"LOOK TO THE LADY": MANIPULATIVE WOMEN AND MARRIAGE CONTRACTS IN RENAISSANCE TRAGEDY

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Chapter 1: Introduction of Historical Marriage Contracts

A young woman, her face aglow, kneels in her chamber and pledges herself to her lover in secret; while directing the household servants, a robust matron wheedles her husband for more attention; saucily, an unfaithful wife mocks her absent mate before making a cuckold of him. From Shakespeare to Middleton, from comedy to tragedy, Renaissance drama typically features some aspect of marriage – be it the forming of a union or the functioning of one. On the stage, lovers are jilted, husbands are cuckolded, women are shamed. No matter the social class portrayed in the drama, the subject of marriage was relevant to all. As the scenes listed above show, marriages could take varying forms, and as such varying forms suggest, marriage proved to be contradictory and confusing in everyday life in early modern England. What the law stated and what ecclesiastical authorities advocated – and even what individuals and families believed – about forming a union and the functioning of a family were sometimes quite different. Granted, church attendance was mandatory, and there the populace could learn the principles of holy matrimony and married life from the sermons. Despite this knowledge and the awareness that comes with public penance for sexual offenses, confusion remained. Such confusion was reflected in the drama of the time in a variety of forms. This study focuses on the way that some characters manipulate others through their knowledge of some of the complex marriage laws, and the way that others used the laws to their own personal advantages.

During the period of 1540 to 1700, English law was divided into two categories: canon law and common law. Church courts presided over canon law, regulating matters important to religion, while common law dealt with secular subjects (Cressy 295). Marriage, though, was relevant to both types of laws. Therefore, common law typically took up the issues of property

and inheritance, especially for the aristocracy, leaving the clergy to regulate the matrimonial process. The clergy's oversight of the vows was appropriate for the period because of the way the "nuptial promise" was viewed, described in the *Ladies Dictionary* in the 1600s as "though in law not an oath, yet so solemn a protestation before God… as binding, and ought to be religiously observed" (Cressy 276). Thus, the playwrights of the time demonstrated women's varying opinions of the solemnity of the marriage vow and the difficulty in determining whether such a vow was made as a binding contract.

Understanding marriage as an oath is important in that it emphasizes the union of two people as a binding contract supervised by an authority of law. Because the supervising authority can only ensure that the process of the contract is carried out properly, the realization of a faithful bond relies on the good will and intentions of the couple involved. Thomas Eden, a lawyer in 1628, shared the importance of an enduring spiritual bond while speaking in Parliament: "There is *nuptiae* and *matrimonium*, usually compounded together; but *nuptiae* is the ceremony, *matrimonium*, the substance" (Cressy 285). His words refer to a double meaning of marriage that refers not only to the wedding but also to the state of a faithful, lifelong relationship between two people (Cressy 285). Therefore, a couple was expected not only to contract themselves in good faith at one particular instant but also for the rest of their lives.

Moreover, this dependence on the good faith of husband and wife is reflected in the matrimonial laws of the time. Marriages were easily solemnized yet reversed with difficulty – if they could be undone at all. Often, if marriage contracts were broken in spirit, little could be done to reverse the bond in the eyes of the law. Canon and common law required only that a couple make an espousal *per verba de praesenti*, in the present tense, to form a legally-binding union. While one might assume a vow *de praesenti* was a straight-forward pledge of good faith

from both man and wife, such was not always the case; for those who do not always say what they mean (or vice versa), the problem arises of determining the actual intent of the couple to marry, a problem that wives, husbands, and clergy alike joined in to solve. Thus, couples could and were encouraged to form pre-contracts, which aimed to lessen confusion on the part of couples and courts in determining the intent of someone to marry (Sokol and Sokol 15-6). A pre-contract severed as a binding contract, in which they pledged themselves to each other *per verba de futuro* (by words in the future tense), agreeing to marry one another later with vows *de praesenti* (Cressy 276). As for a pre-contract ceremony, couples could contract themselves to each other in the form of a handfasting (a ritualistic solemnization) or merely as an informal, verbalized intent. Implicit in this vow was the couple's intent to stay faithful to each other until the actual marriage, after which the marriage vows would take the pre-contract's place (Jordan 36). However, handfastings, if made in the present tense, were legally binding marriages.

Because of this, the intent of a couple even in forming a pre-contract is difficult to determine: did the couple consider themselves fully married or were they intending to formalize the process later? Couples questioned whether it was appropriate to consummate their marriages between the pre-contract and the wedding ceremony. The church, as well as the social mores of the time, strongly encouraged pre-contracted couples to retain their chastity until an actual marriage ceremony (Cressy 269; Amussen 110). Church authorities, such as Richard Greenham, considered a pre-contract "a degree under marriage" but "more than a simple promise" (Cressy 269). Yet, a contract *per verba de futuro* constituted a valid marriage when consummated; another service to solemnize the marriage was not required. A consummated contract in the future tense was a legally binding marriage (Cressy 277; Sokol and Sokol 17). In the case of matrimony *per verba de praesenti* consummation was not required to make the marriage valid,

but each partner did have to be capable of the act (Carlson 21). These laws demonstrate how one's good faith is implicit even in a pre-contract, if not more so, as the couple is expected to follow through in their promises. Because a marriage could still be made valid in a pre-contract *per verba de futuro* (through consummation), a full intent to marry in the case of both parties, as well as a complete knowledge of the law, was vital.

To help ensure couples carried out their intent to marry if a vow were made *per verba de futuro*, pre-contracts were almost as binding as actual marriage: one was forbidden to marry if he or she had previously entered a marriage contract to another. Contracting oneself to another in this case would cause the second contract to be found null and void *ab initio*, from the instant it was made. Even marriages of long standing that produced children would be invalidated if evidence of a former contract was found, and any children by that invalidated marriage would be illegitimate. Also, the female would lose her right to the dower (Sokol and Sokol 139-40; 8). Again, the lack of either good will in forming marriage contracts or knowledge of the law could leave a man cuckolded or a woman shamefully pregnant.

Because of the controversy that plagued couples over the intent to marry, many suits were filed in the church courts. If the court determined that a bond had been formed, the union could not be dissolved if no impediments prevented it. Although dissolution of the marriage was not possible, couples could seek separation in certain instances. In the case of abuse, fear of future injury, "spiritual fornication," or desertion, a couple could be divorced *a mensa et thoro*, from bed and board (Carlson 22; Amussen 57). This type of separation allowed to couple to live apart from each other, but they were not permitted to remarry. Moreover, the clergy hoped to function as mediators, so that the couple might eventually reconcile (Sokol and Sokol 142-3). In this way, the canon law demonstrates that nuptial promises once made are valid for life.

However, Ranald describes a "loophole," noted by Robert Cleaver in *A Goodly Form of Household Government*, which could invalidate a contract, even one in the present tense (75). If either party in the contract committed adultery, the contract could be voided, provided that the injured mate was ignorant and/or condemning of the act (Ranald 75). The guilty party would not be allowed to form another contract (Carlson 32). At the least, adultery was grounds for a divorce *a mensa et thoro* (Carlson 22). Because of the difficulty of voiding a marriage contract, whether established by a well-meaning couple or established after a suit in court, determining intent becomes even more important.

Another way the church courts attempted to clarify the intent of a couple to marry was to impose formalities on the matrimonial process. Religious authorities proposed that couples obtain marriage licenses and have the banns, an announcement of the intent to marry, read in church. The banns were to be read for three weeks prior to the wedding to give the public ample time to discover if either of the couple were already pre-contracted (Cressy 270-1; Sokol and Sokol 13). As for the ceremony itself, couples were encouraged to solemnize their union before a member of the clergy in an open church during the canonical hours, between eight in the morning and noon. Marriages taking place in other circumstances (outside the church, at a time other than the canonical hours, or without the presence of a clergyman) could be considered "clandestine," and the participants and witnesses could be punished (Cressy 318). Even handfastings were intended to be performed in an open church like the marriage ceremony (Cressy 268-9). Moreover, church courts rarely favored matrimony for especially young couples, as a family should have adequate financial resources to sustain a household (Ingram 118). However, these formalities were more suggestions than laws. Marriages conducted without following these guidelines, even clandestine ones, were still binding as long as each had

verbalized intent (Cressy 270-1; Sokol and Sokol 13). These ecclesiastical rituals served several purposes. They aided in clarifying the intent of a couple to marry, they aided a wife in acquiring the right to her dower upon the death of her husband, and they aided in discovering reasons that a union should not or could not be formed (Ingram 117; Cressy 306).

Even though marriages were difficult to dissolve, impediments, such as the pre-contract mentioned earlier, could invalidate a marriage and were often the cause of matrimonial disputes in church courts. The impediments of affinity and consanguinity, however, were among those largely abided by, as churches not only kept a printed table showing the prohibited degrees of kindred but also preached against the violation of these bans. Consenting to marry only providing certain conditions be met could be considered an impediment, as well, if these conditions were impossible to meet. Such conditions were ones that worked against the concept of matrimony; for instance, a couple could not agree not to have children (Carlson 20). Another impediment required the couple to be of lawful age; the male must be fourteen, the female twelve, the ages the court deemed man and maid are able to understand and voice an intent to marry (Cressy 313; 311). However, it was possible for a couple to become betrothed at the age of seven, but upon reaching sufficient age to be allowed to invalidate the betrothal if so desired (Ingram 116). Therefore, parents could not force a couple to marry. If a child did not consent to the match, his or her father could not force the union, even though familial influence in arranging a marriage was common and encouraged. Yet, this impediment was difficult to prove in court and probably took place more often than was known (Cressy 256). Still, the inherent design of marriage in English law rested on a genuine and long-lasting intent of the couple to form a union. In the same respect, Thomas Becon in the *Booke of Matrimony*, which was published in the latter half of the 16th century, advocated a marriage based on love, condemning matches arranged by

the couple's families for financial benefit. According to Becon, a marriage should be based on "a free, louing, harty and good consente" because a match made because of love was more likely to maintain good faith in a long-lasting relationship (Mikesell 99). William Gouge, an English clergyman and author of conduct pamphlets, went a step further, arguing for a sexual relationship between husband and wife, a relationship he believed would help solidify a long-standing good faith match (Amussen 39).

A common dispute in the church courts was the question if a partner had sexual relations prior to the formation of a union. Surprising for a society immensely concerned with purity and virtue, especially in women, these transgressions were not considered an impediment to matrimony. Canon law's jurisdiction of marriage (disregarding rules relating to age) began when a contract or pre-contract was made. While a sexual transgression before wedlock would not be grounds for an objection to the marriage, a public punishment might be issued. Sexual transgressions *after* the marriage was solemnized would be considered adultery and grounds for divorce *a mensa et thoro.* (Cressy 307; Ingram 22).

Perhaps ironically, instead of resulting in the desired effect of clarity, pre-contracts, impediments, and suggested procedures produced more controversy concerning the intent to marry, and the clergy was overloaded with cases to determine the validity of marriages. A common suit was a woman claiming a man intended to marry her and that they consummated the union after their pre-contract. Several of these women were even pregnant (Cressy 279). Witnesses would be called upon to testify and would receive punishment if found of perjury. Even so, witnesses sometimes exhibited behavior that was unreliable or predisposed to favor one partner over another. Two witnesses were required in these cases, but, in instances of

clandestine marriage, such witnesses could be difficult to find, as they could be punished for attending the wedding.

Moreover, the difficulty of determining the intent of a couple to marry increased because nonverbal signs could be interpreted as consent, thus signifying an agreement without explicitly stating it (Sokol and Sokol 15). For example, the exchange of tokens, from coins to rings to knickknacks, was common during Renaissance courtships, and such presents were used as evidence to determine if a pre-contract was made. Usually these gifts indicated a "strengthening of [a couple's] bond, and rings were taken as a sign that a pre-contract had been formed" (Cressy 263-4). However, the exchange of gifts, especially if not accompanied by a verbal exchange as well, was subject to the interpretation of the couple, leaving one or the other open to misconstrued intentions or manipulative misleading.

Obviously, interpreting mutual consent was difficult for man, woman, and clergy, but the determination of the consent was more important to the couple, as their entire relationship is staked on that consent (Carlson 20). As Henry Swinburne's *Treatise of Spousals or Matrimonial Contracts* states, marriage contracts relied on the "inward state" of a couple (Sokol and Sokol 15). Verbal contracts, especially those of marriage, were a matter of conscience because they were, at heart, promises (Jordan 35). Therefore, matrimony depended upon people meaning what they said. Since one had only to state "I take thee in marriage" to be married, the formation of unions hinged upon a couple making an oath in good faith. At that point, the oath is a deed but one that must be realized through future actions. The surest way to determine if someone means what he says is if his stated intent is followed by the action.

The "inward state" of one's conscience was essential not just in contracting matrimony but also in the daily life of the husband and wife, and the importance of one's good faith in

carrying out his oaths as deeds is extended in this realm. Theologically, a perfect union during this period was a "companionate marriage" as set out in *An Homily on the State of Matrimony*, which was given as the sermon at least once a year in church (Sokol and Sokol 117, 128). The doctrine of this union is stated as "instituted of God, to the intent, that man and woman should live... in a perpetual friendly fellowship... by which means a good conscience might be preserved in both parties" ("Homily" 1). This "good conscience" was meant to be kept in a companionate marriage through the principle of a husband and wife being one body in mind and spirit:

> [T]hou shalt find nothing more grievous than to want the benevolence of thy wife.... And, if reason moveth thee to bear any burden at any other men's hands, much more at thy wife's. ...for she is thy body, and made *one flesh* with thee. ("Homily" 7)

A companionate marriage, like a contract, calls into question one's intent based on his or her words, resulting in couple's good faith being put to the test. If either of the couple has an affair or pledges himself or herself to another, certainly that party has failed to carry out in deed the oath promised in marriage and has severed the marriage bond in spirit if not in fact. Moreover, any injury a husband does to his wife, or vice versa, is an injury done to himself because they represent one body, and either of the couple's lack of understanding of this concept shows that their spiritual bond has been broken. The wife who does not regret cuckolding her husband and the husband who unashamedly abuses his wife cannot feel the one-body union, and, therefore, such a union ceases to exist. Even an injury done by another person (one outside the marriage) to either husband or wife should be of grief to the mate. The disregard of this type of union was considered the work of the devil. The "Homily" states, "And this is [the devil's] principal craft, to work dissension in the hearts of the one from the other" (2). While affairs and abuse are more obvious injuries, a companionate marriage tests a couple's willingness to act on their oaths in the

same way that pre-contracts work. As one's well-being is entwined with the other's, the wife was encouraged to "apply herself to [her husband's] will" and "seek his contentation" because what pleases him should please her ("Homily" 3). Moreover, his successes are hers, as hers are his.[1]

Marital problems relating to determining the faithfulness behind oaths were often portrayed on the stage in early modern England. Several playwrights related marriage contracts to the connection between oaths and deeds in their works. *Macbeth*, *Arden of Faversham*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Changeling* are especially suited to this discussion because of their similarities. Each play features a strong female lead, in the higher spectrum of the social classes, who desires or maintains a marriage based on love, a love that these women believe allows them to murder and to deceive, resulting in death for each one. Moreover, images of hands (be they bloody or severed) are used in all four plays, revealing the state of each woman's marriage and further highlighting whether she holds promises important or not. However, the differences that mark these women are of most interest, especially pertaining to the way they regard their marriage oaths. Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi tend to be more steadfast in acting on their nuptial promises, while Alice Arden and Beatrice-Joanna are fickle and changeable. Not one of these women, though, is above using her knowledge of marital laws and beliefs to get what she wants, and their manipulation of principles illustrates not only the assumptions on which these women operate but also the attitudes of those around them. Also, in these plays, minor characters often function to display further the specific views the female leads have about marriage and the importance of truthfully verbalizing their inner intentions. The way each character considers the connection between oaths and deeds uncovers much about her principles of marriage.

Chapter Two: Married Women, Faithful and Fickle

Lady Macbeth and the Breakup of the Companionate Marriage

Shakespeare presents a particularly conniving character in Lady Macbeth, a wife who believes the oath and the deed are one. What she and Macbeth promise to one another, they must fulfill. For instance, Macbeth writes a letter to his wife, which she comes on stage reading aloud, telling her, his "dearest partner in greatness," of the Weird Sisters' prophecies so that she "mightst not / Lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what / Greatness is *promised*" her (Shakespeare I.v.11-3; my emphasis). Because of this, Lady Macbeth sees her husband as committing himself to making her queen. Moreover, in using the same term to address her as the one to inform her of what she is promised ("greatness"), Macbeth reveals that he also operates on the assumption that saying and doing are the same thing (Shakespeare I.v.11,13). In a way, because he has said that she will be queen, Lady Macbeth feels that she now *is* queen. While we see the flaw in her logic, Lady Macbeth allows her understanding of marriage contracts and their binding power to overflow into her everyday life, causing her to hold all promises to the same standard as the nuptial promise. Because saying can make it so, when it comes to marriage, even without the prescribed ritualized actions, Lady Macbeth takes this approach to all promises within the confines of her marriage. Most likely, the Macbeths' worries in later scenes about the legitimacy of their authority and their successive line stems from subscribing to the power of the oath. The witches' prophecies of Macbeth's kingship came true; why would not their statements concerning Banquo's line be also? Thus, Lady Macbeth shows us that she sees herself as the newly-instated queen when she declares that the news has "transported [her] beyond / This ignorant present, and [she] feel[s] now / The future in the instant" (Shakespeare I.v.56-8).

Therefore, when Macbeth later decides that they (his use is actually "we," an important implication for their decision in unison) "will proceed no further in this business," Lady Macbeth feels cheated (Shakespeare I.vii.32). Not only does Lady Macbeth feel her "future" has already arrived, she believes any type of promise Macbeth reneges on is in violation of their marriage contract (Shakespeare I.v.56-8). In doing so, she has made a union of all oaths and deeds, making them as one.

Lady Macbeth, as she works to convince Macbeth to murder Duncan in Act I, scene vii, knows when to change her angle and emotion to get what she wants out of her marriage. She attacks his masculinity, calling him a "coward," a "beast," (Shakespeare I.vii.44,49). Then, she alters her argument to assert how manly she would find him if he completed the deed: "When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man" (Shakespeare I.vii.50-2). Finally, as an example of Gouge's theory that a sexual relationship aids the fulfillment of good intent, she seduces him into following through on his murderous promise by outlining how well their plot will succeed (Amussen 39). The sexual act parallels the action of a good-faith promise because both are the culmination of oaths.

Moreover, saying their plan will come off seems to assure both Macbeth and herself of their future success, a concept fitting with this couple's dedication to the effectiveness of oaths. Therefore, it is evident that Lady Macbeth means what she says and that she believes their oaths to each other are the most important aspect of their lives. This is further supported by her assertion that she would follow through on any promise she made him.

> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this. (Shakespeare I.vii.57-60)

Because her *coup de grâce* convinces him, we continue to see that he shares her same belief about the importance of oaths.

Lady Macbeth's (and even her husband's) strong belief in the binding power of a spoken word fits with the Renaissance ideal of marriage contracts and espousals. Her faith in her marriage bond is the root of her faithfulness in everyday oaths. However, the fact that she requires Macbeth to violate his oath of allegiance to Duncan seems at odds with the character of a woman who expects everyone to mean what he says. In fact, she is able not only to ask her husband to dissemble ("Look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under 't") but also to do so herself (Shakespeare I.v.65-6). She welcomes Duncan and the rest of the company to Inverness, playing the "honored hostess" well (Shakespeare I.v.10). Lady Macbeth justifies this masking of feelings, though, for two reasons, both of which concern promises made within her marriage. First, she feels as if she has a right to become queen since it was promised to her, above all, by her husband. Because she relates everyday promises between husband and wife to her ceremonial nuptial vows, she feels his promise of greatness to her should be as binding as their actual marriage is. Moreover, in working to gain the throne, she is supporting not only her own goals but her husband's as well. The "Homily" even promotes this type of marriage: "for surely this doth nourish concord very much...when she endeavoureth herself to seek his contentation..." (3). In this way, Lady Macbeth manipulates her own views of good faith contracts in order to continue to keep her marriage at the highest priority for herself and her husband.

Furthermore, not only does Lady Macbeth subscribe to the standard of marriage contracts of early modern England, but she and Macbeth are also a complete embodiment of a companionate marriage, as they think and act as one. Lady Macbeth makes her first appearance

onstage, reading her husband's words in the letter which promises her greatness. The beginning of the letter reads, "They met me in the day of success." (Shakespeare I.v.1-2). While Lady Macbeth is obviously referring to her husband as she says "me," the fact that she is speaking his words furthers the idea of the Macbeths as one entity (Woodbridge 227-8). Additionally, Lady Macbeth's entire role can be seen as her commitment to the companionate union, as it is charted in the "Homily." She "acknowledge[s] [Macbeth's] follies," and therefore she is able to prevent him from "stand[ing] not in [his] faults" ("Homily" 3). Lady Macbeth knows that what her husband "wouldst highly, / That wouldst... holily" (Shakespeare I.v.20-1). His fault, in her belief, lies in his sense of honor regarding others that might interfere with promises made within their marriage. As she sees it, he should "bear any burden" for her before doing so for any man ("Homily" 7). Therefore, she asks to be "unsex[ed]" so she can remedy the situation by directing his sense of honor toward her and their marriage (Shakespeare I.v.41). This attempt to stop feminine emotions is, although a masculine request, still feminine in nature, as she sacrifices herself throughout the play for his cause (Boyd 174). She even goes as far as to plan to murder Duncan herself when she calls on "thick night" to hide her "keen knife" (Shakespeare I.v.50,52). She cannot perform that task, though, for Duncan reminds her of her father. So she contents herself to always support her husband's "purpose" by eliminating his "infirm[ity]" (Shakespeare II.ii.56).

Lady Macbeth even supports her husband when she herself is frightened, and she seems to find strength in comforting him. Twice, she expresses her fears when alone, and twice, she contains herself in order to help Macbeth (Boyd 176). First, while Macbeth is committing the murder, she waits, energized by the anticipation, but eventually made more nervous: "Alack, I am afraid they have awaked, / And 'tis not done... . Hark!" (Shakespeare II.ii.9-11). Because

Macbeth struggles to finish the deeds (having brought the incriminating daggers with him), Lady Macbeth composes herself, comforts him, and takes control: "Retire we to our chamber. / A little water clears us of this deed. / How easy it is, then!" (Shakespeare II.ii.70-2). Next, before the banquet scene, upon discovering that Banquo has left the castle, Lady Macbeth (again in the absence of her husband) frets, "Naught's had, all's spent, / Where our desire is got without content" (Shakespeare II.ii.6-7). Upon Macbeth's entrance, though, she tells him not to worry. "Things without all remedy / Should be without regard. What's done is done" (Shakespeare III.ii.13-4). No matter how much despair she feels, she hides it to encourage Macbeth (Boyd 176).

Because she makes such sacrifices for him, she expects the same in return. She equates his actions with the faithfulness of his love, which is evident when she now "account[s]" his love of her as "green and pale [when once it acted] so freely" (Shakespeare I.vii.3-40). While the metaphor is first intended to apply to his desire to become king, she has linked performing his promise with his desire for her, making it even more understandable why the break-down of their companionate marriage leads to her own mental break-down, especially considering Macbeth is largely responsible for their separation. Ironically, although Macbeth has performed the action he has promised, their marriage still fails. Here, we see the importance in a companionate marriage of fulfilling one's promises not merely in a particular instant but rather in a continuous fashion. Once pledged, you must remain in good faith eternally, and although Macbeth has fulfilled his promise to make Lady Macbeth queen, he has not done this in good faith. She recognizes this, stating "My hands are of your color, but I shame / To wear a heart so white" (Shakespeare II.ii.68-9). Already, their souls are not in the same state. His later actions also show this lack of good faith, causing a break her faith in him. Lady Macbeth's earlier words

now seem even more significant. Rather than referring just to the murder of Duncan, she notes that their "attempt but not the deed" at a one-body marriage "confounds" them (Shakespeare II.ii.10-11). The Macbeths' marriage demonstrates the enduring good faith that must be behind the nuptial promise and the responsibility of acting on it. Despite the several years they have been married, a break in their union still shows that their "desire is got without content," which in this case results in uncertainty and insanity (Shakespeare III.ii.6-7).

During the disintegration of their companionate marriage, Macbeth isolates her at the time they need each other most (Woodbridge 227). We are truly aware of how separated they have become when he leaves her out of the plot to murder Banquo, telling her to "[B]e innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed" (Shakespeare III.ii.48-9). It seems odd that he has left her out of the plan, as she was the engineer of the original one. Even more, his failure to bring her into his confidence suggests they are no longer "one flesh" ("Homily"). In addition, his reference to "the deed" signals to her that he is leaving her out of the marriage. Macbeth echoes her earlier use of "innocent," but Lady Macbeth previously recommended that he only "look innocent," while still bearing the same inward guilt as she (Shakespeare I.v.65). His request that she actually "be innocent" while he himself is guilty is then an offense to her and a failure to act on his one-body marriage oaths (Shakespeare III.ii.48). Then, his words that follow this are exceedingly reminiscent of her "unsex me" speech, as he addresses "seeling night" and asks for strength and courage (Shakespeare III.ii.49). Here, as before, he is usurping her role in the marriage, leaving no room for her.

In devising the murder plot and making this speech, he has completely cut Lady Macbeth out of the marriage, causing her subsequent madness. This is evidenced at the banquet scene when she tries to comfort her husband, and this time she fails and must dismiss the dinner party

(Boyd 203). Moreover, Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth in this scene that he "lack[s] the season of all natures, sleep," a phrase that echoes Macbeth's ravings after he murders Duncan: "Macbeth does murder sleep" (Shakespeare III.iv.142; II.ii.40). Theordore Leinward notes that Macbeth has killed another kind of sleep as well, as he no longer seems to be sleeping with Lady Macbeth – which is also significant because producing an heir might have eased their worries about succession slightly (243). Because Macbeth has left Lady Macbeth out of their companionate, one-body marriage, Lady Macbeth loses faith in her marriage and eventually all sense of herself, resulting in her madness (Boyd 203). Her sleep-walking even recalls the last moments we see of their marriage fully intact. Although they did not know it then, Macbeth's murder of sleep severs their bond, and thus Lady Macbeth sees (in her own mind) a physical representation of that in her bloody hand. Representing the broken handfasting of a marriage contract, her bloody hand shows both the dissolution of their marriage and her fixation on the time that break first happened. Now, she realizes that "[a] little water" will not "clear [them] of this deed" (Shakespeare II.ii.71). While the clergy of the time advocated reconciliation, Lady Macbeth obviously does not: "What's / Done cannot be undone" (Shakespeare V.i.67). She exits, crying, "To bed, to bed, to bed!" but Macbeth does not respond to her call (Shakespeare V.i.67-8). Because she thinks entirely in terms of a companionate marriage, she is unable to function when Macbeth fails to uphold his marriage oaths to her. In this way, our matron, in a relationship of long-standing faithfulness and happiness, suffers a horrible breakdown in her marriage and in her mind despite having adhered to prescribed ideology of the time.

Alice Arden and the Faithless Oath

Alice Arden, on the other hand, cares nothing for oaths. She thrives on dissembling, telling others what they want to hear in order to bend them to her will. When we first see Alice and her husband, he is accusing her of calling out Mosby's name. The audience already knows from Arden's conversation with Franklin that Arden is apprehensive of the activities going on between his wife and Mosby. In order to cast his suspicions aside, she makes the incident seem casual. "Tis like I was asleep when I named him… . Now I remember whereupon it came: / Had we no talk of Mosby yesternight?" (*Arden* i.67,76-7). When Arden is appeased, he discloses to her that he must travel to London for a month. In response, Alice acts as if she cannot bear to be without him: "A month! Ay me! Sweet Arden, come again / Within a day or two, or else I die!" (*Arden* i.94-7). Arden is proved a fool again and again in the play – most likely because he acts on the assumption that all mean what they say – as Alice tells him blatant lies to pacify him. She sees words as a means of manipulation, and, because of this, no one can ever be quite sure what she is truly thinking. Her character, because of her tendency to equivocate, remains unclear (Intro Arden 424).

She does disclose to Mosby what she thinks of oaths, though, and this is the only true statement we are certain of her making. Mosby first tells Alice that he intends to honor the promise he has recently made to Arden to "solicit" Alice no more (*Arden* i.329). Alice's response is one of derision:

> 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. (*Arden* i.434-9)

Alice betrays here that, unlike Lady Macbeth, she does not put conscience, or any implicit honor of faithfulness, behind her promises. This idea is reinstated also when Alice says that while Mosby actually has her love, Arden "usurps it, having naught by / That [she] is tied to him by marriage" (*Arden* i.99-100). She does acknowledge that a marriage vow is the ultimate of oaths when she mocks Mosby's desire to honor a friendship promise while she has not honored hers of wedlock. However, she links marriage and oaths in the opposite way Lady Macbeth does. For Alice, love and marriage are validated by oaths. But because oaths are made up of words that are able to be changed, why should love and marriage be so binding? "Marriage is but words" (*Arden* i.101). Therefore, she contracts a new marriage with Mosby, using both verbal signs of consent as well as tokens. Arden states that he has seen Mosby wearing "the ring / Which at [Arden and Alice's] marriage day the priest put on" (*Arden* i.17-8). Moreover, after the quarrel scene, she uses quite explicit language to state their intent. Kissing Mosby, she states, "Then with thy lips seal up this new-made match" (*Arden* i.150). Finally, upon her legal husband's death, she sits Mosby in his chair at the table.

Obviously, Alice and Mosby's espousal is not binding in a legal sense and would be found void *ab initio*. Even worse for Alice, her marriage to Arden is not only legally binding but also looked most favorably upon by the clergy and society because of its ritualistic nature. She speaks of being married in a church and even of being "descended of a noble house, / And matched already with a gentleman" (*Arden* i.203-4). Because her marriage was solemnized *per verba de praesenti* and because she suggests parental involvement its arrangement, it is likely that the families of both were involved to work out the dowry beforehand (Cressy 234-5). Even without these supporting rituals, her marriage would nonetheless be binding. Other ways to legally extricate herself from her marriage, ways with which Renaissance wives would most

likely be familiar, offer little hope for Alice (Ranald 68). She cannot claim to have been coerced by her family (especially since we have no evidence of such happening). Even if there were such evidence, she has lived long enough in peaceful cohabitation with Arden to override any complaint of that sort (Carlson 21). Thus, Alice is aware that her only means to obtain her dowry and marry another lies in her husband's death. However any desire to actually remarry would be strange for one with the proclaimed views of oaths she has. The possibility of her marrying Mosby upon Arden's death must be considered, though; Mosby rejects that idea in his soliloquy in the quarrel scene in favor of killing her, which suggests at least an implied understanding of a forthcoming marriage (*Arden* viii.37-43). Still, even if not in a legal sense, he is, in an "inward state," her husband (Sokol and Sokol 15).

The many contradictory elements of Alice, such as her desire to take another husband, suggest that Alice truly values love and has merely become disillusioned with the marriage process. Arden and Alice do not act as the one body that the "Homily" describes. It is possible, though, that this sort of marriage is something that Alice might have initially desired. She chides her husband for leaving their bed too early in the morning: "Husband, what mean you to get up so early? / ...Had I been wake, you had not rise so soon" (*Arden* i.57-8). Like Macbeth, Arden effects his own departures from his wife (Leinward 254). Not only does he rise too early from bed, but he also leaves town without her for great periods of time. First, he leaves for London for a month, and upon returning, leaves her again, preferring to dine at an acquaintance's house. Alice's response to this shows the injustice of the situation: "The time hath been.../ That honors, title, nor a lord's command / Could once have drawn you from these arms of mine" (*Arden* xx.15-7). While we know that Alice, at this point in her marriage, does not mind him being away from home (as she declines his offer to take her with him), his mistreatment of his wife as

well as her lack of moral obligation to him shows that their marriage is a sham. More support for Alice's disillusion with vows of matrimony – rather than being opposed to them from the outset – comes in the fact that she expects others to keep their promises to her. She specifically instructs Michael to "keep [his] oath / And be as…resolute," implying that she acts on the assumption that other *will* uphold the promise of their words. Alice demands that others keep their obligations specifically to her, yet she fails to return the favor and cares not if they keep good faith with others; such a demand shows that she needs loyalty from others.

Because she has become disenchanted with marriage and because she has the ability to manipulate those who are faithful to her, love becomes a game to her. She and Mosby's love represents a sport in itself; they show affection this way. Alice tells Adam to take a pair of dice to Mosby "with which [they] had played for kisses many a time, / And when I lost, I won, and so did he – / Such winning and such losing Jove send me (*Arden* i.124-6). She also plays with other people's affections, promising both Michael and Clarke that they will be married to Susan, failing to take into account Susan's preference. In fact, Alice and Mosby contract Susan to Clarke *per verba de futuro* in the first scene.

> *Mosby.* And what, will't be a match?
>
> *Susan.* It resteth in your grant. Some words are passed,
> And haply we be grown unto a match,
> If you be willing that it should be so.
>
> *Mosby.* …But, so you'll grant me one thing I shall ask,
> I am content my sister shall be yours. (*Arden* i.601-9)

If Clarke will procure a poisoned painting, Mosby will consent to the match. In this instance, Clarke and Susan have formed a conditional pre-contract, and she now cannot be contracted to Michael. However, this does not stop Alice from leading Michael to believe Susan

wants to marry him. Promising Susan to both seems unfair to Susan and the suitors; yet, it is merely a game to Alice.

Sporting or playing a game, as representative of Alice and Mosby's love increasingly takes on another meaning of "playing." Mosby adopts Alice's view of oaths as changeable and his new perspective becomes more entrenched in him throughout the action. In many of the scenes, Mosby and Alice are playing parts, performing roles in order to judge the other's reactions. We can see this happening already in the first scene when Mosby says he will quit himself of Alice (*Arden* i.185). Alice's reaction does not contain words of unrequited love; rather, she is indignant that she has been "[g]otten by witchcraft" by such a "[b]ase peasant (*Arden* i.201,199). Her issues with his lower class come up many times in their quarrels, underlying her worry that he is marrying her for money. Mosby, however, states that he was only trying her "constancy," not actually meaning that he wanted to leave her (*Arden* i.210). Alice later plays the same part with him in the quarrel scene. Alice enters, holding a prayer book, vowing to return to her status as "honest Arden's wife" even though she can no longer be "Arden's honest wife" (*Arden* viii.73). The audience is aware how much Alice likes to perform and possibly remembers this trick from the first scene; Mosby, though, falls into her trap. Offended, he too claims he has been "bewitched" and denounces her fairness and kindness (*Arden* viii.93).

Throughout the play, we can see Mosby's words imply that his favor for Alice is waning. While she expounds upon the love they will have when Arden is dead, he states, "Why, what's love without true constancy," something he has observed that she does not have (*Arden* xx.94). His words highlight an issue that also was problematic for the Macbeths: "Naught's had, all's spent, / Where our desire is got without content" (Shakespeare III.ii.6-7). Uncertainty breeds

lack of faith, resulting in the dissolution of united souls. Alice possibly picks up his diminishing faith. When she, Arden, and Mosby dine the night of the murder, she appears upset that Arden has asked Mosby to attend and states that she would "rather die than bid [Mosby] welcome" (*Arden* xxiv.182). As Mosby's invitation comes from Arden rather than her own self, Alice has no apparent reason for this performance. Because her relationship with Mosby is encumbered with uncertainties and games, we can assume that Alice has realized that she can no longer operate on the assumption that he will be loyal. She is now unsure how he feels about her (Leggatt 128). Thus, Arden's bloodstain on the floor appears to represent for Alice the permanence their wedlock was supposed to have. She now refers to Arden as her husband (and many times over after seeing the blood and his corpse), whereas before he was merely the "usurp[er] of her heart" (*Arden* i.99). In the end, Alice gains the good faith in their marriage that she never had before, and our inconstant matron realizes too late weight of an initial, and only, marriage contract.

Chapter Three: Contracting the Betrothed

The Duchess of Malfi and the Efficacy of the Clandestine Marriage

In John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, we are given a strong female lead, a widow in fact, who tends to equivocate and speak in metaphors. The Duchess of Malfi is not the deceiver that Alice Arden is, nor is she as forthright as Lady Macbeth. Instead, the Duchess' double talk derives from the complex role she plays within the setting of her court. Because the Duchess is a widow, she is able to manage her own economic and sexual affairs, a concept with which she is likely familiar (Intro Duchess 1749). Not only does she have both a Duke and a Cardinal, representing the common and the canon law, for brothers, but she also indicates her access to those who have knowledge of marital laws. When contracting herself to Antonio, she states, "I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber / *Per verba de presenti* is absolute marriage" (Webster I.i.479-80). Here she has stated the law and used the appropriate Latin legal term. Despite her position and knowledge, we find that the Duchess does not outright assert her will around her brothers. Perhaps an awareness of the threat she poses to patriarchal control holds her back, causing her to veil her true intentions (Intro Duchess 1749). However, in the absence of her brothers at the court, the Duchess assumes a manner of control more fitting with her social standing. Because she is of the aristocracy, she is accustomed to seeing her words carried out as actions. Many of her lines throughout the play are orders to her attendants. Therefore, whether she commands Cariola to fetch Antonio or bids the servants to bring her a litter, she expects her words to be efficacious. Usually, she does not even witness the outright action of her order; she merely sees the result. In a way similar to but more practical than Lady Macbeth, the Duchess connects the oath and the deed. Caught in between her own will and that of her brothers, the

Duchess works to mask her inner intent, while her brothers strive to uncover it, creating a split between her public self and her private one.

The Duchess of Malfi is our best example of a wife in a love-based marriage because she chooses a mate for love rather than rank. Although a wealthy widow, she seeks to remarry, giving up her independent standing to become again a *femme couverte* and asserting her will as wife rather than widow (Bartels 422). Because Antonio is the steward of her household and of lower social rank, she initiates the marriage contract. Summoning Antonio to her chamber and ordering Cariola behind the arras as a witness, she prepares the clandestine marriage. She notes that she takes on a male role in "making [her] will," a phrase that refers more to acting on her desire for marriage than to literally drawing up a legal will, because "'tis fit princes should" (Webster I.i.377). Yet, even though she utilizes double meaning in this line and in others, Antonio understands her, allowing him to voice his own desires and assume more agency in an unconventional, female-dominated relationship. In fact, she even invites him (actually, commands him) to begin the proceeding that she has arranged: "What good deed shall we first remember? Say." (Webster I.i.385). Her requirement that he "raise [him]self" recurs throughout this scene and their marriage; she wants him as an equal in the marriage (Webster I.i.419). She acknowledges her higher social standing: "This goodly roof of yours is too low built; / I cannot stand upright in't, nor discourse, / Without I raise it higher" (Webster I.i.417-8). However, she wants him to understand that in taking her "hand to help" him she boosts his status: "You may discover what a wealthy mine / I make you lord of" (Webster I.i.420,430-1). The Duchess' resolve to make her adversarial relatives her "low footsteps" if they "lay in [her] way unto this marriage" therefore suggests that the step is for Antonio and not the Duchess herself (Webster I.i.342-4).

Equality is important for this couple because both are also proponents of a one-body marriage. The Duchess and Antonio's ability to converse in double speak is reflective of their inner intentions being in tune. Moreover, after finding out that the Duchess intends to marry again despite the freedoms she would be forfeiting, we also discover that Antonio, unlike her brothers, would think it "strange if there were no will in [her] / To marry again" (Webster I.i.392-3). Granted, he prefers her to marry him, but both see how enjoyable a love-match can be, especially when formed with equality of the couple in mind. Their belief in the advantage of this type of marriage also intimates that the Duchess' first marriage was a success. At the very least, her view of matrimony has not been soured, as is Alice Arden's. Thus, the union of the Duchess and Antonio is built upon equality in forming a one-body marriage, demonstrated after their contract is formed when the Duchess states, "for now we are one" (Webster I.i.498). She further utilizes this language to suggest that their body parts (in this case, their hearts) within their own bond are interchangeable: "Go, go brag / You have left me heartless! Mine is in your bosom" (Webster I.i.449-50). Another example of this substitution takes place in the exchange of their vows, as each finishes the other's thought. Intertwining together, even their words form a marriage, mirroring the spiritual action taking place :

> *Antonio.* And may our sweet affections, like the spheres,
> Be still in motion –
>
> *Duchess.* Quick'ning, and make
> The like soft music –
>
> *Antonio.* That we may imitate the loving palms,
> Best emblem of a peaceful marriage,
> That never bore fruit divided –
>
> *Duchess.* What can the church force more? (Webster I.i.482-8)

By representing their inward intent, their words thus constitute the act of marriage. Moreover, when Antonio initially accepts her attempt to elevate his status, he responds, "Begin with the first good deed began i'th'world / After man's creation: the sacrament of marriage" (Webster I.i.386-7). Antonio refers to the marriage oath as a deed, and because he has spoken this within the confines of his private language with the Duchess, we know her beliefs in this respect are the same. Their clandestine marriage is then important in illustrating an efficacious oath because a private and secret marriage is solidified rather less by rituals than by the essential assertions of good faith. Even though they do exchange rings, the words are what make their bond legal. He further asserts his own equality, and therefore their one-body marriage, in the relationship when he urges the Duchess to give her husband "all" (Webster I.i.389). In their double-speak, he states, "Yes, your excellent self," which, on the one hand, refers to her title but more intimately asks her to give all of herself to him (Webster I.i.389). This request and her assent relies on his good faith to take proper care of her as a *femme couverte* (as practically a possession, which his words suggest) and her trust that he will do so.

The Duchess and Antonio's secret one-body marriage is also crucial in this play because they are forming a bond meant for the private sphere, blocking out all others from entrance. It is religiously correct ceremonies that are in the public eye, where the relationship is put on display. Therefore, a clandestine marriage attempts to prevent the intrusion of others (besides Cariola, the loyal waiting-woman), a concept depicted in the ring exchange. In putting on the ring, they are able to eliminate the "saucy and ambitious devil" from their marriage, literally eliminating space for anyone to come between them (Webster I.i.413). This strategy is in line with the "Homily" because those who strive to come between the Duchess and Antonio are doing the work of the devil (Tricomi). The concern of this union is for those within the confines of it; those "without

this circumference" should be "pitied" (Webster I.i.470). Despite this, the Duchess is fixated on her oaths being efficacious both in the private and the public spheres, and problems arise for the couple when their bond becomes public, rather than private, knowledge.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and their hired spy Bosola, do not speak the language that is used by the Duchess and Antonio. They must, therefore, rely on outward signs and symbols to determine the inner intent of their sister. Moreover, the Duchess intentionally makes it very difficult for them to understand her; she equivocates, uses sarcasm, and even outright lies all in the first scene. Even though she would rather be forthright, necessity causes her to strive to "seem the thing [she] is not" in public, a trait common to her brothers (Webster I.i.449). Ferdinand especially "will seem to sleep o'th'bench / Only to entrap offenders in their answers," using the law improperly to imprison others, as he does in the end to the Duchess (Webster I.i.174-5). Yet, he at first wants to rely on more solid evidence for once than "hearsay," and so Ferdinand charges Bosola "[t]o note all the particulars of her havior" (Webster I.i.176;255). Because the Duchess is aristocratic, and her marriage would influence property and titles, Ferdinand's investigation serves as a perverse common law trial on the validity of her nuptial vows. Bosola's task becomes easier as the Duchess is pregnant, but he specifically looks for "apparent signs" to make her private deeds public (Webster II.ii.2). He observes her facial expressions, her garb, her actions. Ferdinand's oath to reveal her "darkest actions – nay, [her] privat'st thoughts" creates a battle of wills between himself and the Duchess (Webster I.i.317). His speech here shows that, despite his awareness that inner intentions are able to be guised, such intentions will always manifest outwardly; one may discern these things with enough attention. Moreover, he warns her that a second marriage "may more properly be said / To be executed

than celebrated" (Webster I.i.324-5). Thus, the struggle to be decided is whose oaths will be more efficacious in the public sphere.

Despite the best efforts of Ferdinand and Bosola to bring the Duchess into the public sphere, it is the Duchess and Antonio themselves who fail to keep their marriage private (Leinward 253). Consequently, their oaths fail as efficacious deeds once out in the open. Antonio rises early from bed when he lies with the Duchess and refers to their nightly activities as work: "Laboring men / Count the clock oft'nest, Cariola, / Are glad when their task's ended" (Webster III.ii.18-20). We see in several instances that he does love his wife, evidenced by their playful banter, yet he takes issue with the fact that his "rule is only in the night," if even then (Webster III.ii.7). Later in the scene, he and Cariola discreetly steal away from the Duchess, leaving her open, albeit accidentally, to the threats of Ferdinand. His own break from his marriage highlights that he is unable to protect the Duchess from forces outside their bond, especially when he tries to assume control within it. Antonio seems to have caused the breach in their private world because of this trick of his, the result of which is a lasting separation, rather than the brief one he intended. Right after this, the Duchess sends him away with a plan that she has "fashioned" already (Webster III.ii.163). Here, she attempts to regain control of their marriage and the situation. The Duchess is now the one making decisions, while Antonio follows her orders; moreover, the she sends him away while initiating the use of their own private language. Yet, they have let a "devil... / ... danc[e] in this circle" of their marriage, which their jointure should have prevented (Webster I.i.413-4). The swiftness with which their Gordian knot unravels demonstrates that plans Antonio makes without consent from the Duchess, such as his hiding trick, destroy their secret marriage.

Now, although the Duchess tries to remedy the situation by her usual public dissembling, Bosola knows what she is attempting: "flatterers dissemble their vices, and they [the princes] dissemble their lies" (Webster III.ii.242-3). He then dupes her into revealing that Antonio is her husband by merely praising him. This weakness also exposes how their marriage is rapidly falling apart. She has violated her own words to Antonio that forbid him to think of those "without this circumference" (Webster I.i.470). Instead, she is seeking validation of Antonio's goodness, a fact she already knows. Thus, as her marriage oaths have not proved as binding and effective as they ought at the very instant they are brought to light, her orders, especially to Bosola, do not stand a chance of being carried out. She even allows him to make suggestions for her plans, which is an even more explicit invitation to join her marriage circle. The consequences of this are swift and harsh: the Duchess is not only banished and stripped of her title, she is also robbed of her wedding ring.

Although her brothers will show her in much more gruesome ways that her marriage has been undone, the removal of her wedding ring is enough to fully separate her and Antonio. Their parting is akin to a death, and both seem to realize the implications of their separation. The Duchess states that she "know[s] not which is best, / To see [Antonio] dead, or part with [him]," acknowledging that these actions are one and the same (Webster III.v.67). On the other hand, Antonio's "heart is turned to a heavy lump of lead"; he kisses her not as a husband to a wife but as "an holy anchorite / ...to a dead man's skull" (Webster III.v.92;90-1). Thus, Antonio returns to his mindset before his marriage, considering the Duchess as a jewel or relic instead of the passionate wife she is. All the Duchess has left to look forward to is a reunion with him in the afterlife. Thus, the actions of her brothers are but ghastly illustrations of an already divided union.

In giving the Duchess, a severed hand, Ferdinand both shows his power in severing the Duchess' marriage and mocks the concept of a one-body marriage. She is forced to kiss the hand with her wedding ring on it, a hand representing Antonio's. While the severed hand is a symbol of a marriage ripped apart, it also mocks the imagery of substitution that couples, such as the Duchess and Antonio, employ to discuss one-body marriages, especially in the exchange of hands and hearts. Thus, Ferdinand promises that the Duchess "will have the heart" of the dead man as well. In this way, the Duchess is made to replay her wedding scene. Here, her perverse marriage to a wax Antonio derides both her authority within her relationship, as a wax Antonio has no agency, and her powerlessness in the public sphere because of Ferdinand's refusal to accept the legitimacy of her union. In an ironic twist, the Duchess is strangled to death by a knot that holds, most likely because it was sanctioned by Ferdinand. Even more fitting, Antonio dies not with her but almost 700 hundred lines later, marking the estrangement of their relationship (Leinward 251). Neither is able to claim retribution on the Duchess' brothers. They are sent to their deaths only able to mourn the lack of efficacy in contracting a marriage, realizing they are not husband and wife, but the Duchess of Malfi and Antonio the steward from the beginning of the play. Thus, our willing wife is cut down for her lack of adherence to male influence and ritualistic conventions.

Beatrice-Joanna and the Substituted Spouse

Whereas *The Duchess of Malfi* involves those who attempt to decipher what the Duchess' will is, *The Changeling* highlights those who willfully misconstrue others' intentions. Here, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley put forth a female very similar to Alice Arden in her changeability. Beatrice-Joanna, a woman determined to "have [her] will" despite the competing

desires of the males around her, is caught in a betrothal forced onto her by her father (Middleton I.i.246). Like all the women we have discussed, Beatrice-Joanna also craves a love-match and prefers to choose her own mate in a manner of which Becon, Gouge, and other English Renaissance preachers would be more approving (Mikesell 99; Amussen 39). Rather than the "Romish," antiquated arranged marriage, she strives to contract her own amorous match (Mikesell 99). However, Beatrice-Joanna, in a way similar to the Duchess, knows how to seek her desires only through the formation of oaths rather than through the outright renunciation of them (Intro Changeling 1594). If Beatrice-Joanna had refused to wed Alonzo, neither her father nor the courts could make her. Instead, like Alice Arden, Beatrice-Joanna utilizes the good faith of others, despite the fact that she has no intent to follow through on her promises herself.

With all the evidence to the contrary, Beatrice-Joanna insists on portraying herself as a conventional Renaissance woman. She invents maidenly excuses to prolong her wedding to Alonzo, allows Alsemero to believe they are "like / In [their] expressions" of courtly romance, and outwardly submits to her father's choice of husband for her (Middleton II.ii.12-3). Rather than showing her strong sense of self, she exploits the traditional view of women – something she attempts to do throughout the entire play, even going so far as to fake the effects of a virginity test. Despite her high social position, her words seem to have little effect, partly because she conceals her sharp wit in asides so often. Moreover, she is plagued by a servant of her father's that she cannot rid herself of, even though she orders him repeatedly to leave her alone. She can take no action against him, so she is left to ask her father to do so: "The next good mood I find my father in, / I'll get him quite discarded" (Middleton II.1.93-4). Even in this request, she looks to take control of the situation in a more wily way, waiting until the right time, rather than appealing for De Flores' dismissal in a forthright manner. It is little wonder then that

Beatrice-Joanna seeks out De Flores to perform her actions for her. She depends on men for action, while the only acting we see her do consists of performing.

Therefore, Beatrice-Joanna deserves her double name (Sugimura; Eaton). Granted, she does not take up full dissembling until later in the play, as even Tomazo is able to judge that she is not in love with Alonzo in the first act. Yet, from the start Beatrice-Joanna proves herself one of the play's changelings in the way she "change[s] [her] saint" (I.i.156). She finds a "giddy turning in" herself because despite the fact that she is betrothed to Alonzo, she has fallen in love with Alsemero, most likely at first sight. When comparing their voiced declarations of love to music, Beatrice-Joanna responds, "You are skillful in't [music], can sing at first sight" (Middleton I.i.67). As the play progresses, though, those around her lose the ability to judge her inner intentions based on her words and actions. No longer can one "mark [her] dullness" or "see small welcome in her eye" (Middleton I.i.127;109). Instead, she makes her thoughts "so unwilling to be known" (Middleton IV.I.64). Because of this, she has become a changeling in another aspect because she now pretends to be what she is not (chaste, for one). Just as the Duchess of Malfi has a private self and a public one, Beatrice-Joanna forms separate identities as she contracts herself to various characters.

Undercutting this plot is that occurring in the insane asylum. Effectively naming the courtly scene a madhouse and a prison metaphorically, Lollio, speaking about Alibius' asylum, says, "We have but two sorts of people in the house,..., that's fools and madmen" (Middleton I.ii.44-5). When applying this to the courtly characters, some cannot decipher the true intent of others' words, while the rest deliberately play false. One difference, however, is that De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna both *do* have "knavery enough," as opposed to the madmen in the asylum

(Middleton I.ii.446-7). Yet, Beatrice-Joanna only believes De Flores, not herself, capable of such acts, demonstrating her belief in the divide between the oath and deed.

The inconsistency shown in the first scene of the play parallels the character of Beatrice-Joanna throughout the play as she attempts to distance herself from the effects of her oaths. Her separation of oath and deed not only aids in her manipulation of others for her own benefit but also helps assure herself of her own innocence (Sugimura). Although we understand why Beatrice-Joanna desires a match with a man of her own choosing rather than with one her father has picked out, we are unable to excuse her make-shift betrothal to De Flores, which she contracts to attain her goal as Alsemero's wife. Despite Beatrice-Joanna's feigned shock when De Flores expects her virginity as payment for his deeds, it is likely she understood the implications of his contract. In the very first scene of the play, she deigns to touch a glove he has picked up, even discarding its pair because she feels she cannot use them anymore. The association of this action to a handfasting and the future sexual partnering that such a promise connotes is already in her mind. Thus, Beatrice-Joanna is careful what outward signs could be misconstrued as intent. She shuns De Flores' advances, but she is aware of his intentions to "thrust [his fingers / Into her sockets" (Middleton I.i.242-3). Moreover, when she conceives her plan to untie herself from Alonzo, she immediately thinks both of De Flores for the job and of the way to convince him (Crupi 142). She regrets that she "ha' marred so good a market with [her] scorn," so seeing him in the very next scene, only moments later, she flirts with him (Middleton II.i.42).

Most importantly in this scene, she touches De Flores. While she earlier scorned to even let her gloves touch his hands, she now touches his face and offers to concoct a cleansing water for him "with [her] own hands" (Middleton II.ii.84). This action, accompanied by words, such

as "my De Flores," and his kneeling in acceptance signals a contract being formed that is deeper than if she had merely hired him to do her bidding (Middleton II.ii.98). Both understand this – although De Flores is the only one who outright accepts it. Even more, Beatrice-Joanna, as we have seen by this point in the action, pays special attention to wording when it concerns wedding contracts. She is quick to change the meaning to fit her need, even when it is done as an aside. When her father welcomes Alsemero with his "best love," Beatrice-Joanna notes that his term can be construed to mean her own self, as he "was wont to call [her] so," causing her father to speak "a most unfeignéd truth" (Middleton I.i.174-5). Moreover, upon requesting that Alsemero be granted entrance into the castle, she says she is "beholding to this gentleman" (Middleton I.i.158). Beatrice-Joanna operates in the language of marriage contracts, and thus likely understands the bond being formed between herself and De Flores.

While Beatrice-Joanna utilizes this particular language, she also employs phrases that De Flores himself uses as sexual innuendo. Mere lines apart, we find the same phrase applied by both even though they not even speaking to each other. De Flores notes that both Alonzo and Alsemero "[c]annot be served unless she transgress," while Beatrice-Joanna vows to keep her loathing of him secret in order to "serve [her] turn upon him" (Middleton II.ii.59;69). Fitting with this theme of their commonality and understanding, De Flores sees through her protestations of innocence (Crupi 146). Rather than wooing Beatrice-Joanna with the courtly love conventions that Alsemero uses, De Flores knows that "[w]rangling has proved the mistress of good pastime" (Middleton II.i.87). In this way, we find that De Flores words are effective, while Beatrice-Joanna's have not been. The men, therefore, have the power to transform her oaths to deeds, but De Flores is the only one able to draw on this power because he is not manipulated by her feigned conventionalism.

Additionally, Beatrice-Joanna professes to wish there were "no such tie as the command of parents," we only half believe her (Middleton II.ii.20). This statement demonstrates that she views the duty of child to parent as that of wife to husband. There is a bond between Beatrice-Joanna and Vermandero, a contract much like the engagement she has with Alonzo. Because her father has played such an instrumental role in contracting her to Alonzo, she naturally likens her link with one to her bond with the other. As Alsemero states, with surprising aptness (although he and Beatrice-Joanna are still not on the same page, as he implies a duel, while she immediately infers outright murder), "Remove the cause, / The command ceases; so there's two fears blown out / With one and the same blast" (Middleton II.ii.23-5). However, despite her complaints, Beatrice-Joanna finds her contract method successful (up to a point) *because* her words are not effective. She never expects to honor the contract, instead putting forth her oaths without good faith; thus, before she is expected to make her word her deed, she seeks to sever the tie. In dealing with the bonds she has with her father and Alonzo, she resists following through on her oath, or her agreement to marry Alonzo, when an action, such as actually having to marry him, is expected of her.

To avoid being held accountable to Alonzo, she forms her contract with De Flores, and she likely believes at the time of its formation that she will find a way to disentangle herself from this one, too. However, De Flores comes "[f]or the sweet recompense that [he] set down for't" and forces Beatrice-Joanna to make good on her promise (Middleton III.iv.20). He expects to be rewarded, and, in a way that resembles the Macbeths, believes the deed to be so forthcoming as to be almost tangible: "My thoughts are at a banquet for the deed" (Middleton III.iv.18). It is this line of thinking, the connection of the oath and the deed, that De Flores relates to Beatrice-Joanna. He becomes angry when she offers him money as payment: "I could ha' hired / A

journeyman in murder at this rate, And mine own conscience might have slept at ease" (Middleton III.iv.68-70). He reveals that his good faith in his promise rather than merely his moral compass is implicit in their contract and feels that hers should be too. He reveals again that their contract is obviously deeper than one of mistress to servant. In the same respect, she asks him to flee the country, but he asserts that they must be together: "Nor is it fit we two, engaged so jointly, / Should part and live asunder" (Middleton III.iv.88-9). Beatrice-Joanna urges that the distance between their social ranks keeps her innocent, that she functions as the oath while he is the deed, a concept similar to the Duchess giving orders. Nevertheless, he continues to use this language concerning their bond until she must face the fact that an oath constitutes an act:

> *De Flores*. Look but into your conscience; read me there;
> 'Tis a true book. You'll find me there your equal.
> Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
> In what the act has made you; you're no more now.
> You must forget your parentage to me.
> You are the deed's creature; by that name
> You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
> As peace and innocency has turned you out
> And made you one with me. (Middleton III.iv.132-40)

He argues that the bond they made was similar to one of man and wife because not only are they of one body now but also their consciences are connected. In entering into this contract with him, Beatrice-Joanna has in spirit left her birth parents and given herself to De Flores. His references to owning her, as well, hint at the wife's legal standing as a *femme couverte*. He states that she is "the deed's creature," which therefore makes her his own because she associates De Flores with action (Middleton III.iv.137). Moreover, in this manner, he shows her that the oath and the deed are one because they two are now one.

He even demonstrates this by presenting her with Alonzo's bloody finger with a ring upon it, which, it turns out, had been given to Alonzo in the first place by Beatrice-Joanna on her father's order. The exchange of the ring here, because she then allows De Flores to keep it for himself, serves as a marriage in the same way that their first contract acted as a betrothal. This is even more consistent because we know that sexual intercourse, which the ring stuck around the finger suggests, will follow this act. Moreover, this part of the contract seems even more legitimate because De Flores has provided her with a physical representation of her severed bond with Alonzo – the bloody finger. De Flores has "cut his heartstrings," an appropriate phrase to describe not only the murder but also Alonzo's ties to Beatrice-Joanna. He then takes Alonzo's place, as another example of a changeling, which is highlighted by Alibius when we are introduced to the asylum: "I would wear my ring on my own finger. / Whilst it is borrowed it is none of mine, / But his that useth it" (Middleton I.ii.27-9). The symbolism of the severed finger is almost needed to properly dissolve the contract, though. Death alone seems not enough, especially considering Beatrice-Joanna's comments on "true deservers" as "diamonds": "In darkness you may see him, that's in absence, / Which is the greatest darkness falls on love, / Yet is he best discernéd then" (Middleton II.i.15-8). Considering her line of thinking, death is the ultimate absence of a lover, although Alonzo is not quite the lover Beatrice-Joanna has in mind when making these statements. Thus, De Flores attempts to take Alonzo's diamond ring, that which "sparkles in [De Flores'] eye" (Middleton III.ii.22). But as the sparkling diamond, the same language Beatrice-Joanna uses to describe the pull of an absent lover, will "not part in death," De Flores resorts to cutting off Alonzo's finger, in effect dissolving the betrothed couple's handfasting (Middleton III.ii.25).

In the end, Beatrice-Joanna's contract with De Flores severs more ties than just that with Alonzo. She also becomes estranged from Alsemero and her father in the end. First of all, Alsemero's faith in his bride-to-be wavers even before he sees the proof in the garden. Granted, we know he has reason to question her faithfulness: not only is Jasperino's challenge to Beatrice-Joanna's innocence correct, but Alsemero also must have in mind that Beatrice-Joanna professed her love to him while promised to another. Yet, Alsemero's lack of faith in Beatrice-Joanna is partly to blame. In fact, he has potions prepared to test if she is a virgin *before* Jasperino tells Alsemero he fears Beatrice-Joanna is sullied. Still, Beatrice-Joanna is most at fault, and fitting with her nature, she avoids the consummation of her promise to him, despite the fact that she does actually wed him. This wedding scene is appropriately absent, though. We see only a dumb show during which "Vermandero points to [Alsemero], the gentlemen seeming to applaud the choice," a scene dominated by men (Middleton SD). Immediately afterward, we see a "bride so fearfully distressed" (Middleton IV.i.2). While outwardly, she is worried about her wedding night, she is also upset because her father has inserted himself into her wedding contract again. The willingness with which she gives up her conjugal rights as well as her changed attitude toward De Flores make us question whether the love she has for Alsemero at the beginning of the play still exists. Now she confesses loving De Flores for his actions and thinks "'[t]were well he were rewarded" for his service to her (Middleton V.ii.327). As her bond with Alsemero is dissolved, so is her bond with her father. Rather than Vermandero gaining a son in a marriage, Antonio has been swapped for Beatrice-Joanna, proving the characters, especially Beatrice-Joanna, changelings in another way. Ironic in that Beatrice-Joanna initially wanted to win her father's favor for Alsemero, her bond with De Flores accomplishes this. Although Vermandero has lost a daughter, Alsemero reminds him that he has "yet a son's duty living" (Middleton

V.iii.227). Moreover, Alsemero notes that he is not an additional child "dry[ing]... kind father's eyes"; he knows he has taken her place. He declares "all griefs... reconciled" when one gives "[b]rother a new brother, father a child" (Middleton Epilogue 8;7). This substitution is further evidence of Beatrice-Joanna's solidified bond with De Flores, a bond so entwined that has changed "beauty... / To ugly whoredom" (Middleton V.iii.206-7). In the same way that her outward appearance was changed to match his ugly one, she recognizes that she "hung her fate" so much with De Flores that her "honor fell with him," too (Middleton V.iii.164;7). Therefore, it is fitting that they die together. Unlike that between the Duchess and Antonio, the bond between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores is fully connected and strong. She follows him immediately in death, "shame[d]" at the consequences of being forced to fulfill promises made in bad faith (Middleton V.iii.189). Despite her conventionally female approach to solving problems by depending on contracts made with men, Beatrice-Joanna learns that feminine actions of honesty and chastity must follow her promises.

Chapter Four: Conclusions about Dramatic Depictions of Marriage Contracts

In these plays, we have seen a variety of marriage contracts develop, in formalized ritual and in secret, with good faith promises and without. Moreover, across various playwrights of the period, we find similar treatment of the marriages of aristocratic women, highlighting the agency they are able to possess in the formation of a contract or the manipulation of one. Such a selection of dramatic works shows us the prevalence and importance of marriage contracts in an historical setting. All in early modern England were concerned with the good faith put behind the nuptial vow that continued throughout the wedded years. Yet, the weight of these bonds increased for the higher classes, with their investment in class boundaries, property, and succession. At the same time, the insight given by the playwrights to a character's true intention in giving an oath reveals the unease the brides- and grooms-to-be had in determining whether their future spouses meant what they said. Sometimes, as these plays show, husbands and wives were unsure if their spouses were faithful.

In the case of *Macbeth* and *Arden of Faversham*, we see two women, already married, who hold the exact opposite view of oaths and deeds. For Lady Macbeth, a word is an oath and something to be honored. Alice Arden, on the other hand, sees oaths as words, which are changeable. Thus, Lady Macbeth finds herself in a marriage that is exceptionally strong and loving; Alice, who does what she wants regardless of what she says, proves fickle in love. Yet, we discover that these women, despite their antithetical views of contracts, suffer the same tragic fate. Lady Macbeth holds her relationship to such high standards, and despite having met them for several years, her husband finally is unable to anymore. Without an idealized companionate marriage, Lady Macbeth cannot imagine or even exist in anything less. Nevertheless, Alice's

marriage is not faithful or loving; cynical and selfish concerning contracts, she is unable to achieve the healthy relationship that Lady Macbeth sustains for so long. Because Alice's prevaricating relies completely on an assurance that others will keep their promises to her, she ruins the chance for an amorous union when her lover adopts her same uncertain, equivocating principles.

With *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, we are focused on the formation of the marriage contract, and, again, we see women approaching the issue of contracts in opposite ways. The Duchess desires to solidify her bond in secret, while Beatrice-Joanna plans on a conventional, public ceremony. Moreover, there is gravity behind the vows of the Duchess; she intends them to be efficacious. On the other hand, Beatrice-Joanna forms contracts with no intention of following through on her promises; she expects results from others. Yet, each woman's fate is to fail to attain her desire. The Duchess finds her marriage ineffectual, while Beatrice-Joanna is held accountable for her promises. We especially see a male influence on the downfall of these newly-wedded characters, with the wills of brothers and fathers taking precedence over their own. In contrast, our matrons' fates are largely sealed within the lovers' affairs alone. The fact that each of these experiences a tragic death, despite their differences in circumstance, suggests a confusion of the time period about the proper protocol in forming and maintaining contracts. Because of the repeated use of bloody and severed hands, we are led to understand the difficulty and disapproval of dissolving marriage contracts. Moreover, that death is the fate for each of these women is telling of this historical convention. Although we observe women who are deceitful and those who are forthright; women who put faith in conventional ideals and those who exploit them; women who assert feminine roles and those who take up masculine parts, this commonality in ideals and those who exploit them; women who assert

feminine roles and those take up masculine parts, this commonality in their deaths leaves us wondering if and how a successful marriage functions. Our longest working marriage most likely comes from the Macbeths, but even they have their breaking point. Obviously few historical cases would be on record; why would a happy couple need a court date? Moreover, several of our tragic examples have followed the idealistic preaching of the clergy. Perhaps, comparative research into these same playwrights' comedies might shed light on the qualities of a prosperous, eternally-enduring contract and marriage.

Notes

[1] Even though the church courts dealt with most of the issues of matrimony, the secular courts still had their own role in the matter. Church courts dealt with the ideology of marriage, but secular courts were involved with economic concerns, especially property and inheritance disputes (Carlson 25). Upon marriage, a wife became a *femme couverte*, or covered woman, in which her legal identity was completely taken over by her husbands, a principal sharing similarities with a one-body marriage. Not until his death, assuming she survives him, does a woman have legal standing. As a widow, she now has standing in common law courts and is able to own property (Sokol and Sokol 164). The only money a wife was automatically entitled to was her dower, but she was allowed to inherit if other previously-made agreements had been arranged (Ranald 73; 69). Dowers were instituted specifically for widowhood, and the amount of estate a widow would inherit was generally one-third of the late husband's real property, possibly including lands that had been sold during the marriage. The secular courts were especially concerned with this issue, as suits arose most often because the families of the husbands with large estates would attempt to bar the dower. Despite this type of complication, widows enjoyed a higher status than the rest of women, and so wealthy widows rarely remarried (Sokol and Sokol 176; 167).

If, however, men and women followed the model of a companionate marriage, a wife should not feel that widowhood is a better state than her current one. When a couple "knit[s] their minds together," a wife can become the spiritual equal of her husband in their own household through his treatment of her, even if the common law does not reflect it ("Homily" 2). Husbands were encouraged to govern with "moderation" rather than "tyranny" and "yield something to the woman" ("Homily" 3). If fact, the husband's role in keeping his "inconstant" wife happy is largely his responsibility, as she is a "weaker vessel...and...soon stirred to wrath" ("Homily" 3). These also are ways in which husband and wife are required to make good faith oaths and act on their marriage promises.

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