Revenge. This play also contains the villainous figure who attempts to poison the man's mind against the virtuous woman, discussed previously in Cymbeline

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[35]Watson, pp. 340-41.

and Othello, but the twist in Marston's play is that, unlike Othello, her betrothed believes in her fidelity. It is her own obsession with honor that destroys her. She adheres to society's view that betrothal is as binding as the actual marriage contract and, though totally innocent of any sexual activities before her marriage, cannot bear the dishonor of accusations to that effect. Here, Marston seems to be suggesting and criticizing the power of social opinion to overcome the belief in one's own personal integrity. Instead of resulting in a harmonious and positive relationship between self and society, the two types of honor, previously discussed, at work in these plays--public esteem and inner conviction--conflict to create a moral dilemma that can only result in tragedy.

In Antonio's Revenge, Piero is a stage portrait of the Elizabethan notion of the Machiavel, characterized by brutality and violence.[36] However, he is not merely a bloodthirsty tyrant but also a disappointed and dishonored lover who caused Andrugio's death because

> We were both rivals in our May of blood
> Unto Maria, fair Ferrara's heir.
> He won the Lady, to my honour's death,
> And from her sweets cropped this Antonio;
> For which I burned in inward swelt'ring hate,
> And festered rankling malice in my breast,
> Till I might belk revenge upon his eyes.
> (I.i.23-29)

He is so overdrawn as a Machiavel that he becomes ludicrous, accusing his daughter Mellida of committing adultery with Pandulph Feliche's son, whom he himself killed on the eve before her wedding to Antonio, to "stop the match / And hale on mischief" (I.i.77-78). When the body

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[36]John Marston, Antonio's Revenge, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 22.

of young Feliche is discovered, Piero swears that Mellida is "unchaste / Tainted, unpure, black as the soul of hell" (I.iv.3-4) and that he stabbed Feliche because he saw "that incestuous slave / Clipping the strumpet with luxurious twines" (V.iv.17-18). He rages that he would not defame his own honor to make up such a story, that Mellida is a "putrid ulcer of [his] royal blood" (I.iv.21). Antonio reacts to this news of his betrothed, whom he views as his "dishonored wife," by exclaiming, "That's a large lie, as vast as spacious hell" (I.v.28). However, he and Mellida, who has been thrust in a dungeon by her father, still feel keenly what for both is the taint of the loss of the wife's good name. Marston is less sure of himself in his portrayal of women than of masculine villains. There is not much depth to Mellida's character; rather she is female virtue personified and victimized. She remains firm in her conviction of the purity of her love:

> O chastest deity;
> If I be false to my Antonio,
> If the least soil of lust smears my pure love,
> Make me more wretched, make me more accursed
> Than infamy, torture, death, hell, and heaven
> Can bound with amplest power of thought; if not,
> Purge my poor heart from defamation's blot.
> (II.iii.77-83)

But she cannot bear the accusations against her good name, asking Antonio to kill her and lamenting that she must die falsely. He refuses because he believes in her virtue, but she affirms that it would be heaven's will. Piero further complicates the plot by having his accomplice, Stratzo, swear that Mellida is innocent of lust, that Antonio bribed Stratzo to defame her honor because of his hatred for Piero, and that he paid Stratzo to kill his father. Though finally

vindicated, the slur against her innocence proves too much for Mellida, coupled with what she thinks is news of Antonio's death, and, gasping "O world, thou art too subtle / For honest natures to converse withal," she dies.

Here Mellida's sighs and moans are a bit much for any audience to take, but she does provide an early example of the attitude toward a betrayed betrothal seen later in The Broken Heart and Appius and Virginia and an example of a woman who, because of her obsession with society's definition of honor, which becomes for her a staunch personal code of ethics, believes herself tainted and dishonored and, accordingly, dies. The Renaissance attitude toward betrothal is important in understanding the moral stance which, for these women, leads to self-confessed adultery. During this time the marriage contract itself is the important consideration, not the actual marriage ceremony. In order to encourage people to marry rather than live outside the institution, the church wished to make the contraction of a legal marriage as simple as possible. Therefore it decreed that any de praesenti contract, or one in which a man and woman stated that they were married, was legal and binding. This kind of contract did not require any third witness, including the blessing of a priest, nor any written document but merely the voluntary, mutual consent of both parties. As Henry Swinburn explains it in his treatise published in 1686 but written in 1600, a major source of information concerning Renaissance legal opinions on betrothal: "albeit there be no Witnesses of the Contract, yet the parties having verily (though secretly)

contracted matrimony, they are very Man and Wife Before God."[37] The religious basis for the validity of betrothal is presented by a number of handbook writers. Bullinger states, "In the fourth boke of Moses the XXX Chapter it is written thus: yf a damsell vowe a vowe unto the Lorde, and bynd herselfs beynge in hyr fathers house and unmarried: yf her father hear hyr vowe and bonde whych she hath made upon hyr soule, and holde hys peace therto, then all hyr vowe and bonde whych she hath made upon hyr soule, shall stand in effect."[38] Thus because such a contract was considered as binding as any marriage ceremony, an attempt to marry another after making the contract was illegal as long as either party lived.

However, in order to counteract the evils which would inevitably result from such laws, the church also insisted that, though legal and binding, these clandestine contracts were sinful and forbidden, and should they take place, the offenders were to be punished and required to participate in an official church ceremony (in facie ecclesiae). William Harrington explains this attitude in his Commendacions of matrimony (1528);

> If that man and woman or theyr procterus do make matrymony secretly by them self without any recorde or but with one wytnesse that is called matrymony clandestinat the which for many causes is forboden by the lawe. And they which done make such matrymony are accused in that dede doyng; not withstondyng that matrymony is valuable and holdeth afore God in to so much that and the one of the same

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[37]Cited by Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 75.

[38]Cited by Clark, p. 80.

> forsake the other and take other they lyve in a dampnable adoutry.[39]

Even more vehement was the Church's invection against any consummation of a secret marriage before it had been solemnized in public. Again Harrington explains:

> And whan matrymony is thus lawfully made yet the man maye not possess the woman as his wyfe nor the woman the man as her husbonde nor inhabyte nor flesshely meddle togyther as man and wyfe: afore such tyme as that matrymony be approued and solempnysed by our mother holy chyrch and yf they do so in dede they synne deadly.[40]

Thus a clear moral stance was made difficult by these two opposed and irreconcilable objectives on the part of the church, and this ethical dilemma, in addition to the strength and indissoluble character of the betrothal, is behind a number of plays. In Heywood's Fortune By Land and Sea a son who has made a contract beneath his social rank defends his position and refuses an alternative and wealthier bride. Women who are faced with the dilemma of betrothal and marriage occur in several plays. In The Witch (1615) and The Lover's Progress (1623) husbands use trickery to marry women betrothed to others, but their wives have in spite of this remained faithful. In The Lover's Progress, however, the wife and the man who has loved her honorably must prove in a Court of Justice that they are innocent of adultery and murder. In both plays tragedy turns to tragi-comedy when, as a result of the fortuitous deaths of the husbands, the women are released from wrong

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[39]Cited by Schanzer, p. 76.

[40]Cited by Schanzer, p. 76.

marriages and allowed to wed, after a respectful period of mourning, their rightful lovers. Here because of the pre-contracts these impending marriages are equivalent to those between never-married lovers.

The inviolable nature of betrothal is best illustrated, however, in Wilkins' The Miseries of Enforced Marriage (1607) and Ford's The Broken Heart (1632). In The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, a play which presents essentially yet less artfully, the problems apparent in The Broken Heart, Scarborrow and Clare Harcop clearly pledge their faith to each other. Clare refers to herself as Scarborrow's "troth-plight wife" and as "a Troth-plight-Virgin," and when she learns of his forced marriage to another, she declares that she is a "whore," a "strumpet," that she is not fit for any man and that anyone who chooses to marry her shall live like herself in adultery. She states of Scarborrow, as she resolves to commit suicide, that he is an adulterer in marriage, and he himself acknowledges that his marriage is the equivalent of adultery.

By far the most interesting Jacobean play in which tragedy results from an enforced marriage in violation of a betrothal contract is John Ford's The Broken Heart.[41] Ford's unique contribution to the drama of the period in his obsession with irresolvable moral dilemmas is apparent in the stands taken by various characters in the play, particularly Penthea, a woman who has been forced by her brother to

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[41]The importance of the Renaissance attitude toward betrothal in this play is explained fully in an article by Glenn H. Blayney, "Convention, Plot, and Structure in The Broken Heart," MP, 56 (1958), 1-9.

break a betrothal and to enter into an unwanted marriage which she views as adulterous and yet to which she believes she must be faithful. The clarity with which both Penthea and Orgilus view their relationship as a formal betrothal is apparent throughout the play. In the opening scene, Orgilus describes to his father the "gentle peace" which was effected between their family and that of Penthea's by the joining of the two "in a Hymenean bond," of their "pledge," their "vows," and of her heart "Before contracted" his.[42] He goes to Penthea disguised as Tecnicus' scholar and, discovering himself, tells her that he would possess his wife, that "Penthea is the wife to Orgilus / And ever shall be" (II.iii.96-97). Penthea herself speaks of their "troth-contracted loves" and reaffirms that their vows were taken with heaven as a witness:

> Orgilus, by promise I was thine
> The heavens do witness; they can witness too
> A rape done on my truth.
> (II.iii.77-79)

These lines also indicate Penthea's reaction to the forced betrayal of her contract and of her marriage to her jealous older husband, Bassanes. She believes that her "virgin-dowry" has been "ravished by another" (II.iii.98-99). She tells her brother Ithocles that he has made her "a faithbreaker / A spotted whore" (III.ii.69) and that:

> [S]he that's wife to Orgilus, and lives
> In known adultery with Bassanes,
> Is at the best a whore. Wilt kill me now?
> (III.ii.73-75)

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[42]John Ford, The Broken Heart, in Stuart Plays, ed. Arthur H. Nethercot, Charles R. Baskervill, and Virgil B. Heltzel (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), I.i.

Orgilus refers to Penthea's marriage with Bassanes as a "rape" on her purity, and during her mad ravings before her death by starvation, Penthea once again reinforces the inviolability of her betrothal and the moral quandary in which an enforced marriage to another has placed her:

> O, my wracked honor, ruined by those tyrants
> A cruel brother and a desperate dotage!
> There is no peace left for a ravished wife
> Widowed by lawless marriage; to all memory
> Penthea's, poor Penthea's, name is strumpeted.
> (IV.ii.144-48)

And as penance for this, as she sees it, tainting of her blood, she resolves henceforth to deny that blood "taste of sustenance" (IV.ii.152).

In her struggles with morality, Penthea makes reference to many of those Renaissance concepts of honor seen in the plays in which a husband falsely accuses his wife of adultery--the importance of honor, good name, and reputation, their connection with virtue, and the association of honor with chastity and fidelity in a female. However, while in Shakespeare's plays, particularly Othello, the concept of honor is interwoven into the very fabric of the play, is a part of the characterization and poetic language, in The Broken Heart, honor is talked about. In Othello, it is the play; in The Broken Heart various characters pause and discuss their respective philosophies of honor.[43] Ford's plays are more remote from the actualities of Jacobean life than any other dramatist's. He is interested in the ethical problems that arise when the reality of marriage conflicts with the ideal, when

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[43]The only play of Shakespeare's that resembles The Broken Heart in this way is Troilus and Cressida.

actual behavior conflicts with the idea of honor, but not in immediate social problems.[44] Unlike the situation in Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and Othello, in which there is but one clear absolute, the evil of a wife's adultery, and the dilemma of the plays simply results from a tragic error in judgment, the moral issues of The Broken Heart involve an irresolvable conflict of absolutes with characters unable to swerve from their individual stances towards honor and morality.

Penthea is the most extreme example in the play of people who cannot escape conflicting moral commitments. Her pursuit of virtue involves her more deeply in sin, and she is destroyed by her own code of honor, her ideal of chastity and fidelity in marriage. To preserve the honor of her husband in name, she must destroy that of her spiritual husband. She forces herself to tell the man she truly loves and to whom she has betrothed to leave her sight and nevermore tempt with "language / message or letter" her frailty, scorning his "former protestations" as lust and telling him to hide his shame (II.iii). And upon his leaving, she laments, "Honor / How much we fight with weakness to preserve thee" (II.iii.130-31). Ribner believes that her "pursuit of virtue not only negates the normal feelings of humanity but makes a mockery of virtue itself."[45] However, the response to Penthea's commitment to her code of honor does not seem to be as negative as this critic indicates. Rather Ford views her as heroic and yet pathetic in

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[44]Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 201.

[45]Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 158.

that she is placed in the awkward position of having her fate decided by the actions of others.

The entire play is based on a situation that took place in the past over which the characters had no control and the consequences of which they are still suffering. Ithocles is no longer the same man, and he regrets the enforced marriage of his sister as the act of an irresponsible youth. But Orgilus' desire for honorable revenge is based on that act, and like Penthea, he too is destroyed by his code of honor; he too reveals the conflict of moral commitments. His promise of marriage has been taken from him by Ithocles who has thus destroyed his honor. Honor requires vengeance, but vengeance demands the destruction of his friend and the brother of his betrothed. Hence honor for Orgilus becomes the destroyer of honor, and revenge becomes its own executioner.

Ford presents an ideal of honor in the play through the character of Tecnicus. The actions of the other characters may be measured by his assertion that:

> Honor consists not in a bare opinion
> By doing any act that feeds content,
> Brave in appearance, cause we think it brave;
> Such honor comes by accident, not nature
> Proceeding from the vices of our passion,
> Which makes our reason drunk. But real honor
> Is the reward of virtue, and acquired
> By justice or by valor which for bases
> Hath justice to uphold it. . . .
> Thus, as you see how honor must be grounded
> On knowledge, not opinion--for opinion
> Relies on probability and accident,
> But knowledge on necessity and truth--
> (III.i.32-48)

The philosopher predicts what Orgilus is to experience--that true honor must not be based on opinion but on the kind of moral certainty which

none of the characters of The Broken Heart can attain and the absence of which destroys them.

The fates of Penthea and Orgilus serve as dramatic symbols of the uncertainty of human values. Those absolutes which society cherishes, love, honor, friendship, become for them sources of destruction and death. In Penthea's honesty lies her whoredom; in her fidelity to her husband-in-name lies her adultery and betrayal of her husband-in-spirit. And Orgilus' honor brings about the destruction of himself and the other major characters in the play. The fates of Ithocles and Calantha reveal uncontrollable human suffering, suffering which, especially for Calantha, may not be attributed to one's own act or that of an external agent. Her death, along with those of the other characters, is Ford's means of showing man's reaction to that suffering: to recognize the moral paradoxes that he cannot resolve, to perform the necessary duties of life, and to meet death with dignity and a calm courage.

Thus, for Ford the pursuit of honor can be at once ennobling and, at its most extreme, destructively obsessive. It places his characters, especially Penthea, in irreconcilable moral dilemmas, and for his female character this means the position of committing adultery in marriage. Another situation in which a woman's pursuit of honor places her in a no-win position involves the attitude toward rape seen in Webster's Appius and Virginia and Beaumont and Fletcher's The Tragedy of Valentinian. Here again the resulting tragedy of a woman who feels that she is an adulteress, this time because she has been raped, involves a personal obsession with society's interpretation of honor.

The moral dilemma apparent in the rape of a married or betrothed woman is reflected in the Renaissance controversies concerning the Roman heroine, Lucrece, who had long been for men and their wives a noble yet tragic example of married love.[46] During the Middle Ages, she was one of a very few "good women" noted for their chastity and fidelity, and yet she became the center of a Christian controversy. A version of the story printed a decade after Shakespeare's poem on the subject offers the paradox:

> Were that unchast mate welcome to thy bed,
> Lucrece, thy lust was justly punished.
> Why seek'st thou fame that di'dst deservedly?
> But if foule force defil'd thine honest bed,
> His onely rage should have bene punished:
> Why diest thou for anothers villainie?
> Both wayes thy thirst of fame is too unjust,
> Dying, or for fond rage, or guiltie lust.[47]

In essence, the problem is this: if guilty of adultery, why is Lucrece praised; if faithful, why does she kill herself? To philosophers such as Jerome and Tertullian, Lucrece is a model of marital virtue; to St. Augustine, she is not so noteworthy. In The City of God, he asserts, "This case is caught between both sides to such a degree that if suicide is extenuated, adultery is proved; if adultery is denied, the conviction is for suicide." If she were Christian, she would have forsaken "Roman pride in glory" and decided upon an alternative means to "reveal her conscience to men."[48] Humanists in the Renaissance

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[46]The problem of rape and the controversy over Lucrece are discussed in an article by D. C. Allen, "Some Observations on The Rape of Lucrece," SS, 15 (1962), 89-98.

[47]Cited by Allen, p. 90.

[48]Cited by Allen, p. 90.

continued to be interested in the controversy with Speroni declaring Lucrece of imperfect chastity, for if truly virtuous, she would have died before surrendering to Tarquin. The French humanist Henri Etienne maintained that suicide was no solution, for it merely avenged the injury done to the body, not the wrong done to the mind or soul which is the seat of chastity. In his version of the story, Shakespeare seems, despite his obvious sympathy for Lucrece, to have sided with St. Augustine. Lucrece's body is defiled by Tarquin, and she destroys that body in order to preserve the purity of her mind. However, unfortunately she does not aspire to divine wisdom and grace but to pagan honor. Though her action is rare and noble, she should have fought to the death or, having been forced, lived free of blame.

This controversy over rape, along with the additional dilemma of betrothal, is apparent in Appius and Virginia. In Webster's drama, a Roman tyrant, Appius, lusts for the daughter of a Roman soldier, Virginius, who is betrothed to Icilius. In Virginius' absence, Appius orders his conspirator Clodius to claim Virginia to be the daughter of a bond-woman and slave to him. As judge for the case, Appius can force Virginia to become his "Strumpet," not his "Bride," and since he is merely the judge, the conspiracy cannot be traced to him. Here the aspects of honor that are threatened are not only the violation of a betrothal but the intended sexual forcing of a virgin. During the trial, for which Virginius has returned, the fiery-spirited Virginia calls

Appius a "putrified dunghill"[49] and pleads with her father to preserve her freedom and honor by taking her life:

> [T]ake the life you gave me
> And sacrifice it rather to the gods
> Than to a villains Lust. Happy the Wretch
> Who born in bondage lives and dies a slave,
> And sees no lustful projects bent upon her,
> And neither knowes the life nor death of honor.
> (IV.i.33-38)

Webster is more interested in ideas than in characterization in this play. Here Virginia is the Virgin Martyr and Virginius the Roman Father, but the tragedy of the play does not merely concern the sacrifice of chastity to preserve honor but is further complicated by Virginia's betrothal. If she succumbs to Appius, she not only loses her virginity in a dishonorable way, but she violates her betrothal and hence becomes an adulteress. Virginius explains this after he has killed his daughter to make her free. He simply could not bear it

> [W]hen [he] saw her pull'd
> By Appius' Lictors to be claim'd a slave,
> And drag'd unto a publick Sessions-house,
> Divorc'd from her fore-Spousals with Icilius,
> A noble youth, and made a bond-woman,
> Inforc'd by violence from her fathers armes
> To be a Prostitute and [Paramour]
> To the rude twinings of a lecherous Judge. . . .
> (IV.ii.144-51)

Although the attitude in the play basically supports Virginia as a model of pagan courage and virtue, there is some slight question as to the necessity and justness of her sacrifice. With the body of Virginia in his arms, Icilius asks Virginius, "Where was thy pity when thou

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[49]John Webster, Appius and Virginia, in The Complete Works of John Webster, vol. 3, ed. F. L. Lucas (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), IV.i.160.

slewest this maid . . .?" and declares that her wounds will never stop bleeding until she finds revenge in the death of Appius (V.ii.198). However, Virginius has the final word on the sacrifice of Virginia and finds it, along with the fate of Lucrece, done in the noble Roman way:

> Two [Ladies fair, but] most unfortunate,
> Have in their ruins rais'd declining Rome--
> Lucrecia and Virginia, both renown'd
> For chastity.
> (V.ii.192-95)

Another play in which a woman views herself as tainted and dishonored, as an adulteress because of her rape is Beaumont and Fletcher's The Tragedy of Valentinian. In this drama Lucina actually struggles to defend herself from the Emperor Valentinian and is overcome by force, but still feels guilt for the adultery that she did not initiate. The play contains many of the commonplaces of the age concerning the connection of female honor with chastity and the frailty of that honor. When Ardelia and Phorba attempt to persuade eighteen-year-old Lucina to lose her honor by committing adultery with the Emperor, who lusts after her primarily because of her virtue and fidelity, she responds:

> There is no wonder men defame our Sex,
> And lay the vices of all ages on us,
> When such as you shall beare the names of woman. . . .[50]

The bawds who try to entice Lucina's fall stand in amazement at her resistance to jewels, promises of honor, glory, and power, and the opportunity to be Empresse, exclaiming, "This Woman has a God of

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[50]John Fletcher, The Tragedy of Valentinian, in The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, vol. 4, ed. Robert K. Turner, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), I.ii.45-47.

vertue in her" (I.i.73). When Lucina is asked how she would respond if the Emperor, "grown mad with love should force her," she merely shoots an angry look filled with "Vestall fire" at her questioner and points to a portrait of Lucrece (I.i). Thus the way is paved for the response of a Lucrece when her chastity is forced. Not only physical violence but treachery is involved in the seduction of Lucina. The Emperor wins the wedding ring of Maximus, husband of Lucina, at dice and uses it as a means to entice her to his court where she is helpless. As in Shakespeare's Rape of Lucrece in which the poet associates lust with uncleanness, Lucina begs the Emperor not to abuse her for she would become so "leprous" that he would curse her from him. And she reminds him of the nobility of her husband and his service to the state, asking Valentinian not to let the destruction of her "vertue be the wedge to break him" (II.vi.29). Ignoring her pleas, the Emperor takes her aside to ravish her, incurring even the scorn of his own bawds. Lucina curses the Emperor, cries for justice, asks him to kill her, and declares that she is totally ruined:

> For I am now no wife for Maximus,
> No company for women that are vertuous,
> No familie I now can claime, nor Country,
> Nor name, but Cesar's Whore. . . .
> (III.i.74-77)

The loss of her virtue has destroyed not only her name but that of her husband, family, and of all good women. Although by the end of the play Maximus turns out to be as deceitful and villainous as Valentinian, the tragedy at this point lies in a woman who, though herself innocent of any foul play, adheres to a code of honor which dictates her atonement in death. The controversy over rape is apparent in the play with

Aecius asking her to "live a little longer" for the "deed is none of [hers]" (III.i). But Lucina refuses, saying:

> For could the world again restore my credit,
> As faire and absolute as first I bred it,
> That world I should not trust again.
> (III.i.248-50)

Thus, various Renaissance dramatists take advantage of a situation in which tragedy is implicit. The accusation of adultery against a woman whose virtue and fidelity have been made so clear as to win immediate audience sympathy for her, by her husband because of his obsession with honor or as a result of her own admirable yet personally destructive obsession with a code of honor that places her in a totally untenable moral position, provides these playwrights with the opportunity to illustrate dramatically the nobility with which a woman is capable of responding to what was considered one of the most terrible offenses she could endure.

CHAPTER III

ADULTERY IN HOMILETIC AND DOMESTIC TRAGEDY: THE REPENTANT ADULTERESS

A second type of adulteress figure depicted by Renaissance playwrights moves further away from accepted conventions and sexual morés. Unlike the woman who is accused falsely of adultery but who is actually a model of marital fidelity and who, as a result of her husband's jealousy and/or outside circumstances, is a tragic victim of society's obsession with chastity, this wife actually participates in an adulterous affair, but because of pressure exercised on her by her husband or her own personal guilt, she returns repentant to the bosom of society.

The basic fable of Arden of Feversham, A Warning For Fair Women, Hamlet, The English Traveller, and A Woman Killed With Kindness involves the adulteress wife, sometimes evolving into murderess or at least providing the motivation for her husband's murder, who undergoes repentance and suffers retribution. Aside from Hamlet and A Woman Killed With Kindness, these plays are not as dramatically effective as other Renaissance plays presenting an adulterous wife because they emphasize a moral or homily rather than "realistic" development of character. However, these women are generally developing characters who, in the course of the tragedies, change substantially as a result of their corruption. Their development, and hence the structure of the fable, can be delineated in four basic stages: their seduction by the

lover, the murder of the husband or the discovery of the adultery by the husband (here the emphasis is on the wife's gradual degeneration of moral character), the moral conflict, whether self-imposed or encouraged by the chastisement of the husband, resulting in the wife's repentance, and the final retribution.

Together with their complete repentance, the seduction of the wives by their respective lovers is a feature of these plays which distinguishes them from dramas in which the wives evolve into stage villainesses. Most of these women are rather passive females who are coerced by flattery, sexual pressure, or their own weakness into falling into sin. Alice Arden, however, of Arden of Feversham is the single exception to this observation. Although she undergoes repentance in the course of the play, allowing her to be included as one of the repentant adulteresses, she will also be noted in a later chapter on villainous women whose evil is seen in terms of a violation of sexual chastity. Alice Arden is not a passive woman, succumbing like Gertrude to the weakness of lust and to the dominance of a potent male, but is rather an active participant in the adultery which is the dramatic focus of the play. Her powerful and psychologically sound characterization is the factor which keeps Arden of Feversham from merely being another of the dramatized homilies on sin and the fallen woman, described by Adams and reflected in the title of his book, Domestic or Homiletic Tragedies. A major characteristic of domestic tragedy is its didactic element, particularly its moral concern for the consequences of the drastic action taken in the play, generally adultery and often murder. The outcome of most of these plays, including Arden, depends on

an act of Providence, and many domestic tragedies reflect the realism, moral concern, and frequently even the allegorical figures typical of morality plays. Given the nature of its material, one of the more remarkable features of Arden of Feversham, however, is its lack of didacticism. When Franklin turns to the audience to deliver the Epilogue, he does not, like the Doctor at the end of Everyman, deliver an obvious moral tag. Instead he accounts for the outcome of characters not dealt with in the final scene and then apologizes for the play's lack of adornment. No one character, including Alice and Mosby, is totally evil, and even the "good" characters such as Arden himself, who is land-crazed, are flawed. The characters are as ambivalent as the society itself in its attitude of individual ambition and social mobility. This ambivalence becomes the theme of the play as much as the wrongheadedness of lust and adultery. For lust and adultery are only manifestations of the human covetousness--for land, money, social position, revenge, and other people--that drives individuals to press for immediate gratification of appetites regardless of social and personal consequences. Not only is the theme more complex than the simple wages-of-sin homily typical of many domestic tragedies, the murder of Arden himself has none of the grandeur of high tragedy, appearing rather as it does in life--messy, senseless, brutal. The "deep moral feeling" found in Arden by many critics comes from no particular justice meted out at the end (Bradshaw is, to the contrary, unjustly punished) nor from any didactic statement, but rather from the totality of an action which verifies that forces greater than man himself conspire to work out his destiny. The terrors of retributive

justice advertised on the title page are submerged by the sheer excitement of a dramatic story. The real interest of this playwright, as opposed to the attention given to the spiritual condition and conscience of the criminals of later domestic plays, is to dramatize a tale of adultery and murder.

Hence it is the adulteress Alice Arden and the development of her character through her seduction, the murder of her husband, her repentance, and retribution that provide the dramatic focus of the play. Hers is a character of a fluctuating variety of moods. In the murder scene alone she moves from total abandonment to the idea of murdering her husband to remorse, fear, lack of control, renewed villainy and duplicity, and to a resignation that foreshadows her later repentance. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of her character, however, is that there is no psychological explanation for the passion which unflaggingly drives her towards that which she fears; thus she becomes an example of the misogynistic view that defines woman as an irrational creature of passion. At intervals during the play, she acknowledges the baseness of the lover whom she has worshipped and recognizes that pursuing her course of action with Mosby will mean her "overthrow." Yet like Arden, who realizes that his wife is rooted in wickedness but cannot give her up, and Mosby himself, who "needs must on" though his evil has caused him unhappiness and insecurity, Alice cannot deny her passion even though she knows that her husband is the better man.[1]

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[1] The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham, ed. M. L. Wine (London: Methuen & Co., 1973), viii.22.

Because Alice is an active participant in her own seduction and adultery, though she undergoes the guilt and retribution of the repentant adulteress, the stage of seduction is deemphasized. This is achieved by combining it with the lovers' plans to murder the husband, presenting the seduction as an already established fact from the beginning of the drama. The play opens with Arden, already aware of the liaison of his wife and Mosby, telling Franklin that "love letters passed 'twixt Mosby and [his] wife" and that Alice had actually given Mosby her wedding ring (i.15). Violence is a part of the fabric from the onset as Arden threatens to dissever the former tailor on the very bed which he thinks to defile. However, Arden's threats of violence are just that. Although he is as flawed with the covetousness of heart as any character in the play, Arden truly wants to believe his wife faithful and Mosby his friend; and time after time he chooses to accept the easy lies which they offer, practicing the patience and lack of jealousy that Franklin encourages and that is common Renaissance advice for the husband who wants to curb the fickleness of woman. It is Alice who is actually the aggressor in the play, the character who follows through with the violence of her threats. It is Alice who is as much seducer as seduced. She is adept at the seducer's art of dissembling, telling her husband that she will die if he stays away in London too long, then immediately making plans for his death as soon as he sets spur to horse. She holds no regard for the sanctity of marriage, asserting that while "marriage is but words," love is a "god," and therefore "Mosby's title is the best" (i.101-102). She uses this kind of reasoning to take the seducer's role in recharging a momentarily

reluctant Mosby who tells her it is impossible to continue their affair after he has sworn an oath to Arden to forbear soliciting her. Again she dismisses all oaths much the same as she does the marriage oath, saying "Oaths are words, and words is wind / And wind is mutable" (i.436-37). Alice plays the aggressive role throughout the play, asserting that she would tear down a fortified house with her bare hands to get to Mosby. It is this wife who first avows the death of her husband, declaring that as surely shall he die as she abhors him and loves Mosby. Here the seduction and affair of Alice and Mosby become fused with the actual murder of Arden itself, for each adulterer tests the love of the other by his or her willingness to go ahead with the murder. Alice has already plotted with her servant Michael, using his love for Mosby's sister Susan as bait, to do away with her husband, enjoining him not to tell even Mosby of their plans. When Mosby enters and tests Alice's love by pretending to want to free himself of their involvement, she is only sure of his love once more when he speaks of his own plan to poison Arden. But it is Alice who actually makes the first attempt to poison her husband, a plan which fails when Arden detects something "not wholesome" in his broth. But, as is the case with all of their foiled schemes, Alice is quick to explain the situation and actually to take advantage of it to make her husband feel guilty. She accuses Arden of always being critical of her, of probably even thinking that, because she made the broth, she was trying to poison him and ultimately succeeds in having Arden apologize to her.

After this initial attempt to murder the husband, the entire play is structured upon a series of repeatedly unsuccessful tries to

effect his death. The stage of murdering-the-husband, in fact, takes up most of the dramatic activity. The plot of Arden is relatively simplistic: a married woman falls in love with another man; they plot to get rid of the husband in order to fully enjoy their love and find that the love itself is destroyed by the very act undertaken to fulfill it. Without some method of delaying the climactic murder in the play and, accordingly, some manner of heightening tension, such a plot would demand about thirty minutes of acting time. The Arden playwright solves this dilemma in a much less sophisticated way than does Shakespeare in Hamlet by deflecting each murder attempt with the hand of Providence through a succession of events that the hired cuttthroats, Shakebag and Black Will, call Arden's "wondrous holy luck" and his preservation by a miracle. The playwright avoids monotony in the repeatedly unsuccessful murder attempts through their sheer ingenuity and through the kind of slapstick ineptitude of the hired assassins--two buffoons reminiscent of Dogberry and Verges.

The actual murder itself is depicted in a series of attempts followed immediately by some kind of foil. The attempts are as diverse as Alice's deal with the servant Michael, her attempt to poison Arden's broth, her manipulation of Greene, revealing her aggressiveness and ability to dissemble as she plays on Greene's already present resentment of Arden's covetousness for his land, the deal with Clarke and his poisoned crucifix, and the various exploits of Black Will and Shakebag. All of these efforts are stifled in some way, but the frustration experienced by the two cutthroats provides by far the most comic entertainment. Foil one occurs when a window lands on Black Will's

skull. Foil two is effected by Michael's ineffectualness despite the assassins' bullying of him. An attempted ambush fails with the appearance of Lord Cheyne and his men, who recognize the infamous thieves and warn them of imminent hanging; a second ambush is prevented by a thick fog which so blinds Shakebag that he falls into a ditch where he almost drowns, and a third attack, which involves Alice and Mosby as well as the still determined assassins, results in the wounding of Shakebag and Mosby by Franklin and Arden. It is during this stage of the murder that much of the characters' development takes place; they are simply placed in such extreme situations that their true natures must be disclosed. Each character's peculiar covetousness of heart is revealed. Arden is fully aware that his wife is "rooted in her wickedness," and he even has premonitions that his life is in danger, but his concern for his name and his need to hold onto her are so great that he cannot let go. It is this same kind of greed that finally destroys Arden. He is protected by Providence until he niggardly refuses the sailor Reede the little plot of ground necessary for the subsistence of his wife and children. Hereupon Reede delivers the curse which is finally enacted upon Arden--that he will be "butchered by [his] dearest friends" and lie dead upon that very ground (xiii.35). Mosby also reveals a kind of covetousness, the desire to possess another man's wife. Like Arden he is aware of the folly of his actions, but he has become too deeply involved to stop. With each successive plan or action he sinks, like Macbeth, more deeply into sin, and each deed makes easier the next. At one point he is so concerned with protecting himself that he states that he

must get rid of all of those who know of his adultery and the plans for murdering Arden, including Alice herself. It is with Alice, however, that the playwright is most clear in his portrait of the degenerating nature of sin. With each successive murder attempt, her ability to dissemble becomes more sophisticated so that when she and Mosby flaunt their relationship in front of Arden, approaching him arm in arm and embracing, to set up an ambush, she is even able to turn this unsuccessful situation to her advantage, scolding Arden for allowing his jealousy to blind him to their affectionate teasing and again soliciting his apology. Alice helps Mosby to carry out the final, successful assassination attempt, urging the murderers on with cheers and offers of more money, easing Arden's suspicions by telling him she does not even want Mosby in the house, and ultimately participating in the very act of murder, adding her blow to those of the others in the name of the love that she and Mosby share (xiv.237).

The action of seduction is a much more important part of the fabric of A Warning For Fair Women, since this drama sets the stage for a number of plays involving an adulterous wife who begins rather innocently. Mistress Anne Sanders is a chaste but ignorant wife, who, in a pique at her husband over being denied money for new clothes, allows herself to be maneuvered by a wily bawd, Mistress Drury, into affecting Captain George Browne, who has employed her for this purpose. Men are frequently at the root of the problem in plays involving the repentant adulteress, and the women they persuade are in the beginning weaklings who are easy prey for clever and highly motivated schemers. Anne Sanders' reputation for chastity is remarked on by various

characters in the play, even the cynical Mistress Drury who hesitates to wrong her because she is so honest. Drury answers Browne's request for her help in persuading Anne by saying that she could do as much with her as any woman in the city, and her servant, trusty Roger, verifies this. He tells Browne that though Mistress Sanders is honest and there be not a kinder couple in Billingsgateward, Drury has "suche a sweete tongue as wil supple a stone," and if she "list to labour/ [she'll] win her."[2]

At first Anne rebuffs and rebukes Browne, who, upon Drury's advice, has gone to pay her a visit. Finding Anne sitting with her small son on the doorstep, Browne approaches her with compliments only to be told that he is welcome if he has business with her husband; otherwise she would take her leave. She responds to his next attempts at pleasantries with, "trouble me no more," and after finally getting rid of him, comments:

> These arrand-making Gallants are good men,
> That cannot passe and see a woman sit
> Of any sort, alone at any doore,
> But they will find a scuse to stand and prate,
> Fooles that they are to bite at every baite.
> (11.394-98)

An interesting bit of characterization is Browne's skewed interpretation of their exchange when he later describes her attitude to Drury as "affable, not coy, nor scornfull" (1.500). The irony of the play is that through the persuasion of Browne and Drury, Anne Sanders becomes

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[2]A Warning For Fair Women, ed. Charles Dale Cannon (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975), 11.259-61.

one of the "fooles that . . . bite at every baite," disrupting the domestic bliss so emphasized at the beginning to provide additional irony.

Mistress Drury is quite psychologically astute in determining just how to work on Anne. She attributes part of Anne's susceptibility to her youth, understanding that she may be "tempred easily like waxe / Especially by one that is familiar with her" (11.447-48). Drury takes immediate advantage of the Sanders' money difficulties to manipulate the young wife. Saluting the good fortune that incensed Anne against her husband, thus encouraging a break with him, she further enrages the wife by saying what will the world come to when a woman such as Anne is not allowed enough money to pay her debts. She blames Sanders in front of Anne for putting more trust in his serving boy than his wife and for giving the servant the authority to refuse her money. Here she is quite aware of the fact that Anne is embarrassed and enraged at being humiliated by her own servant in front of the tradespeople with whom she has contracted. When Mistress Sanders says that she will give her husband the benefit of the doubt, that it was her destiny, revealed by the yellow spots upon her fingers, to have a bad day, Drury seizes instantly upon her victim's superstitious nature and, taking on the office of fortune-teller, claims that Anne will soon be a widow and will thereafter marry a gentleman who will keep her "in her hood and gown of silk" (1.711). She urges the woman to treat George Browne courteously, for he will be her next husband. Anne responds at first by saying that she would rather be as she is if "God were pleased that it should be so," but after Drury's careful explanation that God has

decreed otherwise and that to go against providence would be a sin, she submits to what she believes to be her "destenie" (11.716,756).

The fall of Anne Sanders is prefigured in the dumb show just before scene v in which "Lust imbraceth her, she thrusteth Chastity from her, Chastity wringes her hands, and departs" (11.810-13). Here the playwright does not take dramatic advantage of the situation, revealing the actual seduction only indirectly by a chorus character named Tragedy who states that Browne "doth seduce this poore deluded soule" (1.819). The various parts of the fable are separated and commented on by Tragedy, the abstract figures of Chastity, Lust, and Justice, and their dumb shows, a device which serves to distance the action and testifies to the debt owed to the native morality plays and to the homiletic tradition. A Warning For Fair Women is more involved with making moral capital of the fallen woman and of the sin of murder than is Arden; the excitement of an on-stage seduction and of the lovers' vows to murder the husband are omitted in favor of non-dramatic passages of instruction and exhortation which frequently impede the action. Because the homiletic strain of Renaissance drama reaches a culmination in this play, overpowering its dramatic effectiveness, the seduction is something of a dramatic disappointment. It is significant, however, in an analysis of the character of the repentant adulteress that, unlike her villainous counterpart who is as much seducer as seduced, it takes the combined forces of the lover, the bawd, and the bawd's servant to undermine the honesty of Anne Sanders.

Arden of Feversham, A Warning For Fair Women, and a lesser play of Heywood's involving a repentant adulteress, The English Traveller,

strongly emphasize the process or stages of the fable; they concentrate on the sensationalism of the action itself and, as a result, are frequently melodramatic and even formulaic. Two finer examples of domestic tragedy, however, which concentrate more on the effects that adultery and murder have on the people involved and hence on more complex characterization, are Hamlet and A Woman Killed With Kindness.[3] In Hamlet, a play typical of pessimistic Jacobean stories of lust, betrayal, and adultery in which romantic and disillusioned romantic attitudes coexist and are complementary, providing a major source of their distinctive greatness, both the seduction of the ultimately repentant adulteress and the murder of the husband occur prior to the main action of the play. The play begins, as it were, in medias res; the seduction and murder are revealed to Hamlet and thus to us, since we interpret the events totally through Hamlet's eyes, as the play progresses. Although Gertrude's sin, her adultery and hasty marriage to Claudius, and its effect on Hamlet provide the impetus for the entire play, the audience is distanced from these events, is merely told about them by the Ghost or sees them mimed in a play-within-the-play. Hence the emphasis is not placed on their actual occurrence but on their effect upon the mind of Hamlet. It is Hamlet's play, but Gertrude's adultery and repentance are the catalysts that account for who Hamlet is and determine what he does.

Hamlet is really not a tragic character until he reveals what overshadows his disinheritance so completely that he fails even to

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[3]Hamlet may be referred to as domestic tragedy in the sense that it relates to Adams' definition of the genre as "any phase of family life" (p. 1).

mention it. His mother is guilty of a sin which blackens and corrupts all of life for him, which taints his very blood.[4] The full impact of Hamlet's dilemma is revealed gradually, piling on him one burden after another until we feel he must collapse. The ghost in the opening scene is foreboding of "some strange eruption" of the state, and the second scene reveals Hamlet disinherited by his uncle and mourning a beloved father already forgotten by his mother in her haste to marry Claudius.[5] This is certainly matter for pathos but scarcely for great tragedy. Hamlet does feel himself intertwined in the lust of his mother; his "sullied flesh" is corrupted by her actions, which at first he understands merely as disloyalty and incest. However, it is not until his assignation with his father's spirit, from whom he learns two new facts about his father, mother, and uncle more terrible than anything he had known hitherto, and he is given a task of extraordinary complexity that the play takes on tragic import. He is told that Claudius has poisoned his father so suddenly that he was thrust into the next world "even in the blossoms of [his] sin" with no time to make his reckoning with Heaven (I.v.76). Appearing a satyr to Hamlet before, Claudius now takes on the characteristics of the serpent Hamlet's father likens him to, a deadly, smiling, creeping asp. It would seem that, since the structure of this part of the play is to deliver one staggering blow after another unto Hamlet, Shakespeare

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[4]Gertrude's sin is discussed in J. Dover Wilson's What Happens in Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951).

[5]William Shakespeare, Hamlet, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), I.i.69.

would, for purposes of incremental effect, reveal the news of Gertrude's adultery before the seemingly more terrible revelation of his father's murder. But the playwright is very careful to present the ghost's statement of his wife's adultery after Hamlet learns of the murder because it is his mother's sin with Claudius that delivers the final crushing blow to the Prince, sending him, as would a physical blow, to his knees. He learns that his mother, the stock from which he sprang, who would hang upon his father "as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on," was even in his lifetime unfaithful to him, would steal from her "celestial bed" to "prey on garbage" (I.ii.144; I.v.56-57). He was aware that Gertrude was guilty of lust and even of incest, but, as the images of gross feeding suggest, this new revelation of adultery, itself a kind of appetite, indicates her real nature in all its rankness.

Various critics argue against Gertrude's adultery on the grounds that the word "adulterate," used only once in the play, could refer to the marriage itself which would be inviolate by Protestant and Catholic Church alike. But the ghost's speech (I.v.41) admits of no other interpretation; the closet scene loses much of its impact if Hamlet has no more against his mother than her hasty marriage, and Gertrude's mood of repentance, after seeing that her son knows all, implicitly verifies her guilt. In addition, though Hamlet shrinks from using the word "whore" to his mother's face, he is extremely direct with Horatio when he reveals that Claudius had "whored" his mother. And Horatio's explanation of the unfortunate events to Fortinbras at the end of the play summarizes the deeds of Claudius and

Gertrude. He tells "Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts"--a line which places murder significantly between adultery and incest (V.ii.392). However, the implication and emphasis in the play are that Gertrude is seduced into adultery. The ghost offers no indication that she participated in the murder (though her unawareness does reveal a lack of intelligence and imagination on her part, since even Hamlet suspected; if astute, Gertrude should have been at least guilty of complicity). To the contrary, the spirit's command to Hamlet that he not contrive against his mother and his appearance during the closet scene when Hamlet becomes rather too intense seem to imply that he denied her any knowledge of the crime. The ghost's speech inveighs primarily against Claudius, and he emphatically uses the word seduce in reference to his wife.

Regardless of Gertrude's weakness and passivity regarding her own fall, however, the effect on Hamlet is still staggering. He is sensitive enough to have suspected a conspiracy even before the ghost's revelation and entertained thoughts of his uncle as the guilty party, evident in his response "O my prophetic soul" to the ghost's naming of Claudius (I.v.40). But like most intellectuals, Hamlet is an idealist, a liver in dreams, distanced from reality so that, even though he had his suspicions, when the harshness of fact crashes in on him, he is still stunned. He himself describes his reaction as a feeling like that of the loss of his youth. When the ghost charges his son to "remember me," Hamlet explains, using images of the commonplace book carried by the youthful Renaissance student:

Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
(I.v.97-106)

Again it is significant to note the structure here. Hamlet's mind is first concerned with the disillusionment of his mother's fall. Then he moves on to the villainy of his uncle.

Because Claudius' seduction of his mother and the murder of his father, even though occurring before the action proper, do provide the impetus for the entire play, it is important to understand thoroughly just why and how they work on Hamlet's mind--what they mean to him. Roger Stilling discusses the connection of love and death in the play, and it is this connection between a love affair and the death of his father, mingled symbolically in the new marriage, that preys on Hamlet's mind. Stilling points out that "Claudius murders for love; Gertrude hastily marries in spite of her seeming love for her dead husband."[6] These complicated forces of creation and destruction, so tangled in the emotions of the older generation, are thrust upon Hamlet in such a way that disassociation from them becomes impossible.

The connection of seduction and murder, of adultery and death influence Hamlet's definitions of man (his father and himself) and of woman (his mother and Ophelia). As with most people, much of Hamlet's

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[6]Stilling, p. 109.

beliefs concerning what a man should be and what a woman should be lie in his perception of his mother and father. The roles of man/father and woman/mother are in some way fused for him. Much of the tension in the play results from Hamlet's relationship with his father, his idea of what a man should be resulting from his idea of what his father was, and his definition of woman resulting from his father's perception of woman and from his mother's behavior. Reflected in their linking of names, Hamlet possesses a strong identification with his father, evident in his lasting grief at the King's death and in their similar characteristics and views. The tendency of both men is to see the father Hamlet as something superhuman, beautiful, heroic, perfect--in contrast to the brother Claudius who is described at various times as an adulterate beast, a satyr, a serpent, even garbage. Hamlet associates the roles of father/husband and mother/wife, idealizing his father as a devoted husband by recollecting that he was

> [S]o loving to my mother
> That he might beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly.
> (I.ii.140-42)

And the father views himself the same way, telling Hamlet that his mother declined

> From me, whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage. . . .
> (I.v.48-50)

More complicated and more significant are the implications of the Prince's images concerning his mother. Hamlet's depression and disgust with the world had begun well before the ghost's appearance because for him his mother's disloyalty and hasty marriage were already

a kind of symbolic murder--of his father's memory and of her love for him. This idea is expressed in the lines of the Player Queen: "A second time I kill my husband dead/ When second husband kisses me in bed" (III.ii.183-84). The horrors and reverberations of adultery and incest are, of course, more of the mind, more symbolic than physical. The symbolic association that both Hamlets share concerning Gertrude and Claudius is the story of the fall of Eve. For the ghost and so for Hamlet, Claudius is the seducing, phallic, stinging serpent in the orchard who tempted and overpowered the weaker female with his animal sexuality.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, this kind of misogynistic and sexual interpretation of the Fall is quite ancient. In The Living Theatre of Medieval Art, Henry Kraus reveals that evidence of such interpretations may be found in medieval European art, which indicates an adversion to sexuality itself:

> Surely it is not without meaning that the sculptured presentation of the Vice of Unchastity which one finds on so many church facades of the twelfth century should invariably be a woman, suffering eternally in Hell. She is usually shown in a revolting posture, her naked body entwined by serpents which feed on her breasts and sexual organs. Sometimes, too, she is accompanied by the Devil who assumes an intimate relationship to her.[7]

The real significance of Hamlet's association of Gertrude with Eve and Claudius with the serpent, however, is that the emotions involved in this single case spread into his vision of all women, including Ophelia, and, since we are all of women born, into his vision of humanity itself.

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[7]Henry Kraus, The Living Theatre of Medieval Art (London: James and Hudson, 1967), p. 42.

His distorted view is again reflected by his father, for when the elder Hamlet declares that

> [L]ust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed.
> And prey on garbage,

lust becomes associated with the female, and the husband becomes the "radiant angel" (I.v.55-57). The aversion to sexuality, reflected in medieval iconography depicting the Fall, is revealed in the metaphor for the sex act, "preying on garbage" or on what is bestial in man. Here the ghost, and later Hamlet, views sexuality and hence the body as garbage, as something below the beast. Female duplicity and disloyalty become associated with sexuality for Hamlet so that sexuality, creation, and hence woman herself become tainted and horrible. Kraus' description of the attitude toward Eve and all of her daughters as primarily responsible for man's fall is applicable to Hamlet's vision. His disillusionment with his mother as a result of her adultery would have him agree with St. Benard that Eve was "the original cause of all evil, whose disgrace has come down to other women."[8]

Hence Hamlet's change of attitude toward Ophelia. His attitude toward his mother has colored his view of all women. When he says to Polonius, "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being good kissing carrion . . . have you a daughter," he is linking procreation with decay, woman with the corruption of man (II.ii.181-82). The Eve motif is extended further in Hamlet's constant admonition to Ophelia--"Get thee to a nunnery, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? . . .

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[8]Kraus, p. 65.

go thy ways to a nunnery" (III.i.121-22,130). Here is implied not only a slang reference to a Renaissance term for brothel, but a reference to the Mary/Eve, virgin/whore dichotomy. For Hamlet now when procreation and hence sexuality become associated with a woman, she becomes at once a whore. Natural, sexual woman, the Eve figure, is the "breeder of sinners," the perpetrator of corruption, while perfectable womanhood becomes the nun whose model is the Virgin Mary. Thus Hamlet, taking a misogynistic stance much like that of medieval clergy, has mentally created a situation in which ordinary woman is damned by her natural sexuality and by her contrast with the ideal of impossible perfection.

Hamlet's diatribe against his mother in the closet scene is the result of this way of thinking as he reveals the number of meanings that the relationship between man and woman has come to hold for him and the reverberations of his mother's adultery:

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
> As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow;
> Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
> With heated visage, as against the doom,
> Is thought-sick at the act.
> (III.iv.40-51)

Here because of woman's betrayal, love is blighted; marriage is tainted; the soul is in limbo; religion is reduced to mere lip-service; heaven is embarrassed, and earth is made thought-sick. Gertrude's reason, according to her son, is corrupted by lust, and his disgust with

sexuality and with the natural leads him to connect her with pure bestiality:

> Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty,--
> (III.iv.92-95)

Because of his disillusionment with his own mother as the result of an act of adultery which has forced him to look at her not as the ideal of virgin motherhood (Mary) but as ordinary, natural, sexual woman (Eve), Hamlet is disgusted with all of nature in its sexual and procreative aspects. The practical implications of his mother's seduction and the murder of his father for the young Hamlet, then, are that the son becomes an agent of destruction, both literally as a result of his father's commandment, and symbolically since he has turned away from woman because she betrays and corrupts, away from sexuality because it taints the blood, and thus away from procreation and from life itself.

The treatment of the structure of the fable for The English Traveller and A Woman Killed With Kindness is vastly similar not only because both plays were penned by Thomas Heywood but because Heywood chose a similar situation and plot in both cases. Dramatically, The English Traveller is simply a much poorer imitation of A Woman Killed. Both plays concern the seduction and fall of a chaste young wife by a lover who is a friend and even protégé of the husband. In each situation the husband exercises Christian charity; the wife repents and suffers just retribution. The narrative of both main plots opens with scenes of domestic bliss--ironic commentaries on the domestic chaos to follow. The happiness of the newly wedded pair in The English Traveller is

commented on by the soon-to-be seducer himself. Delavil tells Geraldine that though there might seem a disparity in the years of Old Wincott and his young wife, the husband's experience and poise actually compliment her "modesty and chaste respect." And thus "Betwixt them, there's so sweet a simpathie/ As crownes a noble marriage."[9] A Woman Killed With Kindness opens with the celebration of the marriage of Frankford and Anne, with the harmony of their new relationship symbolized in a dance. Sir Charles Mountford describes the blessings and perfection of the bride. She is noble of birth, qualified with ornaments of mind and body, has the education befitting the daughter of a prince, and, in a word, "She's beauty and perfection's eldest daughter."[10] Anne herself speaks of marriage and domestic duties in the language of the perfect Renaissance wife, much reminiscent of the tamed Kate at the conclusion of The Taming of the Shrew. She declares that if her imperfect beauties please her husband,

> They suffice me now I am married.
> His sweet content is like a flattering glass,
> To make my face seem fairer to mine eye:
> But the least wrinkle from his stormy brow
> Will blast the roses in my cheeks that grow.
> (i.32-36)

The irony of the scene, in view of Anne's later actions, is most emphasized, however, when Sir Charles declares to Frankford that his wife "doth become [him] like a well-made suit/ In which the tailor hath

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[9]Thomas Heywood, The English Traveller, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 9.

[10]Thomas Heywood, A Woman Killed With Kindness, ed. R. W. Van Fossen (London: Methuen, 1961), i.23.

us'd all his art." There is "music in this sympathy, it carries/ Consort and expectation of much joy" (i.59-70). Frankford himself purrs in the words of the contented husband:

> How happy am I among other men
> That in my mean estate embrace content. . . .
> But the chief
> Of all the sweet felicities on earth,
> I have a fair, a chaste, and loving wife,
> Perfection all, all truth, all ornament.
> (iv.1-14)

Heywood's two plays are also similar in their depiction of the seducer as a close friend of the man he cuckolds. A chief characteristic of the villain Wendoll is his remorse at having betrayed the man who has opened his house and purse to him. As the spirit of the Satanic tempter, and the false friend, Wendoll appears again as Delavil who also flees in remorse. In addition, both plays contain subplots which are ironic commentaries on the main plots. The subplot of The English Traveller is more comic than its sentimental counterpart in A Woman Killed, but the inability of man to rely on his own judgment and senses is particularly illustrated by the deception practiced upon Old Lionel, and the ease with which Old Lionel pardons the son who has tricked and defrauded him illustrates Heywood's typical theme of Christian charity destroying evil and restoring harmony. The prodigal son motif contrasts with the perfect son in young Geraldine, and ironically it is the whore in the subplot who is contrasted favorably with Mrs. Wincott. While the wife in the main plot betrays two men, with both of whom she has contracted, Blanda, despite advice to the contrary from her bawd, declares that she would not be in any way disloyal to young Lionel.

The subplot of A Woman Killed has usually been dismissed as irrelevant. But melodramatic and often ridiculous as the story of Sir Charles Mountford and his sister is, it is thematically joined to the main plot, for its subject is also the preservation of honor and the destruction of evil through kindness and love. Susan Mountford's is the familiar story, treated much more effectively by Shakespeare in Measure For Measure, of the virtuous sister brought to the point where, to save her brother, she must sacrifice her chastity to the villain. Susan is finally saved by the miraculous power of her virtue to transform the evil of her oppressor. Sir Charles Mountford cannot with honor accept a favor from his enemy. He must repay Sir Francis with the only good he possesses, the chastity of his sister, and when his debt is repaid, he must slay himself as Susan must kill herself before the actual loss of her honor. The examples of honor and virtue practiced by the Mountfords shock Sir Francis into responding with like generosity. Thus, as in the main plot, the practice of Christian virtue in the subplot has the power to overcome evil. In the main plot the emphasis is primarily upon a conventional Christianity which holds the salvation of the soul as the greatest good while in the subplot the emphasis is on a conventional notion of honor. Yet the emphasis on female chastity as an ultimate good is clear in both plots when they merge at the play's conclusion. The only member of the cast of characters missing in the opening celebration is present in the bitter-sweet reconciliation scene at the end--the still chaste Susan, a painful contrast to and reminder of Anne's adultery.

Though Heywood has begun to repeat himself in The English Traveller, he does add an interesting twist to the plot, to his vision of marriage, and, by extension, to his view of the consequences of adultery. Closer to eighteenth century sentimental tragedy and comedy of manners, this drama questions the sanctity of marriage as it is practiced during the period even more than some of its Renaissance predecessors by having the wife betray not only her older husband of a May/December match, but the young man to whom she has betrothed herself even before the death of her husband. Unlike A Woman Killed in which the dramatic emphasis is divided equally between Frankford and his wife, the focus of The English Traveller is on young Geraldine, a gentleman who, upon returning from his travels, plans to marry the woman he has loved for years. He learns, however, that absence does not make the heart grow fonder, that indeed she has become the wife of his friend and patron, a worthy old man named Wincott. Mrs. Wincott promises to marry Geraldine when her husband dies, Geraldine agrees to remain single until then, and both take solemn contractual oaths to bind their intent. Wincott's wife, unfortunately, is unable to resist the solicitations of Delavil, Geraldine's best friend, and is unfaithful not only to her husband, but to Geraldine. He later accidentally learns of the adultery and, disillusioned, plans to leave the country. Old Wincott insists that, before Geraldine departs, he attend a feast in his honor. Unable to endure the hypocrisy of Wincott's wife, who accuses him of faithlessness in deserting her, Geraldine tells her what he knows of her infidelity. She, in despair, confesses her guilt, repents, and dies.

In domestic plays concerned with the social issues of marriage practices and the moral issues of virtue's corruption and the failure of human perception of good and evil, Heywood emphasizes the stage of the wife's seduction to suggest the vulnerability of the institution of marriage, the frailty of the ties that bind, and the eternal temptation of evil to which mankind is subject. Wendoll and Delavil reflect the existence of a tempter of men constantly reappearing with a different name but otherwise unchanged. Heywood first hints that Delavil might be capable of sexual impropriety when, as Prudentilla points out, he seems to know more about the "Misticall secrets" of marriage than befits the knowledge of a single man (p. 30). His sophistication concerning bedroom matters between husband and wife is extended into his perception of other people. However, like Iago, Delavil uses his knowledge of human behavior to manipulate for his own ends. Realizing the social and sexual problems built into a May/December marriage and recognizing Mistress Wincott as vulnerable not only because of her aging husband but because of her attraction to young Geraldine, Delavil's first act in his plan of seduction is to get Geraldine out of the competition. And, like Iago, he is quite astute in having someone else accomplish his evil purposes for him while he himself stays out of the picture. He is almost as artful as Iago when he tells Geraldine's father not to blame his son for staying away from home so much to court his mistress and not to blame Mrs. Wincott for straying from her aged husband for such a perfect youth. Delavil even uses Iago's term <u>honest</u> to refer to the couple, appearing to defend them to Geraldine while he is actually insinuating damning lies. Delavil is seemingly worried about what such

scandalous rumors would do to the couple's reputation and, as young Geraldine's friend and the intended of Mrs. Wincott's sister, suggests to Old Geraldine that he devise a course to stop the scandal before it spreads. Then in the name of his love for young Geraldine, he requests not to have his name used as the first reporter. Thus Delavil has succeeded in planting in the old man's head the seeds of doubt, which result in his testing his son's honor, without calling attention to himself. When Old Geraldine, unaware of his son's betrothal, tells the young man that he has arranged a marriage for him, young Geraldine's refusal seems to be proof of his guilt. Then the father actually accuses his son of whoring, after which, though Geraldine denies the charge, the young man agrees to forbear Wincott's house to eliminate the scandal and please his father. Delavil has succeeded in clearing the way for himself to pursue an adulterous affair with Mrs. Wincott, the actual consummation of which takes place offstage, for the next time the two are found together, the fall has already occurred.

The seduction of Anne Frankford in A Woman Killed renders this a play markedly different and superior in attitude and treatment from other domestic tragedies. Wendoll's seduction is the catalyst which forces two partners in matrimony, comfortably and blindly blissful in their haven of domesticity, to examine themselves, the nature of temptation and evil, and the responsibilities and moral choices that accompany marriage. Unlike its predecessors, the play deals with events other than the lurid and historical homicides of the murder plays. Heywood, who has fictionalized his material, treats the story of a

wife's adultery and broken friendship with insight and compassion from the inside. As Powell observes,

> It is, of course, difficult to construct a play on domestic relations alone and uninfluenced strongly from without . . . Heywood came the nearest . . . and in Edward IV and A Woman Killed constructed plays in which the outside influence ceases after bringing things to a climax, and the falling action, here more than usually important, is carried on by husband and wife alone.[11]

Thus Wendoll and his seduction of Anne Frankford provide the outside force that set events in motion. The emphasis is on his characterization in the first part of the play while the second part concentrates on Frankford and his reaction and the final third on Anne's repentance and retribution. Wendoll is torn between his loyalty to Frankford and his desire for his wife. He is aware of his moral choice in the situation but ultimately decides to succumb to his passion and declare his love to Anne. At first Anne chides him, reminding him of her husband's love and kindness towards him. But when Wendoll tells her that he risks everything for her, and will be as "close as night" she is moved into relenting:

> My soul is wand'ring and hath lost her way.
> [To him.] O Master Wendoll, O.
> (VI.150-51)

The ease and suddenness with which the heroine capitulates to her seducer and falls into the sin of adultery has repeatedly disturbed critics, many of whom believe that Heywood bungled the central seduction scene and Anne's characterization. Other critics have rushed to Heywood's defense, explaining Anne's behavior in terms of

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[11]Powell, pp. 205-206.

Renaissance beliefs and practices or asserting that Wendoll's approach is effective enough to render the seduction plausible. The best of these theories, most of which are summarized by Van Fossen in his edition of the play, is perhaps offered by H. D. Smith, who relates Anne's fall to the tradition of the sinning wife as found in Elstred, Rosamund, and Jane Shore, and thus immediately recognizable by the audience.[12] The suddenness of the fall, however, may not be a bungling on Heywood's part or even the use of a Renaissance convention, but a deliberate attempt to emphasize one of the themes of the play--the ease with which virtue may undergo corruption, with which a virtuous wife may become an unfaithful one. The initial virtue of Anne Frankford is not intended as irony although it becomes ironic in retrospect. The tragedy is not that the husband is deceived by the falsehood of her initial appearance but rather that such good may be seduced by evil. When Frankford is faced with his wife's adultery, he is made aware of the reality of evil in the world and of the frailty of human judgment as a defense against it. As a Christian pilgrim, Frankford must be made aware of his own human fallibility and the always-present power of evil.

The second stage in the structure of dramas presenting a repentant adulteress involves the murder of the husband or the discovery of the adultery by the husband. As mentioned previously, in two of these plays, Arden of Feversham and Hamlet, the stages of seduction and murder are merged in response to the dramatic needs of the particular

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[12]H. D. Smith, "A Woman Killed With Kindness," PMLA, LIII (1938), 138-47.

play. Because Alice Arden is an active participant in adultery and murder, even though she does ultimately repent in the tradition of most domestic tragedies, she is as much seducer as seduced; and because the murder of Arden for both Alice and Mosby becomes a means of testing their love for each other, it is fused with the stage of seduction. The emphasis in Hamlet is on the character development of Hamlet, and therefore, because the interest is primarily upon the effect on Hamlet, the seduction of Gertrude and the murder of his father are presented prior to the action proper. In A Warning For Fair Women, however, a play in which sensationalism and homiletic statement are important, the murder of George Sanders is a natural and important action of the drama.

Once seduced, Anne Sanders has few qualms about the murder of her husband. George Browne makes the fateful decision: "My guilty soul, burnt with lust's hateful fire/ Must wade through blood t'obtain my vile desire" (912-13). Anne is willing, however, and encourages the deed by being "thoroughly resolved/ None but George Browne must be her second husband" (1098-99). The actual structure of the part of the play depicting the murder is similar to that of Arden of Feversham: attempts prevented by fate. After two vain efforts (Divine Providence exercises more vigor in Arden with at least five abortive attempts on the life of the husband), Browne succeeds in the murder. Unlike Thomas Arden, George Sanders is portrayed as an innocent and undeserving victim of the fate which awaits him, a model husband in the vein of those found in the conduct books. A loving husband and father, an upstanding merchant, a generous creditor, and a good citizen, Sanders' worst fault

is perhaps his shortsightedness in failing to tell his wife he is hard pressed for money at a time when she has bought new clothes. He is absolved from moral guilt in order to blacken the sin of the culprit, showing himself to be a good man even at the moment of death when he asks for God's mercy for Browne as well as for himself. The homiletic aspects of the play are also emphasized with the foiled attempts at assassination. Providence is obviously a factor when this good man's death is interrupted by the gentleman with the torch and then by the presence of Anne Sanders herself, in front of whom Browne refuses to do the murder. At the end of the second act, Tragedy remarks that it is not sin but destiny that cuts short Sanders' life. In a dumb show in which Sanders' life is symbolized by a tree, Anne refuses to cut the tree, but does not prevent Browne from doing so, and then rushes to embrace him. With this act, the allegorical figure of Chastitie enters in disarray, connecting not only Anne's seduction with the downfall of her honor but also her participation, if only passive, in her husband's murder.

In Hamlet, only because the spirit of the dead husband, restlessly seeking vengeance for its sudden murder, comes back to reveal the deed, do we have both the stages of the murder of the husband and the discovery of the murder by the husband, both events of which take place prior to the action proper in order to throw into relief their effect upon Hamlet. In The English Traveller and A Woman Killed With Kindness, the discovery of the wife's adultery by betrothed and husband respectively takes up a large part of the exposition simply because the main character of The Traveller is not the son of the betrayed husband

but the betrothed of the husband's wife while Frankford, the husband himself, shares center stage with his wife, and Heywood's treatment of their reaction to cuckoldry provides his chief vehicle for their character development.

In The English Traveller young Geraldine is warned of Mrs. Wincott's affair with his best friend Delavil by the servant Bess; thus the initial fall has occurred offstage so that the emphasis is thrown onto Geraldine's reaction, which is simply one of disbelief and anger at the bearer of the news. The irony here is in Geraldine's naiveté. Mrs. Wincott is obviously fickle--supposedly committed to Geraldine before his departure but, with his delayed absence, marrying an elderly man. Then upon Geraldine's return, she vows to marry him at the death of her husband, in essence becoming engaged to one man while wed to another. Yet the young man is unable to believe in her adultery with Delavil. Dismissing the idea of her infidelity completely, he breaks his word to his father and, because Wincott wants so much to see him, secretly goes to the old man's house at midnight, unknowingly creating a trap for the adulterers. After explaining the scandalous rumors to Wincott in explanation for his absence from the house he had once so frequented, he agrees to spend the night, planning to return home unseen before dawn. In order to acquiesce with Geraldine's request for secrecy, Wincott had absented himself from his wife's bedroom, pleading illness. When he goes to his sickroom after his meeting with Geraldine, the young man gives in to the ridiculously innocent impulse to visit Mrs. Wincott in her room (Geraldine is here and elsewhere at least guilty of emotional adultery himself), discovers the adulterers in bed

together, practices, like Frankford, Christian kindness, leaving their punishment to heaven, and, disillusioned, vows to leave the country with his secret, turning the punishment onto himself. In Geraldine's long soliloquy upon the discovery of the betrayal, we find the same trajectory from happiness to misfortune described in Frankford's speech in A Woman Killed--the lover's fond remembrance of his contract, the discovery, the suppressed moment of revenge, and the violence turned inward with the stripping of the man of all his comforts. However, the scene is less effective than Frankford's discovery scene because we are as unprepared for the surprise as Geraldine himself. It is an effective stage thriller,[13] but the audience is not able, as in the earlier play, to bring its awareness of the broken contract, the moral and social responsibility which we feel has been shirked, to bear on the particular situation in which one man has to deal with it in his own life, in which the moral theme becomes dramatized in the character of the suffering husband. A Woman Killed even contains a symbol of this theme; the lute, former symbol of harmony, is only one of things reminding him of his wife that Frankford gets rid of, for it has now become a representative of the unbearable tension between what was and what is.

Unlike those of The English Traveller, in the discovery scenes of A Woman Killed With Kindness, there is complete reconciliation

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[13]Heywood's affinity for sensationalism in this play is also indicated by the actual appearance of the lovers onstage in their nightgowns, discussing the success of their diversionary plan for Delavil to court Mrs. Wincott's sister, with Delavil explaining to the Wife his ploy to get rid of Geraldine.

between character and theme; we are able to empathize with Frankford's sufferings and yet view the firm development of the moral dilemma of a broken marriage. Thus the social and moral seriousness of the institution of marriage supports and explains the agony of the individual in question. Several critics reject this interpretation, however, insisting with Adams that "At every critical point in the play religious didacticism and not Elizabethan psychology directs the moral action of the characters. Heywood so emphasizes moral instruction that he neglects or distorts human motivation the better to make clear his point."[14] Ribner concurs with this opinion, saying that, like Shakespeare's, Heywood's tragedies are concerned with evil as a violation of cosmic order which must be restored by a divine providence. What emerges in Shakespeare, however, "as the poet's comprehensive vision of human destiny, conveyed in striking emotional terms," appears in Heywood in terms of "the Elizabethan devotional and homiletic tract."[15]

It is undeniable that the conventional moral struggle between vice and virtue, the salvation of the soul, and divine retribution are large threads in the fabric of the play, and there are certainly Christian overtones. But while the action in A Woman Killed With Kindness can be regarded in an ethical frame of reference, it is not just a dramatized sermon. It is, in fact, less concerned with making what Ribner calls a "theological point" than with dramatizing a

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[14]Adams, pp. 146-47.

[15]Ribner, p. 51.

familiar domestic relationship that is almost destroyed by the marital, social, and moral dilemma of the wife's adultery. And even though, as Ribner points out, only the immediate family is directly concerned, the problem of adultery as depicted by Heywood, representing as it did a sin, a crime against nature, and feminine evil itself, was not an example of the dramatist's lack of vision, his failure to offer any "real insight into the relation of man to his universe";[16] it is, rather, Heywood's method of relating the microcosm to the macrocosm, the moral failure in one domestic situation to the evil of a larger cosmic scheme. For perhaps the entire point of domestic tragedy as Heywood presents it in this play is that evil is as likely to be found in the seemingly peaceful innocence of domestic bliss as it is in the courts of kings--and is perhaps more dangerous in the very unlikelihood of its being there. This recognition and the dramatic fusion of character and moral theme render A Woman Killed different from and more effective than the earlier sensational and didactic murder plays.

The play opens with and is pervaded by domesticity, evident in the native setting and general atmosphere and in the theme itself. The plot is, after all, "concerned with the relationship between the loving husband and the erring wife, with adultery and the penalty exacted for it, with remorse and repentance, with forgiveness and reconciliation."[17] The initial scenes emphasizing the blessings and harmonious order of family life are not only skillful preparation for the antithetical

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[16]Ribner, pp. 52, 58-59.

[17]Van Fossen, p. xxx.

conclusion; they contribute thematically to the primary emphasis on the responsibilities and difficulties of the relationship between husband and wife. The source of Painter's Italian stories has been domesticated. The emphasis in the main plot is not on the sensational events of the seduction but on Frankford's relationship with his wife and on his friendly nature. Even the names are of common English stock, and the house itself takes on a kind of symbolic value--Mrs. Frankford's punishment is to be banished from "home."

The discovery scene, which conveys the illicit relationship by means of a "homely" occasion--card playing--continues this exploration of domesticity and the moral implications of the marriage relationship. It stresses the pollution of the marriage bed and the profanation of "nuptial sanctity" (xiii.10-16) while Frankford's initial encounter with his adulterous wife focuses on the taint and evil of her adultery and the love that has been between the marriage partners now so heedlessly destroyed (xiii.113-14). The actual process of this action begins with Nicholas, Frankford's servant, the only member of the household instinctively to identify Wendoll with Satan, telling his master out of loyalty about the adultery of Wendoll and his wife. But even in his mind it is "that Satan [Wendoll who] hath corrupted her/ For she was fair and chaste," and he declares to Frankford, "that base slave/ Enjoys my mistress and dishonours you," emphasizing the seduction of Anne Frankford (vi.179-80; viii.54-55). Like Geraldine, Frankford's first reaction is one of disbelief and anger at the servant bringing the ill tidings as he strikes Nicholas for his sauciness. But Frankford recognizes that Nicholas is no fool and is honest, and "though [he]

durst pawn [his] life, and on their faith/ Hazard the dear salvation of [his] soul," his suspicions are really aroused during the card game scene. Frankford's reactions to his suspicions are touching in his sincere hurt, his disillusionment and deep disappointment, as he laments, "what thing mortal may we trust/ When friends and bosom wives prove so unjust" (viii.78-79). And most importantly, he questions his own judgment, asking if all the seeming gold of his wife is simply plain copper and his best friend a "Judas that hath borne [his] purse" (viii.101-102). He valiantly resolves to put away his suspicions, but the sexual inuendoes and double entendres between his wife and Wendoll during the game of cards, especially with the names of the proposed games, convince him to set a trap for the lovers. At this point the scene concerning Susan and Sir Francis, inserted between Frankford's intention and his action in order to delay the progress of the main plot and increase tension, is especially telling. With the contrast of Susan's response to seduction and that of Anne Frankford, it reinforces the moral theme of the dishonor and sin in the loss of a woman's chastity and reveals the Renaissance equation of virginity with a wife's fidelity in marriage. Though unmarried, Susan proves to be the gold that Frankford had thought his wife to be, actually turning down Acton's material offer of gold to protect her more valuable chastity, vowing, "My honour never shall for gain be sold" (ix.53-54). The play turns immediately from this model of feminine virtue and honor to Frankford's discovery of his wife in bed with her lover. Because the actual discovery takes place offstage, Frankford's reaction commands dramatic interest with his agonized description of the lovers entwined

in each other's arms and his desperate self-control as he relates, unlike Hamlet, that lest he damn two precious souls and send them to Judgment with their sins upon them, "their two lives/ Had met upon [his] rapier" (xiii.42-49). Before awakening them, he pauses for a painful recollection of his former love and happiness, wishing he could "call back yesterday" and take his wife "As spotless as an angel" in his arms (xiii.51-65). The strongest emphasis is placed upon the way this early bliss has been destroyed by the breaking of the marriage bond. He asks God for patience to keep him from doing any violence, acting very much the role of the perfect Christian gentleman; but Heywood inserts a realistic human touch when Frankford does draw his sword on Wendoll and has to be restrained, as is Abraham by the angel, by the hand of a serving maid (xiii.68-69). Thus Heywood's drama is domestic in a way in which other murder and adultery plays are not because the emphasis is on the relationship between husband and wife and not on the sensational events of the seduction or the prospect of a violent revenge or external execution; it works, rather, from the inside. For this stage of discovery, as elsewhere in the play, Heywood integrates domestic details with theme, plot, and character. For once, the didacticism expected in a domestic tragedy does not detract but contributes to the work as drama. As Doran points out, the superiority of the play resides in its dramatic interest: "the ethical point of view from which the action is regarded moves harmoniously with the fable. . . . Whether or not Heywood intended to preach a sermon on

Christian forbearance in A Woman Killed, the important thing is that he wrote a good play."[18]

The third stage of the structure of the fable, that of the wife's repentance for her sin of adultery, is the turning point in the development of her character and the action which prevents her from being included with the female villainesses whose evil lies in their sexuality. It is at this stage that the woman who has broken with social and moral conventions recognizes the error of her ways and comes back into the fold. Because Alice Arden, with her active participation in seduction and murder, can also be classified as one of the heroine/villainesses, her repentance and retribution are naturally not as great a thrust of the play as are the more spectacular events of seduction and attempted murder. Except for Alice none of the murderers suffers pangs of remorse, and even her repentance is not totally convincing; it takes place after she is arrested (though she has wavered throughout the play); her desire for divine mercy does not result in her showing mercy to Bradshaw by pleading for his release; and she goes to her execution blaming Mosby for leading her astray rather than accepting responsibility for her own actions. Because the repentance scenes are hastily sketched, the emphasis is on the drama of adultery and murder, and the play is less homiletic than a drama such as A Warning For Fair Women.

Alice's repentance develops in a way similar to that of Lady Macbeth; it is the blood of her victim which haunts her and which

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[18]Madelaine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 351.

eventually results in her going to pieces. While Lady Macbeth sleep-walks, Alice has fits of uncontrollable crying which almost give her away (xiv.300). She balks at murdering her husband and has moments of indecision at various points in the play, but under Mosby's encouragement, she continues on her demoniacal course with renewed vigor--at times taking her turn as Lady Macbeth by pushing Mosby. She declares to Black Will that she wishes Arden would hurry to his death so that she would be free of his arms that encircle her like the snakes of Tisiphone, perhaps even here revealing some unconscious hesitation, for, ironically, Tisiphone's snakes awakened remorse by stinging the conscience. But, as with Lady Macbeth, there is no fear of the deed itself; it is, rather, the blood of her victim that produces the remorse and guilt which in the case of the Queen leads to her destruction and in the case of Alice Arden to some degree of repentance: the blood cleaving to the floor of the house after Arden's body has been removed despite Alice's frantic washing and scraping with her nails, the blood covering his body when she looks at it in the countinghouse, smeared on the handtowel and knife with which he was killed and carelessly left unhidden by Michael, spotting the snow across which his body was carried, and, most significantly, welling forth anew from his wounds when his body is discovered, signifying to everyone, including Alice, her obvious guilt. Thus even in death it is the husband who is the catalyst for his wife's repentance. Faced with his blood and with execution, Alice, in her hope for salvation, repents her misdeeds and believes God will forgive them (xviii.9-11).

Because the intent of A Warning For Fair Women is much more homiletic than that of Arden of Feversham, the stage of repentance is more heavily emphasized. However, because of the theological considerations, the development of Anne Sanders' character is not dramatically effective; she does not recognize her sin, accept the responsibility for it, and grow into repentance but rather undergoes a sudden change of character in this tradition where moral, not character, is important. When all recourse is cut off, she confesses her complicity and undergoes the repentant mood exalted by the genre. Anne's character is simply not consistent throughout the play; the dramatist merely manipulates it for instructional purposes.

Unlike Arden, all the characters in A Warning recognize the magnitude of the sins of murder and adultery, and guilty and innocent alike believe in the everlasting damnation which will result from the deeds unless penance and expiation win divine mercy for the guilty. The character Tragedy explains the popular idea of the chain of vice, indicating how lust infects and weakens the soul so that crime leads to greater crime as the natural defenses of conscience become weakened. Tragedy goes on to describe the operation of Sin as occurring in three degrees: temptation, consent, and repentance. Anne Sanders certainly moves through these stages, but she seems to undergo repentance twice. She repents immediately upon the doing of the deed. Like Beatrice Joanna of The Changeling, Anne is a voyeur; she regrets an action only when it becomes too real. For example, when Browne sends his handkerchief dipped in Sanders' blood as a token of his love, Anne cannot deal with the reality and ugliness of the situation but cries, "Oh shew not

me that ensigne of despaire/ But hide it, burne it, bury it in the earth" (11.1535-36). At this point she even threatens to submit to justice and follow her husband to death. There is also a tremendous change in her attitude toward Browne. When Drury tells her to take comfort in him, she retorts that she would as soon

> [F]eed on poyson and be fat,
> Or looke upon the Basiliske and live,
> Or surfet daily and be stil in health,
> Or leape into the sea and not be drownde:
> All these are even as possible as this,
> That I should be recomforted by him,
> That is the Authour of my whole lament.
> (1640-46)

When George Browne admits his deed to the authorities, however, he also absolves Anne from any part in the murder, and this reprieve causes another change in attitude; she stands forth and fights for her life. She vehemently denies any part in the murder, whether in thought or deed; she bribes Drury and Drury's servant to her side; she proclaims herself a wronged innocent; and she even wins a convert to her cause, one of the ministers whose intention--namely to win her himself--is severely rebuked by a more critical judge. During her continued denial of any complicity in the murder, however, she is wearing a white rose in token of her "spotless innocence," the color of which, as she speaks, is observed by the Lord Justice to become "of another hue" (11.2313, 2375). Even after she is sentenced, Anne attempts to persuade Drury to exonerate her. Having repented of her part in the crime, however, Drury refuses to endanger her soul with perjury and becomes the example and catalyst for Anne's ultimate repentance. Anne sends for the Dean of St. Paul's, confesses her "wicked lust" and "wilful sinne," and declares

herself truly repentant (11.2621-22). She asks mercy from all she has injured and thanks God for the awareness of sin which enables her in time to do the penance in this world that will attain her salvation in the next. The importance of this stage of repentance towards the homiletic message of the play is evident in the climactic moment when Anne meets her assembled children, counseling them on the necessity of virtuous living, exhorting them to use her as an example of the results of evil and adultery, and bequesting them a book of John Bradford's meditations.

While there is some minor motivation for Alice Arden and Anne Sanders' stage of repentance in the catalyst of the bleeding wounds of Thomas Arden and the example of Anne Drury, on the whole it is undeveloped, with the result that their repentance becomes an abrupt change of character, more homiletic than dramatic. In Hamlet, The English Traveller, and A Woman Killed With Kindness, however, plays in which the husbands are not killed but discover their wives' adultery so that their reactions become the catalysts for their wives' repentance, the motivation is more significant since the interest rests on the husbands as reactors as much as on the wives' repentance.[19]

Because Gertrude lacks the intelligence and moral sensitivity to be aware of Claudius' evil or even of his assassination of her husband, she is not able to come to a stage of repentance without the

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[19]Though the husband is killed in Hamlet, as the ghost he does indicate his knowledge of his wife's adultery and, bequeathing his revelation to his son, creates a proxy. Thus it is the husband/son's reaction to the discovery and his effect on the wife/mother's repentance that capture much of the play's dramatic interest.

admonishment of her son, himself a kind of catalyst-proxy for her dead husband. There is as much interest in the closet scene in Hamlet's behavior, his response to his father's command to take vengeance but not to "contrive/ Against [his] mother aught," as there is in Gertrude's response to his tirade (I.v.85-86). After the play staged to "catch the conscience of the king," Hamlet resolves to confront his mother, praying that the "soul of Nero" not enter his "firm bosom" and vowing to "speak daggers to her, but use none" (III.iii.412-14). In the interim he has a perfect opportunity to kill Claudius, whose unsuccessful attempt at repentance is contrasted with the true repentance of Gertrude in the scene to follow. But, thinking that Claudius is praying, Hamlet's refusal to kill him results from the same theological concept at work in Frankford's reaction upon finding his wife in bed with her lover, though Frankford's is no real human emotion but a concern for the souls of the sinners. Both Hamlet and Frankford know that a person discovered in the midst of sin and killed without a chance to repent will be eternally damned. The dramatic effect in the two plays, however, is quite different. In Hamlet, the impression of the scene, charged with dramatic irony, is one of disappointment. Unaware that Claudius cannot repent and of his perfect opportunity for revenge, Hamlet restrains himself because, unlike Frankford, he does not intend the salvation of Claudius' soul.

Like the nunnery scene, the closet scene is developed by means of violent fluctuations of emotion, with the total effect being once again one of emotional complexity and confusion. The confusion is, again, the result of Hamlet's love/hatred for a woman, this time his

mother. The inextricability of these emotions and of the connection between man and woman in marriage are revealed as Hamlet tells Claudius,

> Farewell, dear mother
> King. Thy loving father, Hamlet.
> Hamlet. My mother: father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother. (IV.iii.51-54)

Hamlet's dilemma here is how, knowing what marriage means in terms of human union, he is to fulfill the ghost's command--to revenge himself upon Claudius and yet not touch his mother. His inability to resolve this provides a motivation for the hesitation which makes him so fascinating a character.

Hamlet's actual confrontation with his mother, during which his purpose alters from a destructive to a more redemptive one, reveals a change in attitude toward her at least as interesting as her repentance and an inextricable part of that progress. He first attacks relentlessly, accusing her of killing a king and marrying his brother and actually threatening his mother so that she fears for her life. Realizing that Gertrude is certainly at times distanced from reality, Hamlet forces her to look at the tangible, ugly facts, creating a strong impact by thrusting the pictures of his father and Claudius in front of her, comparing their vastly different characteristics, and striking home with the grossness and evil of her choice. Contrasting the two brothers by using images of King Hamlet's beauty, grace, and healthy perfection versus Claudius' diseased foulness, he so affects Gertrude that she cries:

O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.
(III.iv.88-91)

But once having begun his tirade, Hamlet becomes so emotional that he virtually rubs his mother's nose in her own filth, almost spitting his words:

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty,--
(III.iv.92-95)

His attack is so forceful and Gertrude's reaction so pitiful as she tells her son that his words are as "daggers" and begs for mercy that the ghost enters to remind Hamlet of his true purpose. As the wronged husband, the spirit reveals the same kind of sympathy for the erring wife that one finds in Frankford's attitude towards Anne while Hamlet's behavior, as proxy for the husband, is totally opposite. Though Hamlet does not relent much, his words do become less destructive and more redemptive, revealing at least a concern for his mother and an urge towards some kind of reunion. His language takes on the images of the physician who knows he must lance the putrified ulcer in order to prevent infection and restore the patient to health, and his mother responds, "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain" (III.iv.156). He tells Gertrude to "repent what's past; avoid what is to come," to refrain from Claudius' bed this night and the next abstinence will be easier, to "Assume a virtue" if she has it not (III.iv.150,160). Here Hamlet is equating virtue with sexual abstinence, indicating the degree of disillusionment into which his mother's adultery has thrown him.

Her surrender to repentance is indicated when she asks her son what she is to do, and, again, he commands her to refrain from sexual contact with Claudius and not to allow him to wheedle any information of Hamlet's knowledge from her. As is seen at the beginning of the next scene, the sincerity of her promise to keep his secret is proven when Claudius enters, asks about Hamlet, and she responds that he is "mad as the sea and wind" (IV.i.7). From this point there is no indication that she betrays him and every indication that she works for his good. Hamlet has, indeed, brought her to a recognition of her sin and to true contrition.

As with Hamlet the repentance of the adulterous wife in The English Traveller and A Woman Killed With Kindness comes about as the result of the strong admonishment of a male figure who has been betrayed by her, but with each successive play, his sexual and social bond with her becomes increasingly closer, from son to betrothed to husband. Geraldine, as the result of what he believes to be divine providence, becomes the agent of Mrs. Wincott's redemption in The English Traveller. Upon first discovering her in bed with her lover, he, like Frankford, thanks Heaven he does not have his sword so that he does no violence. But perhaps because he is not Mrs. Wincott's husband, only her betrothed, he refrains from confronting her at once, intending, instead, to leave the country which produced two such monsters. Here and later, however, when he does finally accuse her, able to bear her hypocrisy no longer, he compares her to the serpent "Who was the first that did corrupt [her] sex,/ The Devill" (p. 90). Upon discovery of the adultery, his love for her is immediately destroyed, but he, like

Frankford, decides to pardon her and leave her punishment to heaven. Unaware of Geraldine's knowledge and reason for leaving, Mrs. Wincott chastizes him for abandoning her at a final leave-taking dinner after which he explodes. Like Hamlet, he plays "the Doctor/ To open [her] deafe eares" and forces her to see the ugliness and evil of her actions. When asked where he obtained his information, Geraldine responds that he was provided the opportunity by Providence, that he kept all knowledge of her transgression secret in the hope of her repentance. And Mrs. Wincott responds, "Which begins/ Thus low upon my knees" (p. 91). Like Frankford, Geraldine's Christian "kindness" is a bit questionable, for he tells the Wife, "Die, and die soone, acquit me of my Oath/ But prethee die repentant" (p. 91). His words do have their intended effect, however, as evidenced in Mrs. Wincott's response to Delavil upon their next meeting. When he answers with his name to her question concerning his identity, she replies:

> Th'art then a Devill that presents before me
> My horrid sins; persuades me to dispaire;
> When [Geraldine] like a good Angel sent from Heaven,
> Besought me of repentance.
> (p. 92)

The resolute "kindness" of the betrayed male is also the catalyst for the adulterous wife's repentance in A Woman Killed With Kindness. Frankford's method of securing his wife's repentance offers a more domestic than homiletic solution to the moral dilemma of the play, again complementing theme with character development; unlike the domestic tragedies in which there is external, physical revenge, the punishment here is internal, through the growing consciousness of guilt and repentance on the part of the sinner. Only Anne's heartfelt

contrition can alleviate the mounting debt she feels to her husband and lead to the mending of their broken contract even in death. Unlike the repentance of adulterous wives such as Alice Arden and Mrs. Wincott, Anne Frankford's repentance is an increasingly painful awareness of the moral responsibility she has forfeited, a growth in character appropriate to the social and moral theme of the play instead of an abrupt homiletic statement. Her initial yielding to Wendoll indicates an understanding that she has been "enchanted" by his artful persuasiveness a fear that this maze may "prove the labyrinth of sin," revealing some degree of inner struggle even here (vi.159-61). She regrets her rash deed throughout the play, stating in an aside during the card game replete with sexual inuendo, "would I had never dealt" (viii.171). Loathing and fear seem to have replaced whatever pleasurable emotions she may have experienced earlier. Anne's own analysis of the situation reveals a woman who fell not so much from an active desire to do evil but from a lack of prudence and courage:

> You have tempted me to mischief, Master Wendoll;
> I have done I know not what. Well, you plead custom;
> That which for want of wit I granted erst
> I now must yield through fear. Come, come, let's in.
> Once o'er shoes, we are straight o'er head in sin.
> (xi.110-14).

Swept away by Wendoll's passion, she did not think clearly; now she perceives the evil of her actions but can see no way out.

It is not until Anne is faced with the actuality of her husband's knowledge of her adultery, with his physical presence confronting her together with her lover, that she is able to change the pattern of her actions, can truly act on her guilt and regret. She immediately

accepts responsibility for her choices and assumes that death is the only atonement for her betrayal of Frankford. In this moment of remorse and humiliation, her character is rendered all the more human by her one request of her husband:

> Though I deserve a thousand thousand fold
> More than you can inflict, yet, once my husband,
> . . . mark not my face
> Nor hack me with your sword, but let me go
> Perfect and undeformed to my tomb.
> (xiii.94-100)

Anne is here aware that her action means that she is no longer deserving of the title of "wife." Her infidelity, she recognizes, bans her from enjoying the company of husband and children, and her one public address to the audience warns against the violation of marital vows (xiii.141-44). For Anne has understood throughout the play that there is a connection between matrimonial faithfulness and the welfare of a woman's soul, telling Wendoll: "The love I bear my husband is as precious/ As my soul's health" (vi.140-41).

Frankford's considered decision concerning his wife's punishment is as dramatically important to the theme of the play as Anne's repentance itself and is an integral part of that process. When the maid prevents his assault on Wendoll, Frankford alludes to the Bible story of the angel's intervention of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham's sword, and he too maintains what he believes to be a Christian course in withholding immediate physical revenge on his wife, a course counter to the customary punishment for adultery expected even by Anne herself, who felt that it would be dishonorable for her husband to adopt any other action. This belief is, as has been pointed out,

substantiated by the tradition of vengeance in Renaissance drama, which generally conformed to the Italianate code of honor demanding blood revenge, and by actual practice in which the husband has the right to kill an unfaithful wife. Frankford's "merciful" treatment, which ironically results in his wife's death anyway, renders him a "spokesman for a higher code, that which stems directly from Christ's treatment of the woman taken in adultery."[20] His first reaction is highly sentimental as he brings in Anne's children to increase her guilt and contrition and then removes them before her "adulterous breath may blast their spirits/ With her infectious thoughts" (xiii.126-27). Anne admits her sin in soliloquy but does not reveal a full understanding of the value of her spirituality, for she is willing to hazard the redemption of her soul to wipe out the scandal, still unaware that earthly honor is a mere imitation of the soul's salvation. The actions taken by her husband bring her to this revelation. He does not design his punishment as an act of kindness in this world but gives her the time and motivation to contemplate, repent, and save her soul.

The interim in between Frankford's banishment of his wife and her proven repentance is taken up by a scene from the subplot but one which dramatically reinforces the theme of the main plot. In this interlude, Sir Charles asks his sister to submit to Sir Frances in order to save the brother's name, equating the value of her chastity with his reputation, female chastity with male honor. He says to her, "Thy honour and my soul are equal in my regard" (xiv.61). This

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[20]Clark, p. 183.

emphasis on the value of female chastity (in marriage, fidelity) merely foreshadows and reinforces the decisions Anne Frankford will make. Realizing that her every thought must seek repentance, she abstains from food, preparing a penance which is planned to result in her death but which will win her divine mercy. The meeting between Anne and Wendoll in scene xvi when he stops her as she is going to the manor house reveals the completeness of her repentance. Recognizing him as temptation to resume her evil ways, as a "sin" that in her "repentant eyes seems ugly black," she refuses to save her body and lose her hope for spiritual salvation (xvi.109-11). The confrontation between Anne and Nicholas earlier in the scene accomplishes the same purpose. Very much a proponent of his master, Nicholas enters, extends the lute with a brusque "There," and responds to her plaintive remembrance of it in a cold tone that begins with a pointedly sexual innuendo (xvi.17 ff.). The sincerity of Anne's remorse, her genuine grief, and her vow to starve herself to death move even the disapproving Nicholas to the point where he must leave before he too begins to cry. His change of heart is Heywood's skillful method of showing Frankford's most staunch ally, the man who first exposed the adultery to his master, now strongly pitying of the woman he had earlier called a whore. Thus in the world of this play, Heywood succeeds in illustrating for his audience that a psychological rather than a physical punishment is more effective in moving a sinner to true repentance and the possibility for salvation. As Bowers points out, the playwright has the distinction of being the first to "put into dramatic form . . . the punishment which

arises from the erring characters' consciousness of their guilt in the place of the punishment of an exterior physical revenge."[21]

The conclusion of each of these domestic tragedies involving an adulterous wife completes the pattern of sin, repentance, atonement, and forgiveness traditional with the genre. The scheme of retribution is relatively simple: it is designed to emphasize that the wages of sin is death and that the only atonement for an adulterous wife is to die. Because most of Arden of Feversham deals with the spectacular events of seduction and attempted murder, the final scenes of repentance and retribution are cursorily dramatized, but the author does wish to impress upon the audience that no one in the plot escapes his just deserts, for in an epilogue he tells how each meets his death. Alice Arden's execution is particularly significant, however, for she is not hanged or guillotined but burned at the stake in Canterbury, a fate meted out to Renaissance wives whose adultery constituted not only sexual betrayal but petit treason.

Although more extendedly developed because more homiletic, the retribution scenes of A Warning For Fair Women are also typically ironic, for the protagonist learns that the happiness for which she has at least tacitly conspired to commit murder is precluded by that same deed. The somberness and moral earnestness of A Warning makes even A Woman Killed With Kindness seem almost flippant by comparison. There is no one in the play who is willing to risk his soul for anything else, and Anne Sanders comes to the point that she is thankful that God

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[21]Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 225.

discovered her sin and punished it on earth since this divine retribution is instrumental in her ultimate salvation. There are various references to scripture and providence throughout the play which prepare for the final homiletic statement and Anne's deserved execution, but, unlike A Woman Killed in which the allusions are a more integrated part of a character, these occur almost exclusively at times of crisis calling for a didactic assertion. Though the actual execution takes place offstage, Anne's welcoming of it, her repentance before execution, is climactic; because her deed was so foul, she is a glorious convert, a real triumph for the faith.

For the writers of domestic tragedy, there is a general tendency to sensationalize the un-Christian behavior of the wicked, to present the sinner in caricature, to moralize on the inevitable ruin, and especially to force an erstwhile examplar of depravity into glorious repentance. In other words, the structure of the fable moves from a violation of conventional order to a recognition on the part of the rebel of the immorality of that violation to a restoration of the order with the repentance and death of the violator. Even in a more effective play such as A Woman Killed With Kindness, there comes with Anne Frankford's repentance and self-penance leading to death the forgiveness by husband, friends, and audience alike that restores harmony to the world of the play and results in the couple's triumphant remarriage in death. Peter Ure is even willing to assert that the play is not, in any common sense, tragic because "the fracture which was felt to possess a tragic quality--the breaking of the contract

and of Frankford--is allowed to mend before the conclusion."[22] A creative genius like that of Shakespeare, however, understood that great tragedy, and life itself, could be more complicated than the simple sin, repentance, retribution, and forgiveness pattern set up by many Jacobean dramatists, that sometimes the death of the sinner, or of the hero, did not restore order and harmony. An example of this more complex vision is evident in the repentance and retribution in death of Hamlet's mother. Gertrude certainly undergoes during the closet scene the guilt and repentance experienced by other adulterous wives in this group and apparently acts on her remorse, complying with Hamlet's wish not to betray him. However, she does defend Claudius to Laertes after Hamlet's departure for England, telling him that the King had no part in his father's death, and there is no indication of a serious breach of any kind between Claudius and Gertrude. The Queen's death is not a self-imposed penance, nor does it follow in the usual manner of retributory justice after an agonized and public confession; rather it is the ironic result of Claudius' attempt to murder Hamlet. In order not to expose himself, the husband is powerless to stop the woman for whom he has murdered from drinking a toast to her son from a poisoned cup. Gertrude's character development is not, then, a straightforward pattern of sin, exposure, repentance, and atonement. Her death is built on a series of ironies, and it does not restore order to the universe.

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[22]Peter Ure, "Marriage and the Domestic Drama in Heywood and Ford," ES, 32 (1951), 209-10.

However, it does release whatever was preventing Hamlet from acting, and it reveals the essential love he had felt for his mother even while attacking her. As the son was the catalyst for the mother's repentance, so the mother, if in death, is the catalyst for the son's just revenge. The instant that Gertrude dies, Hamlet is all activity. The barrier represented by Gertrude between Hamlet and his victim is down. The union between husband and wife is destroyed; Hamlet's father is no longer his mother. As Ophelia's death released the pent up love that Hamlet felt for woman, so Gertrude's death lets flow the blocked hatred and revenge that was caused by woman. The rapid conclusion of this drama, spurred on by Gertrude's death, is no mere scaffold speech, confession, or simple restoration of harmony, but rather a bewildering succession of events that results in the expulsion of the evil contaminating Denmark, including Gertrude's sin, but at an incredible cost. It reflects the tremendous ironies and mixed emotions that complicate retributive justice, great tragedy, and life itself.

Although never attaining this degree of complexity, the retribution in Heywood's plays, especially A Woman Killed With Kindness, is certainly more an outgrowth of character than the mere scaffold speeches of earlier domestic tragedies. The scheme of retribution in The English Traveller, however, shows little diversity from its superior model. Overcome with remorse and having written a final letter to Geraldine in which she confesses, asks for forgiveness, and hopes for heaven's grace, Mrs. Wincott dies. Like Frankford, Wincott forgives his wife because he believes her truly remorseful and pardoned by heaven. Again presenting a pattern of redemption of the

guilty through sincere repentance and a just earthly retribution, Heywood does little more than repeat himself in this play.

The final retributory scenes of A Woman Killed With Kindness much more effectively connect character development with theme. Contrary to the treatment of Mrs. Wincott, we have been allowed to understand a great deal more of Anne Frankford's feelings about her adultery and of her reactions to the disillusionment of her husband; she is as well-developed a character as Frankford, and the last scene merely carries forward to death the sincerity of her repentance. She is allowed to die reunited with her husband, but, unlike Mrs. Wincott, her death does not smack of the sentimentality of expiration from a broken heart. She told Nicholas earlier that she had resolved to take no more nourishment, and Jenkin confirms the carrying out of that resolution in the last scene. Saying that Frankford was charitable, that he would have killed the adulterers, Anne's own brother comes to berate her, but finding her so pale, ill, and totally repentant, he, like Nicholas, takes pity on her. This repentance makes a last interview between Frankford and his wife almost mandatory. When he arrives, Anne again begs forgiveness for her sin so that Heaven will forgive her. She pleads not to be taken again as his wife but for his aid in her efforts to win salvation. As her husband and a Christian, Frankford cannot refuse; they are reunited in a kind of spiritual remarriage after which she dies. This conclusion creates a mixture of emotions. Joy at the salvation of Anne's soul somewhat mitigates the grief at her death. As Ure points out, this combination of the happiness and grief of the marriage partners enables Heywood to define

their second marriage as "something new in kind, wrested from sorrow and penitance."[23]

While Heywood may have discovered no answer to the moral dilemma of adultery, the forgiveness of the husband leading to an unforced marital reunion reveals at least a different facet to the uncompromising attitude toward the fallen woman. While Frankford's "kindness" leads eventually to the death of his wife and her forgiveness by all is only attained with a repentance so certain that it involves starvation, at least she is not physically abused or executed. And though there are many ironies inherent in this reversal of the conventional pattern of domestic tragedy, especially the one concerning the question of any real mercy apparent in Frankford's more indirect punishment, it is to Heywood's credit, as M. C. Bradbrook points out, that he produced a most "unconventional study of marriage not as a state but as a relationship."[24]

The adulteresses discussed in this section, whose characteristics of lust, ignorance, passivity, or lack of moral strength are made serious flaws by dramatists who present them as negatives of a necessary virtue, are part of a distinctive feature of the change in tragedy apparent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. During this period a "drama of power" gives way to a "drama of sex." And for women this sexual experience becomes tragic when it involves their honor, strictly defined in terms of chastity and obedience. The plays concerning a repentant adulteress depict her as allowing the loss of the

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[23]Ure, p. 210.

[24]M. C. Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), p. 137.

former through adultery resulting sometimes in the loss of the latter in its extreme form through the murder of him she should obey. However, in these plays dishonor demands repentance and retribution in the form of death if there is to be any justice in this world, and for many Renaissance tragic writers, there was, indeed, justice.

CHAPTER IV

ADULTERY AS A SYMBOL OF FEMININE VILLAINY: THE DELIBERATE ADULTERESS

As Renaissance dramatists move further away from society and its moral order and into a more penetrating exploration of the individual, a final type of adulteress figure begins to appear. This is the consummate heroine/villainess--the adulterous wife who is either aware of morality and has consciously chosen to break the moral code espoused by society or the one who is amoral, totally centered on the self. If morality is inextricably tied up with society, implying a capability of choosing between right and wrong action as so judged by that society, then this adulteress represents a final movement away from society, inward into the self. The two overriding motivations for this break with conventional morés, and so the two types of heroine/villainesses appearing in this section, are those that commit adultery as the result of lust and those who are unfaithful to their husbands as the result of a desire for power which is inextricably connected with sexual desire. The frame of reference which most of these playwrights use to impart to the audience the completeness with which this woman breaks from societal morés is to connect her with the capacity for murder. One of the literary commonplaces of the age, expressed in Thomas Dekker's Lust's Dominion, is that "Murder and Lust are twins." Eleazar accuses Eugenia, "Being weary of me thou wouldst worry me/ Because some new

love makes thee loath thine old."[1] Cardinal Monticelso in Webster's The White Devil implies that because Vittoria Corombona is capable of committing adultery, she is also capable of murdering her husband. He states to the English ambassador:

> You know what whore is. Next the devil
> adultery
> Enters the devil murder.
>
> (III.ii.106-107)

And in The Insatiate Countess, Isabella uses promises of sensual delight to persuade a Spanish colonel to carry out her desire for vengeance on a past lover with whom she committed adultery. Upon the death of Massino, Don Sago comments:

> This is the end of lust, where men may see
> Murders the shadow of Adulterie:
> And follows it to death.
>
> (p. 68)

Besides understanding the obviously practical necessity of eliminating the husband in order to free the wife to be with her lover,[2] Dekker, Webster, and Marston all imply an intrinsic relationship between the capacity for adultery and the capacity for murder. Adultery is the ultimate betrayal and disruption of the family unit, viewed at this time as the structure upon which society was based, as a kind of microcosm for society itself, and murder can be seen as an expression of

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[1]Thomas Dekker, Lust's Dominion, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), I.i.94-97.

[2]The irony of this situation lies in the fact that even a woman who denies conventional morality by breaking her marriage vows seeks to reestablish some kind of order in the forced removal of her husband; if undetected for the murder, she will regain a measure of approval in the eyes of society.

this disruption on a larger scale. The adulterous wife of the plays included in this group is a type of woman who is willing to destroy social structures in order to achieve individual fulfillment--a characteristic which renders her at once threatening and exciting. She becomes a kind of Marlovian overreacher, a temptress whose downfall lies in her sexuality. The flaw with which most of the heroine/villainesses of the Renaissance stage are associated is an excess of sexual passion, for some connected with a lust for power. And the result of their inability to control their sexual desires is an active participation in adultery and in the corroboration to murder, if not the actual killing of their husbands, an act which is generally left to a male figure. Here it is female sexuality which leads to the downfall not only of the woman but of the lover tempted by desire for the woman.

The first of the two types of heroine/villainesses analyzed in this section is one who is motivated to commit adultery by sheer sexual lust. Though each dramatist reveals his distinct obsessions, style, and tone, all nine of the plays which present this adulterous wife render her as possessing certain common traits which will be explored here in the context of the individual plays: a one-dimensional nature emphasized through characterization and structure, an active participation in or initiation of adultery and murder, a gradual immersion in evil as the result of the incremental nature of sin, the lack of any real remorse, and a just retribution through the suffering of a horrible death.

First of all, the method of characterization generally used to depict this heroine/villainess is to emphasize one dimension of human

evil and to create only those other qualities of character that result from or revolve around the central trait of unfaithfulness. This does not always imply, however, a lack of depth in characterization. For although a figure like Shakespeare's Goneril does not grow through pain to a new awareness of herself or of morality, does not agonize over moral issues, we are nevertheless fascinated by the many facets and agility of a mind that basically does not change in the course of the play. We are presented with one continuous image but are allowed to see the various sides of that image.

The one-dimensionality of character is evident in a play like George Peele's Edward I, where a major flaw in characterization results in a heroine who is sometimes seen as one type of character and sometimes as another, but always as a type. Peele seems to be fascinated on the one hand with "Merrie England," that ideal world in which lovers assume more importance than battles and political theories and who are in their personal relations more hearty than regal. Ned Longshanks and his lovely Nell form more the "stuff of balladry" than history, and as such the characterization lacks complexity or depth.[3] On the other hand, Queen Elinor is also rendered as the Spanish princess whose prototypical lust is accompanied by the many other sins associated by Englishmen with the Spanish. This section, which reflects the most obvious departure from historical fact and which vilifies Queen Elinor, seems to be based on two popular ballads, "The lamentable fall of Queene Elnor" and "Queen Eleanor's Confession." One critic makes use

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[3]George Peele, Edward I, in The Dramatic Works of George Peele, ed. Frank S. Hook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 16.

of the inconsistent characterization of the Queen plus the author's failure to integrate the plot of her pride and its consequences with the rest of the play, in addition to some unusual stage directions and the obvious omission of scenes, to argue that the extant text is a revision of an earlier version which did not include the episodes based upon the two ballads.[4]

The inconsistency of character is reflected in both language and actions. In the character of "old Nell," helpmate to her husband Longshanks, Elinor's speech is earthy and vigorous; she describes her courtship with Edward:

> Ile tel thee girle when I was faire and young,
> I found such honny in sweet Edwards tongue,
> As I could never spend one idle walke,
> But Ned and I would piece it out with talke.
> (11.1064-67)

The birth of her son produces the exclamation, "Brother thers a fist I warrent you wil holde a Mace as fast as ever did father or grandfather before him" (11.1467-68). And her response to the boy's christening is to say, "They have touzed him, and washt him throughlie and that bee good" (11.1946-47). In this character, the Queen's actions are as down-to-earth as her speech. She arrives in Wales only to face, complainingly, the humid summer weather, gasping for breath and dripping with perspiration. Made irritable by the heat, she responds to an uncontrollable urge to box her Ned's ear, and she chastizes the nurse for allowing the baby to cry in the presence of his father. This

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[4]Peele, pp. 19-25.

character, more woman than regent, contrasts distinctly with Elinor, princess of Spain, whose pride drives her to violence in the form of murder and the attempted mutilation of her English subjects. The language spoken in this role is an inflated rhetoric, heightened at times almost to the point of absurdity. This style appears in Elinor's conversation with her daughter at the end of the first scene:

> I tell thee Jone, what time our highnes sits,
> Under our royall Canopie of state,
> Glistering with pendants of the purest gold,
> Like as our seate were spangled all with stars,
> The world shall wonder at our majestie,
> As if the daughter of eternall Ops,
> Turnd to the likenes of Vermilon fumes,
> When from her cloudie wombe the Centaures lept,
> Were in her royall seate inthronized.
> (11.236-44)

And it is at its most extravagant in Queene Elinor's speech in scene 3:

> The welken spangled through with goulden spots,
> Reflects no finer in a frostie night,
> Then lovely Longshankes in his Elinor's eye:
> So Ned thy Nell in every part of thee,
> Thy person's garded with a troope of Queenes,
> And every Queene as brave as Elinor,
> Gives glorie to these glorious christall quarries,
> Where every orbe an object entertaines,
> Of riche device and princelie majestie.
> Thus like Narcissus diving in the deepe,
> I die in honour and in Englands armes:
> And if I drowne, it is in my delight,
> Whose companie is cheefest life in death,
> From foarth whose currall lips I suck the sweete,
> Wherewith are daintie Cupids caudles made,
> Then live or die brave Ned, or sinke or swim,
> An earthlie blisse it is to looke on him.
> (11.704-23)

This flowery bombast, decorated with high-sounding mythological allusions, is in striking contrast to Elinor's crude exclamation, "Fie

this hot wether how it makes me sweate" (11.1017) and to her complaint, "Old Nell is Mother now and grandmother may/ The greenest grasse doth droupe and turn to hay" (11.1070-71). It is at least surprising to hear this elegant Queen, who waxes eloquent at the sight of her husband's "christall quarries" and "currall lips," complain of sweating. It is thus apparent that the two natures of Queen Elinor are not two sides of the same coin, for there is no connection established between them. Rather they are two interesting but flat characters, conflicting as a result of a flaw in the play.

The heroine of Arden of Feversham[5] is much more consistently and effectively characterized than that of Edward I but is nevertheless one-dimensional. It is actually the firm characterization of the murderess Alice that gives unity and driving force to an otherwise disjointed and episodic play. Her "unswerving determination to be rid of her husband which ruthlessly sweeps aside all impediments and failures," her obsession with an adulterous love, allow her to rise in dramatic stature above a play structured on a repetitive series of unsuccessful attempts at murder.[6] Although written basically as a type character, as a study of passionate woman, Alice is nevertheless fascinating in the various maneuvers and schemes she so adroitly carried out to satisfy her desires. Because the play relies on various homiletic devices used by pamphleteers and incorporated by writers of domestic tragedy to teach

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[5]Arden of Feversham, in Drama of the English Renaissance: The Tudor Period, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

[6]Clark, p. 145.

moral lessons, with sinners brought to contrition and redemption, there are various repentance scenes in the work. But it is Alice's renewed determination and efforts after each spell of doubt that are emphasized. Thus the homiletic, didactic effect is lessened by the Arden playwright's realistic techniques. Alice vows to change to her former happy life again, "From title of an odious strumpet's name/ To honest Arden's wife, not Arden's honest wife" (viii.43-44) and laments, "My husband's death torments me at the heart" (xiv.277), but each time Mosby's kiss seals up a "new-made match" (viii.150). When Alice is confronted with the body of her dead husband and recognizes the implications of his bleeding wounds, she admits her complicity. But her contrition at this point is so sudden as to appear to fulfill not dramatic but homiletic purposes. She is, in the main, one-dimensional.

Two plays, Marston's The Insatiate Countess and Dekker's Lust's Dominion, present villainesses who are almost medieval personifications of lust and thus are studies more of a sin than an individual. Such characters presented as personifications have led at least one critic to note that the playwright's impulse is "essentially satiric rather than tragic. He is concerned with attacking vice, painting it in its most lurid and revolting forms."[7] Isabella is a portrait of lustful woman, selecting, like the Wife of Bath, her next lover before ending her relationship with the present one. But unlike Chaucer's "gode wyf" who represents a kind of life force, a joie de vivre, Isabella's lust is vice in its most grotesque form. This "insatiate" countess is so

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[7]Ribner, p. 13.

driven by lust that even her thinking and language are colored by it. For example, while waiting for one of her lovers, she delivers an apostrophe to Time, personifying it as an old man with whom she will "dally" in "delicious pleasure" if he will only run quickly to bring her lover. She longs to quench her desire and is convinced that "Lust shall be cool'd with lust, wherein Ile prove/ The life of love is onely sav'd by love" (pp. 46-47). In fact, the character of Isabella is so much more a study of vice than of a woman that absolutely no realistic motivation is given for her many changes of lovers. She reveals a lust at first sight, overcome with desire for Massino in between dances and stating:

> Change is no robbery; yet in this change
> Thou rob'st me of my hart: sure Cupid's here . . .
> O powerfull Boy! my heart's on fire, and unto mine eyes
> The raging flames ascend, like to two Beacons,
> Summoning my strongest powers, but all too late,
> The Conqueror already opes the gate.
> I will not aske his name.
>
> (p. 22)

Isabella exclaims, "Lust thou art hie" (p. 25) and claims that she will only be able to enjoy her wedding night with Roberto by thinking of Massino:

> [W]hen my loath'd Mate
> Shall struggle in due pleasure for his right,
> Ile think't my love, and die in that delight.
>
> (p. 27)

Then just having left her husband for Massino, she scorns Massino for his friend Gniaca, and there is a technical break in the action, filled in with music, to indicate the consummation between Isabella and Gniaca. There is simply no change or growth in this woman's character except in the final sudden "scaffold speech," which functions more as a

homiletic than a dramatic device. Even as she faces death, Isabella puns, makes grand gestures, and remains defiant and proud up to the last moment. This kind of satiric portrait of lust is continued to a lesser degree in Dekker's Lust's Dominion. But while The Insatiate Countess presents as its central focus a kind of female Machiavellian adulteress, Dekker's play centers on a male Machiavellian with a female adulteress/cohort. Revealing similarities to Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, in which Aaron is the mastermind behind much of Tamora's villainy, Eleazar, another Moor, controls most of the action, with the Queen, Eugenia, attracted to the power she senses in his ambition combined with a lack of conscience.

It is important to note that three of the plays in this section, including Titus Andronicus, are revenge plays, and as such the lust of the female adulteresses functions more as motivation for the revengers than as a tragic flaw in characters struggling with moral choices. Although supplied with her own motivation for revenge in Titus' murder of her son Alarbus, Tamora is not the moving spirit and actor of her revenge but instead relies on Aaron, who, for example, plans the strike at Titus through his sons. Bowers believes that, because Aaron's role was extended beyond that of accomplice, "the balance of forces was disordered, the natural villain Tamora was forced into the background and the normal conflict between injurer and revenger was so modified that the justness and symmetry of the plot was disturbed."[8]

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[8]Bowers, p. 118.

In The Revenger's Tragedy, Tourneur combines in the role of the Duchess the function of motivating the revenger with a kind of medieval symbol of lust and evil. Tourneur's is the pessimistic view of man inherent in a large segment of medieval thought, emphasizing the baseness and corruption of human nature as the inheritor of original sin. In his play evil characters far outnumber virtuous ones, and the Duchess is lust personified in a world of characters whose evil is all-embracing. In the same way the virtuous characters are so free from sin that they lose any illusion of humanity. Tourneur's method seems to be essentially allegorical; characters are never meant to convey the illusion of reality. For example, as the Duchess personifies lust, so Castiza symbolizes chastity, and, as a result, she cannot be anything but virtuous. The play becomes, then, a symbolic work of art similar to that done in the medieval mode. To carry out its symbolism it uses exaggeration and distortion which are alien to a naturalistic dramatic method. The overall theme which these symbolic characters emphasize is that of impermanence or mutability. And it is Castiza, symbol of constancy and order, who provides a frame of reference for the entire play. She "represents the permanence of heavenly virtue as opposed to the transitory, ever-changing life of sin which the other characters exemplify."[9] To this medieval motif Tourneur adds the popular myth of Italianate evil, utilizing a setting which implies a sink of luxury, sensual abandonment, atheism, and policy. Here again the characters become allegorical, personifying their particular vices. They never

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[9]Ribner, p. 83.

transcend the Italianate "type" but rather epitomize it. As such they contribute to the play's unity of tone, resulting from the connection of their vicious emotions of cynicism, loathing, and horror with the morbidly erotic; here as with the most extreme of the Italian plays of sensationalism, all emotions are as passionate as they are repelling. Thus the characters, including the Duchess, are generally one-dimensional vice characters, whose vices are connected with the central one of lust, with the erotic imagination.

This same single dimensionality of character of the adulterous wife in a revenge tragedy, resulting from her primary function of providing motivation for revenge, can also be found in the characterization of the adulteress in Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy, a work which shares many similarities with Shakespeare's Hamlet. However, Hamlet is reduced (as Amintor) to posturing impotence, and the sensual Gertrude becomes (as Evadne) "so powerful a figure that she actually usurps the traditional masculine role of revenger."[10] Evadne is in all respects the king's whore, willing from the opening of the play to protect that position at any cost--including destroying a young nobleman in a so-called marriage. But instead of developing character, having their adulteress deal with her own moral conduct by examining her relationship to good and evil and coming to some sort of understanding, Beaumont and Fletcher rely on theatricality and plot, on an abrupt reformation, on the avoidance of moral issues through a trick resolution. For example, Evadne's sudden repentance is effected by the

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[10]Ornstein, p. 171.

threat of physical force from her brother Melantius after which she agrees to accept the duty of taking vengeance on a king. She has been drawn throughout the play as a scornful adulteress revealing no consciousness of her sin. And even though she appears to make a sudden reversal of character, a favorite situation with Beaumont and Fletcher, it is still the same opaque sense of moral values which led to her adultery that sends her to ask for Amintor's love in the firm belief that her murder of a king, actually a violation of the divine right of kings, has expiated her sin. Evadne is basically the same character at the end of the play as she is in the beginning.

Other than Goneril, perhaps the most complex and realistically portrayed heroine/villainess is Vittoria Corombona of Webster's The White Devil. However, it is not a developing character that we are allowed to observe, but it is the many facets of her personality, the careful detailing of her nature that satisfy the twentieth-century audience's sense of realism. Although she actually does not undergo any kind of profound change, any struggle to define her moral universe, her personality is psychologically complex. A great deal of this complexity is attained by the dramatist's attitude toward his character. There is, as is indicated by the title, a sense of moral ambivalence in the play. As Bowers points out, "here is a villain play in which the characters are not all black or all white but all gray."[11] The white devil herself, Vittoria, symbolizes the disorder of the play with its constant conflict of opposites. She is as beautiful as she is evil; she

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[11]Bowers, p. 102.

is the beauty which destroys. When Brachiano groans, "Your beauty! oh, ten thousand curses on't/ How long have I beheld the devil in crystal" (IV.ii.87-88), we realize that Webster maintains a moral ambivalence towards his heroine throughout the play, using every means dramatically possible to appeal to an audience's fascinated sympathy. He takes advantage of the fact that a villain as protagonist will receive sympathy if his passion is so great as to appear ennobling and if the environment surrounding him is sufficiently depraved. Our compassion is strengthened by the "gray" treatment of the revengers and by the fact that the Cardinal, Vittoria's judge, is the author of the Machiavellian deception by which Francesco de Medici will accomplish his revenge.

Webster relies on the stock romantic plot of great though illicit lovers, such as Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra, separated by some authority figure like the father. Based on this sympathetic situation, the plot reveals not two young lovers but separately married adults who are kept apart by the woman's husband. Additional sympathy is created by the implication that Vittoria's married life is empty; Flamineo even hints that Camillo is impotent. It is not just physical satisfaction that is lacking, however, for with the wit, courage, and bravery of Vittoria, there is no level of mental, spiritual, or imaginative life on which Camillo can meet her. Vittoria cannot be shamed into accepting the title of "whore" because in her own mind she is not one; she never questions the morality of her

situation, which is that of the self-made world of lovers, a spiritual center untouched by conventional morality. Her great moments in the play are, in fact, those of individual assertion and defiance. Brachiano does not remain with her during the trial scene, and they do not defend their love together. She does not admit she loves Brachiano although she does reveal that he attempted to seduce her. Vittoria laments the death of her lover, but when Flamineo threatens to kill her, all thought of Brachiano vanishes, and she concentrates on her own survival. She dies like Flamineo who, unable to turn his thoughts outward, states:

> I do not look
> Who went before, nor who shall follow me;
> No, at myself I will begin and end.
> (V.vi.257-59)

As at least one critic has noted, her reaction to death, like her answers at the trial, has little to do with morality but "a great deal to do with intellectual and physical energy. . . . Vittoria's flashes of spirit suggest how conventional morality seems to pale before the imaginative expression of some greatness of spirit."[12] To describe Webster's beautiful adulteress as a woman destroyed by the tragic flaw of sexual passion is simply inaccurate, nor is our response so often one of pity or fear as of fascination at the many facets of a single personality. Vittoria faces her death with the same courage and defiance with which she faced life and with a degree of the same wit:

> Yes, I shall welcome death
> As princes do some great ambassadors;

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[12]Stilling, p. 232.

I'll meet thy weapon half way.
(V.vi.221-23)

Our response to her actions is a pride in her heroism. We see an evil woman who achieves a kind of victory by what Ribner calls her "integrity of life."[13] In her defiance she stands for life, revealing that morality exists even in a world of mist.

Thus the adulterous wives in this group of plays are essentially characterized as one-dimensional, not in the sense that they are unexciting or monotonous, but in the sense that they do not change through painful experience nor are led by it to larger moral issues. As with Shakespeare's portrait of Iago, these playwrights create the illusion of reality and of depth of character by fascinating us with the multiple facets of a single, unchanging mind. Not only does characterization revolve around the trait of adultery, but the structure of each play emphasizes the sin either by presenting it from the opening scene or by allowing us to view other damnable qualities which make adultery plausible later in the play. Because of the associative nature of evil, we are not surprised when adultery is evinced. For example, although we are not aware of the adultery of Queen Elinor of Edward I from the opening scenes and, in fact, are faced with two totally different characters in the form of "old Nell" and the Spanish princess Elinor, Peele creates a crescendo effect of sin in the delineation of his Spanish queen. Centered around her Spanish pride are her love of luxury, her capacity for revenge and violence, including a desire for mutilation and murder. All of these

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[13]Ribner, pp. 105-108.

sins prepare us for her ultimate betrayal both to king and country in the form of adultery. We are simply not as shocked at the Queen's final confession of adultery as we would have been without her gradual vilification.

In two of the revenge plays, Titus Andronicus and The Maid's Tragedy, we are also initially unaware of the adultery committed by the wives in the plays, partially because of withheld information or surprising twists of plot. We are actually sympathetic to the Amazonian prisoner, Tamora, at the opening of Titus because, after being chained and paraded through the streets of Rome as the war booty of the proud Andronicus, she must plead for the life of her eldest son whom Titus intends to offer as a human sacrifice in honor of the death on the battlefield of Titus' twenty-one sons. The powerful queen of the Amazons is forced to beg for mercy from her enemy. However, the minute she has an opportunity (when Titus refuses to accept the voice of Rome and throws his support to Saturninus), she takes advantage of her beauty and cunning to manipulate Saturninus and to exact revenge on Titus. Now Saturninus' queen, she reveals her desire for vengeance, her policy and power to dissemble, adopting for the public's eyes the role of forgiving peacemaker and seeming to defend Titus to her husband. But in a significant and telling aside to Saturninus, she reveals her true villainy:

> I'll find a day to massacre them all,
> And raise their faction and their family,
> The cruel father and his traitorous sons,
> To whom I sued for my dear son's life;

> And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
> Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain.[14]

Thus we are not aware until the following Act (in a speech delivered by Aaron who intends to "mount aloft with [his] imperial mistress") that Tamora and the Moor were and still are lovers and that Tamora entered into marriage with the full intention of pursuing an adulterous affair. Yet because of Shakespeare's careful delineation of character, we are not surprised.

In The Maid's Tragedy, the fact is initially hidden that Evadne's marriage to Amintor, arranged by the king, is merely a ruse so that the king can continue to enjoy the woman as his mistress; this delayed revelation of plot is one of the techniques used by Beaumont and Fletcher in the play. However, the exposition, climaxing with the situation in which the romantic and courageous but weak Amintor discovers the infidelity of the fascinating woman he has married (after having rejected his betrothed Aspatia), is effectively written. We are not initially aware that Evadne is already involved sexually with the king and has every intention of remaining faithful to him even after her marriage and thus must ironically acknowledge her adultery to her husband, whose vengeance is restrained by his belief in the divine right of kings. However, we are prepared for her spirited independence and her highly sexual nature in the descriptions that other men make about her (a warning that husbands should heed, according to the commonplace belief of the day), in her bawdy joking with her maid as she undresses

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[14]William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), I.i.450-55.

for her wedding night, and in the kind of music she prefers. Displeased with a tune about false men and rejected women sung by the depressed Aspatia, she requests a song about the lust and fickleness of woman.[15] The revelation of her fickleness to Amintor, therefore, later in the same scene is hardly a complete shock to the audience.

Finally, although we are not aware from the beginning of King Lear that Shakespeare's Goneril is interested in men other than her husband, we are prepared for her involvement with Edmund by the fact that she is capable of deceiving and betraying her father, another kind of disruption of familial order. When a public declaration of his daughters' love is demanded by the proud old king as he is ready to abdicate his throne and divide his kingdom among them, Goneril and Regan are able glibly and eloquently to offer the words they know he wants to hear while Cordelia, whose love for her father goes beyond mere words, cannot bring herself to stoop to such posturing. Goneril, an astute politician, is a creative speechmaker of such false empty rhetoric, avowing to her father:

> Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter,
> Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
> Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;
> As much as child e'er lov'd or father found;
> A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable:
> Beyond all manner of so much I love you.[16]

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[15]Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, in Stuart Plays, ed. Arthur H. Nethercot, Charles R. Baskervill, and Virgil B. Heltzel (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), II.i.84-88.

[16]William Shakespeare, King Lear, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), I.i.54-61.

Shakespeare effectively uses the language of the two evil sisters to distinguish between them. Regan's declaration, though still expressed in the same empty rhetoric, merely echoes her sister:

> I am made of that self metal as my sister,
> And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
> I find she names my very deed of love; . . .
> (I.i.69-71)

In the very same scene, however, we learn just how false these words are, and again the passive Regan is contrasted with the dominant, active Goneril. Alone with Regan, Goneril describes her father:

> The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash;
> then we must look from his age to receive not alone the
> imperfections of long ingraff'd condition, but therewithal
> the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years
> bring with them.
> (I.i.295-99)

She states her fear of other rash actions by Lear such as the "leave-taking between France and him" that will "offend," and when Regan's response to this concern is, "We shall further think of it," Goneril objects assertively: "We must do something, and i' th' heat" (I.i.303-308). From these statements, we are hardly shocked at Goneril's treatment of her father, stripping him of his vestiges of kingship, his retinue, and his dignity, nor of Regan's following suit. And with this familial betrayal, Shakespeare prepares his audience for the betrayal that Goneril will commit in her marriage when she becomes adulterously involved with Edmund.

There are other plays, however, in which the study of an adulterous woman is openly acknowledged from the beginning of the work. Since Arden of Feversham, for example, is based on an already sensational and well known murder, the Renaissance audience would have been

prepared for this adulteress and her bloody murder from the minute they walked into the theatre. The anonymous author capitalizes on this fact and in the very opening lines of the play has Arden reacting to Franklin's attempt to cheer his depressed spirits by responding:

> Love letters passed twixt Mosby and my wife,
> And they have privy meetings in the town. . . .
> Can any grief be half so great as this?
> (i.9-19)

The love affair between Eugenia and Eleazar of Lust's Dominion has apparently also been going on before the play begins. The opening scene finds the lovers already involved in a tryst, with Eleazar having given orders to his slaves to see that they are not disturbed. And Eugenia refers to him as her "love," using language so intimate that it is obvious the two have been involved for some time. Eleazar even complains that he cannot ride through the Castilian streets without everyone throwing "killing looks" at him and crying, "That's he that makes a Cuckold of our King" (I.i.88). Marston gives no indication that his Insatiate Countess, now a widow, had been involved in adulterous affairs in her previous marriage, but her reaction to her former husband and to her widowhood reveal her from the beginning to be fully inclined toward adultery. She reacts to Count Roberto's attempt to comfort her in her grief by exclaiming:

> I waile his losse! Sink him tenne cubites deeper,
> I may not feare his resurrection;
> I will be sworne upon the holy Writ
> I mourne thus fervent 'cause he di'd no sooner:
> Hee buried me alive, . . .
> But now his soule her Argos eyes hath clos'd,
> And I am free as ayre. . . .
> Faire women play: she's chaste whom none will have.
> (p. 6)

Isabella's complaint about her dead husband is that he kept her a prisoner from the attentions of other men.

Desire for vengeance and basic sexual desire are the motivating forces behind the Duchess' decision to commit adultery in The Revenger's Tragedy. We learn in the opening scene that the Duke has refused his wife's plea for mercy for her youngest son, his stepson, who has been convicted of the rape of lord Antonio's wife. Forced, like Tamora, to beg on her knees for the life of her son, the Duchess does manage, unlike Tamora, to get the Duke's promise of a deferment until the next sitting of judges. And, unlike Tamora, any sympathy we might have for this suffering mother is immediately destroyed because, while she has won at least a temporary reprieve for her son, she is still planning to take vengeance on her husband--not only for his hesitation in reprieving the boy but because of his sexual impotence: "Oh, what it is to have an old-cool duke/ To be as slack in tongue as in performance."[17] And her method of revenge is to ignore her vows of wedlock. Using the well-worn image of the cuckold's horns, she declares:

> I'll kill him in his forehead, hate there feed--
> That wound is deepest though it never bleed;
> And here comes he whom my heart points unto,
> His bastard son, but my love's true-begot; . . .
> (I.ii.107-10)

Finally, Webster reveals his white devil as an adulteress in the exposition of the opening scene. Count Lodovico, resenting his banishment from Italy for ruining "the noblest earldom," complains that

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[17]Cyril Tourneur, The Revenger's Tragedy, in Drama of the English Renaissance: The Stuart Period, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976), I.ii.74-75.

while he was punished for his sinful deeds, greater men, such as the Duke of Brachiano, escape banishment. Lodovico's speech is our first indication that Brachiano "by close panderism seeks to prostitute/ The honor of Vittoria Corombona" (I.i.41-42). And with the aid of Vittoria's own brother, a situation which elevates the nobility of the lovers' passion simply by its distasteful contrast, Brachiano has no difficulty from the beginning in seducing Vittoria who has already "Which way so'er [he] went . . . [thrown] her eyes" (I.i.36). And when confronted in close embrace with Brachiano by her mother, Vittoria explains, as she does in the end of the play, that only "blood could have allayed/ His long suit to [her]" (I.ii.297-98).

Another characteristic common to the plays in this group is that these adulteresses are usually active participants in or initiators of adultery and, as has already been pointed out, of murder. In Arden of Feversham, even the full title of the play suggests the wife's intentionality: The Lamentable and True Tragedy of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent: Who was most wickedly murdered by the meanes of his disloyall and wanton wyffe, who for the love she bore to one Mosbie hyred two desperat ruffins Blackwell and Shakbag to kill him. Wherein is shewd the great malice and discrimination of a wicked woman, the unsatible desire of filthie lust and the shamefull end of all murderers. Her active participation in adultery and her initiation of the plot to murder her husband are revealed as Arden himself confides to Franklin that his wife had actually given to her lover "a ring/ Which at [their] marriage day the priest put on" (i.17-18). Thus Alice has not a shred of respect for the marriage institution, expressed in the traditional

symbol of the ring. Her defiance of conventional morality is also revealed in her attitude toward the marriage vows. In soliloquy, she deifies love and disdains marriage:

> Oh, that some airy spirit
> Would, in the shape and likeness of a horse,
> Gallop with Arden across the ocean
> And throw him from his back into the waves.
> Sweet Mosby is the man that hath my heart,
> And he usurps it, having nought but this,
> That I am tied to him by marriage.
> Love is a god and marriage is but words,
> And therefore Mosby's title is the best.
> (i.94-102)

Her lack of faith in oaths is revealed again in a speech to Mosby after her lover declares he has sworn no longer to solicit Alice's affection. Taking the offensive, the woman declares:

> Thou shalt not need; I will importune thee.
> What, shall an oath make thee forsake my love?
> As if I have not sworn as much myself,
> And given my hand unto him in the church!
> Tush, Mosby, oaths are words, and words is wind,
> And wind is mutable. Then I conclude,
> 'Tis childishness to stand upon an oath.
> (i.431-38)

Her active participation in the affair is apparent in this kind of forcefulness in the face of Mosby's hesitation. Denied Mosby's presence, she responds with an overwhelming ruthlessness, threatening his manservant with physical force:

> Were he as mad as raving Hercules
> I'll see him. Ay, and were thy house of force,
> These hands of mine should raze it to the ground.
> Unless that thou wouldst bring me to my love.
> (i.116-19)

This woman not only actively initiates adultery in the play, but she is also the motivating force behind the decision and schemes to murder her husband. Far from a passiave agent seduced into sin by a

villainous male, Alice declares that it is the disapproval of others and the interference of Arden himself that determine Arden's death, vowing, "As surely shall he die/ As I abhore him and love only [Mosby]" (i.140-41). She promises the love of Mosby's sister to her servant Michael on the condition that he kill Arden within the week, tricks Greene into joining the conspiracy, and offers him money and land to hire assassins to "cut [Arden] short" (i.521). She repeatedly reinforces the wavering Mosby when he hesitates about going through with the deed, a variation on the usual practice of having the male instigate the murder, chastising him for his timidity:

> Remember when I locked thee in my closet,
> What were thy words and mine? Did we not both
> Decree to murder Arden in the night?
> (i.191-93)

And she becomes absolutely rapturous at the thought of Arden's slaying, declaring emotionally to her hired ruffians, appropriately named Black Will and Shakebag:

> For every drop of his detested blood,
> I would have crammed in angels in thy fist,
> And kissed thee too, and hugged thee in my arms.
> (xiv.76-78)

Alice has fantasies of murdering her husband herself, responding to the wounding of her lover by Arden:

> [T]hese mine eyes offended with his sight
> Shall never close till Arden's be shut up.
> This night I rose and walked about the chamber,
> And twice or thrice I thought to have murdered him.
> (xiv.89-92)

In contrast to the Arden playwright's reliance on straightforward dialogue and soliloquy to characterize his wife as an active participant in adultery, Marston and Dekker make effective use of structure.

The subplots of The Insatiate Countess and Lust's Dominion are employed to enhance and contrast with the heroine/villainess' active initiation of adultery. Marston's Isabella becomes fascinated with Massino during the celebration of her wedding and begins immediately to think in terms of becoming his mistress. She offers a toast to Massino during the festivities and indicates her desire to be kissed. Before she even knows his name, she instructs her maid to:

> [F]urnish up some stately Palace
> Worthy to entertaine the King of Love:
> Prepare it for my cumming and my loves, . . .
> (p. 26)

She sends a love letter to Massino, admitting to her own page its "lewde entent" and "Syren words," and after just having instructed the page to make ready the entourage for the rendezvous she has prepared, she coyly states to Massino: "My Lord, I should say something but I blush/ Courting is not befitting to our sexe" (pp. 31, 32). No sooner has the adulterous pair escaped to Isabella's palace than she is introduced to a friend of Massino's about whom she declares: "I must enjoy him, lets hope thy [Massino's] passions smother/ Faith cannot coole bloud, Ile clip him, wer't my brother" (p. 42). And she acts immediately on her feelings, sending Massino away on a pretext and avowing to Gniaca, "I am love-sicke for your love . . ./ I never knew perfect love till now" (p. 43). The extremity of Isabella's lust and aggressiveness is enhanced by a subplot which reveals two husbands frantically initiating adultery with each other's wives while the wives, who are aware of their husbands' activities, concoct a scheme to remain faithful to their marriage vows. Here a female adulteress provides material for

satiric censure and tragedy while adultery on the part of husbands is presented comically.

The subplot of Lust's Dominion is also an effective contrast to the heroine/villainess' active participation in adultery. Eugenia hangs on Eleazar's neck from the opening scene, demanding kisses, tossing out bawdy inuendos, and using provicative language such as, "In my all-naked arms, thy self shalt lie" (I.i.60). She even threatens to kill herself if Eleazar will not respond to her seduction, telling him that she has left her husband the king's death-bed to be with him and that "A Queen hath made her self [his] Concubine" (I.i.101). The subplot of the play reinforces the adultery motif as it concerns Eleazar's wife Maria, who is being pursued by the newly-crowned Fernando. This situation renders the Queen Mother's lascivious aggressiveness even more lurid with the contrasts of Maria's avowals to kill herself before she will be unfaithful to her husband (who is ironically already unfaithful):

> This ensuing night shall give an end
> To all my sorrows, for before foul lust
> Shall soil the fair complexion of mine honour,
> This hand shall rob Maria of her life.
> (II.iii.177-80)

Here the chaste wife equates her honor with chastity in marriage and later begs the King to kill her "ere [he] stain [her] chastity" (III.ii.1). Always virtuous, since for women virtue is connected with chastity, Maria gives Fernando a sleeping potion to quench his "wild desire," and she is forewarned by Oberon and his fairies of her ensuing death. Here the reader is made to feel that Maria's virtue, i.e., her fidelity, will be rewarded in another, more spiritual world. Because of the abrupt alteration from sordid realism to a world of fairies,

however, the structure of Lust's Dominion is not used as effectively to emphasize character and theme as that of The Insatiate Countess in which the subplot is a satiric commentary on the main plot.

The remainder of the plays in the first part of this section present women who commit adultery because of an attraction to some kind of excitement, sexual or otherwise, that they sense in men other than their husbands. But unlike the wives who are seduced into marital unfaithfulness by the magnetism of this excitement, these women actually initiate the adultery and thus, according to the moral code of the age, are even more evil and sinful. In Titus Andronicus, Tamora attempts to turn her Moor's thoughts from Saturn to Venus during an outdoor tryst which she compares to that of Aeneas and Dido. Like the mythological lovers, she and Aaron "may, each wreathed in the other's arms/ ([their] pastimes done), possess a golden slumber" (II.iii.25-26). Her thoughts and actions turn constantly to the black Aaron, even seeking him out while her sons rape Lavinia and calling him "sweeter to [her] than life" (II.iii.51). Like Tamora's attraction to a surly blackamoor, part of the Duchess' attraction for Spurio in The Revenger's Tragedy is an excitement with the forbidden. She tells Spurio himself, the bastard son of her husband and therefore an incestuous lover according to the Jacobean view, "Why there's no pleasure sweet but it is sinful" (III.v.201). And she has, for both reasons of vengeance and sexual attraction, actively tempted her bastard stepson, sending him "many a wealthy letter . . . Swelled up with jewels" (I.ii.111-12). The Duchess encourages and uses Spurio's resentment of his father for giving him no name or the inheritance due him were he the eldest legitimate son

by persuading him that committing adultery with her would be the ideal way to take vengeance on the King. She seals their bargain by kissing him and encourages open embraces, daring anyone to object: "May we not deal our favors where we please?" (IV.iii.3).

Also attracted to perverse excitement, Evadne of The Maid's Tragedy has apparently allowed herself to become the King's mistress before the play opens, but a woman of her spirit and vitality simply could not have been coerced into that position. She herself admits that she voluntarily accepted the position because she loves "with [her] ambition/ Not with [her] eyes" (III.i.177-78). And she is well aware of her power over the king, responding to his jealousy that she might be sleeping with her own husband and his threat of punishment with:

> Why, it is in me, then,
> Not to love you, which will more afflict
> Your body than your punishment can mine.
> (III.i.184-86)

She openly admits her highly sexual nature to Amintor, laughing at him for thinking her a virgin at her age, and she explains to him why she has actively participated in an affair and now in adultery with the king: "I do enjoy the best, and in that height/ Have sworn to stand or die" (II.i.297-98). This same offensive tactic is apparent in Shakespeare's Goneril. Attracted both to Edmund's sexuality and to his streak of cruelty which she sees as contrasting with her "mild" husband, the "fool" who "usurps" her bed, Lear's daughter gives Edmund a token of her affection, ventures to call herself his mistress, commands him to decline his head for a kiss, sends him love letters, and swears that she "had rather lose the battle than that [her] sister/ Should loosen

him and [herself]" (V.i.18-19). Her final act of aggression to obtain Edmund's love is simply to do away with her own sister.

Another highly sexed female whose needs are not satisfied by her husband and who actively engages in adultery to meet these desires is Vittoria Corombona. Although Vittoria appears coy during her initial contact with Brachiano, Flamineo describes this as "the supervicies of lust most women have" (I.ii.18). And though her brother acts as pander for Brachiano and Vittoria, setting up the opportunity and place for a rendezvous, Vittoria encourages Brachiano's advances and herself suggests to her lover through the device of a dream that he rid them of his wife and her husband. It appears that part of the excitement Evadne, Goneril, and Vittoria Corombona find in their particular situations and with their particular lovers lies in a perverse attraction to cruelty resulting from their own intensely aggressive natures. Because the aggression of women is generally not allowed free expression, for most it turns inward into masochism, but for these "masculine" types of females, at times it becomes a kind of sadism, expressing itself openly as with Goneril and Evadne or, in the case of Vittoria, in a dream.

Another striking characteristic of these plays is a reflection of the Renaissance belief in the incremental nature of sin, especially of lust and adultery. The association of lust and adultery with sins such as the aforementioned murder, in addition to idleness, theft, deception, envy, wrath, and pride, reminiscent of the medieval seven deadly sins, has biblical and mythic precedence. One of the twelve official homilies published in 1547 and reissued by Elizabeth in 1562,

entitled "A Sermon against Whoredom and Uncleanness," reflects this belief in the association of sins, and the myth of Pandora, along with the story of Eve, asserts that all evil is attributed to the same source--the sinful nature of woman which is responsible for the plagues of mankind. One finds an echo of the incremental theory of adultery in Massino's statement about his Insatiate Countess as he recognizes that if she is unfaithful to her husband, she is capable of infidelity to a lover and a host of other sins:

> Man were on earth an Angell but for woman,
> That seaven-fold branch of hell from them doth grow,
> Pride, Lust, and Murder, they raise from below,
> With all their fellow sinnes. Women were made
> Of blood, without soules: . . . .
> (p. 51)

Some of the characteristics that most often accompany an adulterous nature in the women of these plays are lust, insatiable appetites, ambition for power or money, pride, lying and dissembling, disloyalty to others besides the husband, a lack of conscience if others are tempted into sin, a desire for revenge, and a capacity for violence.

Edward I adopts from its ballad sources the belief in the incremental nature of sin, associating lust and adultery with pride, love of luxury, and a capacity for violence. Anti-Spanish sentiment is reflected in the description of the proud Elinor, with Edward himself identifying pride with love of luxury and saying, "This Spanish pride grees not with Englands prince" (x.1.1626). Every aspect of the scenes dealing with the Queen's pride finds a parallel in "The lamentable fall of Queen Elnor" except the description of her progress through the streets of Acon where she walks on silks and tapestries. When faced

with an unpleasant climate during one of her journeys, the Queen recalls her experience in Acon, complaining to her attendant:

> I tell thee the ground is al too base,
> For Elinor to honor with her steps:
> Whose footepace when she progrest in the streete,
> Of Aecon and the faire Jerusalem,
> Was nought but costly Arras points,
> Faire Iland tapestrie and Azured silke,
> My milke white steed treading on cloth of ray,
> And trampling proudly underneath the feete,
> Choise of our English woolen drapery.
> (vi.ll.1031-39)

Her entourage in this scene, a litter borne by four "Negro Mores" and "foure footemen," is simply not up to her usual standards. The ballad also provides the source for Elinor's desire to delay Edward's coronation in order to give Spanish tailors time to make her coronation robes, and her own weakness for the extravagant leads her to tempt others into the same folly. She requests of Edward to

> Do so much honour to [his] Elinor,
> To weare a sute that she shall give [his] grace
> Of her owne cost and workmanship perhaps.
> (i.ll.216-18)

She also insults the gift of a "frize richlie lined" offered by the Welsh at the birth of her son, rejecting it as unworthy to be worn by her child. For

> Her boie should glister like the Sommers Sunne
> In robes as rich as Jove. . . .
> His pappe should be of precious Necter made,
> His food Ambrosia. . . .
> (x.ll.1610-13)

To Elinor's sin of pride and the ability to tempt others into the same folly, both ballad and play add an enjoyment of violence, cruelty, and revenge. The ballad is responsible for the material in scenes iii and xv concerning the Mayoress of London. In scene iii the Queen learns

that the Mayoress, barren for years, passed off as her child the son of another woman, and in scene xv she vows to "purge [her] melancholy" upon the London Dame, thinking up "some tortures" which will release her choler (xv.ll.278-80). The Queen commands her maid to bind the Mayoress in a chair after which she has her poisoned by an adder. The love of violence is also expressed in the Queen's desire that "mens beards milt and womens bosoms bleed," the source of which is also provided by the anti-Spanish sentiment of the ballad.

The various sins that Peele adopts from the ballad to characterize his English queen, however, seem to culminate in the final admission of adultery. We are in some way prepared for the confession scene, influenced apparently by the second ballad entitled "Queen Eleanor's Confession," by the number of atrocities that Elinor was capable of committing. Reflecting the motif of le mari confesseur, common in continental literature, the deathbed scene reveals Elinor confessing to the King and his brother, dressed as friars, to adultery not only with the King's brother himself but with a friar, whom she names as the father of Jone of Acon. Peele here presents a reversal of the traditional view that adultery leads to a host of sins, beginning instead with the English prejudice concerning the pride of the Spanish and gradually increasing the degree of the sins to end with a charge of adultery. Thus Renaissance political prejudices become the playwright's method of structuring an exploration of feminine evil climaxing in adultery, a technique which is unique with Peele.

Unlike Peele, not political but domestic issues provide a frame of reference for a discussion of the impact of an adulterous wife in

Arden of Feversham. In Edward I the chain of sins increases in severity to culminate in an act which is as much a public as private betrayal--the self-confessed adultery of a queen. In Arden, however, a play which introduces a new kind of genre, that of domestic tragedy, the focus is on private betrayal, on the microcosm of family, and on the result of adultery in murder. By its nature domestic tragedy generally contains as its heroine a woman who is falsely accused of adultery, one who repents for the act, or one who becomes a heroine/villainess as a result of her passion. As Wright describes the genre, "the tragic relations of husband, wife, and illicit lover provided a vehicle for a theatrical sensation capable of running the gamut of sentimentality or pandering to the grosser appetites of the multitude, while, at the same time, it preached a sermon against the crying sins of adultery and murder."[18] Arden of Feversham, however, is a subgenre of domestic tragedy, called the murder play, which is usually based on an actual historical event. The dual purposes of writing these instructive stage thrillers is "to warn the citizens from evil by showing them dramatically the horrible consequences of sin and to provide the public with what it liked best--a sensational plot."[19] However, there is also an emphasis on a Kafkaesque irony in the plays, for in them it is man's capacity for love and passion that betrays him to a world of evil. In Arden, Alice Arden becomes a temptress whose passion leads her and others into a world of evil.

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[18]Wright, p. 63.

[19]Clark, p. 138.

Alice not only initiates adultery and murder, but her characterization also reveals the Renaissance belief in the incremental nature of sin in the presentation of other traits, such as dissembling, betrayal of others besides the husband, and an active participation in violence, which necessarily accompany the desire to possess freely her lover. Her sins not only increase in severity, but her evil and obsession with murdering her husband increase in power, rendering her one of the most awesome stage villainesses in Elizabethan drama. The wife's adroitness in scheming can be seen in her ability to locate Greene's Achilles heel, to work on his emotions, and to manipulate him to her own ends. Learning of Greene's resentment towards her husband for taking over the lease of his land, she is quick to play on his emotions, appealing to his masculinity by describing herself as a damsel in distress. She joins in with Greene's complaints, adding her own that her husband scolds and beats her constantly and even openly keeps harlots so that she lives in fear that he will one day do away with her. His ego swollen with the knowledge that Alice has looked to him for aid, Greene declares, "I shall be the man/ Shall set you free from all this discontent" (i.511-12). Recognizing her opportunity, Alice begs him not to endanger his own life for such a "churl" but to hire assassins to do the deed. Her version of the story told later to Mosby reveals just how coldly and deliberately manipulative the woman is:

> Whenas I saw his choler thus to rise,
> I whetted on the gentleman with words,
> And to conclude, Mosby, at last we grew
> To composition for my husband's death.
> I gave him ten pound to hire knaves
> By some device to make away the churl

> When he is dead he should have twenty more
> And repossess his former lands again.
> (i.562-69)

When the "knaves," in addition to her own servant, fail repeatedly to carry out their assignment, Alice's agile mind turns to some "new device." This time involving Mosby, she proposes to her lover that they, "marching arm in arm," should meet the returning Arden,

> And boldly beard and brave him to his teeth.
> When words grow hot and blows begin to rise
> I'll call those cutters forth your tenament.
> Who, in a manner to take up the fray,
> Shall wound my husband Hornsby to the death.
> (xii.72-76)

The hired ruffians failing once again, Alice is quick to think of a plausible explanation, aware that the best defense is a good offense. She berates Arden for his jealousy, declaring that she and Mosby were only jesting merely to try his patience and had come lovingly to welcome him home. She even manages to turn Arden momentarily against his friend Franklin, accusing the latter of encouraging disputes between husband and wife. And when she succeeds in reconciling Arden to Mosby, Alice then "refuses" to welcome Mosby to her home, saying, "You [Arden] may enforce me to it if you will/ But I had rather die than bid him welcome" (xiv.186-87). Even Mosby is impressed with the adroitness of his lover, musing, "Oh, how cunningly she can dissemble" (xiv.190). Alice's unflagging attempt to manipulate the situation to her own advantage is apparent in her reaction to her accusers at the end of the play. Confronted with the overwhelming evidence of the murder weapons and Arden's blood, she is resolute in her denial, assuring Franklin at one point that the blood is "the pig's blood we had to supper"

(xiv.400) and at another that it is "a cup of wine that Michael shed" (xiv.414).

This adulteress' lack of loyalty to her husband is also extended to a betrayal of others. She never hesitates to involve others such as Greene, her servant Michael, Mosby himself, and even Mosby's own sister in her crimes, and when, out of loyalty and desire for Mosby's sister, Michael agrees to get rid of Arden, Alice never pauses to betray him if another could better serve her ends. Michael has a rival for Susan's hand in Clarke, and Alice's aid goes only to the man who could successfully eliminate Arden. But her betrayal of husband, friends, servant is extended finally beyond the personal level and into the social, for Alice actively participates in the actual murder of Arden--a crime which is not only against family but against society. First she attempts to kill her husband by poisoning his soup, but when Arden detects a strange flavor and this scheme fails, Alice declares her intention to stab Arden:

> Mosby will be there, whose very looks
> Will add unwonted courage to my thought
> And make me the first that shall adventure on him.
> (xiv.142-44)

She does actually take the knife and add her blow to that of the others:

> What groans thou? Nay, then, give me the weapon.
> Take this for hindering Mosby's love and mine.
> (xiv.243-44)

Thus the Renaissance belief in the incremental effect of sin can be seen not only in an historical romance such as Edward I and in a domestic tragedy, Arden of Feversham, but in satiric and revenge tragedies and in the more powerfully drawn adulteresses of King Lear

and The White Devil. The dominant characteristics of each villainess are a lust and strong sexuality which render them temptresses to men. The Insatiate Countess presents as its central figure a woman who is so attractive to males that a series of men will betray reason and their closest friends to win her. Massina tells his friend Gniaca to whom he has lost Isabella:

> Thou dotest upon a divell, not a woman,
> That ha's bewitct thee with her Sorcerie,
> And drown'd thy soule in leathy faculties,
> Her quenchless lust has benumb'd thy knowledge,
> Thy intellectual powers, oblivion smothers,
> That Thou art nothing but forgetfulnesse.
> (p. 58)

Eugenia's own lover in Lust's Dominion is on various occasions repulsed by her lustfulness, and Tourneur's vision in The Revenger's Tragedy centers on primal guilt and the problem of Eve. There are basically three courses of action in this latter play: to participate like the Duchess in a world of sensual pleasure and be damned for it, to be chaste, or to seek vengeance.[20] While the Duchess' view of life asserts that "there's no pleasure sweet but it is sinful," Castiza, as the central moral agent in the play, reveals Tourneur's ideal of withdrawal from the world in the preservation of her chastity and her avoidance of the court (III.v.201). The playwright contrasts what might be called her "virgin strength" with the lust of the Duchess and the "sensual susceptibilities of her sexually experienced mother."[21] Thus to Tourneur women are either virgins or whores, tainted by sexual violation

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[20]Stilling, p. 206.

[21]Stilling, p. 206.

even, like Antonio's raped wife, when forced. Evadne's passion in The Maid's Tragedy results in a travesty of the natural consummation of the marriage vow and of the vow itself since Evadne declares she will not sleep with her husband because she has taken a religious vow of fidelity to the king. Here Beaumont and Fletcher play on the motif used by Chaucer of a husband who discovers on his wedding night that his bride has taken a vow of chastity--only in this case the oath is that of a mistress to her seducer. This is a twist on the Petrarchan triangle "as the King, complaining that there is no faith in sin, accuses Evadne of cuckolding him by sleeping with her husband." And in the murder scene, the sides of triangle change with Evadne hating the King yet remaining unsatisfied with her dagger thrust of revenge, a perversion of the sexual act anticipated by the King, unless Amintor will "kiss the sin of murder from her lips and take her to bed."[22] The lust of Tamora and Goneril is an attraction to the power of conscienceless-ness; behind their calculated schemes to humiliate and avenge lies an overwhelming desire to subjugate which appears also in what are traditionally viewed as masculine sexual lusts. And Vittoria Corombona's passion is ambivalent--seemingly right yet adulterous.

For most of these adulteresses, an extreme sexuality implies extreme sensuality; The Insatiate Countess and Lust's Dominion in particular reveal women with exaggerated appetites and an attraction to opulence. When Isabella anticipates the coming of Gniaca, she

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[22]Ornstein, pp. 175-76.

associates his presence and lovemaking with banqueting and sweet scents, with the titillation of all her senses:

> Prepare a banquet fit to please the Gods;
> Let Sphere-like Musicke breathe delicious tones
> Into our mortall eares; perfume the house
> With odiferous sents, sweeter then Myrrhe,
> Or all the spices in Panchaia:
> His sight and touching wee will recreate,
> That his five Sences shall be five-fold happy.
> His breath like Roses casts out sweete perfume:
> Time now with pleasure shall it selfe consume.
> (p. 47)

Isabella describes her "violent" blood to Gniaca, declaring her need for instant gratification, and Massina warns his predecessor that:

> This curse pursues femall Adulterie,
> They'l swimme through blood for sinnes varietie:
> Their pleasure like a sea groundless and wide,
> A womans lust was never satisfied.
> (p. 58)

Eugenia associates Eleazar's smile with all of the delights of senuous voyeurism, promising him that for one smile

> [T]hese two wanton boies,
> These pretty lads that do attend on me,
> Shall call thee Jove, shall wait upon thy cup
> And fill thee Nectar: . . .
> Smile on me, and with coronets of pearle,
> And bells of gold, circling their pretty arms
> In a round Ivorie fount these two shal swim,
> And dive to make thee sport: . . .
> (I.i.48-57)

In order for these women, who are willing to defy conventional morality, to satisfy their sexual lust and gratify their sensuous appetites, they must be able in a very calculated manner to carry out the practical necessities of their situation; in other words, to commit adultery successfully, they must be able to lie and dissemble. The Insatiate Countess herself recognizes that "Dissimulation womens armour is" and that "Women are witles that cannot dissemble," and she is most

adept at putting her philosophy into practice, feigning sickness to death to get rid of her present lover so that she can threaten to stab herself if his best friend will not sleep with her. And in order to rid herself permanently of Massino so that she can pursue her affair with Gniaca, she declares that she has repented and seeks a reconciliation with her husband. Eugenia of Lust's Dominion dissembles to keep her lover Eleazar and to help him win her own son's crown. She accuses her youngest son of being illegitimate because he has objected to her adultery and then attempts to persuade two friars to spread his infamy with their preaching. She sets a trap for Eleazar's chaste wife and her son, the King, who lusts after Maria and who attempts to rape her, calling in individuals from the court to witness Maria's "adulterous treason" and then, finding the King sleeping from a draught given him by Maria to assuage his lust, accuses Maria of killing her son and stabs her. She even agrees to Eleazar's plot to kill Cardinal Mendoza, using the Cardinal's attraction to her as a means to learn of his plans and then to set him up for Eleazar to murder.

The ability to satisfy her lust for sensation and power through her various schemes is perhaps the chief characteristic of Shakespeare's Tamora, and it is her overconfidence in her wiles and devices that brings about her downfall. She persuades Saturninus to pretend to forgive Titus and his family so that they will be unprepared for the horrifying revenge she intends to exact. Although the rape of Lavinia is not originally accomplished by any set plan of Tamora's, it is linked to her revenge when, reminded of her son Alarbus, she refuses Lavinia's pleas for pity, standing by and encouraging the rape of

another woman and saying to her sons: ". . . use her as you will/ The worse to her, the better lov'd of me" (II.iii.166-67). She aids Aaron in his plot to have Titus' sons accused of murdering Bassianus, and, unaware of the Moor's unexpected love for their newborn child, instructs her lover to "christen it with [his] dagger's point" in order to keep their affair secret (IV.ii.70). Her overconfidence in her scheming is not only apparent in this miscalculation of Aaron but in the culmination of her ploys as she arrives disguised at Titus' house, trying to convince the "mad" old man that she is Revenge come with her ministers to plot with Titus against his enemies.

The entire plot of The Maid's Tragedy depends upon Evadne's ability to maintain her cover, to convince others that she is happily married to Amintor while she is remaining faithful to her role as the King's mistress. Evadne is coldly calculating about explaining her adultery to her husband:

> Alas, I must have one
> To father children, and to bear the name
> Of husband to me, that my sin may be
> More honorable.
>
> (II.i.316-19)

And she chooses Amintor for the part because she would not be associated with a fool. This kind of chilling practicality is also seen in Goneril's dissembling. During the opening testing scene, she acts on Lear's insinuation that his daughters must buy their inheritance with hyperbole and sets the precedent with her flatteries. Then, unable to tolerate Lear's illusions of royalty, she risks power to satisfy an irrational impulse. Yet, like most of Shakespeare's villains, she has an air of aggrieved reasonableness. Her rationalizations to Lear and to

herself concerning her schemes are logical, but as Shakespeare is fully aware, all those who live outside any code of morality have their own terrifying logic.

Like Goneril, Vittoria Corombona is calculating in her schemes to fulfill her desire for excitement through Brachiano, but Webster makes this heroine much more appealing by creating a subordinate side of her character which seems innocent. She is guilty of adultery and of lying and dissembling to carry out her adultery, but there is a strong undercurrent of suggestion in the opposite direction. At first Brachiano pursues her, so that her guilt seems merely weakness. When she suggests that Brachiano murder her husband and his wife, it is done through the medium of a dream which presents her as a victim rather than aggressor and which deflects the sinister intent. She does not witness the dumb shows which reveal the murders of the two spouses although they are in her house. And at the house of convertites she is courageous for standing up to Brachiano and sympathetic in her wounded feelings. As Bradbrook convincingly asserts, Vittoria lies and dissembles steadily "but with no overtones of deceit so that she hardly seems morally guilty."[23]

A consideration of late-sixteenth and seventeenth century social attitudes already mentioned concerning the adulteress defines the reasons why, aside from practical considerations, many dramatists of the age would characterize their heroine/villainesses with the

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[23]Muriel Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 188.

traits of dissimulation and manipulation. Women were generally restricted by the morés and conventions of society to a subservient and passive role, a life of reaction rather than action. Even in a revolt against convention, they were dependent upon men for their happiness, security, and protection, hence vulnerable to the unexpected brutalities of the masculine will. Thus they must tread softly in order not to disturb the male ego in achieving their desires and goals and must rely upon their wits and the passive defense of manipulation rather than upon active assertion. Marston's Insatiate Countess reflects this situation, referring to her wit as her armor and her weapon while associating it with evil and temptation:

> The Serpents wit to woman rest in me,
> By that man fell, then why not he by me?
> Fain'd signes and teares dropt from a womans eye,
> Blindes man of reason, strikes his knowledge dumbe
> Wit armes a woman, Count Massino come.
> (p. 49)

The same lack of conscience apparent in an ability to scheme and trick others is also seen in the Renaissance adulteress' disloyalty to others besides her husband, in her lack of remorse if others are tempted into sin. The Insatiate Countess opens with Isabella's declaration of disloyalty to her dead husband's memory. As she extinguishes the taper at the coffin, so she puts thoughts of him out of her memory, "That his remembrance may not wrong [her] love" (p. 8). The entire play is based upon her fickleness, upon the commonplace that "change is given more to [women] then men" (p. 49). Medina describes the effect that the sorceries this "vilde Adulteresse" who draws "chaste men into incontinence" has upon society as a whole: "her lust/ Would make a slaughter house of Italy" (pp. 68-69). Eugenia is loyal to

nothing but her own desires in Lust's Dominion. Even Eleazar sees the unnaturalness of a mother who will accuse one son of being a bastard, accuse a cardinal of being the father of that bastard, agree to kill that son for her lover, and set up another son in a trap that will reveal him as an adulterer. This disloyalty to blood and family ties is also seen in The Revenger's Tragedy, King Lear, and The White Devil. The Duchess not only persuades Spurio that he should feel no loyalty to a father who has wronged him by giving him no name nor inheritance, but she convinces him that the betrayal should take the form of sleeping with his stepmother, an act which was considered not only adulterous but incestuous. Goneril betrays her entire family in King Lear--husband, father, and two sisters. And Vittoria Corombona's disloyalty to the brother who has acted as go-between in her love affair takes the form of violating a religious oath. Swearing "most religiously" not to outlive Flamineo who has brought in a brace of pistols to kill himself and his sister, Vittoria tricks Flamineo into giving up the guns and attempts to shoot him. The implication of this familial disloyalty is that a woman who is capable of betraying her husband and the sacrament of marriage will not hold any blood tie sacred.

The ultimate betrayal, however, is not a familial but a societal one. Almost invariably the heroine/villainesses of these plays participate in violence, revenge, and murder. Besides the practical necessity for the plot of removing the husband, the motivation behind the murders committed by the adulterous wives of this section is one of vengeance, an act, implicitly denying the power of God, of self-deification. For example, Marston's Isabella seeks vengeance on

Massino whom she accuses of slandering her reputation and declares to Gniaca, "Revenge to me is sweeter now then lust" (p. 57). When Gniaca is persuaded by Massino to forfeit his role as Isabella's revenger, she vows to take vengeance herself on both of her former lovers but finally entices a Spanish soldier to take up her cause. The language used by Isabella to express her desire for vengeance fuses in its imagery the pleasure she receives in satisfying her lust and that in satisfying her revenge. She invokes Don Sago: "Come Mars of lovers, Vulcan is not here/ Make vengeance like my bed, quite voide of feare" (p. 63). This association of sensual pleasure and physical violence is also seen in The Revenger's Tragedy; the skull and rampant sexuality are the twin poles around which Tourneur organizes his verse. Anything connected with sexual love in the play leads to death while only chastity leads to life--eternal life. The method by which this playwright creates a sexually depraved world is to link love with the death motive. The drama contains such love/death horrors as the inability of the Duke in his old age to enjoy the sexual urge, actual murders committed by people under the driving force of lust, involuntary depredations caused by innocent beauty, and the adulterous liaison between the Duchess and Spurio. This affair is not only marked with incest but with premeditated sadism. The desire to injure is built into the very terms with which the Duchess courts Spurio and into her own lust because her husband would not free her son. The imagery gives hatred and vengeance the quality of an aphrodisiac:[24]

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[24]Stilling, pp. 198-201.

> Who would not be revenged of such
> a father,
> E'en the worst way? I would thank that
> sin
> That could most injury him, and be in
> league with it.
> (I.ii.155-57)

Sadism is also apparent in the motivation behind Lussurio's lust for Castiza. His ambition is not the seduction of an ordinary woman but of a chaste, retiring virgin for whom seduction is not just physical but moral debasement. Lussurio seems to look forward to the triumph of the imposed humiliation of chastity. The perversion is continued as the poisoned Duke is forced to listen to the incestuous words of his son and wife, with the latter threatening to poison him if Spurio does not put the Duke out of his mind. Poisoning is significant here because of its traditional associations with the similar disfigurements of disease. It allows the play a measure of poetic justice because the physical death by poisoning of a man whose soul is already so diseased is highly appropriate.

While the conflation of death/love/sadism/perversion is built most deeply into Tourneur's play, influencing language and symbol as well as theme, the fusion of lust and death continues in The Maid's Tragedy on a more superficial level. In achieving this association, Beaumont and Fletcher rely more heavily upon dramatic techniques or tricks than upon Tourneur's method of weaving symbolic and thematic texture. For example, they pun frequently on the antithetical meanings of "die." In addition, under Melantius' direction, Evadne reenacts the bridal scene with the King in Amintor's place. An inversion and perversion of the sexual act occurs, but Evadne is not satisfied with

her knife thrust of revenge on the King unless Amintor will forgive her and "take [her] to [his] bed" (V.iii.151). Rejected by her husband, she turns the dagger into herself, saying, "Amintor, thou shalt love me now again" (V.iii.167).

The violence perpetuated by Goneril is generally motivated by a desire to dominate, and the directness with which she acts on what might be called her almost masculine sexual lusts is extended into her acts of violence. She is very direct in her letter to Edmund, requesting that he "cut off" her husband and stating the alternatives clearly. If Edmund kills Albany, she is the reward; if not she is prisoner to Albany's bed. Goneril even signs the letter "Your (wife, so I would say) affectionate servant" (IV.vi.270). Her other acts of violence reveal just as domineering a spirit. It is Goneril who suggests that vengeance be taken on Gloucester by plucking out his eyes. Goneril herself poisons her sister to keep her away from Albany, and when her plans for power fail, she kills herself. An ambiguous combination of manipulation and directness is apparent in Vittoria Corombona. She merely suggests to Brachiano, by telling him about her dream, that he murder her husband and his wife, and yet at the end of the play when her own life is threatened by Flamineo, she attempts to trick the pistols away from him and shoot him before rushing over to tread upon him.

The final characteristic that the majority of these adulterous wives have in common is that most do not suffer real remorse and most undergo a horrible death. The didactic aspect of the plays is evident here in that even the heroine/villainesses who do repent make such an

abrupt change that their "scaffold speeches" seem to serve homiletic rather than dramatic purposes. And a rather painful death is the only atonement that the moralists of the age will allow for the sin of adultery. The fate of the adulteress in Edward I, whose betrayal to her husband is reflected in a number of horrors against society, including murder, reveals the usual punishment in death and the theme of many history plays: "All pompe in time must fade and grow to nothing" (1.2682). But Peele precedes the Queen's death in his play with the spectacular sinking and rising of Elinor at Charing Cross. Jone of Acon warns her mother that her blaspheming and wicked deeds, including the murder of the Lord Mayor's wife, will result in the vengeance of London and God's punishment. Denying the charges and swearing,

> Gape earth and swallow me, and let my soule
> Sincke down to Hell if I were Autor of
> That womans Tragedy. . . ,
> (11.2916-98)

Elinor actually sinks into the earth as she speaks, an action which affirms the justice of Divine Providence. The repentance and death of Alice Arden also retain homiletic devices used by pamphleteers to teach moral lessons. There are various repentance scenes in the play with Alice finally admitting her complicity when confronted with the body of her dead husband. But her contrition is so sudden that it becomes an exemplum rather than growth in character. Alice's punishment is pronounced by the Mayor:

> Bear Mistress Arden unto Canterbury
> Where her sentence is she must be burnt.
> (xviii.30-31)

Here the play reflects the Renaissance belief that a woman convicted of adultery and murder is guilty not just of murder but of "petty treason" and thus must suffer a death more horrible than the usual hanging.

The fates of the remaining adulterous wives in this section range from the less severe banishment to the more extreme suicide. Lussurio banishes the Duchess in The Revenger's Tragedy, suggesting condemnation by society, while Eugenia's punishment in Lust's Dominion is effected on a personal level as she abruptly decides to end her life doing solitary repentance. Tamora is stabbed by Titus after being tricked into eating a pie made of the flesh of her own sons; she is refused funeral rites, and her body is thrown out to be devoured by animals. Beaumont's Evadne and Shakespeare's Goneril take their own lives. Goneril and Regan die at each other's throats without philosophical meditation. Evadne turns the knife with which she has murdered the king into herself and cries, "O, I am lost" (V.iii.173). The Insatiate Countess and the White Devil die with the same spirit and flamboyance with which they have lived. Isabella jokes at her execution and then rages that she must die. Although the consensus is that "she died deservedly," Isabella is only indirectly involved in the murder of Massina, and while Don Sago is pardoned, she is executed primarily for her lust and the disastrous effects it has had upon others. Vittoria dies with the courage and defiance she has exhibited throughout the play, but she accepts the justness of her death: "Oh, my greatest sin lay in my blood!/ Now my blood pays for't" (V.vi.241-42).

Thus the connection between evil and feminine sexuality, between personal and social betrayal, between adultery and murder and the resulting atonement for both in death is revealed by these playwrights as they create adulterous wives who become heroine/villainesses. Elizabethan and Jacobean tragic dramatists were preoccupied with evil. Their greatest tragedies come to terms with the fact of evil in the world, and out of their exploration arrives a vision of the relation of human suffering to human joy. The plays reflect a drive to find a basis for morality in a society in which the established system of values no longer seemed to hold firm. Though the heroine/villainesses of these works do not come to terms with morality, the greatest of the various plays seek in their ways to discover some meaning in human suffering, some kind of affirmation in the face of evil. Their awareness of the tragic anguish and disorder of experience apparent in the betrayal of adultery and murder takes various forms. As Madelein Doran astutely points out, there was considerable interest in psychological studies around the turn of the century, especially in pathological mental states, which "gave the dramatists a means of rendering human behavior more richly and subtly. Other lines of interest at the time were in satire and moralizing on sin--this amalgam of psychology, satire, and moral gloom resulted in a tragedy of intensely conceived characters--not always attractive and often unbalanced emotionally--caught in an evil world of adultery, incest, and murder."[25] These characters and ideas are found in generic forms as

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[25]Doran, p. 138.

different as the historical romance, homiletic, satiric, and revenge tragedy, and thus in some plays a study of an adulterous woman becomes secondary to the purpose dictated by the genre.

In most history plays women figure less as individual personalities than as accidents of history. Peele's drama is unique, however, in that the author was not interested in writing a history play in the usual sense of the term. Falling into three distinct sections, the main historical events concerning the Welsh rebellion, the Greenwood subplot, and the vilification of Queen Elinor, the play lacks a coherent treatment of the later Welsh rebellion and presents the seizure of Lluellen's Elinor not as a political insult and a hindrance to Welsh diplomacy but as a person loss to the ardent lover Lluellen. Thus Peele avoids political issues for affronted love, actually creating the first of a new genre which could be called the historical romance. Moral problems hardly exist in the uncomplicated world of this play, with neither king nor queen tormented by internal conflict.

Unlike Edward I, Arden of Feversham does confront moral questions but not by the questioning and anguish of its characters as occurs in a play like King Lear. Rather it works as does a sermon or exemplum. Using a documented historical event, it offers an example of "what will happen to a woman who commits adultery and murder" and reflects the belief of the homilists that "Sin must be writ large." Because their impulse is essentially satiric, Marston and Dekker succeed only in being moralistic, never in attaining a truly moral vision. Neither The Insatiate Countess nor Lust's Dominion deals with the relation of good and evil within the universe. Marston, in particular, is "incapable of

any kind of acceptance of the fact of evil implicit in any cosmic vision. Behind his plays is always the impulse to destroy evil by revealing how horrible or ludicrous it truly is, and thus his end is not the understanding of the human condition, but the improvement of social life by the eradication of vice."[26] Three of the plays in this chapter, Titus Andronicus, The Revenger's Tragedy, and The Maid's Tragedy, are revenge tragedies. One of these earlier Elizabethan dramas of revenge, Titus Andronicus, is moral in that the hero is set in a position which, as in Hamlet, disrupts his entire moral outlook. Tragedy comes into Titus' life with sufficient intensity to alter his character, drive him to insanity, and deal him ruin, but the work is structurally marred. In later plays such as The Revenger's Tragedy and The Maid's Tragedy, however, there seems to be less emphasis on revenge and more on lust, villainy, and adultery. Serious meditation becomes invective against the vices of the age, perhaps because, as one critic maintains, "audiences preferred the more artificial, standardized, and hence less serious rhetoric of a villain to the essentially moral and real analysis of a tortured hero revenger."[27]

The greatest of the Renaissance tragedies which present adulterous wives as heroine/villainesses do face moral issues, however, although (except in a play like The Changeling, which, for this and other reasons, deserves a separate analysis) the adulterous wife herself does not acquire a true moral vision. There is no unanimous philosophical

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[26]Ribner, p. 13.

[27]Bowers, pp. 154-58.

conclusion about the nature of the universe at the end of King Lear, and so each character, including Goneril, must interpret the events as his nature allows. Goneril dies like an animal at her sister's throat without any apparent awareness of her moral responsibilities, just the knowledge that she has been trapped and defeated. Lear, however, is educated in political and moral realities, and part of his education is begun by Goneril, along with Regan and the Fool who, for different reasons, would have him come to terms with his folly even at an age when most people have earned peace. Lear's belief in the natural order is a deep certainty, and he must face what to him is unnaturalness in its most horrible forms. Before he can accept reality, he must find out what it is, and as his belief in the natural order is based on reason, so that belief can be shattered only by reason as it is when Goneril and Regan argue sensibly and logically that Lear needs no outward show of kingly dignity and honor and reduce his retinue to nothing. His inner turmoil reflected by the storm on the heath, Lear realizes in a moment of illumination that his daughters' arguments are impeccable. Reason does not allow for such luxuries as retinue, nor can it explain a king's need for love and devotion. When Goneril's reason measures man's necessity, his life is "but such a poor, bare fork'd animal" (III.iv. 107-108).[28]

While Goneril is not the central focus of Shakespeare's play, Vittoria Corombona, about whom the audience is both sympathetic and appalled, is Webster's White Devil. Apparent in its very title, the

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[28]Ornstein, pp. 267-68.

play is a dramatic symbol of moral confusion, of the impossibility of distinguishing between appearance and reality in a world in which evil can appear beautiful and virtuous and virtue appears pallid. One critic believes that Webster's plays "are an agonized search for moral order in the uncertain and chaotic world of Jacobean scepticism by a dramatist who can no longer accept without question the postulates of order and degree so dear to Elizabethans."[29] Though Vittoria herself dies as unaware of morality as she lives, it is through her death that we come to see that Webster's vision concerns the integrity of life. For though evil, Vittoria dies an heroic death, and thus the revelation of nobility in life even through death seems to be the basis for the dramatist's moral order. Conventional morality and the people who represent it pale beneath Vittoria's energy and nobility. Webster's is ultimately the humanist's concern with the ability of man to survive in a shallow, ambiguous world of "mist" and to maintain his human worth in spite of it all. This is a profoundly moral concern based not upon a divine order but upon human integrity and the heights to which it can aspire in spite of the disorder that surrounds it.

In addition to women who deliberately commit adultery, and frequently murder, as a result of sexual lust, another type of heroine/villainess chooses to become unfaithful because of an overwhelming attraction to power. The playwrights who paint such dramatic portraits are exploring the rather interesting willingness of post-adolescent females to exchange physical beauty in males for some kind of power,

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[29]Ribner, p. 97.

whether it be physical, social, financial, or sexual. Famous womanizers such as John Wilkes, Balzac, or in the twentieth century, Carlo Ponti and Aristotle Onassis hardly owe their success with not only beautiful but vital women to physique or face but rather to a feminine weakness for their particular kind of power--in the case of Wilkes and Balzac, charm and wit; in the case of Ponti and Onassis, money and position. This female attraction to a kind of power which turns even ugly men into something extraordinary is treated by Shakespeare in a positive way with Desdemona's recognition, in spite of the traditional prejudice toward Moors, of Othello's intrinsic nobility, with her attraction to his self-confidence, leadership, and virtue. However, other Renaissance playwrights and Shakespeare himself offer a more negative result in the form of women who will violate social and moral codes to commit adultery, which sometimes ends in murder, with men more powerful than their husbands.

Shakespeare in Parts I and II of Henry VI and Marlowe in Edward II present queens who are married to rather weak or passive husbands and who reject kings for men they view as more powerful. Queen Margaret's attraction to the unscrupulous Suffolk is a desire for the man's power, in her view more than that of a king, as well as for the man himself. Her betrothal, effected through the agent of Suffolk, to Henry VI culminates Part I of the tetralogy and also provides both situation and motive for Part II. From his position as Protector, Gloucester has suggested to Henry that he accept the offer of the Pope, the Emperor, and the Earl of Armagnac to mediate the strife between England and France and to insure a lasting peace by marrying the

daughter of the Earl of Armagnac, a relative of Charles the Dauphin. The Duke of Suffolk captures Margaret, daughter of Reignier, falls in love with her, and determines to make her Henry's queen so that, since he is already married, he can enjoy her himself. Against Gloucester's advice, Henry falls in love with Suffolk's description of Margaret and determines to make her his queen in spite of her lack of dowry. Suffolk believes that he will be able to rule the kingdom through Margaret. Henry's breach of contract with Joan d'Armagnac, the concession of more territory in France, and, most importantly, his alliance with Margaret, who succeeds Joan of Arc as the nation's evil angel, indicate danger for the throne and symbolize the disorder that finally destroys the royal power in England.

As Herschel Baker points out in his introduction to Henry VI, Shakespeare's youthful exuberance permeates the play. It is apparent in the huge canvas filled with numerous personages, in the intricacies of plot, in the emphasis on action and pageantry, in the obvious theatricality. But, as with Marlowe, it is most evident in the "mighty line," the single line blank verse adorned with epithets and classical allusions.[30] But even the young Shakespeare had a great deal of insight into the workings of the female mind and into the male/female relationship. Margaret is first presented as a young girl fascinated by Suffolk's virility and position, and she grows in the course of the play into a woman equal in ambition and cunning to Suffolk himself.

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[30]William Shakespeare, 1-2 Henry VI, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Herschel Baker (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 589.

Because of Suffolk's immediate desire for Margaret, he contrives her marriage to his king as a way of keeping her near him. And since Suffolk was proxy for the king, Margaret expected a similar man. But she is doomed to disappointment, for Henry VI is known as the pious monarch, revealing a love of study and learning, a passivity, a desire for peace, a contemplative rather than, like Suffolk, an active man. Henry VI's tendency toward choosing a peaceful compromise, unlike his more valorous father, is evident in his surrender of the very territory that his father captured in France. His nobles refer to his compromises as "effeminate peace" (I Henry VI; V.iv.107), as his "bookish rule" that "hath pull'd fair England down" (II Henry VI; I.i.259). Henry's own language is permeated with pious maxims; he sees God in nature and as ruling over all of man's actions. During a hawking event, the Queen enters with a formidable falcon on her wrist, interested only in the sport, while Henry sees God's wonder in the flight of the birds. His piety makes him rather naive, and he is fooled by a group of so-called miracle workers, marveling that God gives "to believing souls . . . light in darkness, comfort in despair" (II.i.64-65). He avoids confrontations and quarrels, viewing them as jangling music and avowing, "blessed are the peacemakers on earth." This aversion to conflict of any kind and his firm belief in God's sovereignty allow him to respond with perfect composure and passivity to the news of the loss of all of England's territory in France: "Cold news, Lord Somerset; but God's will be done!" (III.i.86). And they also cause him to allow the ambitious, quarreling nobles to force his uncle not only to forfeit his position as Protector but also his very life. He grieves for

Gloucester, believing him to be the "map of honor, truth, and loyalty," yet he feels helpless to do anything about the situation, comparing himself to the cow whose calf has been taken to the slaughter-house and who

> [R]uns lowing up and down
> Looking the way her harmless young one went,
> And can do nought but wail her darling's loss . . . .
> (III.i.214-16)

Though Henry VI's chief attributes are those of a God-fearing, peace-loving man, his only weakness being viewed as his desire for Margaret, Margaret herself interprets these same qualities as weaknesses, complaining to Suffolk of the King's studiousness, piety, and passivity:

> I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours
> Thou ran'st a-tilt in honor of my love
> And stol'st away the ladies' hearts of France,
> I thought King Henry had resembled thee
> In courage, courtship, and proportion;
> But all his mind is bent to holiness,
> To number Ave-Maries on his beads;
> His champions are the prophets and apostles,
> His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,
> His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves
> Are brazen images of canonized saints.
> I would the college of the Cardinals
> Would choose him Pope and carry him to Rome,
> And set the triple crown upon his head--
> That were a state fit for his holiness.
> (I.iii.42-64)

Imagistically, Margaret implies that Suffolk is the complete opposite of the pious, scholarly Henry--a man of active, physical power. Suffolk's very relationship with Margaret begins with her as his prisoner, vulnerable to his power. She is fascinated by the man who can both capture and court her, who can say:

> Be not offended, nature's miracle,
> Thou art alloted to be ta'en by me;

> So doth the swan her downy cygnets save,
> Keeping them prisoner underneath [her] wings.
> (V.iii.54-57)

Suffolk takes responsibility for her wellbeing in England, responding to her complaint about her husband's lack of assertion by asking her patience and promising that he will see to it that she has her just power and control; he fulfills his vow by effecting, with her full knowledge and approval, Gloucester's murder.

Like most of the women in these plays who are willingly drawn into an adulterous relationship because of their attraction to power, Margaret is herself extraordinarily aggressive and vital. It is as though she rejects the <u>anima</u> in herself and in men. After Part I of the play, she takes over the role assumed by the fallen Joan of Arc. And it is interesting that in both cases, Shakespeare expresses feminine evil in terms of an adulterous woman. Joan la Pucelle is presented as a witch and strumpet who claims to be begotten of kings and inspired by celestial grace. Shakespeare represents her from the contemporary English view and, during the interrogation scene, has her deny her parentage--her father, an old shepherd. But to render her even more evil, he has the woman who rests her virtue in her claim to being virginal, chaste, and immaculate assert, out of fear for her life, that she is pregnant with the child of the already-married Reignier. The evil in Margaret is also represented by her lack of feminine morality, in her aggression, manipulation, scheming, and in her adultery with Suffolk. She resents the power Gloucester has over her husband, and, more significantly, becomes infuriated by what she sees as the arrogant behavior of his wife. But Margaret is not content merely to complain.

She acts on her frustrations by devising a situation during which "accidentally" she publicly boxes the Duchess' ears and later casts her vote to murder the Duke.

It is obvious, however, that Margaret's willingness to commit adultery with Suffolk is as much out of desire for the man himself as for what he offers to satisfy her craving for power. Shakespeare not only creates the euphuistic, rhyming scene between them on first meeting in which references are made to both desire and power, but he devises two love scenes in Part II in which lust and desire for power become the same need. After Suffolk's exile and execution by pirates, the Queen enters with his head, holds it in her lap, and croons to it in words that reflect both her love for him and his power over her:

> [H]ath this lovely face
> Rul'd like a wandering planet over me,
> And could it not enforce them to relent,
> That were unworthy to behold the same?
> (IV.iv.15-18)

In Edward II, Marlowe offers another dramatic portrait of a weak king and a woman who betrays this king for a man she views as more powerful. Less structurally sound than Henry VI, the play reveals Marlowe using the Queen's adultery to shift the focus and characterization in the middle. In the first half, Edward is depicted with far more flaws than Shakespeare's Henry VI, although both figures are rather ineffectual kings and men. He is seen as an extraordinarily selfish man, committed more to the gratification of his own appetites than to the welfare of his country. He is extremely sensual, and the focus of his sensuality in the play is his homosexual attraction to Gaveston, a fact of which Gaveston is aware and knows how to manipulate. The

courtier capitalizes on Edward's love of sensation, saying in a language ripe with sensuality:

> I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
> Musicians, that with touching of a string
> May draw the pliant King which way I please.
> Music and poetry is his delight;
> Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
> Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
> And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
> Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
> My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
> Shall with their goat-feet dance on antic hay.[31]

Edward is an incredible spendthrift, dipping into the national treasury to lavish gifts upon Gaveston and bestowing upon him titles far above his social rank. This indifference to national security in favor of personal gratification is a major contention of the nobles who attempt to usurp Edward's power. Mortimer resents Edward's treatment of Gaveston, that

> one so basely born
> Should by his sovereign's favor grow so pert,
> And riot it with the treasure of the realm.
> While soldiers mutiny for want of pay,
> He wears a lord's revenue on his back;
> And Midas-like, he jets it in the court . . . .
> (I.iv.402-407)

Mortimer accuses Edward to his face that

> The idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows,
> And prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston,
> Have drawn thy treasure deep and made thee weak . . . .
> (II.i.153-55)

And he criticizes the behavior of Edward and his soldiers who "march'd like players" to battle dressed in "garish robes not armor" with Edward

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[31]Christopher Marlowe, Edward II, in Elizabethan Plays, ed. Hazelton Spencer (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1933), I.i.51-60.

himself "Bedaub'd with gold" and "laughing at the rest" (II.ii.179-81). Edward is totally lacking in the power, skill, and diplomacy with which to handle the unrest of the commoners, nobles, and clergy alike, insulting each in turn, and even allowing his men to tear the sacred garments of and lay violent hands upon the Bishop of Coventry. Like Shakespeare's Richard II, Edward is full of furious but empty rhetoric, declaring that he will "either die or live with Gaveston" (I.i.138) and comparing himself to the kingly lion, but one who, as it turns out, has no claws.

It is Edward who is presented in a nagative light during the first half of the play and Mortimer and Isabella who are depicted more sympathetically. Mortimer is seen as a young Hotspur who has every right to be dissatisfied with the behavior of his king. He is quick-tempered and impetuous, calling Edward irresponsible and "brainsick," but, unlike Edward, he has the power to back up and act on his accusations. He tells the Queen, "That sly inveigling Frenchman we'll exile/ Or lose our lives," and he actually fulfills his promise (I.ii.57-58). He also threatens to depose the ineffectual King and carries out that threat. The Queen is also presented sympathetically in the first part of the play. She has been rejected by her husband for a man, is insulted by him periodically, but remains loyal to her lord. Her affair with Mortimer begins on an innocent note; she is merely telling her troubles to a man who seems to be interested in her welfare. She responds to Mortimer's query about her depressed behavior by saying:

> For now my lord the King regards me not,
> But dotes upon the love of Gaveston.
> He claps his cheeks, and hangs about his neck,
> Smiles in his face, and whispers in his ears;
> And when I come he frowns, as who should say,
> "Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston."
> (I.iv.49-54)

But when Mortimer assures her that the King will lose his crown if necessary to rid her and the nation of Gaveston, she replies:

> Then let him stay; for rather than my lord
> Shall be oppressed by civil mutinies,
> I will endure a melancholy life
> And let him frolic with his minion.
> (I.iv.64-67)

Edward seems almost to push her into Mortimer's arms, referring time and again to her "lover" Mortimer and her "favorite" Mortimer; however, it is the Queen who persuades Mortimer not to depose Edward but merely to do away with Gaveston. The audience can only be sympathetic to a woman who remains loyal to a husband who responds to her, "Fawn not on me, French strumpet/ Get thee gone!" and feel understanding for her gratefulness to and dependency on a man who is kind to her, is sexually attracted to her, and who is a figure of potency (I.iv.145).

However, in order to heighten the tragedy of Edward's plight in the second half of the play, Marlowe must render the king a sympathetic figure and must depict Mortimer and Isabella as vultures preying on their victim. He effects this by emphasizing Edward's newfound social responsibility, his concern for the kingship, his recognition of his own part in his downfall (in essence depicting him as helpless but noble), and by emphasizing the scheming, deception, cruelty, and, most importantly, the adultery of Isabella and Mortimer. In effect, Isabella's betrayal becomes Marlowe's most significant means of shifting

the emphasis of the play. Both Isabella and Mortimer become more overtly cunning in the second half. Mortimer contrives Gaveston's death, arguing that banishment would allow him opportunity to man opposition. It is the Queen, however, who suggests the murder of her husband (although it is Mortimer who actually hires the serpent Lightborn), telling Mortimer, "as long as he survives/ What safety rests for us, or for my son," and responding to his direct question "shall he . . . die" by saying, "I would he were, so't were not by my means" (V.ii.42-45). And she cleverly and cruelly dissembles to keep Edward's confidence in her loyalty by sending word to him in prison that she is trying to work his liberty and by offering a ring as "witness" of her love.

It is obvious that Isabella's shift in loyalty to Mortimer is a result of the potency of the man, in contrast to the homosexual Edward, and of the power he can offer her. Several connections are made between lust and power in the play. Kent tells himself to be careful, for "Mortimer/ And Isabel do kiss, while they conspire" (IV.v.21-22) and Mortimer himself uses the word "desire" to refer both to sexual lust and lust for power, saying after the imprisonment of the husband, "Fair Isabel, now have we our desire" (V.ii.1). The association of sex, power, and violence can be traced back to Marlowe's source, for Holinshed describes Isabella and Mortimer viewing the torturing of Edward and then using the sight as a kind of stimulant for lovemaking. Marlowe also shows the incremental nature of sin in the play, with Isabella's adultery leading to the murder of her husband and king and finally to the just censure of her son. Like that of Margaret,

Isabella's adultery is not only infamy to her husband's sheets, but because of her position as queen, it violates the social order of the entire nation.

Dramatizing the famous story of the adultery of Jane Shore, Heywood's Edward IV reverses the situation depicted in Henry VI and Edward II and takes the female attraction and submission to power into a more ordinary and domestic world. In this play Jane Shore, wife to a prominent citizen of London, succumbs to the pressure and temptation of Edward to become his mistress, although fully cognizant of her wrong-doing. Because of her knowledge of sin, she is more a figure of pathos than Margaret and Isabella, merely a victim of the greater power of a king. Unlike Henry VI or Edward II, the play is much more homiletic than dramatic, illustrating the theme of mutability and the fall of princes. The playwright seems to place the blame for sin equally on Edward and Jane. Edward is faulted in that he uses his position to force a virtuous wife into committing adultery. Jane laments that Edward

> [W]ith a violent seige
> Labours to breake into [her] plighted faith.

She continues,

> Oh, what am I, he should so much forget
> His royal state and his high maiestie.[32]

If she does not succumb to the King's wishes, Jane realizes that she is not only subjecting herself to danger but also the career and life of her husband. Yet the playwright is quite clear that, with her knowledge of the sin that she is committing by entering into an adulterous liaison

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[32]Thomas Heywood, Edward IV, Part I, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, vol. 1 (London: John Pearson, 1874), p. 73.

with the King, Jane is also grievously in the wrong. She is aware that she was

> [B]ound by oath
> To keep the promise that [she] made at first;
> And virtue lives, when pomp consumes to dust.
> (p. 74)

Thus the fate she receives at the hands of King Richard and her own self-penance of doing good to others from her position as the King's mistress to atone for her sins are considered just. Jane is a tragic victim of power and is a more simplistic version of the kind of no-win moral dilemma found in Ford's plays.

In each of the plays about an English king, a distinct moral code is set up concerning the responsibilities of kingship and the effect disorder, in the form of a woman's adultery, can have on the individual and on the nation as a whole. The theme which dominates Shakespeare's tetralogy is depicted in numerous history plays--the threat to national identity and purpose through the evils of disorder, and the symbol which many Renaissance playwrights use to depict this disorder is the adulterous wife. In two final plays which deal with a woman whose attraction to power leads to adultery, there is also a clear moral vision, but it is not reflected in any of the characters. The personages of Revenge for Honour and Women Beware Women have either misplaced moral values or have ceased to remember them at all.

The vehicle through which the playwrights explore this moral deficiency is found in the adulterous wife, depicted in Revenge for Honour in terms of the familiar Renaissance debate over passion and reason. Abilqualit is aware in the play of the dishonor of his desire

for Caropia, the chaste wife of "surly Mura," but his passion is so great that he would lose his honor as a soldier to obtain her. As in Othello, honor for a man in Revenge for Honour involves a devotion to duty. Abilqualit's dilemma over his honor results from the fact that his passion is interfering with his duty as a soldier; he cannot go to war because he pines for Caropia. His moral vision is no law but "what's prescribed by love," nor can anything that "Nature dictates . . . be held vicious."[33] The play, however, negates this self-centered, relativistic moral view, adhering to a more absolute code of honor.

Female honor, for a wife, is again equated with fidelity. Caropia's moral vision is also blinded by passion, but her willingness to commit adultery with Abilqualit is as much the result of her attraction to his power as her attraction to the man. It is, as she puts it, "ambition joined with affection" (II.ii.30). Any sympathy for the woman whose desire for her lover is so strong that she refuses to be ashamed for her adultery is lost in this rather crass admission and in her willingness to betray her lover, declaring that she was raped, when she faces the death penalty dictated for wives who entertain strangers at a late hour in their husbands' absence. Her affinity for power is again revealed in her submission to the villainous brother of Abilqualit who, after betraying his brother to become Emperor, offers to make Caropia Empress. In a play about honor, there is only one character, the old soldier Tarifa, who does not define honor in terms of self. Even Abilqualit, who defends the honor (i.e., reputation for chastity) of his lover at the loss of his own,

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[33]George Chapman, Revenge for Honour, in The Plays of George Chapman, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), I.i.334-36.

risking his life for her chastity, defines morality in terms of passion. In the end all of these characters receive the retribution due their violations of social and moral codes--death. Caropia, however, goes to her grave acting on the desire for power that made her commit adultery in the first place. Stabbed by one brother, she stabs the other, declaring that her sole ambition was to live an Empress, and if this were not allowed by fate, she was resolved that no other woman should enjoy that glory with Abilqualit.

As in Revenge for Honour, there is a moral blindness apparent in Middleton's Women Beware Women; but unlike the former play in which characters are in a situation where passion blinds their reason, characters in Women Beware Women are half aware of and frightened by moral sanctions but are always able to compromise with, ignore, or brush over their consciences. As Hippolito describes this social group: "Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us/ And we are brought to nothing."[34] The corruption that Middleton analyzes is far more insidious than mere greed for sex and for power in the form of wealth and position; it is the corruption that forgets moral obligations. Again the chief vehicle used to symbolize this kind of permissive society is the adulterous wife--the woman whose drive for power enables her to forget her marriage vows. Middleton reveals his belief in the social and moral destructiveness of female adultery by implying the importance of marriage and family to societal order. His work

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[34]Thomas Middleton, Women Beware Women, ed. J. R. Mulryne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), V.ii.146-47. I am much indebted to Professor Mulryne's introductory discussion of the play.

dramatizes what happens when marriage, the representative social and moral bond, is undermined by lack of scruple; Bianca's adultery, resulting from her need for power and impetus for the entire play, is the emblem of destruction in a casual society. The play describes the violation of an entire network of family relationships that ought to support order. Characters' views toward these relationships are distorted in Women Beware Women, based not on love or responsibility but on greed for sexual or material power which, in the language and attitudes of the characters, amount to the same drive. Bianca's adultery is a symbol of an entire society which has forgotten moral obligations.

An understanding of the significance of adultery in Women Beware Women implies an understanding of the importance of marriage and family. Various posturings or attitudes towards marriage become the very structure of the drama, with violations of the institution of marriage, primarily in the form of female adultery, bringing destruction and disorder in both main and subplots. In the subplot Isabella and Hippolito violate societal order by promoting a fake marriage. Hippolito voluntarily participates in an incestuous relationship with his niece. Though she is hesitant about incest, Isabella has no qualms about adultery. Livia, who also commits adultery, has little regret at her role in contravening the moral code. This subplot material mirrors the story of Bianca, reflecting the same marital infidelities. Both stories deal with a beautiful, vital woman, married to a weak husband, who, because of her attraction to power, offers herself to a more exciting lover--more sexually powerful in terms of physique and social

grace in the situation of Isabella and in terms of wealth and position in that of Bianca. In both cases, the violation of marriage vows disrupts order. But in each case the integrity of the relationship had already been undermined by a previous disregard for marriage. Fabrito has insulted the sanctity of marriage by forcing Isabella to have the ridiculous Ward, and their marriage becomes the absurdity he made of it. Livia, though aunt to Isabella and sister to Hippolito, breaks with morality by encouraging their liaison, insuring that marriage to the Ward is a total mockery. And Guardiano, the Ward's guardian, Hippolito's brother, and Isabella's uncle, encourages the same marriage, doing his part to make it a hypocritical parody. In the main plot, the husband himself undermines marriage. Leantio's characteristic use of the language of things to describe his marriage implies that for him, Bianca is a treasured possession, bought through cleverness and thrift. Fearful like most collectors that his object will be stolen, he determines to case her up from all men's eyes like a jewel hidden from thieves. With such a materialistic view of marriage, it is only natural that when a wealthier, more powerful man appears, he should win the jewel, a view Leantio himself takes in accepting the loss of Bianca and in sealing his new relationship with Livia (III.ii.374-76).

The language of characters other than Leantio also reveals an undermining of marriage and shows how this morally deficient society that could produce a Bianca thinks of sexual relationships in terms of power. Making frequent use of double entendres, various characters employ the term <u>business</u> in a dual sense, referring both to commerce

and to sex and illustrating how they view sexual relationships as more commercial than emotional.[35] The debasement of these traditional human ties is also revealed by the play's connection of sexual feeling with food and eating (I.ii.120-23, 147-50). It is the Ward who makes most frequent use of this imagery, illustrating with his vulgarity and lack of feeling one of his chief functions in the play; he is an instrument for revealing the moral truths hidden behind the breeding of the more sophisticated characters. The Ward also fuses business and marriage, thinking of his occupation of shuttlecock as commensurate with choosing a wife, and Guardiano seconds this view (II.ii.80-83). Bianca is simply a more obvious symbol of the confusion between sex and commerce, marriage and power, and her own language makes her at one with the society that produced her. Social and sexual service are the same for this woman as she uses the word service to imply her husband's lack of virility in contrast to the power that won her over to the Duke (IV.i.47-50).

Total disregard for the institution of marriage and the association of sex with power are also emphasized in the staging of the play. Middleton's greatest contribution to the drama is perhaps to be found in these vivid scenes which function as symbolic commentaries or summaries of theme and which connect relationships with three kinds of power. For example, this society views sex in terms of business power, and to highlight this, the playwright creates a scene (III.iv) in which

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[35]Christopher Ricks, "Word-Play in Women Beware Women," RES, n.s. xii (1961), 238-50. Ricks cites more than a dozen examples of the puns on commerce and sex.

Sordido and the Ward, weighing the possibility of Isabella for a wife, inspect her like an animal at auction. This reinforces the typical attitude of Leantio about his possessions, including his wife, of the Duke "buying" Bianca with his power, of Livia purchasing Leantio, of Fabrito and Guardiano arranging a wealthy marriage for Isabella. Another result of the habitual association of sex and power is that relationships in this society are generally decided by the power of wit, charm, and cunning, with the cleverest player winning the prize. This way of thinking is reflected in Middleton's chess game scene. As helpless pawn, Bianca is taken by a more powerful piece--the Duke, fit center for such a morally deficient world, so callous to moral responsibility that he thinks to arrange murder to avoid adultery. However, as Queen, Bianca becomes the most powerful piece in the game, thus progressing from defenseless novice to initiate fully hardened into the corrupt world.

Bianca begins as an outsider attached to the play-world only by her marriage with Leantio, unaccustomed to poverty, alien to Florence, and new to marriage. In striking contrast to her insecure, anxious position is that of the Duke, whom, as an outsider, she must meet. A much older man than this sixteen-year-old girl, he represents with his experience and position power, self-confidence, and poise. Bianca's social and emotional vulnerability is symbolized with the chess game. Apart from this society from the beginning, even outside the intimacy her husband shares with his mother, she is separated from the mother and Livia in the scene both in her unfamiliarity with their social skills and later physically as she is taken to meet the Duke. At first merely being the culmination of numerous unsettling new social experiences, the

Duke is able to make himself the rock, the figure of power, to which the defenseless Bianca clings. With an admirably timed combination of reassurance, threats, flattery, and sexual innuendo, he appeases her nervousness and moral objections with promises of wealth and honor and finally with the practical question:

> And can you be so much your Beauties enemy,
> To kiss away a moneth or two in wedlock,
> And weep whole years in wants for ever after?
> Come, play the wise wench and provide for ever.
> (II.ii.382-86)

Here the Duke strikes a chord, Bianca's desire for security and peace, that has been consistent throughout the play. Leantio and the Duke both offer her shelter, and Bianca herself says that she requires in place of wealth only that "Heaven send a quiet peace . . . (I.i.127). She even poisons the Cardinal because he is a threat to her newfound serenity (V.ii.70-71). Bianca's is the need of the isolated, inexperienced, essentially friendless girl to find a place in a society to which she is alien. To some degree she succumbs to the Duke because of her vulnerability and his power; she is pressured to do so by social situation and personalities stronger by virtue of experience and position. Bianca looks to power for security and peace. But the tragic irony of the play occurs because the individual who succumbs to social and personal pressures can find at best only uncertain peace. The frantic search for peace in Bianca's case brings on the moral and emotional turmoil she seeks to avoid.

However, Bianca changes, if only superficially, after her transformation from the pawn to the more powerful Queen. She has moved from innocence to experience, from defenselessness to power, and she

quickly reveals a command of the practices of her new world. Her words and attitude are no longer those of the frightened novice as she berates Guardiano for his role in her betrayal and, in contrast to her former behavior, demands of the mother those material comforts which she feels her due. She reveals her change in character most obviously, however, in the banquet scene. Here she is able to flirt with the Duke to the delight of the court while ignoring the presence of her husband who is now the outsider. And her final confrontation with Leantio emphasizes the transformation that has occurred. She remains cool and aloof and, after her husband's departure, refers to him as a plague. There is tragic irony in Bianca's treatment of Leantio, however. Though she has escaped Leantio's "plague" into the apparently more antiseptic and aesthetic world of the Duke, she has in reality entered into a society which repeatedly offers her emotional and social health but which ultimately destroys her.

In addition to the auction and chess game scenes, Middleton offers another scene that reveals how power for Bianca and other like-minded adulterous wives determines relationships. This final kind of power is that of the hierarchy of prestige. Bianca must yield to the Duke, Leantio must submit to the loss of his wife, Isabella must acquiesce to the wishes of her father; a high position takes precedence. This view of the survival of might is symbolized in the Ward's game not of skill but of violence--Cat and trap. There are other less developed scenes which also show the connection of sex with power and the association of female adultery with the immorality pervading the play-world. At the banquet the graceful dancing of Hippolito with

Isabella is contrasted with the Ward's awkward imitation. Here the Ward is symbolically revealed as an unsuitable sexual partner for Isabella, yet the most harmonious dance is an adulterous one. Later Middleton makes use of a discussion of watches by Bianca and her ladies to explain their behavior with their lovers. Here Bianca again flaunts her adultery by admitting to setting her watch by the Sun (Duke), a remark which wins the admiration of the ladies.

Middleton's final masque scene reveals, however, that this kind of immorality and substitution of materialism and power for human emotion will finally overreach itself. The masque is a wedding masque presented in honor of the Duke's marriage to Bianca. Full of ironies and violence, it reveals the self-destructiveness resulting from the violation of the social bonds of marriage and family, most flagrantly violated by the very marriage being celebrated, which prevent societal chaos. While supposedly dramatizing the sanctity and responsibility of making the moral commitment of marriage, the theme of the entire play, the masque is actually a concealment for self-interest and brutality. The ironies continue with the fates of the cast. Isabella who married for wealth dies as "burning treasure" is thrown on her. Guardiano, who set traps for others, dies in his own. Livia, the manipulator of marriage, plays the goddess of marriage who is poisoned by her own votary, Isabella. Hippolito, blinded by desire, is poisoned by Cupid's arrows. Bianca offers the Duke a celestial cup which turns out to be a cup of poison by which she too dies. Just retribution is extended; only those characters who, by virtue of innocence (Cardinal) or stupidity (Ward, Sordido, Fabrito) cannot be held as immoral, are spared.

Ultimately, Middleton affirms dramatically that social order cannot tolerate such a materialistic and immoral view of family relationships, that a society in which evil and a lack of moral obligation, apparent in various violations of the marriage bond, most significantly adultery, will finally prey upon itself.

Thus while the wives of these plays who choose to commit adultery as a result of sexual desire or a desire for power come to no real understanding of their active participation in evil, the greatest of the plays themselves do illuminate the existence of evil in the universe. And they reveal a particular manifestation of evil which had hitherto not been explored dramatically--what might be called feminine evil symbolized in the character of the adulterous wife.

CHAPTER V

ADULTERY AS CENTRAL TO THE VISION OF EVIL IN MIDDLETON AND ROWLEY'S THE CHANGELING

In each of the plays presented thus far, the exploration of the psychology and the social and moral import of an adulterous wife is only one thread of the total fabric of the play. The wives in the first chapter are merely accused, not guilty of adultery: the evil in these plays lies within the jealous hearts of their husbands, in an obsession with extrinsic honor, or elsewhere in the tragic universe. The repentant adulteresses are delineated less as dramatic explorations of evil within a female character than as vehicles for homiletic illustration of a moral. Even more complex studies concerning the nature of feminine villainy, as illustrated through the deliberate adulteress, do not place illicit sex at the center of the plays: Bianca Capella is as much attracted to power as sex; Eugenia, Tamora, and Goneril are only one facet of the total evil of their respective plays; and Vittoria Corombona comes to no awareness of good and evil as a result of her adultery; she is the same remarkable woman throughout The White Devil--her affair with Brachiano is simply one manifestation of her character.

However, one play in which the concept of feminine sexual honor and the sin of adultery are at its very center is Middleton and Rowley's The Changeling; Beatrice Joanna's adultery as a means of arriving at moral awareness is the play. Like the creators of the heroine villainesses previously discussed, Middleton shares a concern with the

individual by delineating a woman who stands apart from society. At first completely self-centered and thus totally unaware of morality, his heroine must, through her exposure to evil in the form of De Flores, come to terms with her own sexuality and come to a definition of morality. Ultimately, Beatrice Joanna must be seen as the finest, most complex study of the implications of the relationship between feminine sexuality, adultery, and morality that Renaissance drama offers. To understand fully the complexity of the play, we should keep in mind that Beatrice Joanna's adulterous activities and De Flores' temptation are at the center. Here Middleton's play moves in a direction exactly opposite to that of Shakespeare's King Lear. The emphasis in Lear is on a larger cosmic evil which is merely reflected by Goneril's personal act of adultery. However, in The Changeling Middleton concentrates on a very personal, specific evil in order to make more definite the vagueness of cosmic evil. Thus adultery becomes the vehicle that serves to illustrate the playwright's theme of the possible triumph of evil. Perhaps the best way to examine the implications of the moral universe of The Changeling is first to examine Beatrice Joanna, the symbol for evil in the play, as both adulteress and changeling. The concept of the changeling, a symbolic renunciation of good and an adoption of evil, will then be examined in reference to the other characters in the play. With the realities of a corrupt world fully established, we may then turn to the theme of Evil versus Good as it is reinforced technically in the subplot and in the dramatist's use of various poetic devices.

One of the first critical questions that needs to be answered if one is to come to terms with the character of Beatrice Joanna is whether or not the interest of the dramatist is primarily psychological rather than philosophical. If such is the case, then the play must be seen as a study in abnormal psychology. Certainly the play contains psychological and sociological interests in that Middleton explores the relation between human appetites and the social environment which conditions them; and of course a character like De Flores is pathological in his masochistic obsession. However, the play is far more than merely a psychological study in aberrant behavior. As more astute critics acknowledge, Middleton's "realistic" method of examining the psychology of a character is merely the vehicle by which the playwright effects the larger thematic design apparent in both plot and subplot. The dramatist's concern is "not so much with the complexities of human characters as with the nature of evil in the world. . . . His works embrace a more comprehensive view of human life than ever could be encompassed in the psychological study of any individual no matter how intense or revealing."[1] The presence of Heaven and Hell is always imminent in Middleton's world; the limits of Good and Evil are distinctly outlined, and the sinner inevitably suffers the effects of divine providence.

Perhaps the metaphysical implications of the game of barley-brake best serve to emphasize the ultimate philosophical and moral concerns of the play. Two references are made to this popular pastime, one by

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[1]Ribner, pp. 123-25.

some of the madmen of the subplot early in the drama and one by De Flores in the final scene. The game was played with a central area known as hell. A couple confined in this circle try to capture as replacements or fellow prisoners various couples running back and forth past them.[2] The references to the game reveal the philosophical concern of the collaborating playwrights since barley-brake can be seen to represent the action of the drama. Beatrice Joanna and De Flores are the couple caught in hell throughout. De Flores himself says in the final scene when Beatrice Joanna confesses to her husband that Diaphanta took the bride's place in bed on her wedding night: "yes; and the while I coupled with your mate/ At barley-brake; Now we are left in hell."[3] Their confinement in hell is dramatically symbolized by the dark closet into which Alsemero thrusts Beatrice Joanna and where De Flores goes, with more right than her husband, to comfort her. Others have run through the circle of hell but managed to escape, even though Vermandero declares, "We are all there, it circumscribes here" (V.iii.164). But as Alsemero reassures him, only Beatrice Joanna and De Flores remain at the end of the play to suffer justice and divine retribution.

Thus it is evident that the problem of evil in the universe interfuses even the smallest event in the play. Yet, exactly what is

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[2]Ribner, p. 134.

[3]Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, The Changeling, in Drama of the English Renaissance: The Stuart Period, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976), V.iii.162-63.

Middleton's theme, the moral vision that encompasses the microcosm of a child's game and the macrocosm of society? The answer best lies in an interpretation of the adulterous character of Beatrice Joanna. She has been observed as a pampered, irresponsible child who has been deluded into regarding herself as an adult. She exerts every effort of will to order the lives of those around her to suit her own desires, and in her naive inability to understand the pathology of a man like De Flores, her plans bring destruction on many of those about her.[4] She is, however, not innocent in any worthy sense. It is the innocence of selfishness, of ignorance, of one "who has failed to realize that she is as much subject to the laws of morality as anyone else."[5] Some critics do not feel that Beatrice Joanna achieves through suffering and damnation the moral awareness which comes too late to Faustus, believing that her awareness actually leads only to further degradation because it does not include remorse. She is "appalled by the consequence of her sin, not by the sin itself." In this view, it was impossible for De Flores to poison Beatrice Joanna because she contained that poison already within her, instinctively fearing in him the evil that was latent but that she had not yet come to acknowledge within herself. De Flores was her "fate" because he recognized her as a soulmate and because only through him could she break with the conventions of marriage and family. He alone could "satisfy that craving for romantic

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[4]Critical commentary is cited in Nethercot's introduction to The Changeling, in Stuart Plays, p. 411.

[5]Cited by Nethercot, p. 411.

experience which is fulfilled in the breathless adventure of murder and adultery."[6]

Acknowledging that Beatrice Joanna comes to terms with the evil that is as much hidden from herself as others, other critics believe that she does attain a degree of moral awareness but that she simply knowingly chooses evil. She represents the typical Middleton progression as one "from a choice of evil through a moral blindness which is the product of her own damnation, to a full awareness of evil, and at last to a willful embrace of damnation."[7]

Beatrice certainly comes to terms with evil, recognizing it within herself, but her story would not be a particularly tragic one if we read her as simply a blackhearted villainess from the beginning of the play. Rather Beatrice's is an untested nature, typical of adolescence and continuing with some people into adulthood. She is fascinated by the danger and excitement she senses in the cynical, evil, malignant figure of De Flores. Beatrice Joanna is not unintelligent or insensitive, for unlike her father with whom De Flores is "In good respect" (I.i.137) and Tomazo who believes De Flores has "a wonderous honest heart," calls him "kind and true one," and remembers his "brother loved [him] well" (IV.ii.57,41-42), she does recognize the poison within De Flores, instinctively thinking of him when she needs to get rid of Alonzo:

> Why men of art make much of poison,
> Keep one to expel another; where was my art?
> (II.ii.46-47)

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[6]Ornstein, pp. 185-87.

[7]Ribner, pp. 126-29.

But Beatrice Joanna's character is not yet developed enough for her to understand the danger, to herself and others, inherent in the evil she is experimenting with, in the choices she is making. She is fascinated and titillated by the evil in De Flores' nature, symbolized in his physical ugliness; but she has no awareness of the consequences of evil.

Beatrice's attraction to the man is apparent in the vehemence and irrationality of her repulsion and rejection of him. Following her doggedly, De Flores says,

> Must I be enjoined
> To follow still whilst she flies from me? Well,
> Fates do your worst; I'll please myself with sight
> Of her, at all opportunities,
> If but to spite her anger; I know she had
> Rather see me dead than living, and yet
> She knows no cause for it, but a peevish will.
> (I.i.102-108)

Beatrice Joanna herself calls her illogical anger and peevishness towards De Flores her "infirmity," able to offer no other explanation to Alsemero of her insulting behavior to De Flores:

> Nor can I other reason render you
> Than his or hers, of some particular thing
> They must abandon as a deadly poison,
> Which to a thousand other tastes were wholesome.
> (I.i.111-14)

She continues, "I am no enemy to any creature/ My memory has but yon gentleman" (I.i.130-31), and Alsemero reveals his lack of sensitivity about human nature by offering as explanation for her too-violent response more platitudes:

> This is a frequent frailty in our nature;
> There's scarce a man amongst a thousand found,
> But hath his imperfection: one distastes
> The scent of roses, which to infinites

> Most pleasing is, and odoriferous;
> One oil, the enemy of poison;
> Another wine, the cheerer of the heart,
> And lively refresher of the countenance.
> Indeed this fault (if so it be) is general;
> There's scarce a thing but is both loved and loathed.
> Myself, I must confess, have the same frailty.
> (I.i.117-27)

But though she tries to drive De Flores away with her scornful remarks, she unreasoningly cannot help herself from enticing him back again, spotting him with, "Not this serpent gone yet?" and then deliberately dropping a glove (I.i.228). When he picks it up, her response is much more vehement than called for:

> Mischief on your officious forwardness!
> Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more;
> There, for t'other's sake I part with this,
> [Takes off the other glove and throws it down.]
> Take 'em and draw thine own skin off with 'em.
> (I.i.230-33)

Beatrice Joanna is instinctively if not consciously aware of her powerful sexuality and that of De Flores and also aware of her sexual power over him. Thus she is titillating herself by playing with, almost torturing him, drawing him forward and then pulling back.

Beatrice Joanna is like Othello who, although incredibly passionate, has had no experience in the complexities of passion, although his courage and honor have been tested in battles and political situations, and who is no match for the machinations of Iago whose evil, unlike De Flores, is not reflected in his physiognomy. She is just coming to feel the power and excitement of her sexuality and that of a man like De Flores, but she has not yet had the experiences to understand her feelings. Beatrice herself says of De Flores, "This

ominous ill-faced fellow more disturbs me/ Than all my other passions" (II.i.52-53) and:

> I never see this fellow, but I think
> Of some harm towards me; danger's in my mind still;
> I scarce leave trembling of an hour after.
> The next good mood I find my father in,
> I'll get him quite discarded.
> (II.i.89-93)

Unlike Othello, however, who has had experiences and has made moral choices in situations other than the realm of love, Beatrice Joanna is completely amoral at the beginning of the play. We hear nothing of the virtuous deeds or honorable behavior that we associate with Othello from the first, and the action of The Changeling begins so that we are, as it were, in Cyprus from the outset.

We are presented with a beautiful, vivacious young woman who operates totally in terms of self. As T. S. Eliot points out,

> The tragedy of The Changeling is an eternal tragedy--the tragedy of the not naturally bad but irresponsible and undeveloped nature caught in the consequences of its own action. In every age . . . there are instances of the same thing: the unmoral nature, suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality--of morality not made by man but by nature--and forced to take the consequences of an act which it had planned lightheartedly. Beatrice is not a moral creature; she becomes moral only by becoming damned.[8]

Morality implies a social conscience; thus a person who is amoral simply makes choices in response to personal desire or will with no awareness that there is any other consideration. This type of individual is incapable of looking beyond the self to see what consequences his choice will have for himself in society. Beatrice is naturally bad in

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[8]T. S. Eliot, Essays on Elizabethan Drama (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1932), p. 86.

the way that most people have the potential of choosing for evil. But, blinded by her ego, she is not yet consciously aware of that potential, sensing only the possibility that it exists in De Flores.

Beatrice Joanna's choices and actions are always dictated by what she needs or wants. When she feels antipathy for someone, such as De Flores, she acts on her feelings, openly insulting him with intention to hurt. Though betrothed to Alonzo, when she meets Alsemero and discovers instantly that "This was the man was meant [for her]," she makes excuses to her father to postpone the wedding and violates her betrothal by arranging a liaison with Alsemero through his friend Jasperino (I.i.86). At the meeting she is free with her embraces, again violating a betrothal contract that to Jacobeans was as binding as marriage, and when Alsemero offers to challenge Alonzo, she protests her own loss if anything should happen to him and immediately, without telling her lover of her plans, thinks of using De Flores for the purpose of murdering Alonzo. In an aside containing images of bartering, she states:

> I was to blame,
> I ha' marred so good a market with my scorn;
> 'T had been done questionless. The ugliest creature
> Creation framed for some use, yet to see
> I could not mark so much where it should be.
> (II.ii.41-45)

Regretting now that she has insulted so useful a creature, she sets about to remedy the situation, supremely confident that she can charm and manipulate De Flores into committing the murder on her terms and for her price. She decides to keep "secret" her loathing for De Flores "And serve [her] turn upon him," consciously calling him by his name

for the first time instead of "rogue" or "rascal" (II.ii.68-69). She flatters him by telling him that his appearance has improved, that he looks like a lover, touching his pimply face and offering to "make a water for [him] shall cleanse this/ Within a fortnight" (II.ii.82). She even turns his ugliness into a positive attribute, saying that a harsh face is becoming to a man, indicating "service, resolution, manhood" (II.ii.92). Then she crowns her flattery by saying, "O my De Flores," sighs, and becomes the clinging vine, complaining that if she were only a man, she would not have to marry one not of her choosing (II.ii.99). Believing that she has manipulated De Flores exactly where she wants him, she allows him to kneel and offer his services. In essence, she accepts De Flores as her knight, but the portrait of vassalic chivalry is perverted not only by the physical ugliness of her Launcelot but by his service of "honor, . . . blood, and danger" (II.ii.118). Mistaking his sexual fervor for greed, she encourages him with money and then verbally works the kneeling De Flores into a frenzy in a stichomythic exchange:

> Beatrice Then take him [Alonzo] to thy fury.
> De Flores I thirst for him.
> Beatrice Alonzo de Piracquo
> De Flores His end's upon him;
> He shall be seen no more.
> [Rises.]
> Beatrice How lovely now
> Dost thou appear to me! Never was man
> Dearlier rewarded.
> (II.ii.133-36)

Pleased with her success and blinded by her ego, Beatrice Joanna totally misinterprets De Flores' motivations and ignores the warning that his reason may be for something other than gold. She reveals the

expertise at manipulation necessary for the adulteress and apparent in previous heroine/villainesses. Telling De Flores that she will help him flee the country, she thinks that she has the situation totally under control:

> [Aside] I shall rid
> myself
> Of two inveterate loathings at one time,
> Piracquo and his dog-face.
> (II.ii.145-46)

The self-centeredness of amorality is also apparent in Beatrice Joanna's lack of concern for her father's wishes about her marriage and her willingness to manipulate her parents. When Vermandero declares that if she is not bound to Alonzo, he will "want [his] will," Beatrice retorts in an aside, "I shall want mine if you do it" (I.i.222-23). After acquiring De Flores' promise to murder Alonzo, she makes use of every opportunity to improve Alsemero's favor in her father's eyes, believing that "So wisdom by degrees works out her freedom" (III.iv.13). This incredible confidence in her abilities, this supreme egoism, is also typical of Beatrice's character. Like Iago she is fascinated by her own desires and her power to carry out those desires. But unlike Iago, who acts on that power and then rationalizes afterwards, creating all sorts of reasons for destroying Othello, Beatrice feels no need to rationalize because she is always confident of her own wisdom and judgment and has no awareness of the consequences of her actions. She warns Alsemero to be cautious in love, using the images of sight/seeing/wisdom that are apparent throughout the play: "Our eyes are sentinels unto our judgment/ And should give certain judgment what they see" (I.i.73-74). She believes wholeheartedly in her own

rationality: "Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgment/ And see the way to merit, clearly see it" (II.i.13-14). After discouraging Alsemero from challenging Piracquo and planning her own scheme for his murder, she pompously instructs her lover:

> The present times are not so sure of our side
> As those hereafter may be; we must use 'em then
> As thrifty folks their wealth, sparingly now,
> Till the time opens.
> (II.ii.49-52)

And Alsemero is duly impressed with her "wisdom." This is a portrait of a young woman whose vision is so shortsightedly caught up in her own ego that she cannot see beyond it.

One of the requirements of this kind of ego is that it needs a great deal of stimulation. Beatrice is attracted to the danger that she senses in a man like De Flores, to the excitement of her power over him, and to what she thinks is her power to manipulate him and others. Even her love for Alsemero is quite forgotten in the peril she feels when near De Flores:

> Oh, I was
> Lost in this small disturbance and forgot
> Affliction's fiercer torment that now comes
> To bear down all my comforts.
> (II.i.93-96)

To gratify her need for sensation, Beatrice Joanna must walk a tightrope; she rejects the security of a marriage arranged by her father for a romantic lover then arranges her own affair and marriage by participating in what, for her, are the adventures of adultery and murder. This is a character who must reject conventional morality not only because it is boring but because her only measure of morality is her own ego. And the role which Middleton deems as best suited for his amoralist is that of

the adulteress. Here his frame of reference for feminine evil is a woman involved in the sins of adultery and murder.

Since The Changeling is a study of a young woman who grows into a knowledge of morality through her exposure to evil, in the form of adultery with De Flores, then it is necessary to realize that the most dramatic "change" in the play, the renunciation of good and the adoption of evil, is evinced in Beatrice Joanna herself. Moving from spoiled adolescent to adulteress to accomplice in murder, her capacity for destruction is hinted only by her mysterious loathing for De Flores, and her villainy is disguised, even to herself, by a delicate concern for her "honor." At the outset she is the clever child fascinated with her "art." When De Flores enters, she is still a child "playing with a complicated machine of whose mechanism and capacities she knows nothing, concerned only to release the catch that will start it working and delighted when, in accordance with the text book's instructions, it begins to move."[9] Her changes begin, her character develops as she moves, through contact with evil, from child-like amorality to morality. Like Macbeth, Beatrice seems to "change" or develop by an habituation to her sin; it becomes no longer sin but custom. At the end of the play, Beatrice, "having been so long the enforced conspirator of De Flores, becomes (and this is permanently true to human nature) more his partner, his mate, than the mate and partner of the man for whom she consented to the crime. Her lover disappears

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[9]Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama (London: Methuen & Co., 1936), p. 146.

not only from the scene but from her imagination."[10] De Flores himself explains this to the disbelieving Beatrice Joanna when he says,

> Why, are not you as guilty in, I'm sure,
> As deep as I? And we should stick together.
> . . . . . .
> Nor is it fit we two, engaged so jointly,
> Should part and live asunder.
> (III.iv.84-90)

Beatrice has a difficult time recognizing her "change" because she is essentially a voyeur. Voyeurism may be described as "an eroticized expression of curiosity whose chief phenomenological characteristic is the distance maintained between the voyeur and the object. The tension between the desire to draw near the object and the necessity to maintain the distance becomes a libidinous energy non-discharge, which is what the voyeur seeks."[11] Beatrice is fascinated with the evil in De Flores and with the tension he offers, but, until he forces her to the realization from which her life as a spoiled child has shielded her, she will participate only from a distance. When De Flores comes to claim his reward for the murder and tries to kiss her, she emphasizes the social distance between their positions to keep him away from her:

> Think but upon the distance that creation
> Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there.
> (III.iv.130-31)

But more significantly, she does not realize the actuality or implications of the service of murder she asked of De Flores until he brings her Alonzo's severed finger. De Flores, in his callous way, is more

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[10]Eliot, p. 87.

[11]Erwin Walter Straus, "Shame as a Historiological Problem," in Phenomenological Psychology (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 219.

than complacent as he enters and shows her his "token." She is horrified, for she had not visualized the murder except at a distance; her hired assassin was to stand between her and the murder as an actual deed. Upon observing the finger, she responds, "Bless me! What hast thou done." (III.iv.28). And De Flores retorts in his realistic manner:

> Why, is that
> more
> Than killing the whole man? I cut his heart-strings.
> (III.iv.29-30)

Contaminated with this sin, Beatrice plays the voyeur even on her wedding night, participating vicariously by substituting another changeling, Diaphanta, in her husband's bed.

This adulteress is able to remain a voyeur, is able to persuade herself that if she does not actually admit, remember, or participate in evil that it ceases to exist, because she hides behind a veneer of delicate "honor." In this play feminine honor is equated with both virginity and fidelity in marriage. When Beatrice is stalling for time, the argument that she uses to win a postponement of her wedding to Alonzo is that she is loath to part with her maidenhood:

> [W]ith speed
> I cannot render satisfaction
> Unto the dear companion of my soul,
> Virginity, whom I thus long have lived with,
> And part with it so rude and suddenly.
> (I.i.94-98)

De Flores forces her to see the shallowness of her veneer, however, when he sets before her, in the form of Alonzo's finger, the reality of the evil she is involved in. She retreats in terror from his advances,

clinging to her honor and to proprieties, calling him wicked and reminding him of the social barriers between them. She states,

> Why 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
> Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
> To make his death the murderer of my honor!
> Thy language is bold and vicious,
> I cannot see which way I can forgive it
> With any modesty.
> (III.iv.120-25)

De Flores' confrontation captures the drama of desire and loathing, of self and moral discovery:

> Push, you forget yourself!
> A woman dipped in blood and talk of modesty?
> (III.iv.126-27)

He pursues his attack, telling her to look into her conscience and find him there her equal. In a sense, he has, through the sin they have experienced together, engendered her; she is "the deed's creature." By that act she has lost her state of innocence, has become at once whore, adulteress, murderess, and "one with [him]" (III.iv.132-44). Reduced to merely repeating the name of her new lord, Beatrice still pleads to retain her honor by attempting to buy it with gold. But even here recognizing De Flores as her "fate," she now understands that murder "is followed by more sins" and that she is united with De Flores in evil as surely as Othello is with Iago. Middleton expresses their union in their sexual relationship as De Flores croons to her with an odd and knowing gentleness:

> Come, rise, and shroud your blushes in my bosom;
> Silence is one of pleasure's best receipts;
> Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.
> 'Las, how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon
> What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on.
> (III.iv.167-71)

Until the end of the play, however, Beatrice Joanna can admit the falseness of her own claim to honor only to herself and her alter ego De Flores. She frantically tries to maintain her veneer of pristine innocence to her husband, faking his test for virginity, pleading a bashful modesty to avoid coming to his bed before dark, and then buying Diaphanta's virginity to exchange for her lack of it. When the virgin Diaphanta becomes another changeling and overstays her visit to Alsemero's bed, Beatrice Joanna complains, reflecting De Flores' association of sex with appetite, that the girl "Devoures the pleasure with a greedy appetite/ And never minds [her] honor or [her] peace" (V.i.3-4). And when De Flores is quick to remedy the situation by devising a fire under the cover of which he can murder Diaphanta, Beatrice tells him, "I'm forced to love thee now/ 'cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honor" (V.i.47). Alsemero's only question for Beatrice at the end of the play is "Are you honest?" (V.ii.20). Denying the slanderous attack on her "spotless virtue," she confesses to murder but denies adultery, thinking that Alsemero will pardon the greater crime since it was done for his sake (V.ii.42). It is not until she is confronted with the term <u>whore</u> which "blasts a beauty to deformity" that Beatrice begins to admit her transformation openly, finally acknowledging her union with De Flores and the significance of her first "will" to dislike him (V.ii.33). Thus, Middleton carries Beatrice Joanna through her changes from "ignorance to experience, from a romantic sleep-walking to an awakening in the midst of horrors. The experience of years has been lived through

with a rapidity that leaves the mind stupid, terrified, and a prey to its own guilt."[12]

Although only Beatrice Joanna and De Flores remain in the circle of hell at the end of the play, other characters also either suffer or are exposed as a result of various changes in their character, changes which, since they are instinctive and uncontrollable, reflect Beatrice Joanna's renunciation of good and suggest that the possibility of evil is intrinsic to man, fully evinced with the slightest encouragement. Although the only literal "changeling" of the title (in the Elizabethan sense of the term as the child exchanged for another at birth) is Antonio, there are various characters who "change" by embracing an evil. Alsemero changes from an ardent traveller to a loiterer, from a woman-hater to a courtier, and his friend Jasperino discovers the changes with the same shock as the discoveries of Beatrice Joanna, Isabella, and Alsemero. Puzzled by Alsemero's refusal to set sail, Jasperino wonders about his strange behavior, declaring that the cause could not be love, for, "Lover I'm sure y'are none; the stoic was found in you long ago" (I.i.36-37). And when he sees his friend kissing Beatrice, he exclaims, "How now! The laws of the Medes are changed sure. Salute a woman!" (I.i.58-59). His usual stability and judgment blinded by passion, the wise doctor is changed into a foolish lover and cuckold, deceived by the hidden evil of the temptress Beatrice Joanna. Even his test to discern virginity becomes ludicrous as Beatrice Joanna is able to manipulate it to her own ends.

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[12]Ellis-Fermor, p. 148.

De Flores is also changed as a result of the destructive force of passion, tempted by the Eve figure of Beatrice. His ugliness is typical of the child exchanged by fairies for another, but his veneer of ugliness is also deceiving as it hides a deep sexuality which in this character becomes a destructive masochism. De Flores is basically a cynical, realistic sensualist. While Beatrice Joanna is reflecting on intellectual love, he enters meditating obscenely on the foul faces which have "plucked" sweets without restraint (II.i.46). Like Iago, he equates sexual feeling with appetite and with food and drink, which tends to coarsen that feeling. Commenting on what he sees as the oddness of Beatrice Joanna's attraction for him, De Flores states:

> Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
> Slovenly dishes and feed heartily on 'em;
> Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em.
> Some women are odd feeders.
> (II.ii.150-54)

Beatrice Joanna prefers distancing passion by couching it in a romantic ideal; De Flores enjoys its seamy side by translating it into realistic sexual terms. His gross cynicism is also apparent in his use of various misogynistic commonplaces. His theory of eros maintains that beautiful women are as attractive and as dangerous as the sirens on the rocks. For De Flores women seem to have no moral or ethical center but are, nevertheless, vehicles for the most extreme pleasures--pleasures so great that even a thorough skeptic such as himself will commit his life to take possession of one. De Flores persists in his unflagging pursuit of Beatrice, counting on the fickleness and mental frailty of women to work in his favor. He states,

> Wrangling has proved the mistress of good pastime;
> As children cry themselves asleep, I ha' seen
> Women chid themselves abed to men.
> (II.i.86-88)

Observing the rendezvous between Beatrice and Alsemero, De Flores is certain that if a woman will betray one man, she will betray another, and, like Lollio in the subplot, he is not asking fidelity from Beatrice, merely to have his share of her favors:

> I have watched this meeting, and do wonder much
> What shall become of t'other [Alonzo]. I'm sure both
> Cannot be served unless she transgress; happily
> Then I'll put in for one; for if a woman
> Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,
> She spread and mounts then like arithmetic,
> One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand,
> Proves in time sutler to an army royal.
> (II.ii.57-64)

De Flores' skewed view of women is also apparent in the emphasis that even this cynic places upon virginity. When he comes to claim his due reward from Beatrice for the murder of Alonzo and she insults him by offering only gold, he refuses the money, saying:

> Not that I want it not, for I do piteously;
> In order I will come unto't and make use on 't,
> But 'twas not held so precious to begin with;
> For I place wealth after the heels of pleasure,
> And were I not resolved in my belief
> That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
> I should but take my recompense with grudging,
> As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.
> (III.iv.113-20)

Ribner believes that Beatrice's virginity stands for the slight pretext of virtue which at first distances her from De Flores and which he must destroy. But actually De Flores is implying here that a woman used sexually by another man is tainted and that part of his attraction to Beatrice lies in her virginity. As with the Eve-figure, Kate, in John

Steinbeck's East of Eden, part of the eternal fascination of woman is the combination of virginal appearance and the strong sensuality underneath; Beatrice is enticing because, even though her knowledge of her sensual appeal is not as developed as in Steinbeck's adulteress, the roles of virgin and whore are combined in her character.

Despite his cynical skepticism and his negative view of women, when in contact with Beatrice, De Flores changes into an obsessive lover. His sexual attraction for her becomes a perverse, destructive masochism. He says to himself,

> Yonder's she.
> Whatever ails me, now a-late especially,
> I can as well be hanged as refrain from seeing her;
> Some twenty times a day, nay, not so little,
> Do I force errands, frame ways and excuses
> To come into her sight, and I have small reason for 't,
> And less encouragement. . . .
> (II.i.26-32)

And in another aside:

> Why, am not I an ass to devise ways
> Thus to be railed at? I must see her still.
> I shall have a mad qualm within this hour again,
> I know't, and like a common Garden-bull,
> I do but take breath to be lugged again.
> What this may bode I know not. . . .
> (II.i.76-82)

Even though this destructive passion and the sinister ingenuity accompanying it which have so attracted Beatrice Joanna finally overreach themselves, De Flores is still a more dramatically powerful figure than Alsemero. Despite his being the injured party and the man with convention on his side, Alsemero, with his faulty chemical test and his idealizing, is no match for De Flores' realism. Evil is destroyed and

virtue triumphant in the end, but De Flores is at least fascinating in his absence of absurd illusions, about himself or others.

Thus the major characters in the play are, in some form of the word, changelings, people who, by virtue of uncontrollable passion, give way to the destructive side of their natures. And Beatrice Joanna's change from amorality to a knowing affirmation of evil in the form of adultery provides the play with its central symbol of the changeling as so defined. This illustration of the theme of Evil versus Good through characterization is further reinforced in the subplot of the play. Characters in the subplot, such as Isabella, Antonio, and Franciscus, are also at least potential changelings. The effectiveness of their characterization, however, and the purpose of the madhouse scenes have long been a source of critical controversy. The subplot has been called "very stupid, rather course and almost vulgar." Another contention is that it is "a pity that the silly underplot should have given its name to a tragedy that ranks among the very finest in the language." Eliot refers to it as "nauseous"; Ellis-Fermor believes that it could easily have been left out, and Barker comments that "it would be nice . . . if we could forget that the play had a comic story at all."[13] Even effective arguments by William Empson and M. C. Bradbrook for a tight thematic relation between plot and subplot seem not to have deterred recent critics such as Schoenbaum and Ornstein who share the feeling that the subplot is the play's worst blemish, the intrusion of irrelevant forces into an otherwise great play.

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[13]Cited by Nethercot, p. 412.

Actually, through the reemphasis of the destructive changes wrought by passion in the characters of the subplot and through the story of Isabella's temptation by not one, but two suitors, a story which parallels that of Alsemero/Beatrice Joanna/De Flores, the collaborators created a play that is much more structurally sound than critics have supposed. M. C. Bradbrook believes that the subplot is connected with the main plot chiefly by implication, comparing their relationship to that of masque and antimasque, with the subplot acting as a kind of parallel in the different mode.[14] While this seems to be an accurate observation, the close thematic relationship between plot and subplot is hardly merely implied. Rather the theme of sanity versus insanity, so popular in twentieth-century literature, is apparent here in a presentation of the destructive madness of passion and in the deceptive appearance of sanity and of evil. The ambiguous nature of sanity is evident in the play through the madmen of the subplot. These characters, who are clamorous for food, equated in the imagery with lust or sexual appetite, and who are dressed as animals and birds, emphasizing man's bestiality, are locked up for their irrational behavior. On the other hand, the characters in the main plot who actually give in to their base desires and commit adultery and murder are able to maintain an appearance of sanity and are allowed to move freely. These characters actually carry out evil deeds instead of, as is the case with the madmen, merely playing at barley-brake. Unlike the so-called sane figures in the main plot who are not what they appear

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[14]Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, pp. 221-23.

to be, effecting change after change, the subplot madmen are what they are. Isabella says of them:

> [A]re they but our schools of lunatics
> That act their fantasies in any shapes
> Suiting their present thoughts; if sad, they cry;
> If mirth be their conceit, they laugh again;
> Sometimes they imitate the beasts and birds,
> Singing, or howling, braying, barking; all
> As their wild fancies prompt 'em.
> (III.iii.201-207)

The only characters in the madhouse who are changelings are "sane" characters such as Antonio, Franciscus, and Isabella.

The theme of love as madness, acted out with De Flores and Beatrice Joanna in the main plot, is also reflected in the subplot. Here the masque of madmen, given in rehearsal for Isabella at the end of Act IV, becomes of note. This masque can be compared with that in Ford's The Lover's Melancholy in which doctor Corax offers a masque of melancholy men as a cure for the melancholy of the Prince. Each type of the disease is symbolically dressed, with wanton melancholy presented as a sea-nymph, a slang reference for prostitute. The Prince remaining unaffected, Corax adds:

> One only kind of Melancholy
> Is left untouched: 'twas not in art
> To personate the shadow of that fancy:
> 'Tis named love-melancholy. . . .
> Love is the tyrant of the heart: it darkens
> Reason, confounds discretion: deaf to counsel
> It runs a headlong course to desperate madness.[15]

Isabella's test of Antonio's faithfulness, which parallels that of Alsemero, also reveals the destructive madness of passion. In her

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[15]Cited by Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 223.

disguise as madwoman lusting after Antonio, Isabella emphasizes to him that lust is madness. Antonio's rejection of what he had formerly pursued saves them both, for Antonio has viewed lust in its true form as deformed madness and Isabella has seen his adulterous pursuit of her as a kind of warped judgment which has worshipped only outward appearance. She states to Antonio:

> No, I have no beauty now,
> Nor never had, but what was in my garments
> You a quick-sighted lover. Come not near me!
> (IV.iii.135-37)

Isabella is Beatrice Joanna's counterpart in the subplot. Unlike Beatrice Joanna, however, who could not resist her lust for Alsemero and commits a kind of adultery in the violation of her betrothal and another act of adultery in her affair with De Flores, Isabella is able to stand firm in the face of temptation by not one but two suitors. As witness to Antonio's courtship of Isabella, Lollio demands for his silence the same price demanded by De Flores for Beatrice Joanna's safe marriage to Alsemero. Like De Flores, Lollio is Isabella's evil spirit, tempting her with prospective lovers, willing to be quiet, asking only her honor for his reward. But she destroys his power over her, as Beatrice Joanna could and would not destroy De Flores', by turning his own instrument against him. If she must "surrender her virtue, her surrender will be the death of her tempter and not his gratification."[16] Isabella warns the impertinent Lollio:

> [B]e silent, mute,
> Mute as a statue, or his injunction

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[16]Ribner, p. 135.

For me enjoying shall be to cut thy throat.
(III.iii.250-52)

We are shown the kind of triumph over evil which Isabella, already conscious of morality, is capable of choosing, but which the amoral Beatrice Joanna is not.

The difficulty of discerning between good and evil because of the deceptive appearance of reality is also paralleled in both plot and subplot. As Alsemero states at the end of the play upon learning of his wife's infidelity, "oh cunning devils!/ How should blind men know you from fair-faced saints" (I.iii.108-109). He has relied upon his reason and knowledge as a doctor to create a test for virtue, but even the wisdom of such a man, representing the ultimate in human power, cannot unmask an evil wearing the appearance of good. His test is not, as many critics feel, simply ludicrous theatricality but an illustration of the fallibility of human judgment in distinguishing between good and evil. The characters in the play, both in plot and subplot, are used to reveal the various positions man may take in the face of evil. As a substitute for Beatrice's virtue in Alsemero's test, Diaphanta's role is parallel to that of her mistress. She is a changeling in the marriage bed, and a character whose "outward appearance of virtue will be changed by temptation of gold to that of the whore which she really is and who will be destroyed by De Flores as he destroys her mistress."[17] Beatrice Joanna chides her maid for her bawdiness and lack of modesty and is terribly concerned that the woman whose virginity she has just bought can pass Alsemero's test for virtue. This ambiguity of good and evil, honor

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[17]Ribner, p. 131.

and vice is also reflected in the subplot. Here sane men pursue adultery, and madmen and fools are protected from sin by virtue of their innocence. While Antonio wears the disguise of a fool, he can escape evil, revealing that it is not through Alsemero's reason that man can avoid sin but through a natural innocence. The fact that Antonio woos Isabella as his true self suggests that he risks damnation only when he casts off the role of the natural. In the subplot, as well as the main plot, then, goodness, virtue, and honor are tested and prove to be deceptive. However, unlike the main plot where characters choose for evil, the figures of the subplot are either protected from damnation by their roles as fools or madmen or are able to make a choice for good. Antonio says at the end of the play that he "had like to ha' been changed to the gallows but that . . . [his] innocence always excuses [him]" (V.iii.206-207). Isabella, on the other hand, is totally aware of the ease and availability of sin, saying:

> Would a woman stray,
> She need not gad abroad to seek her sin;
> It would be brought home one way or other.
> (III.iii.222-24)

In comparing these two attitudes toward evil, the question arises as to whether or not a natural or untested goodness is really virtue or merely, as with Antonio, fortunate foolishness. Inherent nobility seems to lie in a person like Isabella who is aware of the possibilities of good and evil, whose virtue is tempted and tested, and who consciously makes a choice for good.

In turning away from the theme of the play as it is reinforced by characterization and subplot, we find that the theme is also supported by certain techniques, words, and images. Ultimately, of course, the

playwright's major tragic themes are the confusion of appearance and reality seen in the attempt to define virtue, sanity, and love, the acceptance of evil as the result of an inherent moral blindness which renders man incapable of discerning it from goodness, and his destruction as evil and damnation are revealed to him. For Middleton and Rowley these cosmic ideas are acted out around the evil implicit, according to Jacobeans, in the female adulteress.

The device of the aside is used to isolate the characters so that each one must pursue goals dictated by his own ego, come to terms with his own definition of good and evil, and be responsible for his own moral choice. Characters speak to themselves almost as much as they do to each other so that one of the chief functions of language is to encourage introspection. Certain key words in the play such as "change," "judgment," and "will" reveal the confusion of good and evil apparent in characters who are at the mercy of instinctive and uncontrollable feelings. Virtually every character changes and responds with shock to the discovery of changes in other characters. Judgment is blinded so that characters become involved in all kinds of deception, both of others and of themselves, to gain their will. The power of the eye to beguile judgment is a repeated motif in the play; as Beatrice Joanna asserts, "our eyes are sentinels unto our judgment" (I.i.73). Although warned by his brother, Alonzo refuses to acknowledge Beatrice's very plain dislike of him since love has overpowered his judgment. Alsemero's scientific judgment is marred by Beatrice Joanna's cleverness. Even De Flores, who has a certain self-knowledge which elevates him above the others even if it fails to give him self-mastery, has hopes for

himself when Beatrice Joanna seems more friendly and is deceived into thinking her opinion has changed. Beatrice Joanna misjudges Diaphanta and Alsemero, as well as De Flores. Always convinced that her actions are guided by reason and wisdom, she congratulates herself upon her rational powers while she awaits news of the murder she has commissioned: "So wisdom by degrees works out her freedom" (III.iv.13). Her wisdom, however, is merely the delusion that love can grow out of murder. She is directed not by her judgment but by a blind will, a moral blindness which cannot understand that in the act of murder is the denial of honor and modesty. The term will, in the sense of instinctive and sensual desire, is used repeatedly throughout the play. Beatrice Joanna "knows no cause for [her hatred of De Flores] but a peevish will" (I.i.108). Her father declares he will have his will upon her marriage; she says she will lack hers if he does so, and De Flores asserts in soliloquy, "I'll have my will" (I.i.237-40). At the end of the play Beatrice Joanna finally recognizes the significance of her first will to dislike De Flores. The repetition of these key words, in addition to images which fuse sexual love and the death motive and images which equate sexual feeling with appetite, tends to reinforce the confusion of appearance and reality and of good and evil.

Ultimately, theme, characterization, structure, and language come together to create a totally integrated ending to the play. The changes having been made, the deceptions having been attempted, the sins having been committed, Beatrice Joanna begins to develop a moral awareness through her contact with evil. She is now able to discern the difference between appearance and reality, forced to recognize the

falseness of her own claim to honor and the inconsequentiality of physical appearance. She says of De Flores:

> His face loathes one,
> But look upon his care, who would not love him?
> The east is not more beauteous than his service.
> (V.i.70-72)

And she learns that her own beauty comes to nothing in the face of the ugliness of her sins. When Alsemero confronts her with the fact of her deeds by calling her "whore," she responds:

> What a horrid sound it hath!
> It blasts a beauty to deformity;
> Upon what face soever that breath falls,
> It strikes it ugly.
> (V.iii.32-35)

When he learns of Alonzo's murder, Alsemero comes to see Beatrice Joanna's beauty as abject deformity. De Flores assumes his rightful role as Beatrice's partner in sin, going to her in the closet, symbolic of the circle of hell they are in, to join her in death. His clear-sightedness is apparent even in his final words: "I loved this woman in spite of her heart" (V.iii.165). And through his tutoring, Beatrice Joanna's judgment and moral awareness are clarified. She says to her father:

> Oh come not near me, sir; I shall defile you.
> I am of that blood that was taken from you
> For your better health; look no more upon 't,
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly;
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction.
> Beneath the stars upon yon meteor
> Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
> I ne'er could pluck it from him. My loathing
> Was prophet to the rest but ne'er believed;
> Mine honor fell with him and now my life.
> (V.iii.149-58)

And her final words:

Forgive me, Alsemero, all forgive;
'tis time to die when 'tis a shame to live.
(V.iii.178-79)

Ornstein maintains that even in this dying confession, Beatrice believes that her honor "fell with" De Flores, that she is not responsible and sees herself to be, like Othello, an honorable murderer. This critic finds De Flores more admirable because he clings to no moral illusions about himself. Ornstein also asserts that there is no cathartic effect or affirmation at the end of the play because those "who stare at the dead criminals are the shallow innocents who marvel only at their own experiences. Incapable of deep emotion and concerned primarily with their 'honor,' they cannot pity the fallen Beatrice Joanna nor understand her. Their mood is complacence, not compassion."[18] On the contrary, however, Beatrice Joanna seems to take full responsibility for her sins, regretting that she has defiled her father, aware of the significance of her attraction to the evil De Flores, and asking forgiveness from her husband. Likewise, Alsemero, as one of the startled onlookers, has grown through this experience in his awareness of the tenuousness of appearance and reality. He, as representative of the main plot, and Antonio, Franciscus, Isabella, and Alibius, as representatives of the subplot, review the various "changes" that have occurred. Alsemero states:

What an opacous body had that moon
That last changed on us! here's beauty changed
To ugly whoredom; here servant obedience
To a master sin, imperious murder;

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[18]Ornstein, pp. 188-89.

> I, a supposed husband, changed embraces
> With wantonness, but that was paid before.
> (V.iii.196-201)

In the destruction of Beatrice Joanna, Middleton reveals the reality of damnation and, at the same time, the self-destructiveness of evil, but through the subplot he confirms the possibility of good. Isabella is confronted with a temptation like that of Beatrice Joanna and is shown a like vision of evil, but she is able to avoid Beatrice's sin of adultery and with the same moral awareness that, ironically, the act of adultery allows Beatrice to gain, to choose for good. The last lines of the play seem to be Middleton and Rowley's "affirmation of a justice and order of the universe from which man may draw some comfort in spite of the evil around him."[19] However, while order has been restored in the play's final scene with its expulsion of evil, it is a wife's adultery which, unlike plays already discussed, provides the central metaphor for evil in the drama and the playwrights' means to explore the mystery of evil in the universe.

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[19]Ribner, p. 137.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The commanding presence of the adulterous wife in the English drama written from about 1590 to 1640, particularly in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, is a striking feature of that drama. It is especially noteworthy in that one will look in vain through the plays of previous ages for any solid indication of the imminent emergence of the new character. Furthermore, conjugal infidelity, so favorite a motif for comedy with Restoration dramatists, is seldom treated in a jesting or frivolous manner in the plays of the Renaissance. In fact, the typical presentation of adultery in Renaissance drama, resulting in tragedy when the wife is offender but in forgiveness and reconciliation when the husband performs equal and worse crimes, is in strict keeping with the domestic ideals of the day. Perhaps the most striking example of the unique presentation of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean adulterous wife lies in her contrast with the typical heroine of the poetry and romantic comedy immediately preceding her development--the Petrarchan ideal, beautiful and virtuous, if a bit disdainful. It would seem to be important, then, in concluding this study of female adultery to summarize the causes for and, more importantly, the implications of so distinct a characterization as that reflected in late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

The stereotype of the adulterous wife which predominated during this period is that of female villainy, of unbridled lust, a stock

character imbued as much with her own set of connotations as one would find associated with the usurer, the Jew, or the Moor. Epitomizing the vices of womankind, the stereotypical adulteress is the extreme opposite of the Petrarchan ideal, and the influence of both images is of note in that both present a distortion of reality, neither of which allows for credibility. This is obvious in the case of the Petrarchan ideal, frequently pointed out as mirrored in Queen Elizabeth, a woman neither beautiful nor particularly virtuous. The adulterous wife, in essence the lineal daughter of Eve, the corrupter of all mankind, is certainly just as inaccurate a portrayal of women. There is simply no sympathetic portrayal of the tragic adulteress as central character in this or the following age. Though totally opposite, these portraits of female heroines reveal that both Elizabethan and Jacobean ages delighted in a simple statement of a composite absolute. The effects of this tendency on the heroine of late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama are the emergence of a villainess who is basically an inversion of the Petrarchan ideal and the literary rise of woman to an unheralded eminence of evil.

The development of any new idea, movement, or type depends to a large extent upon the prevailing atmosphere. For the stock adulterous wife to spring practically fully developed from the maturing Elizabethan drama is no more absurd than the later frequent appearance of that character. Her emergence in the dramatic literature coincides with the development of a new, satiric drama in the last years of the sixteenth century. This drama differed from its forebears in its focus on human limitations, foibles, and vices rather than upon human potentiality. It is a drama that pictures mankind as a forked animal rather than the

admirable being Hamlet eulogizes in his "What a piece of work is man" speech. The new attitude is reflected in the disillusioned Hamlet's questioning when he asks,

> What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
> (IV.v.33-35)

It is revealed explicitly in the naming and portrayal of characters in such "humours" plays as Volpone and Epicoene. It is implicit in the carpe diem theme of the love poetry of Donne and Marvell. The late sixteenth and seventeenth century attitude is especially emphasized in the contrast between Sir Phillip Sidney--the ideal Elizabethan--and Francis Bacon--the Jacobean reality, and it is reflected in the triumph of Appetite over Reason in Book IX of Paradise Lost. The adulterous wife thus emerges during a period when an atmosphere of cynicism prevailed; the literary adulteress--the arch anti-Petrarchan female heroine--suffered the consequences of the mood that produced her.

No literature which makes man an appetite has yet to do better by women, and indeed the most vital female characters in late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama are those who reflect the new lower status of mankind in general, those who represent some aspect of appetite--specifically, sexual appetite. Those dramatists who fashioned their satiric male characters to reflect a prevalent image of man (whether melancholy, greedy, or lustful) found suitable matches for them in an amalgam of lusty women. What moved the adulterous wife rapidly into the limelight and hence into consideration in the drama are the various social, religious, and educational events discussed throughout this study.

To summarize, the forces which motivated a renewed discussion about the nature and status of women, continuing the "querrelle des femmes" of the late fourteenth century, merge the traditional and the new. Traditional Christian misogyny, the connection of women and property, and the worship of virginity coexisted with a favorable view of women by humanist writers and the glorification of the nuclear family. While the Tudor family was an institution for the passing on of life, name, and property, in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England, it came to be regarded as an instrument of religious and moral improvement. Thus marital separation was an action held up as morally and socially destructive. As the family unit came to acquire a moral value, the wife, held as primarily responsible for the solidarity of the family, was severely criticized for abusing her role. These various movements, which projected onto females a social, economic, and moral value, gave rise to recommendations of increased education and responsibility for woman while, at the same time, questioned whether or not she even had a soul.

Added to these social, religious, and educational movements, there were psychological forces that encouraged the distinctive late Elizabethan and Jacobean treatment of the adulterous wife. It is striking that dramatists "discovered" the tragic adulteress at the very time that serious interest was developing outside the drama concerning the place and role of women in contemporary society. When they dramatize the anguish of enforced or forbidden affections, Beaumont, Webster, Middleton, and Ford make clear at once the helplessness of women in a world ruled by men and masculine ideals and yet the villainy of those who claim their

freedom from the tyranny of family and convention, sacrificing them ultimately to masculine honor and ambition. The Jacobean debate over the status of women suggested a fruitful subject for psychological investigation in a world in which the focus was turning inward. The change in political situation from Elizabethan to Jacobean England was influential in encouraging the rise of individual, psychological studies in literature. The internal discords of Elizabeth's time which made the country vulnerable to invasion had been extinguished; loyalties were no longer divided between two religions and their representatives in Mary and Elizabeth. Men were no longer as absorbed in battles and political intrigues, and so their interest was turning inward to themselves, their beliefs, their families. As a result, women became more interesting. The emotional dramas concerning women present them in two basic ways. They are depicted as restricted by the morés and conventions of society to a subservient and passive role, unable to shape their own lives, at the mercy of father, brother, or husband; excluded from the world of action, they are more involved in emotional relationships. Or they are presented in a revolt against convention but are still dependent upon men for their happiness, security, and protection and hence still vulnerable to the masculine will, and they are finally destroyed for that rebellion. They are most admired for the qualities of innocence, delicacy, and fragility which leave them defenseless against the superior male and damned for those "masculine" qualities of aggression and lust which threaten him.

Thus what seals the adulterous wife's fate in the new satiric drama is the anti-feminist thought underlying the continuing debate

about women. Although the Renaissance drama can boast its honest wives, its loyal maidens, and even its faithful whores, there is in this extensive body of drama not one sympathetic portrayal of the wife who breaks her marriage vows. What seems obvious with respect to both the Petrarchan ideal and the adulteress of late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is that playwrights were still limited as to their concept of womanhood and consequently relied on a few stereotypes. In the case of the adulterous wife, she is used as a construct of a set plot resulting in tragedy when she is falsely accused of betrayal, as a vehicle for homiletic statement when she errs, repents, and suffers retribution, providing an example for other wayward wives, or she is a symbol for feminine villainy with her sexual aggression leading to a number of other evils, including murder.

However, there are dramatists such as Shakespeare, Ford, Heywood, Webster, and Middleton who recognize the possibility of greater complexity and depth in this type character and who, while following and yet transcending the demands of plot, render their wives as much women as adulteresses. It is in the paradoxical or at least ambiguous nature of such characters as Desdemona (who, despite her shining goodness, is, in her evasion of Othello's question about the handkerchief, still very much the Venetian), Penthea, Anne Frankford, Vittoria Corombona, and Beatrice Joanna that these playwrights come closest to capturing, in drama, the vitality and credibility of individualized female characters. Perhaps this is simply one of the manifestations of genius: the ability of a creative mind, despite the limitations placed upon it by adherence to a commonplace, to develop a "real" character in

a tragic dilemma. It is also the ability to turn a social situation into personal tragedy. The years before the Renaissance saw a view of women as irrational, sexually tempting creatures of passion. However, with the issues brought into question about women in the Renaissance, with increased emphasis on education, and the rise of humanism, women came to be considered rational beings, possessed of normal sexual desire, and yet able, like men, to control their passion with "right reason." Astute playwrights were able to recognize in this new awareness the possibility for tragedy. The definition of a tragic character as one that, by some flaw in his nature, creates his own downfall implies a degree of free will. And for the first time in the Renaissance, women were assumed to have free will, to be able to control their passions by the exercise of reason. It is not until women were viewed as responsible for their own sexuality that the possibility could arise of a tragic heroine who brings about her own downfall by a conscious choice to commit the sin of adultery.

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