

**OLDER WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN AND
JACOBEOAN DRAMA**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the presentation of older women on stage from 1558-1625, establishing that the character is predominantly pictured within the domestic sphere, as wife, mother, stepmother or widow. Specific dramatic stereotypes for these roles are identified, and compared and contrasted with historical material relating to older women. The few plays in which these stereotypes are subverted are fully examined. Stage nurse and bawd characters are also older women and this study reveals them to be imaged exclusively as matching stereotypes. Only four plays, Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*, Fletcher's *Bonduca*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Winter's Tale*, by Shakespeare, reject stereotyping of the central older women.

The Introduction sets out the methodology of this research, and Chapter 1 compares stage stereotyping of the older woman with evidence from contemporary sources. This research pattern is repeated in Chapters 2-4 on the older wife, mother and stepmother, and widow, and subversion of these stereotypes on stage is also considered. Chapter 5 reveals stereotypical stage presentation as our principal source of knowledge about the older nurse and bawd. Chapter 6 examines the subtle, yet comprehensive, rejection of the stereotypes. The Conclusion summarises the academic and ongoing cultural relevance of this thesis.

This work is dedicated to all the women in my family, young and old, and especially to Dee.

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PREFACE

The plays discussed in this study are dated in accordance with the *Annals of English Drama 975-1700* ed. by Alfred Harbage, revised by S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964), unless modified by subsequent scholarship. A list of the plays used appears in the Appendix, and there is a list of the editions used and referred to in the Bibliography.

Throughout this study I have considered characters listed in *An Index of English Characters in Early Modern English Drama Printed Plays 1500 – 1660* ed. by Thomas L. Berger, William C. Bradford, Sidney L. Sondergard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

I have modernised old spellings in quotations from plays in accordance with the guidelines laid down in Stanley Wells, *Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

IMAGES OF OLDER WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA

(Yvonne Oram)

Introduction.

Four older women occupy central, authoritative positions on stage during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods - Madge in George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale* (1590), Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* (1610), both by William Shakespeare, and the Queen of the Iceni in John Fletcher's *Bonduca* (1613). That there are only four such outstanding figures is not disappointing, in my view, even though ageing women are present in large numbers on stage at this time appearing in plays of all genres. For, as I show in this study, the majority of older women are imaged stereotypically within the roles of wife, mother, stepmother, or widow, and so the way in which these four evade such stereotyping to take centre stage is remarkable. They personify a positive portrayal of the older woman which, though it cannot completely compensate for a predominantly negative presentation in publicly performed drama of the period, certainly counteracts and challenges such imaging of her character.

In this Introduction I am reversing the order of this research, for I discuss these four female characters in detail in my final chapter – presenting them as the only examples of rejection, by dramatists, of the stereotypes of the older woman. I want to draw attention to them here, though, not just because of their inspiring presence but because they are distinguished by their shared access to the extensive language which is power on stage and

which gives a character dramatic centrality. Some of the other older women I discuss do speak out articulately and at some length but, as I have indicated, this is usually done in the role of wife, mother, stepmother, widow. Even mature female rulers are depicted primarily in relation to a husband (alive or dead) or to grown children. I will establish that the constraints of domesticity limit the range of stage discourse for the older woman. The only ageing women on stage who operate beyond the family are nurses and bawds and even here the nurse can be seen as part of a family, albeit in a servant's role. My exploration of these characters reveals them to be equally constrained by their stereotypical depiction, which limits the language they can access and, consequently, restricts their dramatic power.

The activity on stage of Cleopatra, Bonduca, Madge and Paulina has little or no connection with domesticity and we see them operating freely beyond the conventions of marriage and family. Each manipulates and directs the drama she inhabits: indeed, both Madge and Paulina are imaged, metaphorically at least, as that rare creature in the period under discussion - the female creator of a performed play. In Madge's case the performance is the medium for her spoken tale. Paulina takes part in and directs others in a particular performance which she has created. In all four cases the older woman is authoritatively outspoken. Catherine Belsey has said that 'for women to speak is to threaten the system of difference which gives meaning to patriarchy' and, as I show throughout this study, uncontrolled speech in the older woman causes particular male anxiety.¹ The fact that autonomous power through language is achieved by these four characters indicates a rare

¹ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.191.

celebration of the potential for continuing creativity in the older woman, expressed without apparent anxiety by male playwrights and in terms of theatrical performance. We see that the ageing female who escapes the containment of domesticity and social stereotyping has the ability to create her own alternative story. The creation may have limits. For Cleopatra and Bonduca narrative control extends to the final organisation and performance of their own deaths but, while this is the ultimate act of self-determination, this very control results in each writing herself out of her own story. The storytelling and directorial roles taken by Madge and Paulina apparently come to an end when they are drawn back into domesticity. Madge being a dutiful wife must get on with providing breakfast for the guests who have formed her audience, while the widowed Paulina is presented with a new husband and therefore a new occupation which implicitly supersedes that of playmaker. However, both women remain active in the stories they create until these are fully played out, and at the very end of *The Winter's Tale* Paulina is still free, articulate and acknowledged as powerful by the dominant male character in the drama.

Although these powerful older women are few, their presence and their making of alternative stories signifies a different dramatic imaging of the figure of the older woman which is not only rare but stands in stark contrast to the way that she is generally presented. Despite historical evidence that the older woman occupied many different roles in society during the period discussed, on stage she is presented only in the roles I have indicated above – wife, mother, stepmother, widow, nurse, bawd. Like her younger counterpart, the older woman on stage is depicted as requiring male governance, through the

law in the case of the bawd and, where all the others are concerned, through the controlling agencies of marriage and the family. This is not surprising, given that the performed dramatists of the period are male and influenced by the dominant viewpoint of a society which aspires to clear definition and compartmentalising of male and female roles. In her work on women and religion at this time Patricia Crawford points out that 'the gender order was powerfully supported by religion', and describes how religious beliefs confirmed that 'men and women had separate social functions'.² Men occupied the public sphere and women were expected to remain in the private sphere, as subordinate carers and nurturers. However, as well as emphasising the importance of patriarchal control within the family structure, the drama of the period also reveals male anxiety about subversion of that control by inappropriate female behaviour. Katherine M. Rogers takes the view that in a patriarchal society hostility to women emerges not because men are confident about their own superiority but because they fear female power. She argues that this is fuelled by men's knowledge of their own early dependence on a woman:

the patriarch always has the haunting memory of his original dependence on his mother. Hence he must keep reassuring himself that woman is really weak and insignificant.³

²Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1993), p.6.

³ Katherine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 1966), p.37.

This is worth considering and, as Crawford's work shows, religious beliefs 'reflected and reinforced ideas about difference of sex in English society' and this must also have influenced male anxiety about female power, particularly if women trespassed into the public sphere.⁴ As Crawford comments, with men claiming both the secular and the religious elements of the public domain as their own, 'any intrusion by a female was potentially a source of resentment and resistance'.⁵ So, male anxieties about women can be fuelled by memories of past dependence on women and also by what is perceived as unsuitable female behaviour in the present.

Reflecting on these underlying personal, social and political influences I argue that the majority of male-authored stage images of the older woman reflect male concerns about her potential strength and significance. These images show that her propensity for inappropriate female behaviour – disobedience, sexual incontinence, and unbridled loquacity – is exacerbated by the ageing process itself, thus marking her out as different from other insubordinate females. Because she offers separate challenges to male authority the means of containing, controlling and even punishing her are also different, as I show.

Other writing on my topic is limited. K.J. Rider's lively study 'Shakespeare and Old Age' (1984) explores a range of ageing characters in the plays, but his focus is on both men and women, and detailed exploration is limited. Remarkably, *Images and Impressions of Old Age In The Great Works of Western Literatures (700BC – 1900 AD)* (1987), by Lorna Berman and Irina

⁴ Crawford, p.9.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.9.

Sobkowska-Ashcroft, offers no female stage characters for this period. My work should redress this gender imbalance. Feminist literary criticism now engages closely with the period I have chosen but I have found no substantial exploration of the representation of older women in the drama of this time. Historians Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane also note the 'neglect' of the history of older women, 'despite the fact that since the beginning of reconstructable demographic information [...] there have always been more old women than old men'.⁶ Thane redresses the balance to a certain extent in her work *Old Age In English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (2000) which ranges from ancient Greece and Rome to the present day, but there is an undeniable silence about the older woman in feminist literary criticism and this is an important reason for my pursuit of this particular research topic. However, my work on the subject results in more than a survey of the number and type of ageing female characters on stage, to compensate for past neglect. I certainly provide that in the process of discovery of these characters and believe it is useful, but I look much deeper. Kathleen McLuskie points to the way in which feminist criticism of dramatic texts can both 'reveal the conditions in which a particular ideology of femininity functions' and can act to subvert 'the hold which such an ideology has for readers both female and male'.⁷ By exploring the many instances of the stereotyping of the older woman on stage, the occasions when she escapes the stereotypes, and the significant rejection of the stereotypes in the four

⁶ *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp.3-4.

⁷ Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 24-48 (p.44).

cases already mentioned, I identify the ideological construct of ageing femininity. In doing so I enhance, challenge and often subvert, the ideological 'hold' which has influenced accepted readings of these characters. However, this critical approach is always based upon close reading and analysis of the language used by the dramatists concerned in their creation of older women on stage.

I am aware of past critical debates about the inadvisability of treating characters on stage as though they exist beyond the dramatic structure - arguments which have been countered by critics like Peter B. Murray who argues the validity of 'construing characters much as if they were real people' in his exploration of the issue from a psychological standpoint.⁸ In her work on the representation and reception of dramatic characters Christy Desmet confirms an engaged approach. She points out the ways in which characters 'fashion themselves by reading one another through a repertoire of shared rhetorical forms' and places the critic firmly within the process - 'reading Shakespearean character and writing character criticism are inseparable as activities'.⁹

This subjective engagement with literary criticism is relevant to this study. I come to the subject from my own experiences as an ageing feminist, aware, as I move towards my 60s, of a depressing continuation of negative representations of older women. Fourteen years ago the Older Feminists' Network commented:

⁸ Peter B. Murray, *Shakespeare's Imagined Persons: The Psychology of Role-Playing and Acting* (Lanham MD: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996), p.1.

⁹ Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics and Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p.35.

The media's discrimination against older women seems to be successfully effected by ignoring them completely, or, when represented, devaluing them - at best patronising, at worst mocking them.¹⁰

More recent studies into age stereotyping and gender portrayal in the media indicate that 'midlife and older women are "virtually invisible"' still, and that when they do appear are more often represented as 'complainers, patients and victims' than in positive ways.¹¹ My own research discloses the marginalising of the older woman in literature, but also confirms that this is not confined to a particular period of history. So, I am aware of personal bias in this work, based on the feeling of being rendered invisible, powerless and patronised in the way we are represented which accompanies the ageing process for women of my generation. However, I feel, with Jean Howard and others, that the fact that we see and interpret the past in ways influenced by what and where we are in the present does not invalidate that vision or interpretation. While I agree with Jean Howard that it is 'not desirable to look at the past with the wilful intention of seeing one's own prejudices and concerns', I am aware that my view of the past will not be entirely detached from the fact that I am a construct of my own society and my own

¹⁰ Tina Davidson, Molly McConville, Joan Hammond, Jinnie Tew, Pat Hayslip, Marj Flemming, Older Feminists Network, 'Images of Older Women in the Media', in *Out of Focus: Writings on Women and the Media*, ed. by Kath Davies, Julianne Dickey, Teresa Stratford (London: Women's Press, 1987), pp.28-32 (p.29).

¹¹ UN Radio Programme transcript, 'Images of Older Women In The Media', in *The Communication Initiative*, 28 June, 2001, (<http://www.comminit.com/pdsc2001/sld-2223.html>); 'Older women do not exist in prime time', *Hilversummary*, November, 1999, (http://www.omroep.nl/nos/rtv/voorlichting/hsumm/hs99_3_11.html).

chronological age.¹² Kate Chedgzoy has commented on the way in which questions of race and culture have influenced feminist criticism by scholars aware 'of their own location in relation to discourses and structures of racial difference'.¹³ I believe this should also apply to awareness of age as the focus of this study shows. However, as Howard suggests, I 'acknowledge the non-objectivity [...] and the inevitably political nature' of the interpretative aspects of my research.¹⁴

This way of exploring the characters and plays I consider here also influences the range and depth of the material used. While focusing on contemporary drama I place alongside it exploration of historical evidence. I acknowledge that literature is one of many ways in which cultures image themselves in order to make sense of the world. Literature is a part of history rather than being in a hierarchical relationship to it as no more than 'the parasitic reflector of historical fact'.¹⁵ I consider ways in which drama relates to other representations of the culture and in each chapter include relevant contemporary historical material, exploring this in relation to the plays and characters under discussion. However, I am also aware that these other cultural representations must be treated with caution. In his detailed exploration of the pleading of cases in equity courts in Elizabethan England, Tim Stretton warns that the duties and values articulated 'represented a somewhat artificial code of ideal behaviour' often drawn from 'sermons, conduct books and the Homilies' of the day, and he underlines the importance

¹² Jean E. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 13-43 (p.43).

¹³ Chedgzoy, p.11.

¹⁴ Howard, p.43.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.25.

of seeing such material as 'prescriptive rather than descriptive'.¹⁶ Being watchful in this way does not mean disregarding or denigrating the codes established or ideals conveyed in such documents. Rather, it encourages exploration of the social hopes and expectations that they express about human behaviour and relationships for men and women. I follow this procedure in comparing and contrasting these cultural representations with other such expressions in contemporary literature and on the contemporary stage.

That the bulk of texts explored here - and certainly all the plays discussed - are male-authored poses a problem identified, though not resolved, by Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps - 'How can one produce female values from within a binary system in which both terms are defined by a masculine ethos?'.¹⁷ Equally problematic is the knowledge that the masculine ethos itself is established and expressed by men from a narrow band of society. I counteract this, where possible, by drawing on the available writings of older women, which help establish how the writers see themselves as mature women. However, published works clearly attributable to women writers are few in this period and although private writings exist, the low levels of literacy among women limit the social and cultural ranges of such material.

In order to give appropriate consideration to the dramatic and historical material used I restrict this study to the period from the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558 to the end of the reign of James I in 1625 and focus on work performed in public. The sole exception is Samuel Daniel's closet drama *The*

¹⁶ Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.209-10.

¹⁷ Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps, *Shakespeare and Gender: A History* (London, New York: Verso, 1995), p.8.

Tragedy of Cleopatra (1593) which, I argue, provides an important contrast to Shakespeare's image of the ageing Queen of Egypt, in terms of male depictions of female reactions to the ageing process.

As dramatists do not always indicate the age of a character identifying an older female character in a play at this time is not always straightforward. Lynn Botelho's work on the effects of the menopause on poor rural women indicates that the physical changes relating to this often affected perceptions of female age - 'A woman became old when she looked old'.¹⁸ This applies to one level of society and, in any case, the overall lack of stage directions about physical appearance limits the use of this finding as a guide. A more helpful indicator is provided by both Claire S. Schen and Jeremy Boulton who find that low-status elderly women were often given the courtesy title "Mother" in this period.¹⁹ As far as this study is concerned I judge who qualifies as an older woman in three ways. I consider the character mature if she has children of her own who are of marriageable age. It would be wrong to assume that all women married as young as Shakespeare's 14-year-old Juliet. Indeed, the fact that he refers specifically to her youth, in the exchanges in *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) between her mother and her nurse, in Act 1 scene 3, suggests that the playwright needs to establish Juliet as unusually young to be a potential bride, for the benefit of an audience more used to the marriage conventions of their own society. This is supported by Ralph A. Houlbrooke's work on parish registers, where analysis establishes 'a

¹⁸ Lynn Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women in early modern Suffolk', in Botelho and Thane, pp.42-60 (p.43).

¹⁹ Claire S. Schen, 'Strategies of poor aged women and widows in sixteenth century London' in Botelho and Thane, pp.15-25 (p.15); Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.164.

mean age of marriage for women of about 26' for the majority of the population.²⁰ Comparatively late marriages, then, would mean that by the time their own children were ready to marry most women would be mature. I also use as a guide to age the fact of a character being an obvious contemporary of other, identifiably, older women in the play. However, the most reliable indication is when the woman is designated old by her own account or by the unbiased witness of others.

In Chapter 1 I establish the general stereotypical images of older women in the drama of the period and compare these stereotypes with contemporary attitudes towards the older woman. An ideal of appropriate behaviour in the older woman is apparent in both areas, with stage stereotypes matching social concerns. The good old woman should provide, through her own behaviour, both a model of moral rectitude for her younger counterpart and an example of ongoing submissive obedience to patriarchal governance. The bad old woman does the exact opposite. She behaves badly herself and subverts male control through open or covert disobedience, and so encourages, and sometimes even initiates, similar behaviour in younger women. Male discomfort over loss of looks in the ageing woman is also apparent, yet any attempts by the older woman to keep the physical effects of ageing at bay by use of cosmetics is criticised strongly. Continuing sexual desire and activity in the older woman is also a cause for male concern. The mockery and disgust aimed at the older woman here indicates increased levels of male anxiety about this particular example of the sexual voracity which they perceive in women as a whole. However, I find that the

²⁰ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700*, (London: Longman, 1984), p. 63.

main focus for male unease in connection with the older woman is her garrulousness - that uncontrollable and inappropriate female uttering which is incompatible with the chastity and obedience required of the good woman. As with the younger woman this loquacity can be imaged as merely comic or downright dangerous - to herself and others - but it is never ignored. In the older woman, however, it is imaged as particularly worrying for, stereotypically, it is the ageing process itself which renders uncontrollable this verbal incontinence.

In Chapter 2 I look at the public commentaries on appropriate behaviour in a wife and explore the available historical material which gives us an insight into the marriages of mature couples. This establishes that the behaviour of an older wife is expected to match that of a younger wife in terms of obedience and deference to her husband and performance of her domestic duties. It also shows that in reality relationships were more complex and that mature couples were as likely, or unlikely, as newly-weds to fit into the perfect social pattern. I also consider the issue of marital violence during this period, how it was perceived and how this might affect mature marriages. I am aware of debates on the ways in which shifting religious views within the period of the Reformation may have influenced attitudes towards marriage and I engage with these issues.

I show that the stereotypical stage images of the ageing wife predominantly emphasise the importance of her behaving appropriately and underline the necessity of strong governance by her husband. However, should her husband be weak, this is no excuse for weakness in the ageing wife. A strong husband must correct and, if necessary, punish bad behaviour

in his wife and where he is too weak to do so this task may fall to another strong male, usually within the family circle. Here there is little difference in the imaging of the old wife, relative to the younger, although negative male attitudes to ageing are brought to bear in controlling the unruly older wife. More interesting dramatic tensions and complexities occur when dramatists begin to engage critically with what it is like for a married woman to know she is losing her sexual attraction as she grows older. I discuss the ways this issue is touched upon in *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon* (1588), by Henry Porter and Webster's *The White Devil* (1612). I argue that only Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597) and *Henry VIII* (1613), by Shakespeare and Fletcher, substantially challenge the issue of male dominance and female subservience in marriage with images of mature wives taking control of their lives and acting in their own interests.

Chapter 3, which deals with stage and contemporary images of the ageing mother, is the largest in this study, reflecting this character's many appearances on stage at this time. However, as I pointed out above, this is not merely a survey of the number of roles occupied by the older woman and the size of this chapter essentially is due to my exploration of the weight given to the role of the mature mother. She appears often and she is important, even when presented stereotypically. Mary Beth Rose asks why there are 'so few dramatic stories generated by conflicts centring on mothers' in either Shakespearean or non-Shakespearean drama and I have discovered this to be a fair question in terms of the stereotypical character of the mature

mother.²¹ I find that she may support or subvert the wishes of her offspring but she does not act independently of the maternal role and we are not encouraged to view her as potentially autonomous. However, I reveal that, as with the other older women discussed here, when stereotyping is set aside dramatists do indeed utilise 'opportunities presented by the construction of maternal power', in ways which Rose does not acknowledge.²²

Initially I establish the maternal stereotypes employed by playwrights, discussing their dramatic relevance and, as in previous chapters, showing how they relate to dominant contemporary assessments of the mature mother and to her own attitude to maternal duties and relationships. I then go on to discuss plays in which the dramatist moves beyond the stereotypical image of the mature mother, creating instead characters capable of self-determination and autonomous action in ways which influence a play's development. Obviously, a mature mother may be motivated in such actions and behaviour by hopes and expectations which can drive a woman at any age. Yet it becomes clear that in certain plays dramatists acknowledge that the ageing process is an important factor in female behaviour and this is especially relevant in those plays in which a mother seeks power and security for herself and her offspring in her old age, or looks for sexual adventure and fulfilment. Here I pay attention to the mothers in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608), Webster's *The White Devil*, *Lust's Dominion* or *The Lascivious Queen* (1600), attributed to Dekker, Day and Haughton, *Thierry and Theodoret* (1617) by Fletcher and Massinger, and Webster's *The Devil's Law Case* (1619). I also

²¹ Mary Beth Rose, 'Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 291-314 (p. 301).

²² *ibid.*, p.298.

explore the complex readings imposed upon the character of Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601).

In my discussion of the presentation of mature mothers in the drama of the period I include that of the mature stepmother. Given the available information about the high incidence of re-marriage by men after the death of a first wife it is interesting to note that the stepmother of any age is surprisingly under-represented on stage at this time. However, it is clear that when she does appear dramatists utilise the stereotype of the wicked stepmother as a benchmark in their imaging of this character, whether she is "wicked" or not.

The poor and powerless ageing widow is either an acceptable object of charity and pity, if she behaves well, or an easy target for mockery and repression if she does not, but the widow left financially independent by her former spouse is a source of acute male concern, as I show in Chapter 4. The importance placed on men maintaining control over women, even when those women are ageing, is at its most obvious in connection with the mature widow. Received ideas that the majority of widows at this period sought re-marriage and were usually snapped up by fortune-hunting younger men have been contradicted by historians such as Charles Carlton, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, Vivien Brodsky and Barbara Todd who find that this is not the case - that the ageing widow wanting to remain single was not an unusual figure.²³

²³ See Charles Carlton, 'The Widow's Tale: Male Myths and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England', *Albion*, 10 (1979), 118-129; Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering 1500-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Vivien Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabeth London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientation', in *The World We Have Gained: History of Population and Social Structure*, ed. by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson

Such historical evidence conflicts with portrayals in contemporary literature and drama of the stereotypical widow as being in urgent need of a new husband to restore control. Yet this evidence may also account for stage representations of the widow as the potential victim of the worst aspects of her own female nature because she is bereft of male guidance. For these kinds of images indicate male anxiety about the financially secure mature widow preferring the single state to re-marriage. It is made clear that this woman needs a firmer hand than most and that rough wooing is appropriate where the widow, not knowing what is best for her, seems reluctant to give up her newly independent state. In three plays, Chapman's *The Widow's Tears* (1605), Middleton's *No Wit No Help Like A Woman's* (1613) and *Wit Without Money* (1614) by Fletcher, Middleton and Rowley, the wooing of the older widow reveals more about male fears than the supposed shortcomings of the women concerned. Only in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1621) does the dramatist move beyond the stereotypical in his creation of Livia - a mature widow who is neither an object of pity or derision nor a target for self-serving wooers.

Doubtless because there is very little contemporary evidence about older women in the roles of nurse and bawd we tend to base our historical assumptions on how these mature women appear in the drama of the period, as I show in Chapter 5. This is an interesting and rewarding area of study, but equally worthy of attention are the similarities between these two stage characters. These mainly reflect standard images of the old woman such as

(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.122-154; Barbara J. Todd, 'The Re-marrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered', in *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, ed. by Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.54-92.

her loquacity and her alarmingly undiminished sexual appetite, but there are also unexpected links between nurse and bawd. Both are imaged as a danger to young women and subversive of the family structure. The bawd, already condemned for corrupting the young women she has drawn into prostitution, is also shown as undermining the institution of marriage by procuring sex for straying husbands or providing the environment and the excuses for straying wives to indulge in extra-marital sexual adventures. However, the nurse behaves equally reprehensibly. While acting as confidante and guardian to the young woman in her charge, she risks the physical and often the sexual security of that charge by acting as go-between in a love affair - an affair the girl's parents usually disapprove of or which they know nothing about. Because both nurse and bawd are canvassed for assistance by men - the eager lover or client - they appear to achieve a rare position of dominance and authority over men, in this situation at least. I explore the precarious economic situation of both ageing nurse and ageing bawd which reveals them as vulnerable, rather than superior, to men and I discuss the gender politics underlying their situation, in which the bawd especially is used as a female front for male control of commercial sex.

As I have already indicated, the final chapter of this study, Chapter 6, deals with the older women on stage who achieve an independence of the controlling family structure and who, through their unique access to language, also achieve centrality and power. These characters are created by male playwrights and so it is not surprising that the power conveyed through them is of a theatrical nature in that they all become "directors" of their own dramas.

The reasons for the playwrights developing the characters in this way will be considered as the older women are explored.

I accept that Elizabethan and Jacobean plays are not “drama documentary” productions and therefore may not comment exactly upon the life of the times from which they emerge. However, playwrights do not function in a vacuum and are as influenced as any of us by contemporary social constructs and changes. In this study I show that the majority of plays deal with stereotypical images of the older woman and I discuss these in detail. I also reveal the dramatic potential of this character in plays where dramatists subvert the stereotypes to explore relevant issues of female ageing. Finally, I engage critically with the four plays in which the playwrights abandon the stereotyping of the older woman.

Chapter 1. Older women in the Early Modern period – stage images and contemporary evidence.

Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems.

The Winter's Tale, 5.3.28-29.

This immediate reaction of Leontes when faced with the "statue" of the wife he has not seen for 16 years - focusing on her loss of looks - threatens to distract him from proper contemplation of his own 'evils conjured to remembrance' (5.3.40). And while it reflects the tricks memory can play in the passage of time his response also typifies male antipathy towards the physical effects of the ageing process in women at this period, often shown far less subtly in literature and drama as distaste and derision.

Loss of looks in the older women is also a focus for comedy at her expense as we see in *The Old Law* (1618), where Thomas Middleton presents a society in which men are put to death at 80 and women at 60. Gnotho, the Clown, doctors the parish register to show his wife, Agatha, as having only a month to live because he is anxious to marry the more youthful Courtesan. Agatha's loss of looks is a source of humour - as Gnotho so charmingly puts it:

Though a
piece of old beef will serve to breakfast, yet a
man would be glad of a chicken to supper.

3.1.354-56

Similarly, in his comic poem on the ages of women, Thomas Tusser also refers to 'trim beauty' falling off rapidly as women turn into 'matrons or drudges'.²⁴

Although old age 'has long been predominantly a female experience', as Pat Thane points out, at this time writing about the ageing process, from the informative to the meditative, is by men.²⁵ We find, for example, Henry Cuffe's *The Difference of the Ages of Man's Life* (1607); Symon Goulart's *The Wise Veillard*, translated into English in 1621 and John Reading's *The Old Man's Staffe: Two Sermons, Showing the Only Way to a Comfortable Old Age* (1621). A perennial problem of old age – lack of deference from the young – is addressed from the pulpit in 1580 by John Chandon, who asks, 'when were men [...] more disobedient to father and mother, when more unthankful, when more unholy, when more unkind?', firmly linking such disrespect with all things wrong in society.²⁶ Literature of the period shows a similar concern. Phillip's *The Play of Patient Grissil* (1559) emphasises the importance of deference – 'dread and fear' (237) – for the old from their offspring, even though aged parents are now of 'crooked shape' (236). More ironically, Poem 12 in the collection *The Passionate Pilgrim*, published in 1599 and ascribed to Shakespeare, insists that 'Crabbed age and youth cannot live together' (1) and goes on to compare all the sad deficiencies of physical ageing with the

²⁴ Thomas Tusser, 'Description of Woman's age by VI times XIII years prenticeship, with a lesson to the same' (1562), in *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640*, ed. by Suzanne W. Hull, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1962), p.65.

²⁵ Pat Thane, *Old Age In English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.3.

²⁶ John Chandon, 'A Sermon on Luke xxi 25', in *Sketches of the Reformation and Elizabethan Age Taken from the Contemporary Pulpit*, ed. by John Oliver Willyam Haweis (London: William Pickering, 1844), pp.209 – 234 (p.234).

attributes of golden youth. Such general incompatibility may render the ageing male vindictive towards the younger, like Shakespeare's Old Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* who describes the young hunters as 'boiled-brains' and wishes that 'there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty' (3.3.62-63, 58-59).

While there are no female voices discussing the ageing process or articulating concerns about getting old there are examples of the pressures upon women to deny the ageing process - most notably in the public presentations of Queen Elizabeth. She takes great pains to present herself as ever young, despite all evidence to the contrary. Paul Hentzer, a German visitor to London comments on seeing Queen Elizabeth 'in the 65th year of her age (as we were told), very majestic; her face oblong, fair but wrinkled'.²⁷ Yet Roy Strong draws attention to 'the amazing images of Elizabeth painted by Nicholas Hilliard [...] in the last decade of her reign' which show the Queen as a young girl, and he also refers to the famous Rainbow Portrait of c.1600 which shows her 'rejuvenated face' as Astrea, Queen of Beauty.²⁸ One reason for such idealised images of Elizabeth is offered in Nanette Salomon's exploration of women in visual conventions. Salomon comments that 'images of ageing women could be positive only when they were informed by maternal contexts' and she suggests that this accounts for the fact that after 1590 portraits of the Queen used a formal, ageless face pattern.²⁹ Elizabeth's own

²⁷ *England As Seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First*, ed. by William Brenchley Rye (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p.104.

²⁸ Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*, 2nd edn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 48, 50.

²⁹ Nanette Salomon, 'Positioning Women in Visual Convention: the Case of Elizabeth I', in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. by Betty S.

“painting” - the use of cosmetics to disguise her true age - may have been influenced by political necessity. Steven Mullaney argues that such self display was not ‘mere vanity’ but deliberately done to ‘imbue the ageing natural body of the monarch with the ageless aura of the body politic’.³⁰ The motives for this masking of the ageing process by the most powerful woman in England may be mixed, but her doing so suggests a generally critical attitude towards loss of looks in the older woman.

It is not surprising, then, that much male-authored drama of the period shows male characters expressing concern or distaste about the decline of beauty in ageing women and also has older female characters articulate anxiety in this respect. In Webster’s *The White Devil* Isabella, determined to battle for her husband's affections against the attractions of Vittoria, hopefully reminds herself and Bracciano that her lips are ‘not yet much withered’ (2.1.167), while in *The Devil’s Law Case*, by the same playwright, Leonora is reluctant to agree to what she thinks is Contarino’s request for her picture – ‘shadows are coveted in summer, and with me/ ‘Tis fall o’th’ leaf’ (1.1.136-37). When the previously emotionally detached and independent Livia in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* suddenly falls for Leantio her first thought is that she has let herself go:

I am not yet so old but he may think of me;
My own fault, I have been idle a long time,
But I’ll begin the week, and paint tomorrow,

Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), pp. 64-95 (p.82).

³⁰ Steven Mullaney, ‘Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet* and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I’, in Chedgzoy, pp. 161-183 (p.167).

3.3.138-40

Actions such as Livia's are presented for mockery. In *The Old Law* Agatha is shown 'repairing/time' (3.1.264-65) with cosmetics and, pathetically and unconvincingly, pretending to be pregnant to hold back the years. This play perfectly demonstrates the double standard set by male attitudes, for alongside Agatha's effort at rejuvenation is the equally ludicrous attempt of the ageing Lysander to rival the laddish suitors buzzing about his young wife Eugenia, in expectation of her impending widowhood. Lysander also resorts to "painting" (in that he dyes the white from his hair and beard) and to some undignified behaviour when he challenges the young courtiers to dancing, fencing and drinking bouts, risking 'twenty sciaticas' (3.2.159) as he takes them on. The twist here is that Lysander bests the lads to 'put down youth at her own virtues' (3.2.197). So the old man straining after lost youth is shown as both admirable and victorious while the old woman attempting the same thing remains a ridiculous figure. There is a similar situation in John Day's *The Isle of Guls* (1606). An ageing couple, Duke Basilius and his wife, Gynetia, both pursue Lisander who, disguised as an Amazon, is secretly wooing one of their daughters. Basilius is taken in by the disguise and woos Lisander as a woman, while Gynetia recognises his masculinity. However, the Duke's behaviour in pursuing a much younger "female" is not questioned, while Day gets comic mileage out of the folly of Gynetia – 'old Autumn' (5.1. G4^v) – as the Duke registers disgust at her inappropriate desires – 'that a dry sapless rind/Should hold young thoughts, and a licentious mind' (5.1.HI^r).

This notion of sexual desire in the ageing female is also the subject of much male mockery. As Edward Bever points out, in his discussion of old age

and witchcraft, the censorious attitude to sex and the elderly meant that post menopausal women would be 'frustrated at exactly the point in life when sex lost its responsibility'.³¹ In her detailed exploration of female ageing and sexuality Lois W. Banner refers to positive erotic experiences with old women recorded in Thomas Wythorne's *Autobiography of Thomas Wythorne* (1597) and Thomas Deloney's *The Pleasant History of John Winchcombe, in his younger years called Jack of Newbery* (1626).³² However, she is also aware of the negative and, 'equally venerable convention about ageing women's propensity to hire young men for sexual purposes when they could no longer attract men on their own'.³³ On stage the older woman is often shown in this way, desperate with desire and either having to buy sex or cheat her way into bed with the male she lusts after. In *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1598) Anthony Munday shows the lustful Queen Elinor disguising herself as the object of the Earl's affections to satisfy her sexual longings:

Now shall I have my will of Huntingdon
Who taking me this night for Marian,
Will hurry me away instead of her;

418-20

Elinor fails in her attempts but another lust-driven ancient, Erictho, has better success in John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1605). Having infernal powers Erictho is better able to disguise herself as Sophonisba and cheat her way into bed with Syphax. Come the morning Erictho is triumphant. Not only has

³¹ Edward Bever, 'Old Age and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe', in *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*, ed. by Peter N. Stearns (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), pp.151-190 (p.175).

³² Lois W. Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p.173.

³³ *ibid.*, p.172.

she satisfied her desires 'to fill/Our longing arms with Syphax' well-strung limbs' (5.1.14-15) but the experience has banished decrepitude - 'Thy proud heat, well wasted/Hath made our limbs grow young' (5.1.19-20). Syphax perfectly reflects male fear and loathing here, angry less at being fooled than at being fooled into having sex with an old woman. He immediately reaches for his sword to destroy the 'rotten scum of hell', the 'loathed delusion!' (5.1.2-3).

The ideal mature woman at this time is presented as accepting age without fuss, denying her sexuality and, importantly, providing a good example to younger women. On stage we see the Abbess, in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (1592), take Adriana to task for jealous nagging and the young wife accepts the justice of the older woman's criticisms – 'She did betray me to my own reproof' (5.1.91). This echoes Thomas Becon's earlier stricture in *Catechism* (1564) that 'old and ancient matrons' should teach young ones to be 'sober-minded; to love their husbands; to love their children; to be discreet, chaste, housewifely; good, obedient to their husbands'.³⁴ Similarly, William Harrison's *The Description of England* (1587) praises the 'ancient ladies of the court' for rejecting idle behaviour in favour of such quiet occupations as reading religious texts and 'writing volumes of their own or translating of other men's into our English and Latin tongue'.³⁵ For Harrison the good example shown by these older women appears to be more important than the possibly challenging nature of their literary activities.

³⁴ Thomas Becon, 'Works' (1564), in *Renaissance Women: Constructions of Femininity in England*, ed. by Kate Aughterson, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 175-177.

³⁵ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. by George S. Elden (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p.228

The ideal ageing lady on stage provides good examples to young men as well as young women. In *Sappho and Phao* (1584) John Lyly gives the mature Sybilla a substantial role as guide to Phao through the trauma of unrequited love, while the same writer's *Mother Bombie* (1589) shows the 'good old woman [...] cunning and wise' of the title (5.3.2033, 2069) making gnomic prophecies for the guidance of all concerned. In Greene's *Orlando Furioso* (1591) the 'old witch', Melissa, (4.2.1236) cures the infected Orlando and sends him off to battle, earning his gratitude and admiration as a 'sacred goddess' (4.2.1340). Similarly, *The Prophetess* (1622) by Fletcher and Massinger shows reports of Delphia's piety initially mocked by Maximinian - 'Old women will lie monstrously' (1.3.109) - only to have him kneeling at her feet after she passes his potentially lethal "test". Her remonstrance, 'I am a poor weak woman: to me no worship' (1.3.232), indicates a suitable modesty in this mature Druid who Maximinian now wants to 'adore' (1.3.225).

If the old woman is powerful for good in these ways she must, equally, have subversive power. For instance, we see anxiety about this in Jonson's *Catiline His Conspiracy* (1611) demonstrated through the dubious influence of the ageing female conspirator, Sempronia, on the married Fulvia. The older woman encourages the younger to pursue an affair, advising 'make/ Use of thy youth and freshness, in the season' (2.186-87). Jonson alerts us to Sempronia's essential triviality by having her reflecting with surprise that 'states, and commonwealths employ not women/ To be Ambassadors sometimes!' (4.715-16). This confirms her own lack of good sense rather than a demonstrating a bold aspiration, for she has already shown her folly by parading her scholarship and dismissing visiting male ambassadors who do

not speak Greek as 'mere statesmen' (4.711). So, although she boasts of her influence in helping Catiline,

We shall make him Consul,
I hope, amongst us. Crassus, I, and Caesar
Will carry it for him.

2.99-101

and it seems that her candidate is grateful to her, praising her remarkable powers - 'you've done most masculinely' (3.687) - it comes as no surprise to learn that this older woman is merely tolerated 'to procure moneys' (2.194). Catiline's true feelings about her involvement in his campaign are shown in his private disgust at having to rely on the help of 'ev'n the dregs of mankind [...] whores, and women!' (3.716-17).

Concern for the bad influence of older women appears, too, in the comic piece *The Schoolhouse of Women* (1541), attributed to Edward Gosynhill, where the older wife mischievously stirs up the younger to rebel against her husband:

Then saith the elder, "Do as I do;
Be sharp and quick with him again.
If that he chide, chid you also,
And for one word give you him twain."³⁶

Fletcher's *Rule A Wife and Have A Wife* (1624) expresses similar anxiety about the bad influence of older women on younger. When the two Old Ladies are approached for advice by Margarita, who says that she looks for

³⁶ Edward Gosynhill (?), 'The Schoolhouse of Women' (1541?), in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in 1580-1640*, ed. by Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.136-155 (p.142).

sexual pleasure in marriage, one agrees this is 'necessary as meat to a young Lady' and her companion adds cynically,

But might not all this be, and keep ye single?

You take away variety in marriage,

The abundance of the pleasure you are barred then,

2.1.16-18

The conversation then moves on to ways of choosing a suitable husband - one who is easily cuckolded - with the two old women clearly encouraging the younger.

On stage badly behaved older women are most easily recognisable by their inappropriate volubility, reflecting the misogynistic view of Joseph Swetnam that 'a woman's chief strength, is in her tongue. The serpent hath not so much venom in his tail, as she hath in her tongue'.³⁷ Generally, the garrulous crone is a figure of fun like Gammer Gurton whose frenzied behaviour has house and locality in an uproar in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1553, published in 1575) by William Stevenson (?) and who gets into an undignified shouting match and fist fight with her equally loquacious old neighbour, Dame Chat. Similar amusement is had at the expense of the old, deaf countrywoman in *The Woman Hater* (1606) by Beaumont and Fletcher, who mishears everything and will not be silenced, as her despairing "victim" Gondarino confirms - 'What can she devise to say more?' (4.1.105). However, comic garrulous ramblings can develop into dangerous speaking by

³⁷ Joseph Swetnam, 'The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women; or the Vanity of Them, Choose You Whether. With a Commendation of Wise, Virtuous, and Honest Women' (1615), in *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers In Seventeenth Century England*, ed. by Angeline Goreau (New York: The Dial Press, 1985), pp.69-74 (p.73).

older women. In Greene's *Alphonsus King of Aragon* (1587) Amurack is so incensed by his wife's refusal to be silent about his marriage plans for their daughter that he banishes the 'prattling dame', Fausta, from court and country on pain of death (3.2.1057). It is worth noting that it is another woman, the enchantress Medea, who schools Fausta in appropriate behaviour, 'O foolish queen, what meant you by this talk?/ Those prattling speeches have undone you all' (3.2.1151-52).

The Old Lady in *Henry VIII* narrowly avoids being "undone" by lack of control over her own tongue. Bringing the King news of Anne Boleyn's confinement she will not be silenced and creates a potentially explosive situation by her rambling repetition of Henry's dearest hopes:

King Henry:[...] Is the Queen delivered?

Say, 'Ay, and of a boy.'

Old Lady: Ay, ay, my liege,

And of a lovely boy [...]

'Tis a girl

5.1.163-65, 166

That she is too foolish to realise the danger of her own position at this crucial moment is apparent in the way she chatters on about the paucity of her financial reward from the King (5.1.172-77). Equally, an old woman's uncontrolled tongue can cause problems for others. Though Agatha, in *The Old Law*, may have lost her sex appeal she hasn't lost her voice and when attempts to re-attach Gnotho fail she speaks out loudly and publicly in her own interests and against her husband.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of outspokenness in an ageing woman at this time is the fact that it can result in accusations of witchcraft. The ease with which an old woman may be so accused is shown in *The Winter's Tale* where Paulina takes pains to avoid being thought 'assisted/By wicked powers' (5.3.90-91) when she undertakes the transformation of Hermione's statue. She is very much in control of this "performance", as I will discuss in Chapter 6, so the fact that she appeals for Leontes' approval of what she will do is unexpected but also understandable, given his earlier references to her as 'a mankind witch' (2.3.68). His reassurances now are part of the dramatic process of healing and reconciliation but Paulina's concerns also reflect social attitudes. Although historical evidence is thin on the numbers of old women accused of witchcraft the fact of their being aged seems crucial to commentators at the time. Reginald Scot, in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584), identifies the witch as 'commonly old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles' and George Gifford's *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* (1593) refers to the 'poor old witch'.³⁸ As Marianne Hester points out, 'It was perhaps easier to accuse those women who were more vulnerable, such as the old, widowed and poor'.³⁹ Clearly, Paulina is aware of the dangerous assumptions which may be made about her.

The fact that an old woman might make inappropriate utterances and be dangerously outspoken by male standards would only add to her vulnerability in terms of witchcraft accusations. In his exploration of the Essex witchcraft cases of 1560-1680 Alan Macfarlane shows women who

³⁸ Lucy De Bruyn, *Woman and The Devil in Sixteenth Century Literature* (Tisbury: The Compton Press, 1979), p.115.

³⁹ Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.201.

were involved in slander, arguments with neighbours, scolding (and scolding in church) accused of witchcraft, including Margaret Prentize, cited in 1605 as a witch and 'a Railer, Curser and scolder'.⁴⁰ Frances E. Dolan also highlights speaking as 'allied to witches' transgressive agency' and refers to Thomas Potts' account, in 1613, of the compulsive 'chattering' of an accused witch.⁴¹ Similarly, the 'oaths, curses, and imprecations irreligious' of Joan Flower are emphasised by the anonymous pamphleteer of 1619, recording the trial for witchcraft of the old woman and her daughters the previous year.⁴² When the events were turned into a ballad much was made of Joan's being silenced by divine justice after her brash claim that if she was guilty the bread she was eating would not pass through her. Apparently it didn't, and the writer records 'she never spake more words'.⁴³

Even in a state of repentance such a woman could continue speaking out as we see in the final, public confession of Mother Waterhouse, in 1566. It is recorded that 'she bewailed, repented, and asked mercy of God, and all the world forgiveness and thus she yielded up her soul, trusting to be in joy

⁴⁰ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p.161.

⁴¹ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.199.

⁴² 'The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philippa Flower, daughters of Joan Flower, near Belvoir Castle' (1619), in Henderson and McManus, pp.369-79 (p.372).

⁴³ 'Damnable Practises of Three Lincolnshire Witches, Joan Flower, and her two daughters, Margret and Phillip Flower, against Henry Lord Ross, with others the Children of the Right Honourable the Earl of Rutland, at Beaver Castle, who for the same were executed at Lincoln the 11 of March last' (1619), in *A Pepysian Garland: Black-Letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595-1639*, ed. by Hyder Rollins (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.96-103 (p.103).

with Christ her Saviour'.⁴⁴ Marion Gibson's examination of written confessions by accused witches points out the possible influence of the questioner and writer of the confession upon its content. However, she sees the witch's role as 'co-author of original material' as indicative of creative agency, particularly in view of evidence of accused women 'refusing to retract material which the supposedly more powerful co-author/co-editor finds unacceptable'.⁴⁵ This goes some way to confirming the view of Catherine Belsey that witchcraft persecutions gave women 'a place from which to speak in public with a hitherto unimagined authority', though the punishments for witchcraft - increased after the accession of that published expert, James I - were a heavy price to pay for such public utterance.⁴⁶

On stage the image of the ageing witch engaging public attention is not apparent for her dealings with the man or woman seeking her help are imaged as secret and meetings clandestine. It is interesting that in *Macbeth* (1606) we find the witches coming firmly under Macbeth's control and in Act 4 speaking at his request and doing his bidding:

All the witches: Seek to know no more.

Macbeth: Deny me this,

And an eternal curse fall on you!

4.1.119-121

⁴⁴ 'The Examination and Confession of Certain Witches at Chelmsford in the County of Essex' (1566), *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, 8 (1863-4), 11- 49 (p.49).

⁴⁵ Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.25, 33.

⁴⁶ Belsey, pp.190-1.

Garry Wills argues that Macbeth is 'one of the great male witches of drama'.⁴⁷ Certainly he seems to be in control of the old women in this scene, rather than at their mercy, and by the end of their meeting the old witches are silenced and reduced to performing an 'antic round' (4.1.146) for Macbeth's benefit. An alternative reading is presented by Diane Purkiss who judges the witch scenes in the play as part of the 'unbridled sensationalism' of the whole and aimed at 'a forthright rendering of witches as a stage spectacular'.⁴⁸ Whatever the reading the witches have little female authority here.

An exception to this controlled and contained stage presentation of the old witch is *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), by Dekker, Ford and Rowley, where Mother Sawyer is publicly outspoken. These playwrights are also unique in placing the old woman's behaviour in a social context, exploring the reasons why she becomes a witch. The ageing Mother Sawyer, 'poor, deformed and ignorant' (2.1. 3) is seen, long before her decision to sell her soul, to be the focus for verbal and physical abuse in her community - 'a common sink/For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues' (2.1.6-7) - and blamed for any neighbourhood mishap. When brought before the local squire and a Justice she proves remarkably articulate, albeit 'too saucy and too bitter' (4.1.82), and Sir Arthur's urging that they let 'her tongue gallop on' (4.1.103) works against them as she reels off examples of other kinds of "witchcraft" within a corrupt society which has an easy scapegoat:

Reverence once

⁴⁷ Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.74.

⁴⁸ Diane Purkiss, 'Macbeth and the Jacobean Witch-Vogue', in Chedgzoy, pp.216-234 (p.221).

Had wont to wait on age; now an old woman,
Ill-favoured grown with years, if she be poor,
Must be called bawd or witch.

4.1.121-24

Karen Newman points out that Mother Sawyer 'recognizes that the accusation of witchcraft is only part of a larger animus against all women', and certainly the playwrights highlight such male anxiety.⁴⁹ On stage the countrymen blame the inappropriate behaviour of their wives on the witch, while Young Banks, who has been 'bewitched' in a different way by the charms of Kate Carter (2.1.261), demands that Mother Sawyer help him to redress the balance. A play which charts Frank Thorney's betrayal of two young women also shows betrayal of the old woman by a male-governed society. She is viciously beaten by a landowner, abandoned by the forces of law and order, even blamed by Old Carter for Frank Thorney's crime. It comes as no surprise that, at the end, she is deserted by the Devil himself. She complains, 'But is every devil mine?/ Would I had one now whom I might command' (5.3. 30-31), and though her isolation at this point is an appropriately moral conclusion it also underlines the helplessness of the lone and friendless old woman.

While the drama of the period images the ageing woman as a butt of comedy or a source of discomfort because of her loss of looks, inappropriate sexual desires, outspokenness and potential for dangerous behaviour she is almost entirely shown as such within the stereotypically domestic roles of wife, mother, step-mother and widow. Yet historians indicate that all women,

⁴⁹ Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.57.

including those advanced in years, were active in other spheres of Early Modern society.

While Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith point out that the survival rate in women 'simply increased their vulnerability to poverty and sickness'.⁵⁰ Pelling's own research into the situation of the elderly in Norwich reveals that ageing and elderly women formed an important part of the workforce - busy in the cloth trade, in the preparation and sale of food and in caring for the sick. Pelling concludes: 'In such contexts post-menopausal women appear to have been seen as having a positive value in society which men over 50 would have lacked'.⁵¹

Mature women took positions of responsibility in contemporary society. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford note the long service of some of the matrons employed at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, including Elizabeth Collston who was matron for over twenty-five years.⁵² Diane Willen identifies a similar arrangement at Christ's Hospital which employed 'a matron and twenty-five nurses' who cared for poor, orphaned children and where a nurse of 'great age' was granted a weekly pension and help with rent even when dismissed for negligence.⁵³ In his detailed work on the jury of matrons, James C. Oldham suggests that mature, married women generally served on such juries which had the responsible task in civil cases of determining if a

⁵⁰ *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith (London: Routledge, 1991), p.11.

⁵¹ Margaret Pelling, 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability in Early Modern Norwich: work, re-marriage and other expedients', in Pelling and Smith, pp. 74-101 (p.84).

⁵² Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women In Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.41.

⁵³ Diane Willen, 'Women in the Public Sphere in Early Modern England: The Case of the Urban Working Poor', in *Sixteenth Century Journal* (1998), 559-75 (p.566).

widow was pregnant by her late husband. In criminal cases the jury would examine a woman sentenced to death but pleading pregnancy and here the findings of the matrons could result in a stay of execution.⁵⁴

Examples of ageing women working independently are also revealed in contemporary church court records analysed by Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing. Some of the women are self-supporting widows, like Elizabeth Ellell who at 50 'is a sempstress and teaches young children to read and work with their needles' and the 60-year-old Elizabeth Gaskyn who 'useth to keep women in childbed and doth wash at several men's houses'. Others work alongside their husbands like Marie Cable, aged 50, who runs her husband's butcher's shop, or in separate employment like Ann Hawes, also 50, who 'keepeth a sempster's shop' while her husband 'is a musician'.⁵⁵

While some older widows would have been left destitute and reliant on parish charity Amy Louise Erickson shows that others had the responsible task of acting as executrix for the husband's estate and would find themselves functioning in the public world of the probate courts – 'created and maintained entirely by men'.⁵⁶ The widow of a tradesman would often continue her husband's business, giving her a measure of authority in her community, and widows also had civic responsibilities in terms of payment of taxes and parish rates. Some widows used their money for investment and loans. Mendelson and Crawford point out that 'as wealthy widows, old women might enjoy

⁵⁴ James C. Oldham, 'On Pleading the Belly: A History of the Jury of Matrons', in *Criminal Justice History*, 6 (1985), 1-64.

⁵⁵ Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing, *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-80.

⁵⁶ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.175.

authority over younger men', while Pat Thane observes that 'rich old women generally carried more clout than poor old men'.⁵⁷

Though older women, like their younger counterparts, were officially excluded from political activity many were in fact active in this way. Queen Elizabeth is a prime example of a post-menopausal woman running a country. The women of her Privy Chamber remained in place for some years – indeed, as Leeds Barroll records, on the accession of her husband to the throne Anne of Denmark installed younger women in favoured court positions, preferring them to Elizabeth's ageing attendants.⁵⁸ As Elizabeth A. Brown indicates, these older women attending on Elizabeth 'participated in an elaborate network of influential and political interconnection'.⁵⁹ Elizabeth's women included Blanche Parry, more than 20 years Elizabeth's senior, who is thought to have had considerable influence with the Queen, often acting as an intermediary for aristocratic appellants. Blanche remained single throughout a career which earned her many gifts and bequests, a poetic tribute from George Gascoigne and the title of baroness upon her burial.⁶⁰ Throughout the period older women were also active as writers, translators, and literary patrons – examples include Lady Anne Bacon, Mary Sidney Countess of

⁵⁷ Mendelson and Crawford, p.187; Thane, p.7.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth A. Brown, "'Companion Me With My Mistress": Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Their Waiting Women', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.131-145 (p.132).

⁵⁹ Leeds Barroll, 'The Court of the First Stuart Queen', in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. by Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.191-208 (p.202).

⁶⁰ Charles Angell Bradford, *Blanche Parry, Queen Elizabeth's Gentlewoman* (London: R.F. Hunger, 1935); Anne Somerset, *Ladies in Waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984).

Pembroke, and Lady Elizabeth Russell who, at 70, prepared and published her English version of a Latin work.⁶¹

Mature women were present in strength in areas of public health and private healing. Lady Grace Mildmay is a recognised expert in healing, corresponding with male practitioners and exchanging findings, but there is evidence of others at all levels of society.⁶² Margaret Pelling's work on older women in such roles shows that at least 10 of 110 irregular female practitioners were described as old by the College of Physicians who were trying to control them.⁶³ Diane Willen cites the appointment of old women as inspectors of the living sick and the dead at times of plague outbreaks, and A.L. Wyman's research into the surgeoness reveals a remarkable number – especially married women - operating under license at this time, including 'Mother Edwin' who was paid for carrying out treatment at St Thomas's hospital in 1563.⁶⁴ As Mendelson and Crawford point out, 'Central to the female world was the woman with knowledge, the midwife who was herself a mother', and the importance of this figure – usually a mature woman – is seen in the strict regulations relating to her licensing and practice.⁶⁵ David Harley's

⁶¹ See especially Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1983) and *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers*, ed. by Maureen Bell, George Parfitt, Simon Shepherd (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

⁶² Linda Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (London: Collins and Brown, 1993).

⁶³ Margaret Pelling, 'Thoroughly Resented? Older Women and the Medical Role in Early Modern London', in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500-1700: Mothers and sisters of the Royal Society*, ed. by Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), pp. 63-78 (p.72).

⁶⁴ Willen, p. 572; A.L. Wyman, 'The Surgeoness: The Female Practitioner of Surgery 1400-1800', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1999), 559-75.

⁶⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, p.203. For details of the licensing procedures see W.S.C. Copeman, *Doctors and Disease in Tudor Time* (London: Dawson, 1960); Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of the Struggle*

findings show that at this period midwives were 'prominent within their community' and that their duties to that community could also include investigation of rape, bastards and infanticide.⁶⁶ It is surprising, then, that only one midwife has a central role on the contemporary stage, in Heywood's *The Silver Age* (1611). Here the 'Beldam's brain' (3. F2 '1) fools the goddess Juno who is trying to prevent Alcmena giving birth to Jove's child, and although the role is very brief it is crucial. The way the midwife tricks Juno into lifting her spell is unremarkable but the emphasis placed on her 'wit' in helping her lady 'brought to bed' (3. F3 '1) reflects the importance of the midwife's presence of mind at a dangerous time for any expectant mother, whether or not vengeful goddesses are about.

Clearly there were many valuable roles for mature women beyond the domestic sphere, belying Edward Bever's belief that 'while older men might continue to exercise public functions, older women had virtually no role other than informal advisor and critic, "wise woman" and witch'.⁶⁷ I have already drawn attention to the fact that dramatists elect to present the older woman as wife, mother, stepmother, widow or as a nurse or a bawd, whether the character is developed in a stereotypical or non-stereotypical way and I will now go on to discuss the way this is done as a means of containing the ageing woman within a patriarchal structure. It is interesting, though, that such containment does not seem sufficient and that drama matches other

for the Control of Childbirth (New Barnet: Historical Publications, 1988); Jean Towler and Joan Bramall, *Midwives in History and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Merry E. Weisner, 'Early Modern Midwifery: A Case Study', *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 6 (1993), 26-43.

⁶⁶ David Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch', *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 20 (1990), 1-26 (p.10).

⁶⁷ Bever, p.174.

contemporary writing in focusing with distaste on the older woman's loss of looks, with derision on her supposed sexual rapacity, and with anxiety on her uncontrolled outspokenness. As Joy Wiltenberg points out, literary images are valuable to men here, helping establish 'control of women through their fear of fitting an absurd or dishonourable stereotype'.⁶⁸ However, such use can be counter-productive. Regularly reassured that she is falling short of male standards because she is past her best, a woman will cease to value or care about such male judgements and so the situation which threatens the older woman can, paradoxically, empower her. Dramatists do not present older women on the Elizabeth and Jacobean stage in the diverse occupations seen in contemporary life. However, the few playwrights who appreciate this empowering potential of this character engage in the subversion and rejection of the stereotypical images of the older woman I have identified here.

⁶⁸ Joy Wiltenberg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p.253.

Chapter 2: Older Wives.

Philippo: Who knows this woman?

Franio: I have been acquainted with her these forty Summers,
And as many Winters, were it Spring again;
She's like the Gout, I can get no cure for her.

Philippo: Oh, your wife, Franio?

John Fletcher, William Rowley, *The Maid in the Mill*
(1623), 5.2.395-98

This comic exchange focuses on a stereotypical image of male dissatisfaction with an ageing wife: Philipppo immediately recognises the status of the ageing Gillian from the way Franio refers to her. That she is a trial to her husband is emphasised when Franio goes on to describe her as 'a painful stitch to my side' (5.2.399). This harks back to the creation of Eve by the removal of one of Adam's ribs, and the eventual fall. It also reinforces the idea that even in old age a wife can be a literal and metaphorical pain to her husband and set him yearning for the 'Spring' of a younger woman. That Gillian has also known Franio for forty summers and may find him less than perfect is not touched upon.

Whether handling the complexities of marriage in a comic or a serious manner, all Elizabethan and Jacobean plays featuring ageing wives reflect or reinforce the contemporary ideal, where wives of any age are obedient, loyal and orderly. Few dramatists consider how the ageing process in a woman may effect her behaviour in marriage but when they do the ideal

image of marriage is undermined, revealing constant male anxiety about insubordinate female behaviour.

The idea that, during the Reformation period, the position of women in marriage may have been improved by Protestant teachings, which envisaged a companionate institution based upon mutual love, is one which has engaged social historians. Exploring conduct and advice books before and after the Reformation period Kathleen M. Davies has argued convincingly that the notion of mutual support within marriage was no new concept.⁶⁹ More recently, Patricia Crawford has warned against assuming that either Protestantism or Catholicism particularly benefitted women, pointing out that both churches 'believed in female inferiority and subordination'.⁷⁰ While convinced that Protestant women had more 'spiritual influence' upon their households than Catholic women Crawford confirms that Protestant teachings 'strongly supported patriarchal authority' within the family.⁷¹ Jacqueline Eales concludes that, currently, the Reformation is seen as having little influence in altering 'attitudes towards female inferiority'.⁷²

I believe that a more important influence on contemporary attitudes towards marriage is the fact, foregrounded by Davies, that during the Reformation the "market" for advice material on the subject shifted from priests in need of guidance to a larger, secular readership. Husbands and

⁶⁹ Kathleen M. Davies, 'Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage', in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. by R.B. Outhwaite (London: Europa, 1981), pp.56-80 (p.63).

⁷⁰ Crawford, p.41.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁷² Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p.13.

wives had greater access to guidance on all aspects of marriage – ‘choice of partner, dominance of husband, mutual affection and respect, sexual activity, and sharing of work’.⁷³ Thus hopes and expectations were more widely articulated as was the insistence, in conduct books, advice tracts and sermons, upon the subordination of the wife in marriage.⁷⁴ Any possibility of independent behaviour in a wife was worrying and we even find a husband in an elevated position, James I, offering firm advice on this in *Basilicon Doron* (1599 - reprinted upon his accession to the throne in 1603). The monarch insists that a husband rule his wife as a ‘pupil’ and that there should be restrictions upon her learning - ‘teach her not to be curious in things that belongeth her not [...] It is your office to command, and hers to obey’ (O1^r - O2^v).⁷⁵ Wifely disobedience can only result in disorder as William Whately points out in his *A Bride Bush* (1617). For Whately a key indicator of proper wifely behaviour is her manner of speaking - ‘using few words, and those low and mild’.⁷⁶ Warning ‘Out of place, out of peace’, he states that it is a wife’s duty ‘to acknowledge her inferiority’ and ‘to carry herself as inferior’.⁷⁷ Clearly, this is the kind of ‘due subjection to her husband’ praised in John Mayer’s ‘A Pattern For Women’ (1619), written after the death of Lucy Thornton, ‘a humble, loving and obedient wife’.⁷⁸ That such subordination must continue throughout a marriage is emphasised in ‘An Homily Against Excess of Apparel’, one of those read out in churches throughout Elizabeth’s reign and

⁷³ Davies, p.78.

⁷⁴ This area of publication is explored in depth in Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*.

⁷⁵ James I, *Basilicon Doron* (1599) (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1969).

⁷⁶ William Whateley, ‘A Bride Bush’ (1617), in Aughterson, p.31.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.33.

⁷⁸ John Mayer, ‘A Pattern for Women’ (1619), in Henderson and McManus, pp.336-342 (p.341).

attributed to Bishop Pilkington. He cites St Peter on how properly, "the old ancient holy women attired themselves, and were obedient to their husbands".⁷⁹ Even writing which does not fall into the conduct book genre continues to place emphasis upon a wife bowing to her husband's wishes. In 'A Wife' (1614) - attached to the *Overburian Characters* - the good points of a good wife are itemised but the focus is upon her essential readiness to be moulded to the husband's need - 'For when by Marriage both in one concur,/Woman converts to Man, not Man to Her'.⁸⁰ This is very much in line with the sentiments expressed in the characters 'A Good Wife' - 'She frames her nature unto his' - and 'A Good Woman' - 'her chiefest virtue is a good husband. For She is He'.⁸¹

Our knowledge of women's hopes and expectations for marriage is limited, although material is emerging in this area. Alison Wall's research into the letters of Joan and Maria Thynne explores the disparity between what women were lead to expect of husbands (as discussed in the very advice tracts designed to guide their own behaviour) and their actual experiences. Joan Thynne disliked her husband's absences, 'she expected a husband to share a wife's company - a factor stressed in the texts', while Maria demanded her rights of household management - 'if she recognized his sphere in the outside world [she] was entitled to her say indoors, according to

⁷⁹ *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be read in the Churches*, ed. by John Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), p.316.

⁸⁰ Sir Thomas Overbury (?), 'A Wife' (1614), in *The Overburian Characters to Which Is Added A Wife*, ed. by W.J. Paylor (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), p.108.

⁸¹ Paylor, 'A Good Wife', p.21, 'A Good Woman', p.4.

the prescriptive books'.⁸² Wall demonstrates that for these two wives the 'ideal of manhood derived from the prescriptive texts' was not experienced and that they objected to this.⁸³ The Thynnes were not alone in their sense of dissatisfaction. In his exploration of the work of the 17th century astrologer and physician, Richard Napier, Michael Macdonald finds that the majority of wives who sought Napier's help, were distressed 'because they expected to be treated fairly and affectionately' in their marriages and were not.⁸⁴

As these examples show, and as historians warn, it is important to be aware that idealised images of marriage deviated considerably from the actual behaviour of men and women at this time and so it would be wrong to assume that all marriages were under strain. Any conflict over the issue of the subordinate role of the wife is not apparent in the glimpses we have of comfortable marital relationships at this time. Among mature couples an obvious example of a happy marriage exists in the correspondence between Lord Arthur Lisle and his wife Honor where the great affection shown on both sides indicates a companionable partnership.⁸⁵ A caring relationship between Margaret Countess of Lennox and her husband is also suggested in the concern this wife expresses when writing to Sir William Cecil in 1569 - 'it toucheth me nearest to see my L. my husband who and I have been together this xxvi years, fall into such an extreme heaviness'. She and Lennox were eager to gain guardianship of their grandson, the young James I, but although

⁸² Alison Wall, 'Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practice: The Thynne Family of Longleat', *History*, 75 (1990), 23-38 (p.29).

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁸⁴ Michael Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.102.

⁸⁵ *The Lisle Letters*, 1, ed. by Muriel St Clare Byrne (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

this is a politically-motivated letter the concern the Countess has for her husband is apparent as she frets over being unable 'by any mean to comfort him'.⁸⁶ Wives clearly established strong and lasting relations with their husbands in which notions of subjection were not foregrounded. The diary ponderings of the Puritan minister Richard Rogers on the pros and cons of re-marrying when his ailing wife dies seem cold and thoughtless to the modern reader, and his concern that the 'care and looking after children' will fall to him in her absence merely selfish. However, Rogers does refer to his wife as 'so fit a companion for religion' and all other aspects of his life and reflects on the 'many uncomfortablenesses' he is protected from by her care, and the importance of valuing this should she survive.⁸⁷ There may be little passion here but he appreciates his marriage as a supportive partnership. Lady Grace Mildmay's collection of meditations (though not written for publication) shows that she too feels partnership should exist in a good marriage. While wives ought to 'submit themselves unto their husbands as unto the Lord [...] as the church is in subjection unto Christ', husbands are urged to 'love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it'.⁸⁸ Though their marriage was not an easy one Grace Mildmay and her husband seem to have achieved mutual affection in their relationship. It must be taken into account though, that she was unusual in having something like a career of her own. Linda Pollock's detailed exploration of Grace Mildmay's medical activities reveals that these, 'were practised on a large, expensive and systematic

⁸⁶ *Ellis's Original Letters*, 2nd series, ed. by Henry Ellis (London: Harding and Lepard, 1827), p. 333.

⁸⁷ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. by M.M. Knappen (Chicago: The American Society of Church History, 1933), pp.73-4.

⁸⁸ Pollock, p.44.

scale'.⁸⁹ The intellectual and creative satisfaction gained here may well have mitigated any sense of irritation about subjection to a husband's rule.

Perhaps the firmest evidence of mutual trust in marital partnerships appears when wives act publicly on behalf of their husbands. In the correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston, from 1602-1627, we see her dealing with suits in Chancery for her husband Edmund while he is 'exceeding sickly', writing letters, conducting all arrangements and making necessary decisions. In her copious correspondence to her son at Cambridge Lady Katherine also relays messages and gifts from her husband, maintaining crucial family connections.⁹⁰

However, when trouble comes this often centres on lack of wifely obedience. That conflict between husband and wife should be the focus of many homilies and similar religious writings indicates widespread social concern over marital rupture and this is further emphasised by a wedding sermon of 1608 by Robert Abbott who presents the problem as one 'common in many places' and affecting even 'men of higher place'.⁹¹ An example is seen in George Carew's letters to Sir Thomas Roe which provide details of marital 'difference' between Sir Edward Coke and his wife Elizabeth in which the subordinate role is flouted. Lady Elizabeth violently opposed the proposed marriage of their youngest daughter, to the extent of trying to gain

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.44.

⁹⁰ 'Lady Katherine Paston to Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, 29 April, 1619?', 'Lady Katherine Paston to William Paston, January 1624, June 1624', in *The Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston 1602-1627*, ed. by Ruth Hughey (Norfolk: The Norfolk Recording Society, 1941), pp. 51, 65-6, 72.

⁹¹ Robert Abbott, Bishop of Salisbury, 'Wedding Sermon' (1608), in *Putting Assunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society*, ed. by Roderick Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.98.

custody of her daughter 'by force'.⁹² Here the disobedient wife found herself at odds with her monarch as well as her husband as the bridegroom was a member of the favoured Villiers family and both the betrothal and eventual marriage took place while Lady Elizabeth was absent, 'under restraint', obviously defying both patriarchs with remarkable boldness.⁹³ Such insubordination in a wife was worrying for those men involved and those observing. Coke experienced the personal discomfort of his position at court being affected by Elizabeth's bad behaviour and Carew does not omit the pleasing conclusion - 'Within two or three days following Sir Edward Coke was restored again to his place in the Counsel'.⁹⁴ John Smyth, recording the lives of the Berkeley family shows similar unease about the effect of the behaviour of Anne Savage, second wife of Thomas, Lord Berkeley, 'a lady of masculine spirit, over-powerful with her husband'. Smyth's anxiety is similarly provoked by Anne's daughter-in-law, Katherine who, in her 'middle and elder years', always wanted to know what her husband was doing and the details of his financial dealings. Smyth comments disapprovingly, 'For the most part it falleth out that where wives will rule all they mar all'.⁹⁵

The emphasis upon expected perfection in a wife indicates considerable male anxiety about potential imperfection - disobedience, disloyalty and disorderly behaviour - and this concern can be seen in mature marriages in the drama of the period. The importance of a husband

⁹² *Letters from George Lord Carew to Sir Thomas Roe Ambassador to the Court of the Great Mogul 1615-1617*, ed. by John Maclean (London: The Camden Society, 1860), p.119.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.120.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 120

⁹⁵ *The Berkeley Manuscripts: The Lives of the Berkeleys by John Smyth of Nibley, 2*, ed. by John Maclean (Gloucester: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 1933), pp.263, 387.

exercising control over his ageing wife is most remarkably represented in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600). In this version of the *Hamlet* story the hero's mother, Maria, who is about to wed her husband's killer, is not admonished by her son but by the ghost of her dead spouse. Andrugio, perched on his wife's bed, first reads her a lecture on marital fidelity beyond the grave, 'Hast thou so soon forgot Andrugio?/ Are our love-bands so quickly cancelled?' (3.5.3-4), but then forgives her and urges her to join their son, Antonio, in his plan for revenge. Antonio arrives rather late on the scene, ready to harrass Maria, but it is her husband who is in control here. A strong husband can even redeem an errant wife, as we see in John Lyly's *Endymion* (1588) where the disgraced and ageing sorceress, Dipsas, is forgiven by Cynthia as long as she renounces her 'horrible and hateful trade' (5.4.274) and is reconciled to her husband, Geron. Geron's generous reception of his estranged wife - 'with more joy than I did the first day' - is seen as part of Dipsas' salvation and she promises to confess to him 'the cause of these my first follies' (5.4.278). Another satisfying reconciliation, with a mature wife happily giving up an independent lifestyle, appears in *The Sea Voyage* (1622) by Fletcher and Massinger. Rosella has kept the flame burning for her lost husband Sebastian while running an Amazon island stronghold, protecting her daughter and other young women against a group of newly-landed pirates, and fending off the attentions of the attractive Tibalt. Yet Rosella is only too pleased to 'give up her self/ Her power and joys' (5.4.97) to the restored Sebastian, reverting to her old role as obedient wife in which she 'can deny Sebastian nothing' (5.4.96).

A husband's inability to control his wife and experience such selfless obedience in her becomes the stuff of comedy on stage, especially when wifely disobedience leads to public wrangling. In Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1595) the Duke of York determines to reveal the treachery of his son to the new monarch but his Duchess refuses to obey her husband's edict. Their private bickering threatens to spill over into the King's presence but Henry defuses the tension by identifying that the Duchess's intervention has altered the situation 'from a serious thing' (5.3.77). A potentially problematic scene is turned to comedy and the cause of the dispute resolved with a display of paternalistic mercy. Similarly, in George Chapman's *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597) Countess Moren's public nagging of her husband, which embarrasses him and his friends, is silenced by the King. Neither of these husbands has the authority of Simon Eyre, in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), in dealing with an outspoken wife. He puts the sharp-tongued Margery firmly in her place - 'quarrel not with me and my men [...] Away, rubbish. Vanish, melt, melt like kitchen stuff!' (7.43, 51).

If a wife is not kept in line by a husband's firm governance her behaviour may extend beyond disobedience, as we see in Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596). Queen Aegiale who rules her husband, Ptolemy, also turns out to be a treacherous adulteress. Ptolemy's collusion in her disobedience is seen when Aegiale publicly criticises her husband for what she sees as his weak handling of their daughter's reluctance to marry - 'You take a course my Lord to make her coy' (4.15). She compounds this by her interference in offering lengthy advice to her would-be son-in-law. Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Pericles* (1607) Dionyza is imaged as a 'harpy' of

a wife when she dismisses her husband's pangs of conscience at the supposed murder of Marina, left to their care (17.47). Dionyza's calm assumption of her ability to control Cleon – 'But yet I know you'll do as I advise' (17.52) – shows where this relationship has gone wrong. It is interesting to note that while the conduct books focus on the importance of the husband schooling his wife, on stage a disobedient and disorderly wife whose husband lacks the necessary strength to tame her may be shamed into good behaviour through the intervention of another male. We see this in the case of the Duchess of York and Countess Moren, both brought into line by a male monarch, while in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* Aegiale is silenced after a confrontation with the forceful Count.

That obedience and loyalty to a husband are expected even when he is patently undeserving of such is imaged in John Fletcher's *The Tragedy of Valentinian* (c.1614) and *The Honest Lawyer* (1615) by S.S. Valentinian is acknowledged as 'a bad man too, a beast' (5.2.61) who dies a particularly nasty death, but although his most recent infidelity has involved the very public pursuit of a friend's wife and her eventual rape, Valentinian's ageing spouse Eudoxa remains loyal to her dead husband. She marries his killer then poisons him at a celebratory banquet. Having apparently betrayed her new husband Eudoxa is threatened with instant death by the men about her but is allowed to speak in her own defence, being recognisably weak - 'a woman,/A subject not for swords but pity' (5.8.73-74). She convinces her hearers that she has dispatched a traitor and is reaffirmed as 'virtuous' (5.8.114). This only adds to the confusion of an already confused conclusion to the play, but it is clear that the mature Eudoxa, her face 'Long since

bequeathed to wrinkles' (5.6.9), has remained loyal to the horrid Valentinian who she still refers to as her 'noble lord' (5.8. 96). In *The Honest Lawyer* the long-suffering wife of Vaster selflessly offers to 'work or beg' (1. A4') for her obsessively jealous husband when he apparently falls on hard times, but to test her loyalty he sells her to a brothel then fakes his own death. He woos her in disguise but she remains steadfast to her husband's memory, telling her wooer that she has the pox to frighten him off. Unfortunately, Vaster is convinced by this so even when he reveals his true identity to the delight of his wife - 'Into your arms I fly' (4.H4') - further rejection and humiliation are her lot before their eventual reconciliation.

Given the great emphasis placed at this time on obedience in a wife, whatever her age, it is important to be aware that the husband would have an extreme, yet permissible, sanction against a disobedient wife - that of physical violence. There is first hand observation of the results of marital violence in the diary of Adam Winthrop, who usually concentrated on births, marriages and deaths but was moved to record in 1595 that, 'the 27 day my sister Hilles came to my house for that her husband had beaten her face and arms greviously'.⁹⁶ Richard Napier's records also show wives in despair because of the beatings administered by brutal husbands.⁹⁷ Legal action could be taken against wife beaters. Paul Hair's exploration of church court records reveals a prosecution in 1592 against Wiliam Hylls, accused of using his wife

⁹⁶ 'Diary of Adam Winthrop of Groton in Suffolk' (1586-1616), in *More English Diaries: Further Views from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Arthur Ponsonby (London: Methuen, 1927), p.40.

⁹⁷ Macdonald, pp.98-105.

'most ungodly [...] beating her most cruelly'.⁹⁸ Yet such judicial actions were rare and generally the law seemed reluctant to intervene. In his detailed study of documentary material F.G. Emmison finds evidence in the Essex court records of a woman who accused her husband of attacking and beating her. Though the husband was committed to prison this seems to relate to an earlier court appearance due to his 'incontinency and wicked life'.⁹⁹ The wife-beating is apparently considered the lesser evil by the justices concerned.

It is true that discussion of this practice in contemporary advice material reveals some discomfort among the male authors. In the *Homily of the State of Matrimony* (1563), one of those read in churches each Sunday and therefore available to a wide audience at a time of obligatory church-going, the writer reflects on dissension and physical violence in marriage as all too common – 'how few matrimonies there be without chidings, brawlings, tauntings, repentings, bitter cursings and fightings'. Yet although wife-beating is castigated as 'the greatest shame that can be' the homilist is all too aware of the strength of male peer group pressure in terms of influencing masculine behaviour 'they think that it is a man's part to fume in anger, to fight with fist and staff'.¹⁰⁰ Such writings veer away from total condemnation of this kind of male violence but *The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights: or the Lawes Provision for Women* (1632), thought to have been written at the end of the 15th century by two lawyers, is quite clear about a husband's legal position - 'if

⁹⁸ *Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from Church Court Records 1300-1800*, ed. by Paul Hair (London: Elek, 1972), p.68.

⁹⁹ F.G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life, Disorder* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1970), p.168.

¹⁰⁰ Bishop John Jewel, 'An Homily of the State of Matrimony' (1563), in *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writing by Men about Women and Marriage in England 1500-1640*, ed. by Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp.13-25 (pp. 15, 21, 16).

a man beat an out-law, a traitor, a pagan, his villein or his wife, it is dispunishable, because by the Law Common these persons can have no action'.¹⁰¹ Given these attitudes it is refreshing to hear the oppositional male voice. The Puritan William Perkins states:

Here the question is moved, whether the husband may correct the wife? [...] He may reprove and admonish her in word only [...]

But he may not chastise her either with stripes or strokes.¹⁰²

The confusion evident in attitudes to wife beating is also apparent when a marriage ends in murder. In her work on domestic violence Frances E. Dolan points out that accounts of murderous wives are published 'far more frequently' than those of murderous husbands, despite the statistics which indicate that 'husbands murdered their wives at least twice as often as wives murdered their husbands'.¹⁰³ Then, as now, the image of the homicidal female partner seems to be more socially disturbing and sensational than that of her male equivalent.

It would be wrong to conclude from all this that all husbands were violent and potentially homicidal. However, it is clear that all husbands were permitted the sanction of beating and this must colour our perception of the difficulties facing a wife of any age who might be discontented with the accepted stereotype of her role as subordinate.

¹⁰¹ 'The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights: or the Lawes Provision for Women' (1632), Klein, pp.27-61 (p.46).

¹⁰² William Perkins, 'Christian Economy: or, A Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family According to the Scriptures' (1609), in Klein, pp.151-173 (p.172).

¹⁰³ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1500-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.25.

Drama which focuses on the disobedient and disorderly ageing wife often establishes inappropriate sexual appetite as a contributory cause. Chapman embellishes the stereotypical treatment of Aegiale by emphasising her sexual desires. She admits that her passion for another man is out of control - 'not Gods can rule' (1.46) - and pictures herself as a tireless sexual predator - 'like an Eagle prying for her prey' - in her search for him (1.58). That a wife who exerts power over her husband will incline to promiscuity is also imaged in George Peele's *Edward I* (1591) where Elinor, who easily overrules her husband the King, reveals that she has been unfaithful with his brother and that all her children are illegitimate. In Robert Armin's re-working of the Hamlet theme, *The Two Maids of Mortlake* (1608), the mature wife is condemned as 'false' (6.1) by the husband she thought dead because she is planning to re-marry. The Lady tartly reminds her husband, James, that he was responsible for sending home news of his own "death" – 'Bawd to your own misdeed/ Three quarters guilty of this accident' (6.19-20). Indeed, as if this was not evidence enough of lack of wifely submission, we find her taking charge of the situation and, instead of giving up the new marriage, smuggling James into her household and into her bed – 'Leave all to me. Women that wade in sin/ Have their wits charter to authorise it' (6.34-5). Here, brazen sexual promiscuity is dangerously linked to wifely disobedience.

A more thoughtful approach to desire in the ageing wife appears in *The Malcontent* (1604) where Marston makes it clear that sexual conquest is essential for the unfaithful Aurelia as a means of confirming her own continuing desirability. She is deeply wounded by the reported insults of her lover Mendoza, "'witch" [...] "dried biscuit"' (1.6.18), and her repetition of the

hurtful words (1.6.47, 64) is evidence of the anxious brooding of a woman who knows, in truth, that she is past her best. Her swift replacement of Mendoza with Ferneze shows her urgent need to bolster her damaged self-confidence. Yet this fascinating glimpse of female anxiety is all too brief and the dominant image of this marriage is the foolish negligence of a husband who does not punish disobedience and disloyalty in his wife. Even after her adultery is discovered Pietro is unable to scold Aurelia (2.5. 25), and can only castigate her treachery when in disguise (4.3.15-45).

When dramatists begin to consider the importance of age in relation to female behaviour the character of the older wife gains depth. In Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1607) the plotting for power of the ageing Tullia is linked to her being beyond childbearing age. (She has adult offspring, including Sextus who will eventually rape Lucrece). Imagining a restoration of fertility Tullia refers to herself as being pregnant with ambition - 'my hot appetite's a fire,/Till my swollen fervour be delivered' (1.A3^r) - and this is echoed by observers, showing desire for power replacing desire for children in a mature woman - 'The wife of Tarquin would be a Queen, nay [...] she is with child till she be so' (1.A4^r). In the same way, the age of Antigona in Middleton's *The Old Law* is relevant to her apparently disorderly behaviour. As the loyal and loving wife of Creon, who is due to be executed because he is 80, Antigona tries to secure his release. Their ungrateful son, Simonides, is only interested in inheriting his father's wealth and tries to undermine his mother's credibility by utilising the lustful old woman stereotype - 'I'll help you to a courtier of nineteen, mother' (2.1.107). Antigona would rather die with her husband than live without him and when her appropriately restrained pleading

for her husband's life fails she confronts the Duke with the 'cursed tyranny' of his justice (1.2.137). She is the only one to challenge him in this way: other objectors to the law argue it out with lawyers or debate it with members of their family. At 55 Antigona sees her own legally sanctioned death looming, and it is her age which emboldens her to speak out loudly in public against authority. Though only touching briefly on the reasons for the disorderly behaviour of these older wives, these plays hint at aspects of the ageing female's experience ignored elsewhere in the drama of the period.

Movements away from the stereotype of the ageing wife by the dramatist can result in a sense that the character does not entirely fit with the overall mood of the play. In Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1606) Thomasine initially seems a stereotypical comedy wife. Her scheme to marry her daughter to the well-to-do Rearage, her eagerness to rush into marriage when her husband Quomodo is presumed dead, her final come-uppance when he reappears, are all recognisable aspects of the stage city wife of advancing years, with ideas above her station and a sexual appetite to match. She is also disobedient, defiantly rejecting Quomodo's choice of suitor for their daughter, Susan, as 'A proud, base knave!' (2.3.9). However, Middleton reveals greater complexity in this character when she spies on the conning of Easy. This ageing wife, well aware of her husband's 'knavery' (2.3.79) and seemingly unconcerned till now, finds herself deeply ashamed, not only of Quomodo's behaviour but of her own connivance at it. Her angry, 'Why am I wife to him that is no man?' (2.3.206), may draw attention to Quomodo's limited sexual powers, but it also identifies his dubious morality. It is Easy's youthful gullibility that moves her (2.3.209) and when he unwittingly signs his

land and livelihood away she can no longer bear to look, creating in her distress a vivid image worthy of a revenge tragedy:

Now is he quart'ring out; the executioner
Strides over him; with his own blood he writes.
I am no dame that can endure such sights.

2.3. 341-43

One reason for Quomodo's rigging his own death is to see how Thomasine takes it:

which will appear by November in her eye, and the
fall of the leaf in her body, but especially by the
cost she bestows upon my funeral, there shall I
try her love and regard

4.1. 106-08

but the joke is on Quomodo for his wife rejoices in her apparent widowhood and immediately rushes into Easy's arms, taking the opportunity to right his wrongs and satisfy her own needs at last - 'I have the leisure now both to do that gentleman good and do myself a pleasure' (4.3.40-41). The joke is against Thomasine too, for when Quomodo reappears and she is ruled to be his property still, Easy is seen as an unworthy second choice concerned with retaining his own property - 'Although the law too gently 'lot his wife/The wealth he left behind he cannot challenge' (5.3.60-61). Yet while Thomasine's enforced reunion with her husband seems to shift her character back into the stereotype of the disorderly wife, thus reinforcing the importance of wifely loyalty even to someone as foul as Quomodo, it provides an thoroughly

uneasy conclusion to a comedy in which she has grown into a more complex woman of conscience.

In a similar but more complex way Webster, in *The White Devil*, moves beyond the stereotypical in his engagement with the character of Isabella, wife of the adulterous Duke Bracciano. The result is exciting and we glimpse a tough-minded ageing wife who discovers an empowering way of coping with her husband's betrayal of her love and trust. Isabella is sometimes misinterpreted as a pious, virtuous wife (in pallid contrast to the wicked, vigorous Vittoria) who is such a doormat that she even takes responsibility for her separation from Bracciano, turning the other cheek in a move of fine Christian martyrdom. Indeed, in his introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* Rene Weis twice describes Isabella as 'saintly' and asserts that her outburst of passionate jealousy in Act 2 scene 1 is 'feigned'.¹⁰⁴ The image of Isabella as saint is also touched on by Dympna Callaghan, in her discussion of Renaissance tragedy. However, she sees this as dramatic convention with Isabella following 'fairly typical terrain for a female tragic character; that from sinner to saint', in that she 'begins by being somewhat peevish and perverse and ends by being idealised'.¹⁰⁵ Laura G. Bromley sees Isabella as playing out the submissive role imposed upon her by her brother, Francisco, with the purpose of 'actually demonstrating her compliance'.¹⁰⁶ These views of saintliness and compliance are countered,

¹⁰⁴ *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. by Rene Weis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. xvi,xvii.

¹⁰⁵ Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.76.

¹⁰⁶ Laura G. Bromley, 'The Rhetoric of Feminine Identity in *The White Devil*', in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, ed. by

though, by the exploration of Isabella's behaviour as performance, by both Sheryl A. Stevenson and Christina Luckyj. Stevenson argues that Isabella's seemingly saintly forgiveness of Bracciano is 'a mask' concealing a woman who impersonates men so well that 'she draws Francisco's condemnation and ridicule of her as a potential cuckold'. Similarly, Luckyj believes Isabella is 'deliberately constructing and playing out a female stereotype'.¹⁰⁷

While the view of Isabella as active rather than passive is convincing it is also crucial to be alert to the influence of her age on her behaviour, an aspect of the character which is foregrounded by Webster. She is neither saintly nor an impersonator of male behaviour but a mature wife who knows her husband well and firmly believes that she can win him back. That she understands him is obvious from her initial appeasement of her brother Francisco who is ready for an aggressive confrontation with Bracciano. Isabella knows very well that applying a 'rough tongue' (2.1.11) is not the way to handle Bracciano and she briskly announces that she forgives her husband - 'all my wrongs/Are freely pardoned' (2.1.12-13) - and then reassures Francisco that she knows exactly how to resolve the problem:

I do not doubt

As men to try the precious unicorn's horn

Make of the powder a preservative circle

Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow press, 1991), pp.50-70 (p.51).

¹⁰⁷ Sheryl A. Stevenson, 'As Differing as Two Adamants': Sexual Difference in *The White Devil*, in *Sexuality and the Politics of Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Carole Levin and Karen Robertson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), pp.159-174 (p. 165); Christina Luckyj, 'Gender, Rhetoric, and Performance in John Webster's *The White Devil*', in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Victoria Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp.219-232 (p.221).

And in it put a spider, so these arms
Shall charm his poison, force it to obeying
And keep him chaste from an infected straying.

2.1.13-18

She firmly believes she can heal Bracciano and physically reclaim him with the 'force' of her love-making and it only gradually becomes apparent to her that she has badly misread the situation. When she and Bracciano meet her manner is open and friendly, not hesitant or self-deprecating, and she replies with wit and assurance to his question about the state of her soul, admitting sins and the need to confront them:

'Tis burdened with too many, and I think
The oft'ner that we cast our reckonings up,
Our sleeps will be the sounder.

2.1.152-54

The use of the term 'cast', which reinforces the image of calculation, can also refer to vomiting,¹⁰⁸ presenting a wry picture of the sinner's confession of sins being like the behaviour of a practised drunk, throwing up to ensure an easy night's sleep. This is surely designed to amuse and suggests that until now she has perceived her relationship with Bracciano not only as sexually sound but also as companionable, allowing for witty and playful exchanges. Even when he accuses her of jealousy she responds wittily - 'I am to learn what that Italian means' (2.1.161). Her perception of their shared understanding is shattered, though, when her husband refuses to kiss her and avoids her embrace in a way that emphasises physical distaste - 'O your breath!'

¹⁰⁸ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, gen ed. C.T. Onions, 3rd edn, rev. by C.W.S. Friedrichsen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

(2.1.163). It is this which undermines her self-confidence, as we see from her anxious reference to her age and loss of looks:

You have oft for these two lips
Neglected cassia or the natural sweets
Of the spring violet, they are not yet much withered,

2.1. 165-67

Now her wit forsakes her and Bracciano creates images of her as a stereotypically disloyal and disorderly ageing wife - complaining about him to her family and chasing after other men (2.1.172-77) - to put Isabella in the wrong. Small wonder that she wishes she were dead (2.1.178-79) and in her 'winding sheet' (2.1.205). The extreme nature of her reaction implies that such cruelty from Bracciano is not a typical experience for her. It is only when he announces that he won't sleep with her again that Isabella pulls herself together, challenging his denial of 'the sweet union/Of all things blessed' (2.1.198-99). She loves this man and wants to share his bed, convinced that this is where she has the best chance of winning him back. In forcing him to face his decision she clearly hopes he will back down,

dear my lord,

Let me hear once more what I would not hear,
Never?

2.1 206-08

When he proves adamant she reveals the depth of her pain but retains her strength of mind. By insisting that she become 'the author' of Bracciano's decision (2.1.218) she takes control of the situation, of her own life and to a certain extent of her husband. This not an unusual gambit by a rejected

mature wife. Isabella may forfeit public respect by seeming to behave badly, but in doing so she binds her husband to her even more strongly, for only he knows the truth. In the scene they play out for Francisco's benefit, Isabella's is the central role while Bracciano cuts a sorry figure with his feeble 'Ne'er lie with me?' (2.1.260), and 'You see 'tis not my seeking' (2.1.265). Far from 'imagining a language of jealousy', as Weis suggests, Isabella has no problem accessing appropriate language within her own consciousness.¹⁰⁹ If, as Stevenson and Luckyj argue, she is playing a role it is grounded in her position as an ageing wife, hurt and embittered at being rejected for a younger woman - 'Are all these ruins of my former beauty/Laid out for a whore's triumph?' She turns all Bracciano's earlier cruelty against him with wonderful irony, kissing him to seal their separation and repeating his own word 'never' (2.1.254) to confirm her decision.

As well as exercising this limited female power she has also been politically astute and averted a war between Padua and Florence, but this will have no part in how Isabella, a stereotypically disorderly old wife, will be viewed from now on. This is made clear in Francisco's far from brotherly response, mocking her earlier boast about recapturing her husband - 'Now horns upon thee,/ For jealousy deserves them' (2.1.266-68). In choosing not to be like the 'other women' who 'suffer these slight wrongs' (2.1.240, 241) she becomes, as Stevenson states, an active subject of male anxiety, a thorn in the flesh of Cardinal, brother and, most importantly, husband. It is a negative kind of power, of course, and one which fuels Bracciano's determination to remove the thorn for good, but it is the only kind of power

¹⁰⁹ Weis, p.xvii.

available to this rejected ageing wife and she seizes it defiantly. In engaging so closely with an older wife who breaks the stereotypical mould while functioning within it Webster gives a tantalising glimpse of an intriguing character, loyal to her husband, doing her best to get him back and, in failing, refusing to let go easily. It is telling that her murder takes place as a dumb show. We do not hear that passionate and sympathetic voice again.

None of the plays discussed so far has marriage as the central theme, yet there is a distinct group of plays about marriage at this time, *A Warning For Fair Women* (1599), *Arden of Faversham* (1591), *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1606) and *The Witch of Edmonton*, dealing with adultery and violent death in the comparatively early years of marriage. Such plays, while taking a strong moral stance about the crimes unfolded, also explore the pressures on couples to perform their new roles as husband and wife in a socially acceptable way, matching up to the expectations of both partner and public. So we see marriages coming apart as husband or wife succumbs to jealousy, loses interest in the relationship, is tempted into adultery, and so on. This kind of intensely focused examination of marital difficulties is carried out on mature married couples in only one play of the period, Henry Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*. Awash with sexual innuendo, this play charts the breakdown of neighbourly relations between Mistress Barnes and Mistress Goursey, a situation which turns very nasty indeed when marriage between their offspring Mall Barnes and Frank Goursey is projected. After several rancorous confrontations and some farcical crashing around the countryside in the dark by all concerned, order and friendship are restored.

Though a long way from the blood-letting of the domestic tragedies of youthful marriage this play shows two mature marriages in difficulties. Indeed, in their introduction to the Nottingham Drama Texts edition of the play Michael Jardine and John Simons assert that it may be seen as 'an alternative presentation of some of the issues' raised in the domestic tragedies.¹¹⁰ Certainly Porter's play confirms our belief that then, as now, adultery, betrayal and unkindness are not the prerogative of young marrieds. Yet the domestic tensions in *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon* relate specifically to the difficult experiences of the ageing wife, setting this play apart from the other domestic tragedies.

From the outset Porter's two angry women are established as disobedient and disorderly refusing, in company and with much ill will, to do as their husbands ask. At a neighbourly gathering which rapidly turns sour, Mistress Goursey sits down to cards with Mistress Barnes and says she will play 'A pound a game' (1.1.93). Her horrified husband attempts to dissuade her, urging economy, but she is tartly defiant - 'No, we'll be ill housewives once:/You have been oft ill husbands - let's alone' (1.1. 97-98). Soon after this Mistress Barnes, who believes that her husband has been unfaithful with Mistress Goursey, sets up a vicious exchange of sexual double entendre over the card table. Barnes tries to curb her and gets short shrift:

Barnes: Go to - be ruled, be ruled!

Mistress Barnes: God's Lord! be ruled, be ruled!

What, think ye I have such a baby's wit

¹¹⁰ *Nottingham Drama Texts: The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, ed. by Michael Jardine and John Simons (Nottingham: Nottingham Drama Texts, 1987), p.iv.

To have a rod's correction for my tongue?

1.1.180-83

This defiant disobedience in the wives continues throughout the play until their somewhat unbelievable reconciliation in Act 5. Like other dramatists of the period Porter emphasises that it is weakness in a husband can allow a wife to develop such disobedient ways. This is seen particular with Goursey who sets a bad example in the home - explaining to his son how easy and pleasant it is to stray after marriage (3.2.1089-1117). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when he tries to conceal a letter from his wife she snatches it, provoking an unseemly struggle, verging on a fight, refusing all the while to be overborne by him - 'I will not be afraid at your great looks' (3.3.1218).

Yet the play also engages sensitively with female fears that undermine notions of growing old gracefully. Mistress Barnes' inability to make peace with her husband is rooted in her knowledge that she is ageing and her suspicion that he has been unfaithful. There is a deftly handled scene between Barnes and his wife in which Porter shows the husband's initial attempts to soothe and encourage his wife undermined by his unwitting revelation that her bad temper is destroying her charms:

O, do not set the organ of thy voice
On such a grunting key of discontent.
Do not deform the beauty of thy tongue
With such misshapen answers

2.1.480-83

Small wonder that her tight response is, 'So, have ye done?' (2.1.489), and that a full-scale row ensues. Her obvious reasons for opposing her daughter's

marriage to the son of her "enemy" are augmented by a jealousy of Mall which is rooted in age difference and sexual envy. She dismisses Mall as too young to marry and when her daughter counters with the obvious question about her mother's age upon marrying Mistress Barnes' attitude hardens further - 'How old so ere I was, yet you shall tarry' (2.1.654-5). Mistress Barnes sees the intervention by her son Phillip over the marriage as further confirmation of her husband's bad faith - 'Thou set'st thy son to scoff and mock at me' - and being schooled by her offspring only serves to emphasise her age (2.2.722).

This exploration of female fears is abandoned and a happy ending achieved -the wives being shamed into remorse and silenced at last by their newly-powerful husbands. Yet for all its confirmation of the importance of male control within marriage the play contains remarkable insights into the insecurities of a married woman growing old and knowing she is losing her sexual attraction.

Only in two plays of the period, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry VIII* by Shakespeare and Fletcher, do we find dramatists moving beyond the stereotypical images of wives and exploring what happens to a woman when she faces a crisis in her married life - a crisis made more acute because she is ageing. Though these two plays are very different we see in both mature wives handling situations which threaten their emotional lives, their social status and the independence they have previously enjoyed. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford triumph over the threat embodied in Falstaff by apparently being disloyal and disobedient wives but in fact setting their own, very moral, behavioural agenda. Queen Katherine loses her status and

therefore her title, despite being all that a good wife should be - and to add to her tragedy the attack upon her is initiated by the very person who is supposed to care for and support her. She becomes disobedient and - albeit briefly - outspokenly disloyal, but she maintains until her death the political and personal position she has chosen.

Although it is a comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, like the best of the genre, skates close to disaster for the characters concerned. The engaging story cannot conceal the fact that these mature wives face public shame if things go wrong for them. For their situation is serious. In *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon* the news of the quarrel between the women might be picked up by neighbours and criticised, but the cause of that quarrel - Mistress Barnes' accusations about her husband and Mistress Goursey - is kept firmly within the confines of the family. The two Windsor wives cannot hope for such privacy. Falstaff, an intruder into the domestic sphere, is no sly and secretive sinner and his plan to entrap the wives is aired with various fellow con-men and other parties. The whole purpose of such trophy-hunting is to advertise the continuing sexual potency of the male concerned so the reputations of these mature wives are very much at risk. In his discussion of community "policing" of morality F.G. Emmison cites the Chelmsford Ballads, which libelled local people, particularly wives accused of cuckolding their husbands. That such attacks resulted in the injured parties going to law is indicative of the very real threat posed to married women.¹¹¹ Ralph Houlbrooke also considers the 'sensitivity to imputation of sexual misconduct' within communities, finding this an explanation for the eagerness of parties

¹¹¹ Emmison, pp. 69, 71-79.

involved to 'go to law upon what first appear trivial grounds'.¹¹² Laura Gowing sees the use of church courts by women for sexual slander suits - 'the most popular type of litigation' - as allowing at least a measure of redress for wives with adulterous husbands. As she points out, male adultery was not grounds for marital separation as a wife's would be, but women could speak out about their grievances by publicising their husbands behaviour in court 'through the words of insult, centring the blame on other women'.¹¹³ However, for the woman whose sexual reputation was called in question - perhaps without cause - the situation would be less than empowering. As Tim Stretton comments, 'such allegations were invariably more potent when they were directed at women'.¹¹⁴ It is also telling that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is set within a rural community. Exploring records of the York Church courts A.J.A. Sharpe comments that more of 'the rural middling sort' were involved in costly and lengthy defamation cases brought on sexual matters, adding that the English villager would be well aware 'that reputations are more easily lost than gained'.¹¹⁵

It is clear that whatever scandal might fly around about Meg Page her husband, George, would not believe it. Their relationship is Shakespeare's only representation on stage of a comfortable marriage and it is interesting that he chooses a mature couple to "demonstrate" this enviable state. That

¹¹² Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation 1520-1570* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.81.

¹¹³ Laura Gowing, 'Language, power and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern London', in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. by Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker (London: UCL, 1994), pp.26-47 (pp.26, 32).

¹¹⁴ Stretton, p.212.

¹¹⁵ A.J.A. Sharpe, 'Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York', in *Borthwick Papers*, 58 (York: Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1980), 15-27 (p.18).

the pair use first names in public is an indication of mutual friendship. They may hold contrary views on a suitable husband for their daughter and scheme to outwit each other over this, but there is no malice involved and no bad feeling between them when they find their plans overturned. Fenton is accepted as their son-in-law with a combined, dignified front: after all, Anne Page has been provided with a convincing model of a companionate marriage by her own parents. A shared sense of the absurd may well be part of the good relationship of this long-married couple. Certainly Mistress Page is not the least flattered by Falstaff's attentions - 'What, have I scaped love-letters in the holiday time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them?' (2.1.1-3) - and this reference to the lack of such amorous attentions when she was younger suggests that her husband's wooing was of a more down-to-earth nature, of which she approves. And while Ford is easily swayed by Pistol's warnings about Falstaff and his wife - 'Twas a good, sensible fellow' (2.1.138) - Page is merely amused by Nym's turn of phrase and style of delivery, 'I never heard such a drawling, affecting rogue' (2.1.133-4).

So, with regard to Falstaff's behaviour, Mistress Page is secure in her husband's faith in her - 'He's as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause - and that, I hope, is an unmeasureable distance' (2.1.98-100) - and he is secure enough about her not only to treat the warnings of Pistol and Nym as a joke but also to include a reference to being cuckolded in the jest:

If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I
would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of
her than sharp words, let it lie on my head.

2.1.171-74

This is not the foolish trust of a simple man. Page may err on the side of giving Falstaff the benefit of the doubt (2.1.163-66) but he is a good judge of character, as his assessment of the bucolic host of the Garter shows (2.1.179-81).

Yet, while she will not face the pain of having the trust of a spouse tested, Meg Page is aware of the importance of maintaining her good name in public. She is also deeply affronted by the knight's assumption that she has been leading him on:

What an unweigh'd behaviour hath this Flemish drunkard
picked - with the devil's name - out of my conversation, that
he dares in this manner assay me?

2.1.21-24

It is worth noting here that despite her denunciation of such of unpleasant male activity - 'Why, I'll exhibit a bill in Parliament for the putting down of men' (2.1.27-8) - she tends to blame some 'unweigh'd behaviour' of her own for Falstaff's outrageous response. Even a strong-minded, mature wife, secure in her husband's trust, finds it difficult to break away from the judgement of her society that 'Frailty, thy name is woman' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.146).

Mistress Ford is much less fortunate in her marriage and sadly aware that her friend is 'the happier woman' (2.1.101). Ford's jealousy has nothing to do with passionate attachment to his wife. The language he uses when he pretends to be another lecherous wooer after Mistress Ford reveals that his notion of love is based on getting value for money - 'engrossed opportunities', 'fee'd every slight occasion', 'bought many presents', 'given largely', 'purchased at an infinite rate' (2.2.191, 191-2, 193, 194, 199-200). He is also

pathologically pessimistic about human nature in general, and women's behaviour in particular, and is obsessed with being right all the time. He at once assumes that both his wife and Mistress Page are unfaithful and takes a morbid pleasure in anticipating a public demonstration of this,

Well I will take him, then torture my wife, pluck the borrowed
veil of modesty from the so-seeming Mistress Page,
divulge Page himself for a secure and wilful Actaeon;
and to these violent proceedings all my neighbours shall
cry aim.

3.2.35-39

From the start we see the poverty of his relationship with his wife. Mistress Ford's attempts at affection are quickly put down (2.1.141-44) and after the uncomfortable comedy in Act 3, when Ford drags friends and neighbours through the house in search of his wife's lover, there is a charged and painful exchange between husband and wife:

Mistress Ford: You use me well, Master Ford! Do you?

Ford: Ay, so I do.

Mistress Ford: Heaven make you better than your thoughts.

3.3.192-95

Equally, Ford's venting of his frustration on the Old Woman of Brentford, by administering a thrashing (4.2) is funny because we know this is Falstaff in disguise, but is also disturbing in terms of the level of wrath exhibited by the furious husband, and the fact that he is attacking a woman he believes to be old. This is telling, in the light of my earlier comments about wife-beating. The Ford marriage is clearly uncomfortable and unstable and it is easy to

imagine a man so lacking in self-control devising many forms of 'torture' (3.2.35) for a wife believed false - her age proving no barrier.

The reputation of both women is at risk through Falstaff's lecherous meddling and Shakespeare also makes it clear that each wife has a measure of financial independence, as Falstaff ascertains early on. Mistress Ford 'has all the rule of her husband's purse' and Mistress Page 'bears the purse too' (1.3. 47-48, 61). Any tarnishing of her good name could result in the loss of this measure of autonomy. So, it is crucial for these women to publicly demonstrate that 'Wives may be merry and yet honest too' (4.2.94). By boldly pretending to be the disobedient, disloyal wives of the stereotype they make a complete fool of the man who, while being such an obvious scoundrel, can still undermine their hard-won, yet easily damaged, reputations.

Although the Ford relationship is seriously flawed, at the end of the play we are shown this mature married couple continuing to struggle along together. Ford's comment on Anne Page's match with Fenton that 'wives are sold by fate' (5.5.225) may reflect his own dissatisfaction with his marital purchase, but he appears now to accept such a deal, announcing his intention to 'lie with Mistress Ford' (5.5.237) that night and presumably on future nights too. In *Henry VIII* though, we have an exploration of the difficult territory of the separation and divorce of a mature married couple - a couple who are also King and Queen of England.

The subtle exploration of Katherine's position, first as a valued mature wife and then as a rejected marriage partner, achieves a complex character who engages our interest and sympathy. It can be argued that, as Queen of England and the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Katherine is not

an "ordinary" wife. In her discussion of queenship in the play Jo Eldridge Carney feels that this status implies 'a superiority over other women' and that once Katherine is 'stripped of her official trappings as queen her very identity is called into question'.¹¹⁶ However, I believe the playwrights make clear Katherine's awareness that, like her less elevated contemporaries, she owes her position in the world to that of her husband, knowing that if he divorces her on his terms she loses that position, her own good name and the legitimacy of her only surviving child. Her royal background, her 'friends in Spain', (2.4.53) even the regular public affirmations of her good character - from the Second Gentleman (2.1.158) to the King himself (2.4.133-40) - will mean nothing and she will be turned 'into nothing' (3.1.113) if she loses her place as Henry's wife. Carney's focus on queenship, presenting the characters of both Katherine and Anne as lacking 'individual features' and seeing Katherine 'associated with death, Anne with fertility and life' ignores a key aspect of the play.¹¹⁷ While the issue of fertility and lack of it is central to the plot and crucial to the fate of both women I argue that Katherine is more than a symbolic death figure here. The dramatists make an issue of her age, not just in terms of barrenness and death but to emphasise the length of her relationship with Henry, a relationship now under serious threat. In doing so they give us a moving and powerful account of an ageing wife reacting to the sudden withdrawal of marital security.

¹¹⁶ Jo Eldridge Carney, 'Queenship in Shakespeare's Henry VIII: The Issue of Issue', in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. by Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp.189-202 (p.191).

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.190.

With her first appearance in Act I the dramatists establish the strength of Katherine's position as Henry's wife and the Queen of England. She is clearly obedient and loyal, and speaks out only in the furtherance of her husband's good. Henry's gracious, 'Half your suit/ Never name to us: you have half our power' (2.1.11-12), could simply be public politeness, but his acceptance of her subsequent advice shows that he relies on Katherine in certain political situations like this. She loyally pinpoints the actions of Wolsey for which Henry will be blamed publicly and when Wolsey argues this it is the Queen who challenges him. She takes a hard line with the Cardinal, using strong, emphatic language - 'not wholesome', 'pestilent', 'tongues spit', 'curses now live', 'incensed will' (1.2.46, 50, 61, 63-64, 66) - while Henry can be detached, puzzled yet concerned - 'Taxation?/ Wherein? and what taxation?' (1.2.38-9). So when Wolsey attempts to defend his position Henry, independent of the sharp rebukes of his wife to his minister, can weigh in with sound, measured advice for the Cardinal (1.2. 89-103) which is immediately acted upon. Katherine's personal dislike of the Wolsey is evident but her outspokenness against him here is clearly allowed by her husband. She is permitted to play the role of the good wife who is a little too voluble but only out of love for her husband, a situation which emphasises the bond of trust between them.

She is less active when the Duke of Buckingham's alleged treachery is investigated. Her only interventions are important though - to rebuke the over-eager Wolsey for lack of 'charity' (1.2.143) and to alert Henry to the fact that the surveyor's evidence may be suspect:

You were the Duke's surveyor, and lost your office

On the complaint o'th'tenants. Take good heed

You charge not in your spleen a noble person

And spoil your nobler soul - I say take heed;

1.2.173-76

Henry doesn't see the importance of this but the Surveyor sensibly picks up the cue and duly swears to tell the truth, putting his evidence on a proper footing. Having a wife as sharp-witted and loyal as Katherine to watch his back is an advantage to the King and she clearly has his confidence.

Given this image of Katherine as good and loyal wife we do not expect the fireworks of a passionate defence from her when Henry initiates divorce proceedings in lavish style in Act 2. Initially, her plea for an adjournment and her publicising of her own record as a good wife are restrained, careful and well-argued. She presents her case as a partner of 'Upward of twenty years' to Henry (2.4. 34), and at first her tone is personal:

Heaven witness

I have been to you a true and humble wife,

At all times to your will conformable,

Ever in fear to kindle your dislike

2.4. 20-23

This image of an obedient wife is enhanced by her mention of the 'many children' she bore Henry (2.4. 35) and the very fact that she does not discuss the fate of these offspring gives a picture of shared loss between husband and wife. Moving from these intimate memories she challenges Henry to prove 'against mine honour aught' (2.3.37) and then shifts her discourse from the personal to the political, engaging with the arrangement of their marriage

by their fathers after serious thought and reference to 'a wise council' (2.4.49). Katherine carefully establishes her credentials as Henry's wife and the lawful, well-grounded, nature of their marriage.

When Wolsey enters the debate, however, Katherine's self-control wavers. At first she challenges his role as judge in the hearing, blaming him for having caused the dispute between her and her husband (2.4.76-77). Then anger and despair prevail and she lashes out at his 'arrogancy, spleen and pride' (2.4.108). Though her attack on Wolsey's speedy rise to power may be accurate this is not appropriate behaviour for a 'simple woman' (2.4.104) in such a position, and her subsequent refusal to return to court is hardly evidence of the 'meekness' which Henry then extols (2.4.135). Katherine is taking on the minister she dislikes, but while her anger about male 'cunning' (2.4.105) is focused on Wolsey it is clear that this also embraces the husband whose divorce strategy challenges her chastity and good name. Certainly it is Henry's personal request to 'Call her again' (2.4.122) that she so publicly refuses:

They vex me past my patience. Pray you, pass on.

I will not tarry; no nor ever more

Upon this business my appearance make

In any of their courts.

2.4.127-30

'They' and 'their' must include her husband, who is left to cover the unpleasantness she has created with an awkward eulogy to a wife who has shifted abruptly from bowing to his 'pleasure' (2.4.55) to being argumentative, vexed, impatient and, finally, disobedient.

We do not see husband and wife together again but Katherine's vigour in defending her marriage and her honour is still evident in her powerful confrontation with Wolsey and Campeius, when these 'free and honest men' (3.1.59) come to sound her out further on the divorce. She refuses to see them in private or allow any discussion in Latin, emphasising her own clear conscience and readiness to be examined, and also underlining the fact that she is England's Queen and has been for some time - 'I am not such a truant since my coming/As not to know the language I have lived in' (3.1.42-3). Similarly she uses her own lack of powerful friends at Court to bolster her request for help from Spain, playing up her position as 'a woman, friendless, hopeless!' (3.1.79). Her careful politicking is overcome though by righteous anger when the two churchmen urge her to knuckle under and accept Henry's protection or be sent away in disgrace - 'Ye turn me into nothing. Woe upon ye,/And all such false professors!' (3.1.113-14). Like Mariana in *Measure for Measure* (1604) she will have no status and will be open to calumny:

Duke: Why you are nothing then. Neither maiden, widow, nor wife.

Lucio: My lord, she may be a punk.

5.1.176-8

It is not surprising that Katherine's anger spills over at last into direct and devastating criticism of her husband and his withdrawal of mutual sexual pleasure and marital affection. All her hurt and sense of betrayal are articulated here:

Have I with all my full affections

Still met the King, loved him next heaven, obeyed him,

Been, out of fondness, superstitious to him,
Almost forgot my prayers to content him,
And am I thus rewarded?

3.1.128-132

In her mind there is no separation between King and husband, Queen and wife and she refuses to sacrifice her marriage to political expedience:

I dare not make myself so guilty
To give up willingly that noble title
Your master wed me to. Nothing but death
Shall e'er divorce my dignities.

3.1.138-141

This is a wife being outrageous, making a scene (she even drags in the friendless state of her women) and embarrassing her husband through his messengers.

She cannot sustain this position for, as she has already admitted, the only way she can touch Henry now is by doing what he wants, once more playing the role of good, supportive wife that we have seen in Act 1. She has no other way of engaging his affection - 'I am old my lords' (3.1.119). In this dramatic re-telling of would have been a piece of comparatively recent history Shakespeare and Fletcher create a challenging figure in this ageing wife struggling to hold on to herself in the face of the "nothing" of divorce. She does so with wit and words, which seem to be the only, limited, weapons of a wife stripped of the power given to her by her husband.

Yet there is another weapon available to the mature wife, as the wrinkled Hermione shows in *The Winter's Tale* - her silence. As a young wife

she speaks out strongly in her own defence against the accusations of her deranged husband, Leontes. Exonerated by the oracle she "dies" and so speaks no more until the final scene of the play when her "statue" comes to life in the presence of her penitent husband, her newly found daughter, and the court. Although she 'embraces' her husband (5.3.112) when this ageing wife gives voice at last she speaks only to her daughter - 'Tell me, mine own,/Where hast thou been preserved?' (5.3.124-25) - and promises to tell her own tale to Perdita,

For thou shalt hear that I,
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
Myself to see the issue.

5.3. 126-29

There is no mention of Leontes in the reason she gives for self-preservation.

This is in strong contrast to the reunions of Emilia and Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors* and Pericles and Thaisa in *Pericles*. In both plays the ageing husbands and wives believe their respective partners long dead. Though Emilia, now an Abbess, does not fall into her husband's arms she frees him and explains how she came to survive. She then happily arranges a feast to celebrate their reunion with each other and their sons. In *Pericles* Thaisa collapses at the sight and sound of her long-lost husband and there are tender moments between the ageing pair as they confirm identities and restore their relationship in an embrace. Only then is Marina attended to by her mother.

Hermione addresses not one word to Leontes, maintaining the removal of herself from her husband begun with the oracle's revelations. In age she is, demonstrably, the perfect wife - proved chaste, revived in obedience to her husband's wishes and silent towards that husband. This chilling image of wifely perfection casts an ominous shadow over the end of the play.

Chapter 3: Older Mothers

Lena Cowen Orlin points out that although Elizabeth I had no offspring of her own she was often referred to as virgin mother to her people in public writings of the period and appeared to embrace this self-image within a structure of “fictional families” for herself.¹¹⁸ The caring, nourishing and guiding behaviour implicit in motherhood clearly carries great symbolic weight here, matching the importance placed upon motherhood and positive maternal influence in society at this time, as recorded in other contemporary writings. The conduct-book genre is itself an example. The majority of such writing is male-authored during this period, yet advice texts by mothers are an exception to this rule. We find works appearing such as advice to sons from Elizabeth Grymeston in ‘Miscelanae, Meditations, Memoratives’ (1604) and Dorothy Leigh in ‘The Mother’s Blessing’ (1616), and a detailed advocacy of breast feeding by Elizabeth Clinton, Countess of Lincoln in ‘The Countess of Lincoln’s Nursery’ (1622). As Valerie Wayne points out ‘the writer’s role as mother offers her a position of authority from which to speak’, but it must also be noted that the women writers concerned are careful not to challenge the patriarchal structure. However, the very fact that texts by these female authors were published adds further evidence of the respect accorded to the image of the caring mother.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Lena Cowen Orlin, ‘The Fictional Families of Elizabeth I’, in Levin and Sullivan, pp.81-100 (p.90).

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Grymeston, ‘Miscelanae, Meditations, Memorative’ (1604); Dorothy Leigh, ‘The mothers blessing’ (1616); Elizabeth Clinton, ‘The Countess of Lincolnes nurserie’, in *The Paradise of Women: Writings by*

Given society's perceived importance of the role it is not surprising, then, that mothers feature so often on stage and that the majority of older women characters can be seen occupying this particular role. Therefore, this is a lengthy chapter. Initially I discuss and establish the "good" and "bad" stage stereotypes of the older mother. I then go on to explore the non-stereotypical presentations of this character. I have commented, in the Introduction to this study, on the fact that stepmothers appear rarely on stage at this time. However, when they are imaged it is in relation to stereotypes of motherhood and so it is sensible to include here consideration of the character of the older stepmother.

There is no specific advice material addressed to the mature mother herself at this time: all guidance is directed towards the young mother with emphasis upon her bonding with and caring for her new-born offspring and closely supervising their physical and spiritual growth and development.¹²⁰ Here anxiety is apparent about early over-indulgence and the spoiling of the child through unstable female influence. So, while advice for the new mother reinforces the importance of her involvement with her children, writers also warn of the dangers of any lack of rigour in the young mother's handling of her child's upbringing. The older mother appears, then, in warnings about the spoiling of sons where this is imaged as rebounding upon the mother in later

Englishwomen of the Renaissance, ed. by Betty Travitsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp.51-55, 56-57, 57-60; Valerie Wayne, 'Advice For Women From Mothers and Patriarchs', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.56-79 (p.56).

¹²⁰ See especially Valerie Fildes, 'Infant Care in Tudor and Stuart England', in *Midwife, Health Visitor and Community Nurse*, 2, (March, 1986), pp.79-83, and Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

life. In the *Overburian Characters* - 'Her Next Part' - the young mother bequeaths her unpleasant qualities to her eldest son and is seen to guide his education in entirely the wrong direction - 'her utmost drift is to turn him fool'.¹²¹ The result of this kind of wrong-headed maternal guidance appears in the character 'A Golden Asse' where the son, now grown, suffers the results of that early influence - 'knaves rent him like tenterhooks: he is as blind as his mother, and swallows flatterers for friends'.¹²² Two cautionary tales from Thomas Beard also show the long-term effects of early spoiling. He cites a Flanders mother who lavishes money on her two sons in their youth, 'against her husband's will', only to be racked with guilt when, as grown men, the pair fall 'from rioting to robbing' (O4^v). Her conscience 'told her that her indulgence was the chiefest cause' says Beard(O4^v). He goes on to describe another, mature mother having her ear bitten off by her son who, about to be hanged, heaps blame upon her for not chastising him more often in his youth(O4^v).

While the older mother may feature in texts which emphasise the importance of good maternal example in early childhood no attention is paid in the guidance literature to later issues for a mother, such as detaching from the life of the fully-fledged progeny and adjusting to the new roles of mother-in-law and grandmother. However, it appears from personal writing of the period and the presentation of the older mother on stage that certain kinds of behaviour were expected of her. Care for her adult children is crucial, of course, but more important than these is the provision of a good example to offspring, especially those who might go astray. Where her daughter is

¹²¹ Paylor, p.5.

¹²² Paylor, p.7.

concerned this example nearly always focuses on obedience to the dominant male in her life (father, husband or prospective husband) and emphasises the duties and responsibilities to be taken on with marriage. The ageing mothers in both *Appius and Virginia* (1563) by R.B. and John Phillip's *The Play of Patient Grissil* are both near death and vanish from the stage early on, so their most significant action is in giving their daughters sound advice on appropriate female behaviour in terms of obedience. Mater urges Virginia to 'be constant' to her husband and 'Love, live and like him well' (1.79, 80), while Grissil learns from her mother that 'many words' in a young woman 'is unfit' (315) and that she should 'grudge not in ought' to her father (318). It is interesting to note that in reality such obedient behaviour was neither enacted nor advocated by Margaret, Countess of Cumberland who challenged her husband's will on behalf of her daughter, Lady Anne Clifford. This resulted in much legal wrangling, and marital tussles for Anne but she expressed no criticism of her mother's actions and example, and when the Countess died Anne described the loss as 'the greatest and most lamentable cross that could have befallen me'.¹²³

A mother's role in the arrangement of a marriage for her daughter is imaged ideally as being supportive of the father's wishes. In reality, as in the case of Lady Elizabeth Coke, discussed in the previous chapter, a mother might violently oppose paternal marriage plans for a daughter, with public contention and disgrace as a result. On stage more appropriate maternal behaviour is seen in Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* and *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (1589) by Anthony Munday, where mothers who initially

¹²³ *The Diaries of Anne Clifford*, ed. by H. Clifford (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1990), p.36.

support their daughters' opposition to arranged marriages eventually bow to expedience and advise these daughters to do the same. Similarly, Lady Capulet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* shows a correct example to a daughter resisting her father's plans. However, her disregard for her daughter's feelings is callous - 'I would the fool were married to her grave.' (3.5.140) - so, while maternal firmness may be applauded, maternal unkindness in forcing a daughter to marry against her will is made more problematic on stage. Two plays by Fletcher, *The Night Walker or The Little Thief* (1611) and *Women Pleas'd* (1620) show widowed mothers initially in conflict with daughters for whom they have arranged marriages. The daughters, who have already made their own choice of husband, disobey their mothers and run away but eventually reconciliation is achieved. Each mother repents of her harshness while each daughter gains the husband she desires.

Whatever the relationship between mother and daughter the maternal example in preserving her daughter's chastity prior to marriage is seen as crucial. In Greene's *James IV* (1590) the monarch's extra-marital pursuit of Ida is frustrated by that young woman's modest good sense, inculcated by her mother. Indeed, the Countess of Arran warns that this is the case when seeing off the King's go-between Ateukin:

Good sir, my daughter learns this rule of me
To shun resort and strangers' company;
For some are shifting mates that carry letters

2.178-80

Similarly, Widow Capulet, in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602), is equally concerned for her daughter's chastity, supporting Diana's rejection

of Bertram in spite of their having fallen into poverty. The Widow agrees to help Helena bring off the bed-trick only when convinced it will not result 'in any staining act' (3.7.6-7).

These examples establish the stereotypically good mother on stage as a continuing role model for her adult daughter, one who demonstrates and encourages the cardinal female virtues of a male-governed society - chastity and obedience. Yet it was not unusual at this time for a mother to intervene in her adult daughter's life in the delicate area of marital conflict, where issues of female obedience would be challenged. Mendelson and Crawford cite church records of mothers attending court to speak out for daughters against abusive husbands.¹²⁴ This kind of maternal activity is also seen in Lady Anne Stanhope's letters to Sir William Cecil in 1569 on behalf of her daughter whose husband had sent her away, installing 'a naughty pack' in her place. She begs Cecil to use his influence with the erring husband to get her daughter re-admitted into the marital home. Yet the fact that Lady Anne treads warily here indicates that a mother must take care not to be seen as challenging the status quo with regard to marriage. While, with practical good sense, she urges that if mediation fails Cecil try and 'order it so that she may, having some allowance, live with her friends', Lady Anne does not speak in support of any separation. Instead she reassures Cecil, 'I will do the part of a mother to frame her to devise by all good and godly means possible to recover him to that contentation which should be their greatest comfort'.¹²⁵

Similarly, on stage a mother's participation in a married daughter's affairs is imaged as praiseworthy only if correct. Mistress Touchstone in

¹²⁴ Mendelson and Crawford, pp.160-61.

¹²⁵ Ellis, p.322.

Eastward Ho! (1605), by Chapman, Jonson and Marston, initially attracts disapproval by supporting the extravagances of her wealth-obsessed and status-seeking daughter, Gertrude. However, when the young woman's new husband loses all their money Mistress Touchstone adopts a more appropriate maternal stance by trying to instil proper behaviour into her daughter - 'Speak to your father, Madam, and kneel down [...] O Madam, why do you provoke your father thus?' (4.2.132, 182-83). Although she is a comic figure Mistress Touchstone expresses a mother's responsibilities in continuing to school a daughter in difficulties. The importance of perpetual guidance of this kind can excuse apparent acts of defiance by mother and daughter. In *The Triumph of Love*, one of *Four Plays or Moral Representations In One* (1612) by Fletcher, Beaumont and Field(?), Angelina cares for her daughter Violanta, who has given birth after secretly marrying the man she loves, against paternal wishes. However, new motherhood reminds Violanta of all that her mother has done for her:

Violanta: Alas, dear mother, you groaned thus for me,

And yet how disobedient have I been?

Angelina: Peace, Violanta, thou hast always been

Gentle and good.

3.100-103

The fact that they are complicit in defying the wishes of husband and father is offset by Violanta's newly-achieved penitence and appreciation of appropriate female behaviour, confirmed by her mother's tender silencing of her. The play's happy ending is, therefore, appropriate.

An older mother may be equally active and supportive on behalf of a son but, again, any such action is circumscribed by the more important criteria of her providing a strong example of proper female behaviour. Lady Anne Bacon, mother of Antony and Francis, continues to be closely engaged with the lives of her adult sons. Writing to them in 1590 this highly-educated parent gives unsolicited advice on everything from behaviour - 'courtesy is necessary, but too common familiarity in talking and words is very unprofitable' - to their everyday lifestyle - 'I pray you be careful to keep good diet and order'. She urges them not to let their men drink wine in hot weather, not to loan their own transport to others, and to get to bed earlier. Her tart reflection, 'my sons haste not to hearken to their mother's good counsel' indicates that the Bacon brothers do not spring into corrective action on receipt of her letters of guidance.¹²⁶ However, her interest and interference in their lives seems to spark no ill-feeling in her offspring. A letter from Francis to his mother in 1594 urges her to look after herself in turn - 'deny not your body the due, nor your children and friends and the Church of God which hath use of you' - and encourages her to 'use all the comforts and helps that are good for your health and strength'.¹²⁷ There is a deferential tone, but also kindness here.

Lady Katherine Paston also shows close maternal concern over the health and welfare of her son, William, while he is at Cambridge, urging upon him good behaviour and habits of hard work and being polite to his teachers. William is instructed not to eat too much fruit, to use liquorice rather than

¹²⁶ *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, 4, ed. by James Spedding (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1868), pp. 113-15.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.300.

tobacco and to avoid 'possetty curdy drinks' which his mother believes are 'most unwholesome and very clogging to the stomach'. Like the Bacons, William seems to take this fussing in his stride, writing back fondly. His mother is delighted by his reassurance that he likes to hear often from her, 'springing from thy dutiful love to me'.¹²⁸

As with daughters, so with sons, if a mother uses her position to attempt to influence and persuade in matters beyond the domestic she must do so with delicacy. This is apparent when Anne, Duchess of Somerset, writes to Sir William Cecil in 1565 urging his help and that of the Earl of Leicester in getting her son released from the Tower. He was held there after secretly marrying Lady Catherine Grey, one of the Queen's potential heirs. The Duchess carefully suggests that in pressing for the release of her son, 'the more shall you set forth the Queen's Majesty's honour; and as a mother I must needs say, the better discharge your callings and credits'.¹²⁹ This reference to her own position carries an image, albeit obliquely presented, of the approval of the mothers of the powerful men whose support she seeks. Where a mature mother steps beyond the bounds of appropriate behaviour it is clear that she cannot rely on maternal privilege for a defence, as Lady Lennox finds after organising the marriage of her son to another claimant to the English throne, the daughter of Bess of Hardwick. Lady Lennox's defence is that of the fond mother who claims her son had 'entangled himself so that he could have none other' and that she cannot but promote the marriage, 'he being mine only son and comfort that is left to me'.¹³⁰ Queen Elizabeth

¹²⁸ Hughey, pp. 72,78.

¹²⁹ Ellis, p.287.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.323-24.

ignored such maternal excuses, however, and imprisoned Lady Lennox for her political impudence.

This notion of a son as “comfort” to an ageing mother can be based in practicality. It is important to acknowledge that should a mother be widowed, or poor, a good relationship with a son could mean the difference between a comfortable and an uncomfortable old age. Strong ties would also benefit the mother’s own social position and enhance her influence. The mother of George Villiers was active in bringing her son to the notice of King James, and when he became the monarch’s favourite and she the Countess of Buckingham her power increased. In a letter of 1619 John Chamberlain records the Countess using that power to advance another of her offspring by singling out the daughter of the Lord Mayor of London who she ‘will needs have for her son Cristofer’. Though bride and father expressed reluctance Chamberlain records that the Countess’s wishes were backed by ‘messages sent him by the King’.¹³¹

While drama of the period often images love between mother and daughter this is never elevated to the almost reverential attitude seen in some stereotypical mother-son relationships on stage. In Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), for example, Isabella experiences a vision of her murdered son, Horatio, seated Christ-like in heaven, supported and uplifted by cherubim, and with his wounds 'newly-healed' (3.8.19). It is hardly surprising that Isabella goes mad with grief and frustration over the lack of justice for her seemingly sanctified son. Veneration of similar fervour grips Elinor, the

¹³¹ *A Jacobean Letter-Writer: The Life and Times of John Chamberlain*, ed. by Edward Phillips Statham (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1921), pp.179-80.

Queen Mother in Peele's *Edward I*, and her eagerness to be reunited with her 'lovely Edward' is not deemed foolish - 'tis but mothers love' - even when she faints away at the sight of her son (1.29.A2^v, 1.44.A3^r). In Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1602) we see the Duchess Martha prepared to wait all night 'on the humble earth' (4.2.1715) for the arrival of her son and when she falls asleep at this task she presents an image of 'one of her sex so perfect' that the vengeful Hoffman is unable to kill her (4.2.1864). When she learns that her son is dead she wants only to entomb herself in a cell with his body.

Yet the importance of balance in a mother-son relationship is also seen on stage, reflecting those contemporary social concerns that over-indulgence of a son can result in spoiling. That early indulgence of Leantio by his mother may be the cause of his rash behaviour is suggested in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, for although she lectures him on the dangers of running off with Bianca and the hazard of marrying without money he soon wins her over, boasting,

I know it is

The fortune commonly of knavish children

To have the loving'st mothers.

1.1.9-11

The mature mother in *The Custom of the Country* (1620) by Fletcher and Massinger is clearly made of sterner stuff and therefore able to provide a better example to a son who has lost moral focus. Guomar is torn between love for her son, Duarte, and adherence to honour - a virtue she has tried to inculcate in him. In spite of her best efforts, 'a Mothers prayer and care' (2.1.8), Duarte's experiences as a courtier have undermined her early

training, turning him into a boastful and quarrelsome oaf. Guomar attempts with 'th'authority of a mother' (2.1.62) to persuade him to alter his behaviour, but good advice goes unheeded so she warns that if he does not change his ways she will continue to pray for him but never give him 'means or favour' (2.1.166). Duarte ignores her entreaties and soon is killed in a brawl - or so it appears. Guomar finds she is harbouring her son's murderer, Rutillio. Ironically she has helped him with Duarte in mind:

and who knows not,
But the charity I afford this stranger
My only Son else-where may stand in need of?

2. 4.57-59

This motherly care backfires but as she has given her word to Rutillio not to betray him she lets her son's killer go free. Duarte, not dead, is restored to his former decent nature and, in disguise, rescues Rutillio, now languishing in a male brothel. Guomar traps Rutillio and though she has difficulty in approving the death of a murderer who 'looks not like one' (5.5.170) she keeps faith with her son (5.5.177). At this point Duarte reveals himself and a happy ending is achieved. Within the stereotype Guomar functions as the ideal mother - still caring for her son in his independent adulthood, ready to risk their relationship to chastise and caution, and uncompromising on standards she has imparted even when they run contrary to her own desires.

The stereotypically good mother can also demonstrate care of her son or sons by working on their behalf. In *Cymbeline* (1609) the imprisoned and entirely downcast Posthumous is lucky enough to have his mother return from the dead, with other deceased family members, to plead with Jupiter on his

behalf. The alive and strong-minded Agrippina, in Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), is equally caring of her sons' futures and her political manoeuvring on their behalf causes Sejanus some concern:

she tells

Whose niece she was, whose daughter and whose wife,
And then they must compare her with Augusta,
Ay, and prefer her too

2.222-25

Agrippina is outspoken - not a female characteristic prized by the men around her - and though, understandably, reduced to monosyllables at the news of her son Drusus' death she is soon crying out for vengeance against Sejanus and trying to inspire resistance in her remaining offspring:

Then stand upright

And though you do not act, yet suffer nobly:
Be worthy of my womb and take strong cheer.

4.73-75

Though Sejanus prevails his description of how he has dealt with the threat - 'set my axe so strong, so deep/Into the roots of spreading Agrippina' (5.249-50) - images a matriarch whose actions on behalf of her sons command respect, even if she is an enemy.

William Rowley's *A Shoe-Maker A Gentleman* (1608) also reveals a powerful mother taking control of her sons' lives at a time of crisis. Eldred and Offa want to revenge their dead father while their mother wants them safe in hiding until resistance stands a better chance. It is interesting to note that in this play the queen uses an important inducement, the mother's blessing, to

bring about her sons' agreement - 'I'll take my blessing off if you delay/And plant my curse instead' (1.B3^r). The blessing and the curse of a good mother, representing parental approval or disapproval, can be used powerfully by dramatists to establish audience response to the male offspring concerned. Eldred and Offa immediately obey their mother, disguise themselves and take up humble employment. As good sons and therefore good men they are seen to deserve happiness at the play's conclusion. However, in *Richard III* (1593) Richard seeks the blessing of his mother only to mock it (2.2.92-99) and we are not surprised when the Duchess later presents this bad son with a catalogue of his sins and delivers herself of a 'most heavy curse' (4.4.188). Throughout this confrontation Richard behaves in a thoroughly shifty fashion, trying to deflect his mother's attack with feeble jokes and eventually acknowledging his discomfort, 'You speak too bitterly' (4.4.181). The Duchess concludes her curse by negating maternal support - 'My prayers on the adverse party fight' - and uttering a grim prophecy - 'Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end' (4.4.191, 195). She exits without Richard making any response. Although this mother can no longer influence alteration in her son's behaviour her complete division from him is enough to silence the usually articulate Richard. Their total separation comes to mind again in Act 5 when the challenger, Richmond, refers before battle to his own 'loving mother' and is assured of her blessing (5.5.35-36).

The way in which ongoing maternal care can become maternal self-denial on a son's behalf is apparent in *The Spanish Curate* (1622), by Fletcher and Massinger, for Jacintha only reveals the legitimate and noble paternity of her son, Ascanio, when his father tries to claim the young man as

his bastard. Her years of silence for the good of her son - her 'dearest and[...]best one' (3.3.25) - have been spent in an entirely platonic relationship with another man to preserve her own chaste status, for the present and possible future benefit of Ascanio. Jacintha's behaviour is presented as admirable, yet dramatists are wary of presenting a positive view of maternal self-sacrifice when it involves undermining the moral principles a mother should continue to inculcate in her adult offspring. In Middleton's *No Wit No Help Like a Woman's* (1613) Lady Twilight lies about her chastity, at her son's request, in order to protect him, yet this is not seen as admirable self-sacrifice but the cause of further conflict. Another mature mother's lying about her chastity is shown in *A Fair Quarrel* (1617), by Middleton and William Rowley, as an example of weak parenting. Terrified that her son will be killed in a duel to defend her honour, the widowed Lady Ager convinces him that she has no honour worth defending. Appalled at her apparent treachery he fights the duel anyway, on another cause, and survives. At first Lady Ager also seems to value honour highly and when her son reveals the cause of his quarrel with the Colonel she reacts furiously, for the Colonel has called Ager 'Son of a whore' (2.1.85). This is a serious slander, so the fact that Lady Ager changes her mind and pretends it is true shows the extreme lengths to which she will go to protect her son.¹³² However, although she eventually tells him the truth - that she was always faithful to his father - she is punished for her bad example by losing her son's affections to his erstwhile enemy. Clearly, a mother's actions in guarding her offspring, whatever the cost to herself,

¹³² See my discussion of sexual defamation in Chapter 2.

cannot be applauded when they involve that mother undermining male reliance upon female chastity and honesty.

Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* (1591) is imaged as bad throughout the play, though her actions are rooted in desire to revenge the death of her son Alarbus. She is entirely frank with Saturninus about her intentions:

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

1.1.447-50

Yet even protestations of a mother's love cannot justify her actions, especially as her attitude to her surviving sons reveals her as a bad mother who encourages their rape and mutilation of Lavinia. Similarly, the Queen in *Cymbeline*, planning to poison both her husband and her stepdaughter, cannot be considered a good mother even though her motive is the advancement of her son, Cloten.

Exceptions to this condemnation of mother as avenging tigress appear in Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* (1611). That the Duchess Martha uses her feminine attractions to lure Hoffman to his death is justified dramatically by his being a 'cruel murderer' (5.3.2575) who has killed her son. It is also important that, although devious in her entrapment of Hoffman, Martha otherwise maintains her purity and goodness throughout the play - unlike Tamora and Cymbeline's Queen, who are morally flawed. The image of Arane, the Queen Mother in *A King and No King*, is more complicated. She is initially perceived as a wicked mother

determined to kill her son, Arbaces, but is finally revealed as a good mother, planning this murder simply for the benefit of her daughter, the true monarch. The problem is solved by the revelation that Arbaces is not Arane's son yet the happy ending, with the king who is no king marrying the newly-discovered queen, leaves an uncomfortable understanding that this mother's attempts at murder to gain her daughter's rights have been acceptable because the person she has tried to kill is not a blood relative!

A more clear-cut stereotype of correct maternal behaviour under stress is identified in *The Queen of Corinth* (1617) by Field, Fletcher and Massinger. Here the Queen retains a strong moral stance and rejects her son, Theanor, when he admits to raping two young women of the court. She hands him over for justice to be done, not because of any lack of 'soft compassion' (4.2.113) for him but out of determination to uphold the law of her country and to make him and others realise they cannot flout this. She does not waver from her duty, though longing for the intervention of 'some miracle' (5.4.183), and is perceived as a good woman, worthy of reward by winning a new husband in the contrived happy ending which also allows Theanor to avoid execution.

Although Shakespeare does not challenge the stereotype of the good mother in *All's Well That Ends Well* he provides an engaging critique of the role. The Countess sets her son an example of behaviour by compartmentalising her expressions of affection into what is appropriate for the public and private spheres of life. She is uncomfortable with showing maternal affection for her son Bertram, yet able to relate generously to the surrogate daughter, Helena. Her behaviour raises questions about her attitude to public and private behaviour and how her own confusion may have

influenced Bertram's immaturity. Barbara Everett points out in her introduction to the Penguin edition of the play that 'one of the things that gives it its unique tone is the gravity and intensity with which it focuses (and makes us focus) on behaviour' and it is evident that correct behaviour is very important to the Countess.¹³³ We see this in her comments to Lafew on the way Helena conducts herself (1.1.45-48) and in her advice to Helena against overdoing mourning - 'No more of this, Helen. Go to, no more' (1.1.48-49). Even on greater issues the Countess is concerned with social propriety, and when she hears that Bertram has abandoned Helena the Countess is as horrified at his discourtesy to the King, as at his dishonouring of the young woman (3.2.28-32). When Helena returns after this incident, accompanied by two French lords and clearly distraught, the Countess urges her to be calm - to behave properly - giving herself an example,

Think upon patience. Pray you gentlemen -
I have felt so many quirks of joy and grief
That the first face of neither on the start
Can woman me unto't

3.2.48-51

Her concern with Helena's behaviour is expressed in the context of her care of and affection for the young woman and this closeness is reflected in the way she re-lives her own youth through Helena's passion for Bertram - 'Even so it was with me when I was young' (1.3.124).

Yet Shakespeare shows that the Countess is unable to achieve such warmth with her son and while she admits affection for Bertram she cannot do

¹³³ *William Shakespeare: All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. by Barbara Everett (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), pp.21-22.

so to his face. In the opening scene of the play, when Bertram leaves for Court, the Countess expresses her feelings formally and obliquely - 'In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband' (1.1.1-2). Although the final lines of the Countess's farewell blessing reveal some anxiety for her son this is couched in terms of his lacking guidance and does not articulate motherly affection - 'good my lord,/Advise him' (1.1.68-79). The burden of her speech is advice to her son on correct behaviour - 'Love all, trust a few,/Do wrong to none' (1.1.61-62). Only when alone can the Countess reveal the depths of her affection for her son and even then this is linked to her love for Helena -

which of them both

Is dearest to me I have no skill in sense

To make distinction.

3.4.38-40

Bertram's equally formal farewell to his mother contains no loving words but focuses upon his own bereavement (1.1.3-4). Clearly his attitude is influenced by hers and since mother and son both mention the loss of husband and father at parting it could be that this dictates the way they now relate to each other. Shakespeare goes no further into this, but his expression of the Countess's self-restraint in connection with Bertram - set against her lively and relaxed exchanges with Lavatch her Clown and her overt care for Helena - hints at the complex and uneasy relationship between mother and son which he explores in much more depth in *Coriolanus* and *Hamlet*.

The stereotypical stage image of the bad mother - whether she is bad in relation to son or daughter - focuses on her selfishness in pursuing her own interests at the expense of an offspring's concerns. Even in comedies a mother cannot get away with behaving badly. Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) shows Mistress Merry-thought repudiating her grown son Jasper, spoiling her younger son Michael and then leaving home. Her attitude to her husband gives an entirely inappropriate example of female behaviour to Michael:

Let thy father go snick-up.

He shall never come between a pair of sheets with me

Again while he lives.

2. 81-83

Her punishment is to find the outside world less than appealing, and after losing her jewels she has to return to home and husband where, ironically, the rejected Jasper pleads for and gains her re-admittance.

Though Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611) is also a comedy it is a very dark one and here the mother, Maudlin Yellowhammer, shifts from being a source of comic embarrassment to her son to being 'a cruel mother' (4.2.59) to her daughter Moll, forcing her into a loveless marriage. Unmoved by Moll's apparent death Maudlin bustles off to fix up a soundly financed match for son Tim - 'We'll not lose all at once, somewhat we'll catch' (5.2.116). She gets her comeuppance here for Tim marries a whore believing her to be a rich gentlewoman and when the truth is revealed Maudlin ruefully advises her son to make the best of a bad job - 'There's no remedy now Tim' (5.4.110).

Middleton makes it clear that Maudlin's callous attitude to Moll is rooted in sexual jealousy of her daughter. She boasts, 'When I was of your youth, I was lightsome and quick two years before I was married' (1.1.8-9), but her youth has gone, of course. The destructive potential of such maternal envy is seen more dramatically in *The Turk* (1607) by John Mason. The ageing Timoclea is rejected by Mulleus as 'not pleasing' even though she reckons herself to be as attractive as ever - 'fresh and delightsome' (3.4.65) - so when the Turk falls for her daughter instead Timoclea murders the young woman. Even in a much lighter play, *The Sea Voyage* by Fletcher and Massinger, there are tensions between mother and daughter, sparked by the mother's sexual anxieties. Rosella may have good reasons to protect her daughter, Clarinda, and the rest of the young woman from contact with Albert the pirate and other 'poor and miserable men' (3.1.257), but when she finds this impossible her predictions are sour :

When you repent,
That you refus'd my counsel may it add
To your afflictions, that you were forewarned.

3.1. 248-50

Clarinda thinks her mother is simply too far gone in years to comprehend sexual attraction - 'You are angry mother, and ye are old too,/ Forgetting what men are' (4.2.29-30) - yet Rosella has not forgotten, finding one of the men attractive enough to disrupt her strict self-control,

A merry fellow,
And were not man a creature I detest,
I could endure his company.

3.1.324-26

Another kind of maternal jealousy appears in mother-son relationships, showing the bad mother's conflict with a daughter-in-law disrupting domestic harmony. In *The First Part of King Edward the Fourth* (1599), by Thomas Heywood, the Duchess of York angrily criticises her son's hasty marriage and his concern to win back her approval upsets his new wife. When Isabella, mother to Sforza in Massinger's *The Duke of Milan* (1621), rejects her son's new wife her actions have even more dreadful repercussions. Aware of the threat Marcelia poses to her power base Isabella trades insults with the young woman and is delighted when the marriage collapses, thanks to the vengeful plotting of the Duke's favourite, Francesco. Isabella will not help patch things up for her son - 'I had rather/Wait on you to your funeral' (4.111-12) - and by the time she realises the accusations against Marcelia are groundless - 'Our conscience tells us we have been abused/Wrought to accuse the innocent' (5.2.71-72) - it is too late to undo the damage, for her son has killed his wife.

The stage stereotype of the bad mother also shows that lack of care for her offspring can be driven by a desire for personal power. This is clearly most dangerous in a woman like Catherine, the murderous Queen Mother in Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), whose personal agenda is to govern no matter which son is on the throne - 'For I'll rule in France, but they shall wear the crown,/ And if they storm, I then may pull them down' (11.43-44). A similar image of a mother's bad influence is seen in Shakespeare's *King John* (1596). Queen Eleanor is described by John's enemies as 'An Ate stirring him to blood and strife' (2.1.63), and this image which links her to the instigator of moral blindness in humanity is telling. At first she appears just high-handed,

briskly identifying Philip the Bastard as her illegitimate grandson and urging him to follow her - 'I am a soldier and now bound to France' (1.1.150) - leaving John with little option but to agree and knight the newcomer. Once in France, though, Eleanor dominates the negotiations, attacking Constance, claiming to have evidence that will refute young Arthur's claim to the English throne and pressing John into tactical agreement with the opposition - 'Urge them while their souls/Are capable of this ambition' (2.1.476-77). That she uses her son to gain power for herself is seen in her suspicions that Constance is just such a mother - 'Thy bastard shall be king/That thou mayst be a queen and check the world' (2.1.122-23). Clearly, her behaviour has undermined her son who remains weak and vacillating after her death. Indeed, he seems lost without her driving force - his doleful 'what, Mother dead?' (4.2.127) is repeated in line 180, 'My Mother dead!' Interestingly, the third mother third mother in *King John* also demonstrates the dangers of moral weakness in a mother. Lady Falconbridge furiously denies the Bastard's accusation about his real parentage, to defend her honour, only to admit the truth - 'King Richard Coeur-de-Lion was thy father' (2.1.253) - when she learns her son is now a knight and rejecting any claim to her husband's estate, so leaving the field clear for her second, legitimate, son.

A desire for personal security can also motivate the actions of the bad mother. In contrast to uncompromising moral rigour of the Duchess of York in *Richard III* we see Queen Elizabeth's weakness when offered the chance to regain her former position at court, through her daughter. In her lengthy confrontation with Richard in Act 4 Elizabeth initially resists his arguments for

marrying her daughter, but he eventually convinces her that her own safety and that of the realm depend on her influence over the young woman:

Without her, follows to myself and thee,
Herself, the land, and many a Christian soul,
Death, desolation, ruin and decay.

4.4.338-40

Elizabeth's flat refusals turn to feeble questioning - 'Shall I be tempted of the devil thus?'[...] 'Shall I forget myself to be myself?'[...] 'Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?' (4.4. 349, 351, 357). That she decides to secure her own position at her daughter's expense marks her down as a stereotypically bad mother. The helplessness of a mature woman with no sympathetic male relatives to turn to and no independent means of existence is not touched upon. We are meant to share Richard's real feelings towards her - 'Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!' (4.4.362) - for her weakness emphasises his villainy. Strong defiance by a good mother at this stage in his plans would shift the dramatic balance of the play.

Gervase Markham and William Sampson in *The True Tragedy of Herod and Antipater* (1622) present a more sympathetic image of the mature mother who has to fend for herself. Mariam's mother, Alexandra, hurriedly changes her 'disposition' (2.1.351) to protect herself when Mariam faces a trumped-up charge of adultery. Alexandra's pragmatic view is 'It skills not whom we injure, whom we blind' (2.1.353) and the shock of having her mother turn against her breaks Mariam's defiance - 'if you think/I can be guilty, who is innocent?' (2.2 384-85). This bad mother redeems herself, however, by

setting her own interests aside - 'I will forget my greatness' (4.1.95) - to plan revenge when Mariam's innocence is confirmed.

In both Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1604) and Robert Armin's *The Two Maids of Mortlake* the selfish behaviour of widowed mothers causes problems for their respective sons. When choosing her second husband Castiza, in *The Phoenix*, wilfully ignores the recommendations of her friends and, more importantly, does not consult her son, Fidelio. The young man is concerned - 'that marriage knew nothing of my mind,/ It never flourished in any part of my affection' (1.1.159-60) - and with just cause, for the Captain is not a good catch. After a brief experience of matrimony he is eager to go back to sea, trying to sell Castiza on to another suitor. Fidelio's intervention 'in the stainless quarrel of her reputation' (2.1.11) rescues this foolish mother from the worst effects of her selfish choice. The Lady, in Armin's re-working of *Hamlet*, may seem to be acting selflessly in marrying Sir William Vergir so that her son Humil can in turn marry Sir William's daughter, but it is clear that she puts her own security first, making sure that her marriage settlement - 'three hundred by the year' (8.15) - is safe before pleading Humil's case. She is equally interested in her own sexual satisfaction, for although the reappearance of the husband she thought dead threatens this Lady's security she smuggles him into her household and into her bed. Discovering the two together and not realising this is his father, Humil informs Vergir and the *Hamlet* plot is amusingly tweaked as the stepfather urges the son to vengeance with the mother as prospective murder victim. Fortunately, Humil - like Fidelio - is a sensible son and confronts his foolish mother so the truth is revealed. Humil then acts with the Lady to foil Vergir's nasty schemes, and

again we see the dangerous consequences of a mother's selfishness averted by the actions of a decent son.

Maternal selfishness is also apparent in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) in the character of Gratiana who agrees to sell her own daughter, Castiza, to the Duke's son, Lussurioso. While this mature woman remains within the bad mother stereotype Middleton uses her situation - and aligns it to that of the other mature, stereotypically bad mother in the play, the adulterous Duchess - to explore male hypocrisy. There are some similarities between Gratiana and the Mother of the Courtesan in Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters* (1604) in that both are motivated by fear of poverty: in putting her daughter to prostitution the Courtesan's Mother hopes for wealth and security and to 'see those golden days again' (1.1.151). However, this mother and daughter are well established in world of sexual commerce and the Mother more closely linked to the stereotype of the bawd on stage, and I shall discuss her more fully in Chapter 5.

While Gratiana's weak and wicked behaviour is not condoned, Middleton shows the anxiety about her own security which convinces her to "sell" her daughter, Castiza, to Lussurioso. Gratiana does not feel her husband has left her financially comfortable - 'Indeed he was a worthy gentleman/Had his estate been fellow to his mind' (1.1.122-23) - and the disguised Vindice plays upon her anxieties to bring about the betrayal. She is 'touched[...]nearly' (2.1.108) by his arguments but succumbs entirely at the sight of the first instalment of hard cash:

these are

The means that govern our affections. That woman

Will not be troubled with the mother long,
That sees the comfortable shine of you;
I blush to think what for your sakes I'll do.

2.1.123-28

Gratiana is perfectly aware of what she intends and although she may blush at her own behaviour this mother is not prevented by any twinges of conscience. Her limited moral values are seen in a comically muddled yet revealing speech when she airily sets aside Castiza's concern with her honour. According to Gratiana the young woman's liaison with Lussurioso will raise her above the 'mean people, ignorant people' (2.1.150) who value honour and into the society of 'The better sort' who 'cannot abide it' (2.1.151).

Like her brother, Castiza expresses horror at this unmotherly behaviour but, unlike Vindice, she is concerned about Gratiana and, though aware of her own danger, struggles to reclaim her mother. She speaks of losing Gratiana - 'Pray you did you see my mother? Which way went you?' (2.1.162) - of Gratiana changing out of recognition - 'It is a wise child now that knows her mother' (2.1.167) - and even of Gratiana as a victim of demonic possession - 'Mother come from that poisonous woman there[...] Do you not see her? She's too inward then' (2.1. 239, 241).

When confronted with her crime by Vindice and Hippolito Gratiana duly repents, weeping and praying for forgiveness but the nature of this confrontation is disturbing. Though we apparently see a bad mother schooled for her own good and thus redeemed by her sons, Middleton places this image within the context of physical intimidation of an ageing woman by two young and vigorous men. The stage directions state that Vindice and

Hippolito are armed and that both have hold of their mother, but even without this indication of the dynamics of the scene it is clear Gratiana is physically overwhelmed and in fear for her life - 'What mean my sons? What, will you murder me?' (4.4.2). This dramatic image connects with Hamlet's threatening behaviour to his mother, but in that play Shakespeare moves beyond maternal stereotyping in the character of Gertrude and I shall discuss her in the next section of this chapter.

Supervacuo and Ambitioso are also determined to punish their mother, the Duchess, for her sexual adventures. That the Duchess is a bad mother is made clear in the way she pleads for the life of her youngest son, guilty of rape. While apparently serious in her urging that justice 'Temper his fault with pity' (1.2.26) her language is laced with sexual innuendo (1.2.37-39) and when she blames her husband for not supporting her this is done in sexual terms, 'Oh, what it is to have an old-cool duke/To be as slack in tongue as in performance' (1.2.74-75). Although judgement upon her son is suspended she decides to punish her husband anyway, by cuckolding him. While Supervacuo and Ambitioso are determined to 'prevent' (4.3.17), with the aid of a rapier, her relationship with socially inferior Spurio, they quickly alter priorities when the old Duke is discovered murdered. As Supervacuo advises, 'Learn of our mother, let's dissemble too!' (5.1.114), and the two are soon plotting against the new ruler, and each other. Middleton makes this pair entirely obvious in their self-serving behaviour, while Vindice and Hippolito appear unselfconscious in their hypocrisy towards their mother.

In his discussion of the images of families in the play Jonas A. Barish argues that the two sets of sons have different attitudes towards their bad

mothers, with Gratiana's two 'however roughly they proceed' being 'bent on reclamation' of their mother, and he sees their intimidation of their ageing parent as ending with 'a loving reconciliation among all three'.¹³⁴ However, I feel that Gratiana's grovelling repentance - 'to myself I'll prove more true./ You that should honour me, I kneel to you' (4.4.37-38) - hardly constitutes a sound basis for Barish's perceived 'loving reconciliation', especially as it comes so soon after apparent threats against her life. This mother's true reclamation takes place in the scene that follows her humiliation at the hands of her sons. Castiza now agrees to Gratiana's proposition and it is this which brings home to her mother the full implication of what she has done:

I am recovered of that foul disease
That haunts too many mothers. Kind, forgive me;
Make me not sick in health. If then
My words prevailed when they were wickedness,
How much more now when they are just and good!

4.4.121-25

The tension between the penitent mother and the apparently unmoveable daughter is powerfully developed in this short scene until Castiza reveals that she has no intention of giving herself to Lussurioso:

Oh mother, let me twine about your neck,
And kiss you till my soul melt on your lips;
I did this but to try you.

¹³⁴ Jonas A. Barish, 'The True and False Families of *The Revenger's Tragedy*', in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honour of Madeleine Doran and Mark Eccles*, ed. by S. Henning and others, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), pp.145-54 (p.151).

4.4. 146-48

Rather than battering her mother into submission, Castiza plays a loving game which enables Gratiana to understand the enormity of what was so nearly achieved and to become a stereotypically good mother once more. Middleton's final image of the two women shows them as models of female perfection - young and old. The treatment of both these characters at the hands of their menfolk is matched by the rank hypocrisy of the Duchess's sons and is typical of the corrupt, male-dominated society Middleton attacks in this play.

Though she is not necessarily imaged as a bad mother the mature woman who causes embarrassment for her offspring is often a comic stage stereotype. That the offspring concerned is always a son touches on adult male anxieties over such behaviour, but in the majority of these situations the son is not an admirable person himself and so humour is to be had at the expense of both embarrassing mother and squirming son. For example, Edricus in *Edmund Ironside* (1595) is appalled when his father Edrick and his mother claim their relationship to him. He gets rid of them by having them beaten, but not before his mother reveals that he is quite correct in denying Edrick's paternity, 'for in faith my husband is none of his father, for indeed a soldier begot him of me as I went once to a fair' (2.2.498-500).

Middleton uses a similar theme in *Michaelmas Term* in which poverty-stricken Mother Gruel arrives in London seeking her son Andrew, who has

changed his name to Lethe and is aspiring to high status and a wealthy marriage. She doesn't even recognise her smartened-up son and when she talks to him, seeking information, Mother Gruel comically reveals enough of his background and true nature to make him uncomfortable and delight the audience:

I have known the day when nobody
cared to speak to him[...]
His virtues? No, 'tis well known his father was too
poor a man to bring him up to any virtues[...]
he has no good parts about him.

1.1. 274-75, 280-82, 285-86

To secure this loose cannon of a mother the still unrecognised son employs her to carry messages to his prospective bride, and Mother Gruel embarrasses him further by delivering the subsequent rude rejection to Lethe with simple frankness in front of the very friends he wants to impress. Middleton adds an interesting edge, however, when Lethe, faced with punishment at the end of the play unless he can get someone to speak on his behalf, turns to his mother sure she will help him. Realising her cheapskate employer is her 'wicked son Andrew' (5.3.155) Mother Gruel takes her revenge. She delivers a brisk sermon on how he has changed - 'when thou had'st scarce a shirt, thou had'st/ More truth about thee' (5.3.161-63) - and then falls tantalisingly silent. The play ends with neither audience nor Lethe knowing if she will eventually plead for him. Embarrassment is the only form of punishment facing Abraham, in Nathan Field's *A Woman is a Weather-Cocke* (1609) whose mother, Lady Ninnie, shames him with her drunken and

incontinent habits - 'I have seen her so bepiss the rushes as she has danc'd/ at a wedding' (3.2.25-26). However, he is an unpleasant young man and gains no sympathy here. Again, when the horrid Tim returns from Cambridge in *A Chaste Maid In Cheapside* his doting mother feeds him plums 'like a child' (3.2. 155), forces him to kiss her female friends and reveals his adolescent failings to his tutor. 'These women must have all out' Tim complains (4.1.63) but he clearly deserves such a mother.

It is interesting to note that in Middleton's *The Witch* (1615) even the most powerful and unpleasant of witches, Hecate, who boils up unbaptised infants is mocked behind her back by her son, Firestone. While she dotes on him he merely wants her out of the way, describing his mother, with her companion witches, as 'foul sluts' (3.17). His reason for disliking Hecate clearly has to do with her power, which he does not share. As she flies up to join her spirits he sulks below, 'Well mother, I thank your kindness: you must be gambolling i'the air, and leave me to walk here like a fool and a mortal' (3.81-83). The resentment of the son of a witch who cannot attain his mother's superior power is comparable to that of mortal progeny who are equally aware of the potent "magic" any mother has to turn her adult offspring into a cringing child once more with an embarrassing word or action.

The dramatic strength of stereotypical good mothers and bad mothers may be limited but their presence is important as a reminder to both offspring and audience of the principles of right and wrong. The good mother emphasises sound moral attitudes, the bad or weak mother either creates present problems for her offspring by selfish behaviour, easily identified and

condemned, or shows how her early influence may be responsible for a child's current reprehensible behaviour.

As I indicated in the introduction to this study, the older mother is rarely imaged on stage as a woman in her own right. Where she is, age and the ageing process is either a direct motivating force for the mother concerned or, when taken into consideration, adds intensity to the behaviour and actions of the character and to our appreciation of her. I discuss the plays in which these non-stereotypical mothers appear out of chronological order but connected by what motivates the behaviour of the woman concerned. The desire of Volumnia in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* to have her personal ambitions for her son fulfilled is an accepted aspect of the play, but the approach of her old age adds urgency and pressure and, I argue, this undermines her attempted manipulation of her son. The Duchess Sophia in *The Tragedy of Rollo Duke of Normandy* (1619), by Fletcher, is also motivated by personal ambition in her declining years and she, too, miscalculates in her intervention in the lives of her sons. In the character of Cornelia, the ageing, widowed mother in Webster's *The White Devil*, we see the importance she places on security and honour for herself and her family, allowing this to override her own morality.

Anxiety about age itself and the physical effects of the ageing process is most apparent in mothers who are seeking sexual satisfaction, often with inappropriate disregard for their own good name and that of their offspring. Here I explore the character of Eugenia, the Queen Mother of Spain, in *Lust's Dominion or The Lascivious Queen* (1600) attributed to Dekker - the subtitle indicating how her behaviour should be viewed - and I compare her to the equally sexually charged Brunhalt in Fletcher's *Thierry and Theodoret* (1617). I contrast these larger-than-life lustful older women with Webster's more

subtle presentation of desire in old age, in the character of Leonora in *The Devil's Law Case*.

In all these plays the ageing mother is, or soon becomes, a widow and her main focus of conflict is with her son or sons, resulting in acrimony and division. Clearly, playwrights see and capitalise on the dramatic power of this most complex of male-female relationships in which the man can never escape the knowledge of his early and complete dependence upon a woman he may now support, guide, restrain or even punish. On stage these mothers are also connected through their outspokenness and it is this uncontrolled female uttering which, stereotypically, marks them out as bad older women who do not comply with male constructed standards of female behaviour. However, in the final play I consider - Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601) - Gertrude, the mother in question, is far from outspoken. In her silence and her submission to male governance she seems the perfect pattern of female behaviour, yet Shakespeare shows how such passivity enables the males around this mature woman to create their own versions of her character. This becomes particularly dangerous for Gertrude when her son's images of her apparent sexual license result in a brutal schooling.

Volumnia's motherly feelings for Coriolanus are openly passionate and possessive - 'If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love' (1.3.2-5). Such robust sexual imagery is hardly

appropriate, especially as she is using it to compare her own attitude to Coriolanus' absence to that of his actual wife, Virgilia. Yet it shows that Volumnia still sees herself as being powerfully connected to her son and entitled to share the honours he is winning. And although the picture conjured is of herself as subservient female recipient of her son's male 'embracements' she is soon revealed as a woman who has so thoroughly internalised traditional masculine values as to take them as a model for herself. Instead of occupying a female place within this male-dictated structure Volumnia has adopted, and adapted, male behaviour, and so the mother who represents herself as her son's "wife" is, in truth, more of a strong father figure to him.

She has certainly raised Coriolanus to be vigorous, with her own strength as a bench mark:

To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned
his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I
sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a
manchild than now in first seeing he had proved
himself a man.

1.3.13-17

So, the news of Coriolanus' triumphant return is made more splendid for Volumnia by the fact that he is wounded - 'I thank the gods for't' (2.1.119) - and she recalls the other injuries her son has amassed: she knows his victories by the body map of his scars.

Her toughness is in direct contrast to the care and compassion for Coriolanus expressed by older male characters in the play. After Coriolanus' first skirmish Lartius fusses over him, wanting him to take some rest - 'Thy

exercise hath been too violent/ For a second course of fight' (1.6.15-16). Following another scrap it is Cominius's turn to cherish Coriolanus, wishing him 'conducted to a gentle bath/ And balms applied' (1.7.62-64). Yet in exploring the idea of a mother who behaves like the hardest man in Rome, Shakespeare not only highlights the battlefield tenderness of masculine father-figures but also engages with negative images of fathers, who are either absent (as in the experience of Coriolanus himself – both as son and father) or deviant, weak and indecisive. Menenius, trying to calm the hungry and angry mob, likens the patricians of Rome to fathers caring for their children. It is promptly pointed out to him that these are fathers who not only keep their children short but are likely to turn on them, cannibal- fashion, in time of need:

They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish
and their storehouses crammed with grain [...]
If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's
all the love they bear us.

1.1.77-79, 82-84

When Coriolanus's banishment from Rome brings vengeance down on the city, through his new alliance with Aufidius, we see much hand-wringing, whining and divisive blame-laying among the city elders. Cominius and Menenius taunt the tribunes about the 'good work' they have done in getting Coriolanus banished (4.6. 83, 9, 99, 105, 123-24, 155) - indeed Menenius is still at it in Act 5 - while the tribunes in turn claim that it's not their fault. None of this is stereotypically strong, responsible, manly behaviour. As Cominius moans:

Desperation

Is all the policy, strength and defence

That Rome can make

4.6.134-36

In a society where men behave like this when trouble looms it is not surprising that Coriolanus looks to his mother as a source of masculine strength and inspiration.

The masculine aspect of Volumnia's character is discussed by Coppelia Kahn, who identifies it as a crucial element of her power, and by other critics, who explore Volumnia's behaviour in terms of the way she exercises control over her son.¹³⁵ Janet Adelman considers the feeding metaphors within the play and initially sees Volumnia as withholding nourishment from her son as a means of maintaining control over him.¹³⁶ Later she pictures Volumnia as a 'cannibalistic mother who denies food yet feeds on the victories of her sweet son'.¹³⁷ Thomas Sorge refers to Volumnia as one who has 'fashioned' her son and who 'may consequently dismantle her creation'.¹³⁸ The idea of Coriolanus as being sacrificed to his mother is also taken up by Madelon Sprengnether, who sees this as 'a perverse fertility rite

¹³⁵ Coppelia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.147.

¹³⁶ Janet Adelman, 'Anger's My Meat': Feeding, Dependency and Aggression in *Coriolanus*', in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. by Murry M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp.129-149.

¹³⁷ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin In Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.158.

¹³⁸ Thomas Sorge, 'The Failure of Orthodoxy in *Coriolanus*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. by Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp.225-241 (p.237).

that benefits no one'.¹³⁹ With so much emphasis on Volumnia's apparently abusive manipulation of her son it is refreshing to find Theodora A. Janowski taking issue with critics who see her as entirely selfish and manipulative. Janowski explores Volumnia in relation to the limited power perceived as appropriate for such a woman at the time the play was written and questions whether that power is 'really so strong as to allow her to control completely the personality and actions of her son?'.¹⁴⁰

However, none of these critics touches on the fact that Volumnia is also an ageing mother, in my view an essential motivating influence on her behaviour. Indeed, it is something she herself draws attention to and which shifts the balance in her relationship with her son. When he returns victorious she declares:

I have lived
To see inherited my very wishes
And the buildings of my fancy

2.1.195-97

The linking of 'have lived' and 'inherited' images her own death and she triumphantly presents herself as an ageing matriarch who has seen achieved almost everything she had mapped out in her mind for her son. He just needs to attain the 'one thing wanting' in her plans, a consulship (2.1.198). Volumnia aims to see her son settled in an appropriate civic role which will crown his

¹³⁹ Madelon Sprengnether, 'Annihilating Intimacy in Coriolanus', in *Coriolanus: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995), pp.179-202 (p.195).

¹⁴⁰ Theodora A. Janowski, *Women in Power in Early Modern Drama* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p.103.

military achievements. However, this requires Coriolanus to move into a political mode of being and he warns her that he's not capable of doing this:

Know, good mother,
I had rather be their servant in my way
Than sway with them in theirs.

(2.1.199-201)

She tries to coach her son for his new role but in instructing him in political dealings she shifts from her straightforward, masculine attitude into stereotypical feminine behaviour, demonstrating compliance and compromise:

now it lies upon you to speak
To th'people, not by your own instruction,
Nor by th'matter which your heart prompts you
But with such words that are but roted in
Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
Of no allowance to your bosom's truth.

3.2.53-58

At first Coriolanus is coerced by his mother into being 'humble as the ripest mulberry' (3.2. 79) but finds he cannot sustain this. Volumnia punishes him by withdrawing her support - 'Do as thou list' (3.2.128) - and he is childishly contrite:

Mother, I am going to the market-place.
Chide me no more [...]
Look, I am going

3.2.131-32, 134

The dislocation in their relationship is a direct result of Volumnia's determination to crown her old age with her son's glory and leads to Coriolanus's severance from Rome and his eventual death. Her ambitions also undermine her own self-assurance. Because she attempts to change her son's nature by changing her own she is left more vulnerable than he is when all comes to grief. Coriolanus has at least stuck to his guns but Volumnia has forfeited her old strength and standing, and not only in her son's eyes. We are aware of a new carefulness in her as she urges her departing son,

Determine on some course
More than a wild exposure to each chance
That starts i'th'way before thee.

4.1.36-38

Coriolanus would like the old, tough mother back 'Where is your ancient courage?' (4.1.3) but when he goes he lumps Volumnia in with the others - Virgilia, Memenius and Cominius - who are variously drooping and weeping. I see this as a crucial moment for Volumnia. She is not seeing her son off to a 'cruel war' (1.3.13) and the anticipated glories which have sustained, even justified, her own existence. This is her son's dismissal and disgrace and it renders her weak and inarticulate. Her subsequent confrontation with the tribunes has only a faint echo of her old spirit and this is collapsed by what is easily identified by the men as the stereotypical ranting of a foolish, ageing female. Almost too tearful to make them understand her feelings she is soon incoherent - 'If that I could for weeping, you should hear-/Nay, and you shall hear some' [...] 'I'll tell thee what - yet go./Nay but thou shalt stay too' (4.2.15-16, 24-25) – and as a result becomes the butt of standard jibes against

garrulous old women - 'They say she's mad' [...] 'Are you mankind?'[...] 'Why stay we to be baited/With one that wants her wits?' (4.2.11, 18, 46-47).¹⁴¹ She makes aggressive, yet useless and self-destructive statements – 'Anger's my meat, I sup upon myself' (4.2.53) - and is even reprimanded by the previously devoted and submissive Menenius, 'Peace, peace, be not so loud' (4.2.14).

It is a different Volumnia, ageing and pitiable, who goes to plead with her son for Rome. She still tries to manipulate Coriolanus - 'thou art my warrior./ I holp to frame thee' (5.3.62-63) - but her old assurance has gone and she places herself as a stereotypical older mother, no longer masculine and strong but female, ageing and helpless, fearful of losing 'The country, our dear nurse, or else thy person,/ Our comfort in the country' (5.3.111-12). Her language becomes domestic, diminished and self-pitying:

Thou hast never in thy life
Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
Has clucked thee to the wars and safely home

5.3.161-64

Again she urges political compromise upon him, and this time she prevails.

Much has been made of the moment when Coriolanus gives way to his mother and the linked stage direction *he holds her by the hand, silent*. Adelman sees this as Coriolanus becoming 'a child again', while Sorge feels Volumnia has so dismantled her son as to reduce him to 'a womanly

¹⁴¹ For example, the elderly Queen Margaret is treated to similar verbal scorn in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and I discuss this in Chapter 4.

silence'.¹⁴² Again, though, Volumnia's age is not taken into account, yet this is apparent in her helpless and pathetic final words:

I am hushed until our city be afire,

And then I'll speak a little.

5.3.182-83

At this point a son might well take his mother's hand, motivated not by a return to childhood but by mature sympathy for an older woman whose helplessness has succeeded in winning him over but who doesn't recognise the awful significance of her successful pleading - 'The gods look down and this unnatural scene/They laugh at' (5.3.185-6).

We do not know if Volumnia becomes aware of the 'unnatural' thing she has done as Shakespeare gives us no further insight into her feelings. She is feted in procession as the saviour of Rome in Act 5 scene 5 but does not speak again. Her initial masculine strength has gone and in old age her once assertive language is finally reduced to appropriate female silence.

A similar eventual marginalisation is experienced by the older mother, Sophia, in *The Tragedy of Rollo Duke of Normandy*, after her brief occupation of the political limelight as she intervenes in the lives of her warring sons, Rollo and Otto. Initially she is imaged by Beaumont and Fletcher as 'a weak woman' (1.1. 108) but she soon blossoms into an active, tough-talking diplomat as she takes up the task of brokering peace between her sons, clearly relishing the public activity which so revives her. Unlike the masculine Volumnia, Sophia comfortably accesses the very personal language of motherhood and uses it to try to reconcile the brothers, urging that they

¹⁴² Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p.161; Sorge, p.237.

abandon their quarrel out of obedience and respect to her - 'Your duty should be swifter than my tongue,/And join your hands' (1.1. 260-61). Although Otto is moved Rollo proves less malleable and Sophia changes tack, now pointing out the folly of civil war - 'tis still desperate madness,/To kill the people which you would be Lords of' (1.1.319-320) - and this argument succeeds with Rollo but not in the way she wants. His suggestion that the brothers divide the Dukedom between them horrifies Sophia - 'Divide me first or tear me limb by limb' (1.1.332).

It is clear that she is not just a mother, wanting family peace at any price. Her entry into the political arena has stimulated her own judgement of the situation and she acknowledges that she wants Normandy to remain whole to ward off invasion and to maintain value. She likens her country to a diamond which,

cut in pieces, (though these pieces are

Set in fine gold by the best workman's cunning)

Parts with all estimation:

1.1.351-53

Confident now in her own ability to combine the political and the personal Sophia draws on maternal images to finally achieve reconciliation between her sons, suggesting that if they really want to go to war with each other they should begin with, 'the last and worst act of tyrannies,/ The murder of a Mother' (1.1.370-71), and this appears to clinch the peace. Her own investment in establishing peace and the success of her diplomacy result in re-invigoration and rejuvenation - 'Now I am straight my Lords and young again,/ My long since blasted hopes shoot out in blossoms' (2.3. 10-11). She

accepts the remarkable flattery of Aubrey which not only praises her 'woman's goodness' but also encourages her to see herself as a near-deity, capable of absolving sins and generating sanctification:

May the most sinful creatures of thy sex,
But kneeling at thy monument, rise saints.

2.3.20, 21-22

Even such successful intervention by a woman in affairs of state is seen as problematic and the dramatists convey an ambivalent response to Sophia's actions. Her success gives credibility to this kind of outspokenness as Aubrey confirms - 'May never woman's tongue/ Hereafter be accused, for this one's goodness' (1.1.383-4). However, Rollo's favourite, Latorch, equates this with female subversion of male strength, 'where is your understanding [...]The tempest of a woman's sighs hath sunk it' (2.1.29, 32).

When Rollo reveals himself in his true murderous colours Sophia shows great bravery, physically trying to protect the unarmed Otto from his brother's attack. However, Otto's death undermines her brief triumph over old age and she reverts to submissive female behaviour, cowering under Rollo's threats and obeying his orders. She advises her defiant daughter, Matilda, 'serve his will in what we may,/ Lest what we may not he enforce the rather' (3.1.165-66). Now the younger women in the play attain centrality as they plot to kill Rollo, and Sophia is sidelined, what maternal influence she had subverted by the self-centred nature of her interference in the lives of her sons.

In *The White Devil* Webster engages with dangerous outspokenness in a mature mother who is driven by fear of losing the little that she and her

family possess. Cornelia may seem the model of good parenting by intervening in the seduction of her married daughter, Vittoria, by Duke Bracciano, yet we are soon made aware that it is not outraged morality that initially grips Cornelia, but a desperate fear for the status and future of her family and, by implication, of herself. This is clear in her reflections on overhearing the lovers:

My fears are fall'n upon me, O my heart!

My son the pander: now I find our house

Sinking to ruin. Earthquakes leave behind,

Where they have tyrannized, iron or lead, or stone,

But - woe to ruin - violent lust leaves none.

1.2. 216-20

The image of 'our house' - the family and family honour - in ruins is powerful, and her personal dread of 'our fall' (1.2.269) is that of a widow whose husband sold all his land leaving her with limited status (1.2.318). Cornelia also sees Flamineo - acting as pander to the Duke and Vittoria - putting family honour and security at risk. This fear of loss of honour can certainly be seen to influence her outspoken attack on the Duke. She harangues him, calling him 'adulterous' to his face, announcing the unexpected arrival of his wife, and apparently reminding him that he should be an example of proper behaviour (1.2.284, 287-89). Completely panicked by her mother's ferocious attack Vittoria kneels to plead her own helplessness in the face of the Duke's relentless pursuit and Cornelia kneels with her, spelling out the hard lesson of how society views a treacherous wife - 'May'st thou be envied during his short breath/ And pitied like a wretch after his death' (1.2.299-300). As Laura G.

Bromley points out, in her exploration of feminine identity in the play, both Bracciano and Flamineo 'attack her personally in terms reserved for women who fail to be compliant' - Flamineo connecting Cornelia with wickedness, 'What Fury raised thee up?' (1.2.270). However, while Bromley sees this behaviour of Cornelia's as 'the voice of traditional morality' I believe Webster is presenting this older mother as a more complex character.¹⁴³ For the fond wooing and exchange of 'his jewel for her jewel' (1.2.226) is not all that Cornelia witnesses - she overhears Vittoria's account of a "dream" in which her husband and Bracciano's wife, intent on burying her alive, are killed themselves instead. Cornelia's fears about the dangers of an extra-marital liaison are combined with a clearly imaged solution. For all of her references to the affair between Vittoria and the Duke relate to death. She likens the presence of Bracciano as transforming a once flourishing garden into a polluted burial ground:

What make you here my lord this dead of night?

Never dropped mildew on a flower here,

Till now [...]

O that this fair garden,

Had with all poison'd herbs of Thessaly

At first been planted, made a nursery

For witchcraft; rather than a burial plot

For both your honours.

1.2.271-73, 274-78

¹⁴³ Laura G. Bromley, 'The Rhetoric of Feminine Identity in *The White Devil*', in Kehler and Barker, pp. 50-70 (p.51).

This also links to her fear of the death of family honour and connects in turn to an unpleasant image of her own death. Here she uses a conventional maternal stereotype of the thankless child - 'In life they keep us frequently in tears/ And in the cold grave leave us in pale fears' (1.2.281-82) - to conjure up a sense of isolation and desertion in death. Kneeling with Vittoria, Cornelia goes on to consider her daughter's death, 'If thou dishonour thus thy husband's bed,/ Be thy life short' (1.2.295-96), and to connect it with the deaths of 'great men' who earn few 'funeral tears'(1.2.296-97). This is enough to have the infuriated Flamineo dismiss his mother in the way all garrulous old women are set aside - 'Are you out of your wits?' (1.2.302). Yet it seems she has been influential in quenching the Duke's amorous intentions for he decides to go off to bed without seeing Vittoria again.

Cornelia has imaged a situation in which the pursuit of lust brings death - of both personal and family honour - but hers is not the voice of morality. For she has talked about specific deaths and set into this scenario a reminder to the Duke not only of his role as exemplar of good behaviour but of his power as a manipulator:

The lives of princes should like dials move,

Whose regular example is so strong,

They make the times by them go right or wrong.

1.2.287-89

It is telling that this comes just after mention of the arrival of the Duchess. Under the guise of appropriate maternal disapproval Cornelia is hinting that the Duke can put everything right by disposing of the problem raised by the presence of Isabella and 'Unfortunate Camillo' (1.2.290). That she presents

herself as doing right in contrast to Flamineo's wrong - 'What? Because we are poor,/ Shall we be vicious?' (1.2.314-15) - argues considerable hypocrisy, an aspect of her character developed further as the play progresses. Her harping on death, funerals and graves and the control powerful men can have over 'right or wrong' (1.2.289) confirms Vittoria's dream as a solution for Bracciano. As he leaves he calls for Doctor Julio to attend on him, and Julio is the man who later arranges the poisoning of Isabella. Bracciano's final words to Cornelia are telling -

Uncharitable woman, thy rash tongue
Hath raised a fearful and prodigious storm,-
Be thou the cause of all ensuing harm.

1.2.305-07

This sounds like a bad conscience manufacturing an excuse - he can focus blame for whatever he decides to do on the behaviour and 'rash tongue' of the stereotypical older woman. However, he has also recognised and acknowledged the lack of charity and dangerous fixity of purpose in the tough-minded and far from witless Cornelia.

The way in which Cornelia's moral standards are influenced by self-consideration is reinforced by her silence concerning any 'vicious' behaviour (1.2.315) once Vittoria and the Duke are married, despite the deaths under suspicious circumstances of their respective spouses. Her hypocrisy is emphasised when Flamineo kills his brother, Marcello. At first she tries to stab the murderer, but cannot and instead attempts to convince the Duke that Marcello provoked Flamineo into attacking him. She is moved by the concern that having lost one son she will now lose the other - 'One arrow's grazed

already; it were vain/ T'lose this, for that will ne'er be found again' (5.2.68-69)
- as much as by grief. Once again the fear of forfeiting what little she has motivates Cornelia's actions.

There is irony in the fact that the only time Cornelia actually has some positive influence on one of her children is when she truly loses her wits. Observing her wild behaviour Flamineo reflects:

I have a strange thing in me, to th' which
I cannot given a name, without it be
Compassion,-

5.4.113-15

The self-centred behaviour of all the mature mothers I have considered so far is explored through their outspokenness. To the worrying potential for inappropriate uttering in an ageing mother can be added another source of embarrassment, concern and even danger for her offspring - her continuing quest for sexual fulfilment. Hamlet expresses the view held by most adult children, even now, in connection with a mother's sexuality - 'at your age/ The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble' (3.4.67-68) - and this augments the sense of disgust with which society views sexual activity or the desire for such activity in the ageing woman. The anxiety caused by the older woman who will not tame or humble her desires is generally dealt with through comedy and even the plays I discuss here show the woman concerned as so outrageous in her sexual demands as to be laughable. Yet she is also shown as being empowered by her sexuality in ways which make her dangerous.

Both Eugenia in *Lust's Dominion* and Brunhalt in *Thierry and Theodoret* ignore the warnings of their sons about their immoral behaviour, take revenge on those sons, work to subvert the succession to power, deny the legitimacy of offspring and plot the deaths of younger women by whom they feel threatened. Yet, while both mothers are, clearly, engaged in political power struggles to achieve their own security they are imaged entirely in relation to their sexual desires. Both are outspoken in their defiance of accepted standards of female behaviour and show little restraint in making their desires public, and confrontations with their sons focus solely on this. After his father's death Philip describes his mother, Eugenia, as creating a 'brothelry' in the bedchamber (1.2. 118), while Theodoret accuses Brunhalt of 'loose and lazy pleasures' (1.1.4), and it is in this way - sex driven - that both mothers are identified throughout these plays. Even the plots they hatch require sexual desire in others. To get rid of the good wife of her lover, and her own son, in one go, Eugenia arranges for the seduction of the wife by the son, mentally urging him 'Blush not my boy; be bold like me thy mother' (3.1.15). Brunhalt tries to wreck the marriage of her son Thierry with a potion that will suppress all his desires on his wedding night. She believes her physician's assurance that the new wife will 'fly out, or at least give occasion/ Of such a breach which ne'er can be made up' (2.1.310).

The two women are similar in their extreme sensuality. When we first see Eugenia with her lover, the Moor Eleazar, she is wrestling kisses from him and trying to create a voluptuous atmosphere for their tryst with music, drink and 'wanton boys' (1.1.1-60). Brunhalt is equally physical with her lover, Protaldye, demanding 'kiss me strongly;/ Another, and a third' (1.1.147-48).

Both are defiant of the ageing process, secure in their power over their men. Eugenia may be anxious when Eleazar is less than passionate and, fearing that his frowns will exacerbate her own wrinkles, she asks him 'Am I grown ugly now?' (1.1.65). However, her position, if not her looks, can bring him into line and he is soon lavishing kisses upon her as he comments ironically, 'Call to thy ashy cheeks their wonted red' (1.1.119). Later, Eugenia has no difficulty achieving the sexual entrapment of Cardinal Mendoza - 'He hath entreated me in some disguise/ To leave the Court, and fly into his arms' (3.4.34-35) - even persuading him to claim paternity of her son, Philip. Brunhalt makes full use of Protaldye who, at her command, is always ready to 'glut' her with the 'best delights of man' (2.2.171-72), but she is quite prepared to use her ageing state to counter criticism, deploring that her behaviour should be 'brought in question,/ Now in my hours of age and reverence' (1.1.49-50).

The dreadful acts of these dreadful mothers are demonstrated as emerging from their alarming and overpowering lust, and while some men may recognise and try to subvert this power the ageing, lascivious, mothers are finally defeated by good and pure young women. Brunhalt's schemes are exposed through the chastity and loyalty of the daughter-in-law whose wedding night she ruins. Ordella not only shows understanding and care for the impotent Thierry but even offers to lay down her life for his good. Though the couple die in each other's arms at the end of the play their exchange of almost holy kisses shows in stark contrast to Brunhalt's sensuous embraces. Having achieved the murder of one son and the bastardisation of another, Eugenia sees her plans overturned by the enthroning of her daughter,

Isabella. This young woman gains freedom by professing love for her guard, Zarack, a neat piece of irony on the part of the playwright. Zarack is also a Moor and Isabella appears to be using her mother's sexual skills to get what she wants. However, we are assured that her purity is not in doubt by the way she excuses her actions, 'I did profess [...] / I loved him well, what will not sorrow do?' (5.2.154-55). Isabella has used male lust not for her own satisfaction but to save her brother's life and restore the succession, so her chastity remains untarnished.

Eugenia, in the end, is reconciled with Philip and, duly repentant, goes off to solitary confinement to 'spin out the remnant of my life, / In true contrition for my past offences' (5.3.177-78). Brunhalt, however, who spurned such seclusion at the start of the play - 'a monastery, / A most strict house [...] cold repentance and starved penance' (1.1.79-80, 84) - refuses to submit to male rule. With angry eloquence she spells out the reason for her defiance:

Preach to me not of punishment or fears,
Or what I ought to be, but what I am,
A woman in her liberal will defeated,
In all her greatness crossed, in pleasure blasted;
My angers have been laughed at, my ends slighted,
And all those glories that had crowned my fortunes,
Suffered by blasted virtue to be scattered:
I am the fruitful mother of these angers,
And what such have done, read, and know thy ruin!

5.2.114-22

The image of the woman driven to a frenzy of revenge when denied sexual pleasure emphasises the perceived danger of unfettered female sexuality, powerful for evil at any age, which is explored in both these plays. Brunhalt kills herself conniving, like Eugenia, in her own silencing. In death she is to be erased from public memory and public discourse, allowed 'A private grave, but neither tongue nor honour' (5.2.195).

As I have argued, the extravagance of evil committed by these mothers makes them extraordinary characters. In contrast we find a more subtle exploration of the sexuality of a mature mother by Webster in *The Devil's Law Case*. Although Leonora's inappropriate desires cause her to turn on her son and attempt to ruin him - a maternal strategy less drastic but not entirely dissimilar to those of Eugenia and Brunhalt - she is presented as far more self-aware. Like Brunhalt she is conscious of the needs which motivate her, but she is unique in understanding that these needs are set against the bitter isolation of widowed old age.

Leonora is an attractive character, financially independent, witty, outspoken and passionate. She is certainly a mother who puts her own needs first. She loves and lusts after Contarino who is the suitor of her daughter Jolenta, but the man is supposedly killed by Leonora's unpleasant son, Romelio. This tough woman decides to pay her son back by going to law to prove him a bastard and so ruin his business, and the fact that this accusation is false and that she is ready to perjure herself demonstrates her determination to 'be a fury' (3.3.256) to her son.

Through Leonora Webster explores, in close and often uncomfortable detail, love and desire in age and shows how even an experienced woman

can succumb to self-deception. When the vacuous Contarino asks her for her picture - his convoluted code for her approval to marry Jolenta - Leonora's response shows that she has taken this as a romantic overture. Not only is her answer - 'Shadows are coveted in summer; and with me/ 'Tis the fall o'the'leaf.' (1.1.136-37) - constructed to allow the tactful suitor to deny any hint of age in the loved one, but her clever word-play, imaging 'shadows' both as pictures and shading, suggests the cooler, yet equally pleasant delights an experienced, mature woman can offer in contrast to the overheated approach of youth.¹⁴⁴ Contarino's reply seems to be all that a middle-aged mother could desire:

You enjoy the best of time:
This latter spring of yours shows in my eye,
More fruitful and more temperate withal,

1.1.137-39

However, J. Pearson points out that Leonora's attachment 'to language rather than action' results in her being 'constantly deceived about the relationship between metaphor and literal truth', and this is very much in evidence here in her exchanges with Contarino and her misinterpretation of his words.¹⁴⁵ When she realises her error Leonora is quite ruthless in helping Romelio to set up another match for Jolenta and the fact that the girl loves Contarino does not weigh with her mother. There is no question of Leonora suppressing her own needs in favour of her daughter's happiness.

¹⁴⁴ Similar imagery is used in Sir John Davies' poem *A Contention betwixt a Wife, a Widow and a Maid* (1608), which I discuss in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁵ J. Pearson, *Tragedy and Tragicomedie in the Plays of John Webster* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.101.

Despite this selfishness we cannot but feel moved when, after Romelio says he has killed Contarino, Leonora's feelings burst forth:

There is no plague i'th'world can be compared
To impossible desire, for they are plagued
In the desire itself:-

3.3.236-38

Even in grief she does not romanticise what she felt for Contarino: having experienced desire she knows there is no cure for it. A strong-minded woman, she forces herself to acknowledge the hard reality, that her suffering will continue through lack of fulfilment, before allowing herself to think more tenderly of the subject of her grief:

never, oh never
Shall I behold him living, in whose life
I liv'd far sweetlier than in mine own.

3.3.238-40

Leonora has demonstrated no overt maternal qualities so far in the play, indeed she images her motherhood to Romelio and Jolenta almost as a business arrangement - if they do as she wishes they will eventually access her wealth:

Know for your sakes
I married, that I might have children;
And for your sakes, if you'll be ruled by me,
I will never marry again.

1.2.75-78

So it is interesting that in mourning Contarino she accesses the idealised language of motherhood, linking the depth of motherly love and the kind of sexual passion experienced on the verge of old age:

For as we love our youngest children best,
So the last fruit of our affection,
Wherever we bestow it, is most strong,
Most violent, most unresistable,
Since 'tis indeed our latest harvest-home,
Last merriment 'fore winter;

3.3.246-251

The seasons of life are connected to the seasons of the year and the image of a mature woman gathering but also, like nature, providing a final, rich harvest of love before the winter of old age is very moving.

Leonora knows that all she can look forward to now is the lonely old age of a sour old woman:

Come age, and wither me into the malice
Of those that have been happy; [...]
Let me envy the pleasure of youth heartily.

3.3.265-56, 268

Her only comfort is the knowledge that after the loss of this last love nothing can hurt her - 'Let me in this life fear no kind of ill,/That have no good to hope for' (3.3. 269-70). This long speech of Leonora's contains some remarkably sensitive writing in which Webster explores the grief of lost love, deepened by the understanding that youthful resilience has gone and there is no time left for the natural process of spiritual restoration.

After showing the painful fragility of the ageing woman Webster returns to the image of Leonora as a bad mother as she plots to take revenge on Romelio. In her raging against her son, she conjures images of breastfeeding him as a baby, only to overlay these with the rejection of the mothering role:

like an Amazon lady,
I'd cut off this right pap, that gave him suck,
To shoot him dead. I'll no more tender him,
Than had a wolf stol'n to my teat i'the'night,
And robb'd me of my milk: nay such a creature
I should love better far.

3.3.256-261

The desire for self-mutilation and a kind of bestial nurturing in preference to human and humane care shows the strength of her resentment. To make this a public punishment of her son Leonora now becomes outspoken in challenging the male establishment. She goes to court to prove Romelio a bastard so that he will forfeit all his property, but her lie is exposed and she removes herself to 'a place of penance' (4.2.550).

Pearson describes the happy ending of the play as being 'drawn out of grief and pain and the fear of old age' and, given Webster's subtle and convincing examination of an ageing mother experiencing the delight and despair of late-flowering love, I would like to agree with this.¹⁴⁶ However, I feel Pearson's view gives undeserved weight to a confusedly comic conclusion in which Leonora, indeed 'ageing and passionate' and 'drawn with

¹⁴⁶ Pearson, p. 97.

an intensity and simplicity of feeling',¹⁴⁷ is reduced to the status of stereotypical bad older mother, boasting that she is cunning enough to take on 'Four devils, five advocates' (3.3.395) and condemned in court as the embodiment of 'woman's malice' (4.2.253).

The character of Gertrude in *Hamlet* is another mother linked with images of desire, indeed she is often critically discussed as the powerful and irrepressible sexual focus of the play. As a result, the sense of deep discomfort generated by Shakespeare as he shows this ageing mother physically threatened and punished by her adult son is sidelined in reading, analysis and production. Yet the violence is crucial to the play's engagement with male anxiety about maternal power. Though there are obvious dramatic connections between Hamlet's behaviour here and that of Vindice and Hippolito towards Gratiana in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Shakespeare's handling of Gertrude makes her a far from stereotypical "bad mother". He shows that her character is imposed upon her by the men around her that her behaviour will adapt according to whoever she is dealing with. She suits her actions and attitudes to what is expected of her, as Shakespeare images a society in which women survive through subservience and obedience. This notion of Gertrude as a repressed female is firmly grounded in the text but acceptance of it requires examination and removal of the Gertrude myth. Focusing on the limited amount of dialogue given to Gertrude Rebecca Smith discovers that she 'speaks plainly, directly and chastely', and that her actions 'are as solicitous and unascivious as her

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.99.

language'.¹⁴⁸ Smith shows that the sexual image of the woman is presented by the Hamlets (senior and junior) and has been preserved and embellished by male stage and film directors. Smith's essay is important in alerting the reader to the dangers of ignoring Gertrude's 'own words and deeds' in favour of what everyone else says about her.¹⁴⁹

In fact, when we look closely, we find that Gertrude adapts her behaviour to suit the expectations and requirements of those she is with, and we always see her with men. When she is offstage men construct for her a character to suit themselves - loving wife, doting mother, the personification of frailty - but the men of Elsinore are practised at turning their women into whatever they wish them to be. We can observe the young woman, Ophelia, being trained in unquestioning obedience by the men in her life, father and brother. In Gertrude we find a woman who has so internalised such training that, in age, the result is almost complete eradication of the self. The mature woman has become like one of Pavlov's dogs, responding to her men on cue, even anticipating their requirements. David Leverenz views Gertrude's 'inconstancy' as 'the sign of diseased doubleness in everyone who has accommodated to his or her social role'.¹⁵⁰ I argue that Gertrude is not inconstant. She does indeed fulfil her social role and has certainly accommodated to it, but that role is designed for her by men. If she is judged inconstant because she obeys male rules it is a sign of the diseased

¹⁴⁸ Rebecca Smith, 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Gayle Green and Carol Neely (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 194-210 (p.199).

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.207.

¹⁵⁰ David Leverenz, 'The Woman in *Hamlet*: An Interpersonal View', in Schwartz and Kahn, pp.110-128 (p.112).

doubleness which is the male standard of behaviour here. It is important to be aware that the trigger for a different response from Gertrude - unforced, without calculation and painfully moving - is the death of her young counterpart, Ophelia.

Before looking closely at Gertrude we should consider the ways in which the men of Elsinore establish and maintain control of their lives and their society. As Levernz points out, the father-figures in the play demand obedience - 'At times their power seems to be defined by their ability to order women and children around' - but this is true also of the younger men in the play, Hamlet and Laertes, who dominate the women.¹⁵¹ It is a society, in fact, organised around domination through fear and aggression, loudly signified by male noise. The play begins with the shouts of sentries (1.1. 1-3) and ends with Fortinbras arranging martial obsequies for the dead Hamlet - 'The soldier's music and the rite of war/ Speak loudly for him' (5.2.353-54). All this is typical of the decibel-level of this play. It is relevant that the action is set in a country on a war footing. There has been 'post haste and rummage in the land' (1.1.106) as Claudius prepares to try conclusions with young Fortinbras and so a good deal of noisy and assertive male posturing might be expected at the King's headquarters. However, aggressive male noise is intrinsic to the society Shakespeare shows us. The King heralds each drinking bout with 'kettle drum and trumpet' (1.4.12), Hamlet rants at his mother and commits a far-from-silent murder before her eyes, Laertes returns for vengeance with a mob in full cry, he and Hamlet brawl in Ophelia's grave, cursing each other. The only quiet moments in this play occur when men scheme together or

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.110.

soliloquise. The women are silent foci of instruction and verbal or physical assault by the men, with only Ophelia breaking into noise when she goes mad.

In *Hamlet*, the women have powerful, male-constructed stereotypes of good and bad female behaviour to be matched with and assessed against. These stereotypes are personified in Hecuba and the Player Queen. Hecuba images a proper wifely devotion, running barefoot and bereft of finery (2.2.508-21) to bewail the loss of her husband, while the Player Queen shows another stereotype, the woman who promises to be faithful to her husband even if he dies before her (3.2.175-76) - only to be revealed as a faithless hypocrite. Hamlet's judgement of his mother uses these stereotypes, so that Gertrude is first imaged as a Hecuba wife to Hamlet senior -

Why she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on,

1.2.143-45

only to become even worse than 'a beast that wants discourse of reason' (1.2.150). The only other imaging of Gertrude's behaviour as old Hamlet's wife comes from the Ghost but while this witness describes her as 'seeming-virtuous' (1.5.46) he has more to say about her poor choice of a second husband (1.5.47-52). Interestingly, the Ghost blames her defection on Claudius and the 'witchcraft of his wit' (1.5.43) and urges his son not to take vengeance on Gertrude - 'Leave her to heaven' (1.5.86). From this we can see that Hamlet has constructed images of his mother to suit himself in his grief, while the Ghost has his own construct of this woman. Nowhere in the

play does Gertrude say anything about her relationship with her first husband or the reasons for her marrying the second, and she is judged unheard - 'O most pernicious woman!' (1.5.105). It is this unexamined judgement which has affected the presentation of the role in countless performances of *Hamlet*.

It is important, therefore, to consider what Shakespeare reveals about Gertrude through the character herself. We are first aware of her in Act I.2 as a silent presence whose new husband is "introducing" her to the court. She takes no part in her new husband's justification of their problematic marriage, nor does she participate in the arrangements to deal with the threat from Fortinbras, even though Claudius refers to her as 'Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state' (1.2.9). Gertrude is the passive prop to the new monarch's position: law and war remain firmly in the male domain and her submissive behaviour is entirely appropriate. When Gertrude does speak at last it is in her maternal role, remonstrating with her son over his continuing public display of mourning for his dead father (1.2.68-73). However, her intervention is in support of her husband. Claudius has already announced his good intentions towards Hamlet (1.2.64) and is struggling with the uneasy role of step-father:

King: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet: Not so, my lord, I am too much i' th' sun.

1.2.66-7

It is in support of Claudius that Gertrude picks up her husband's 'clouds' image and cuts across her son's ironic reference to 'the sun' to urge him, 'cast thy nightly colour off' (1.2.68). Her seemingly philosophical attitude to death is hardly designed to comfort a grieving son, if her aim is to reconcile him to his

father's death and her re-marriage. As a wife, though, and an ageing one at that, it is important to be seen to support her new husband and her words demonstrate this. Now Claudius copies Gertrude's theme that death is common when he tackles Hamlet - 'But you must know your father lost a father/That father lost, lost his' (1.2.89-90). Husband and wife are shown as working together as a team - indeed, as one flesh - on this issue. When Claudius urges Hamlet to remain at court Gertrude again follows her husband's lead - 'Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet./ I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenburg' (1.2.118-19).

This image of Gertrude as a dutiful wife continues when Claudius sets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet. If she has any anxiety about this procedure she does not reveal it, rather echoing and reinforcing her husband's request and also reminding Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where their best interests lie, 'Your visitation shall receive such thanks/ As fits a king's remembrances' (2.2.25-26). Once the two have hurriedly agreed Gertrude briskly sends them about their business - 'And I beseech you instantly to visit/My too much changed son' (2.2.35-36). Concern for Hamlet may be present here but she seems more determined that everything will go as Claudius wishes. This is further borne out by her response to Polonius's theory of Hamlet's madness. Before the young man's "love letter" to Ophelia is read out Gertrude backs the favourite cause of her son's 'distemper' (2.2.55) - 'I doubt it is no other but the main,/His father's death' (2.2. 56-57). In this she is echoing Claudius's view - 'what should it be,/More than his father's death' (2.2.7-8). However, Gertrude adds to this a reason that Claudius did not touch on - 'and our o'er-hasty marriage' (2.2.57). For the first time we see

Gertrude advance her own opinion, one not mentioned by Claudius or Polonius. Yet, when the men start getting excited over the notion of Hamlet as spurned lover and decide to investigate further Gertrude quickly revises this opinion (2. 2.153). The King's attitude now enables Gertrude to display a concern for Hamlet that was not permissible earlier when he was behaving badly towards his stepfather. The men have designated Hamlet as mad through unrequited love, so Gertrude can make the closest she comes to an intimate remark about her son, 'But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading' (2.2.170), without jeopardising her own position.

When Claudius and Polonius set up Ophelia as a kind of Judas-goat to trap Hamlet into revealing his feelings, Gertrude's response to her husband who has just ordered her off - 'I shall obey you' (3.1.39) - gives a clear example of correct behaviour to the young woman. Her measured words to Ophelia support what their menfolk see as an ideal solution to an awkward problem:

And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.

3.1.40-44

She is, obviously, an older woman who is well aware of her responsibility in providing a model of obedience and order to any younger woman. However, Ophelia needs no lessons in obedience. When Hamlet lays into her with wicked viciousness Ophelia responds with sympathy for him, and though

momentarily touching on the appalling hurt he has done to her - 'and I, of ladies, most deject and wretched/That suck'd the honey of his music vows' (3.1.158-59) - she goes on to further bemoan Hamlet's being 'blasted with ecstasy' (3.1.163). This is clearly the kind of self-sacrificing love she believes appropriate: another element of female education and indoctrination by men that Shakespeare images in the society of his drama.

This sensitive exploration of the young and the older woman negotiating their way through relationships with men is crucial to our understanding of the violent confrontation between Hamlet and Gertrude. The way in which this mother-son relationship is influenced by the roles imposed on women by the society they inhabit is brutally exposed when Hamlet bullies and harangues his mother into submission. Gertrude responds as she has responded to men throughout the play (especially to her husband) following, agreeing and placating. Hamlet is threatening and abusive and Gertrude is frightened and confused. 'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!' (3.4.147) is not the repentant cry of a miserable mother, whose beloved son has revealed her sins to her and made her sorry, but the desperation of a woman who is deeply afraid of that son and also confused by the collapse of an established pattern of behaviour in which she has always known what she has to do to secure male approval.

Like Ophelia, Gertrude is set up by her menfolk for this confrontation, with Polonius and Claudius deciding on the action and Polonius on hand with instructions for Gertrude - 'A will come straight. Look you lay home to him' (3.4.1). Hamlet is still wound up tight after the play, which convinced him that Claudius was guilty, and his subsequent inability to act on that conviction

when the King was at prayer and at his mercy. Gertrude does not know this, however, so her opening gambit, 'Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended' (3.4.9) is unfortunate. She attempts to re-establish an appropriate relationship between them, appealing to him to remember she is his mother. His answer indicates that the interview is already well off course, 'You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife,/But - would you were not so - you are my mother' (3.4.15-16). Faced with this entirely inappropriate response, Gertrude is eager now to hand over the situation to someone else, retreating into the safety of female silence - 'Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak' (3.4.17) - but she is prevented by her son and his behaviour is alarming enough to make her fear for her life:

Hamlet: Come, come and sit you down. You shall not budge.

You go not till I set you up a glass

Where you may see the inmost part of you.

Queen Gertrude: What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?

Help, help, ho!

3.4.18-22

Although Shakespeare gives no stage direction as to Hamlet's actions his words indicate that he is detaining his mother physically. He has a sword too and although it is Polonius who dies at Hamlet's hands the subsequent situation is dreadful. I find it impossible to view this mother-son confrontation in the sanguine fashion of Juliet Dusinberre who sees it as part of Hamlet's 'triumph' arguing that his 'upbraiding' of his mother divides her from Claudius

and 'forges a link once again between her and her son'.¹⁵² Shakespeare is very clear in showing us a much more alarming scenario - an ageing woman defenceless in the presence of an armed killer. This is rather more than an 'upbraiding' and the fact that the killer is her son only exacerbates the terror. Gertrude shows considerable bravery at first, attempting to stand up to him - 'What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue/In noise so rude against me?' (3.4.38-9) - and in trying to make sense of his ravings. This bravery is short-lived, though, and Gertrude is silenced by her son's aggression and made to suffer an outpouring of verbal abuse, insults and accusations, laced with images of decadent sexuality. In desperation Gertrude, used as we have seen to following the male lead, picks up on what he seems to want of her and in order to conciliate and appease presents herself, without argument, as guilty and penitent:

Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

3.4.79-81

Hamlet does not respond, being too tied up in his own vision of his mother's supposed lasciviousness and decadence (3.4.82-84) and Gertrude again emphasises her willingness to accept suffering if that is what he wants - 'These words like daggers enter in mine ears' (3.4.85). What she most wants, however, is for him to cease his verbal assault and be quiet, 'O Hamlet speak

¹⁵² Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* 2nd edn (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), p.99.

no more' [...] 'O speak to me no more' [...] 'No more, sweet Hamlet' [...] 'No more' (3.4.78, 84, 86, 91).

Even after the intervention of his father's ghost Hamlet rants on - warning his mother to keep out of Claudius's bed, giving her a lecture on the habits of abstinence, remarking in passing that he regrets the murder of Polonius, imaging himself as an instrument of heaven. He is still harping on husbands and the possibility that Gertrude might be kissed into telling all to Claudius, and if this crazy behaviour were not enough to crush her his reference to her being in physical danger - 'break your own neck down' (3.4.180) - would surely do so. Rather than re-connecting mother and son as Dunsinburne believes, I see this as establishing complete division between them. Gertrude is very careful about her response here, linking and repeating 'breath' and 'life' so that her dangerous son will understand that she is far too frightened and too oppressed by him to betray him:

Be thou assured, if words be made of breath
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.

3.4.181-83

She maintains obedient behaviour as a form of appeasement, but there is also painful irony here. What mother could wish to reveal to anyone else the details of such dreadful exchanges with her son?

When Hamlet leaves her Gertrude understandably gives way and Claudius finds her in a state bordering on physical collapse. She turns to him for comfort - 'Ah, my good lord, what have I seen tonight!' (4.1.4) - but her good lord is not interested in his wife, even though she has just witnessed a

murder, and is more concerned with avoiding a public scandal and trumpeting his own reactions - 'My soul is full of discord and dismay' (4.1.40). Just as we saw Ophelia automatically placing concern for Hamlet over her own damaged feelings after his cruel rejection of her, so now we see Gertrude taking responsibility for what has happened upon herself. Despite following correct lines of behaviour Gertrude has been abused and degraded by her son and seen her husband selfishly withdraw support for her. Like so many victims, she assumes a sense of guilt, referring to her 'sick soul' as being the product of 'sin's true nature' (4.5.17) and continues this placatory role as the play moves to its violent conclusion.

Throughout the play Shakespeare shows Gertrude reacting to men, her behaviour constrained by their expectations, her unhappiness created by their aggression - an aggression which is demonstrated most violently by her own son. She has survived in this male world by internalising male values, but the cost is her own creative, active being. We get sight of this potential Gertrude only once, in her meditation upon Ophelia's death. Even though men are present - she is giving the account to Laertes and Claudius - her language takes on a different texture. There is powerful imagery and lyricism:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds

Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy tropies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook.

4.7.138-147

This death releases Gertrude's imagination into visions of flowers and nature: madness had a similar effect on Ophelia. The ageing Gertrude draws a picture in words of a young woman retreating from the horrors of reality to create beauty with flowers. But she cannot escape for long; the flowers she touches include 'dead men's fingers'; the ageing willow (interestingly male) quite literally will not support her.

Gertrude goes on to describe Ophelia's eventual death:

Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

4.7.147-155

This play which focuses upon the tragedy of a man who has lost a loved father also reveals, in the way that man relates to his mother, much about the world that father has made and which Hamlet would have inherited. It is a world dangerous for women. At first Ophelia is not aware of being at

risk - 'incapable of her own distress' - and it seems as though she will somehow fit in - 'like a creature native and endued/Unto that element' - but in the end, of course, Ophelia is lost. Does Gertrude identify with Ophelia, so that some of the tenderness of this passage is pity for herself? Certainly we can reflect that Gertrude, well aware of the source of 'her own distress', had repressed this knowledge and become 'endued/Unto that element' - the world of men.

Unlike Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Gertrude is not reconstituted into a good old woman through her violent schooling at Hamlet's hands. There is no suggestion that she follows Hamlet's instructions to reject Claudius: indeed, when Laertes returns she defends her husband against him, to the extent of physically trying to restrain the young man (4.5 115-125). Gertrude may appear disobedient in drinking Hamlet's health when Claudius has forbidden her, but this is a mild defiance apparently permitted by her husband's newly supportive attitude towards her son (5.2.239). In behaving as a wife should, Gertrude has weathered the upheaval caused when men change the rules of female behaviour and it is interesting to note that Hamlet also seems to accept this, paying no further attention to his mother other than cool respect. In this remarkable play we not only see the agonising of a young man attempting to become a "revenger" against his better nature, to gain the approval of his dead father, but also the dangers facing women who are entirely reliant upon the approval of men. The young Ophelia, in her madness, resists all control and is broken. The ageing, more careful, Gertrude bends and, for a time at least, survives.

Whether the ageing mother on stage is stereotypical or non-stereotypical the way in which the role predominates in drama at this time reflects her significance in contemporary society. It is relevant that reconciliation between a mother and her offspring is often part of a play's conclusion and can signify a setting aside of conflict and herald new beginnings. Reunion with a long absent and now mature mother is used to reinforce dramatic images of renewed stability. I have already discussed *A Comedy of Errors*, *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* in connection with the reunion of long-parted wives and husbands but these plays also engage with ageing mothers reunited with long-lost children. The Abbess in *A Comedy of Errors* describes her years of separation from her twin sons in terms of a lengthy labour 'and till this present hour/ my heavy burden ne'er delivered' (5.1.404-05), and so the reunion is imaged as a new birth, a fresh start. In *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* the mothers embrace and bless their newly found daughters, adding religious emphasis to the sense of renewal with which each play closes. Yet, while the reintroduction of the mother figure carries positive images it is important to note that the mature woman herself is only allowed back into public life as a mother. In all these plays the mother concerned has lived a life of retirement until reunited with her family: she only regains a proper, public identity by becoming a mother once more. Even here we find male anxiety about the ageing woman as a potential loose cannon, without a properly designated and therefore controllable family role.

Older Stepmothers.

Contemporary sources have few examples of "bad" stepmothers. In *The Theatre of God's Judgements* (1597) Thomas Beard makes a tremendous to-do about the prevalence of the wicked stepmother and the 'many horrible murders' such women have committed with their stepchildren as victims (S6^v). He comes up with little hard evidence, however. According to Beard, 'it is a world to read' of such domestic carnage carried out, he alleges, either to enable the stepmother's own offspring to usurp the inheritance of her step-children or simply to wreak a nasty revenge (S6^v). He boasts of knowing of 'many hundred' such incidents, but in fact offers only two examples of the bloodthirsty stepmother and even one of these is of little relevance to his charge since it is a version of the Phaedra story - where a second wife falls in love with her stepson and plots his death after he rejects her advances (S7^r). Beard's polemic is well weighted with examples of other forms of wickedness, from disobedient children to thieves and robbers - taking in the deleterious effect of 'plays and comedies' en route (Aa7^r). So it is strange that where the wicked stepmother is concerned he leaves further research, somewhat vaguely, to the 'judgement and reading of the learned' (S7^r).

In his detailed work on the family at this time Ralph A. Houlbrooke uses William Gouge's *Of Domestical Duties Eight Treatises* (1622) and Robert Cawdrey's *A Godly Form of Household Government; for the Ordering of Private Families according to the Direction of God's Word* (1600) to support a

view that step-relationships 'were often full of bitterness and jealousy'.¹⁵³ Yet the only example of unscrupulous step-parenting Houlbrooke records focuses on a wicked stepfather. Indeed, Houlbrooke fairly sets against Cawdrey's belief that, 'women failed in their duty to stepchildren' more often than men, his own findings of 'much testimony' indicating bad behaviour by men in this role as much as by women.¹⁵⁴ However, Majorie Keniston McIntosh's detailed work on the Havering community does reveal wills in which the husband insists that his children by his first marriage be supported by their stepmother after his death, which suggests a need to ensure this would happen. She also cites the case of William Hampshire who 'made arrangements before his death in 1598 in case his second wife and older son were unable to live together'.¹⁵⁵

While this evidence indicates that conflict could exist we also find striking images of stepmothers acting positively in the affairs of their extended families. Lady Anne Bacon was stepmother to the children of her husband's first marriage and one of the sons of that marriage commented on her 'goodwill' in helping with the education of his young wife.¹⁵⁶ Bess of Hardwick who, after previous marriages of her own, became the second wife of George Talbot Earl of Shrewsbury, industriously arranged the marriages of two of her own children to two of the Earl's offspring. Her motives may have been based on maintaining family financial advantages yet if her behaviour seems high-handed at least it is even-handed towards children and stepchildren alike.

¹⁵³ Houlbrooke, p.222.

¹⁵⁴ Houlbrooke, p218. This refers in particular to the case of a woman whose stepfather refused to pay any of the legacies left to her by her own father.

¹⁵⁵ McIntosh, p.50.

¹⁵⁶ Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Victor Gollantz, 1998), p.33.

The strongest example of a happy relationship between stepmother and stepchild appears in the diary of Sir Simonds D'Ewes (1622-25) and is all the more pleasing because the diarist initially expresses concerns about the re-marriage of his father. D'Ewes was clearly devoted to his mother, who died when he was 16, but anxieties about a new marriage for his father also focused on the possibility of a young wife producing children who could claim the estate. His diary records his aim to get his father 'well and happily married to some good and ancient widow' and his delight at acting as go-between for his father to Lady Elizabeth Denton who fits the bill perfectly.¹⁵⁷ The couple marry in March 1623 and D'Ewes finds he gets on well with his 'lady mother' as he is soon calling her. Their relationship flourishes and it is significant that on the day when he is due to be called to the bar and is anxiously waiting for news he chooses to spend this time with his stepmother. D'Ewes is able to reciprocate such support later when he finds her 'very sad about a plush gown she had bought, for which my father was much offended' and she 'much grieved at his anger'.¹⁵⁸

While it is pleasing to note that these positive examples given above involve mature stepmothers I would not attempt to argue that at this time the only good stepmother was an older one - or that bad stepmothers did not exist. The general lack of public discussion of the "wicked stepmother" stereotype would appear to indicate that, even if there was a problem here, it was not perceived to be an issue requiring male attention. However, it may be that male writers did not care to open up an area so universally

¹⁵⁷ *The Diary of Sir Simonds D'Ewes 1622-1624*, ed. by Elisabeth Bourcier (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1974), p. 52.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp.136, 179.

problematic. As D.M.Palliser points out 'step parents were inevitably common, as remarriages were frequent' and Houlbrooke's findings imply that step-parenting could be as much of a minefield for men as for women.¹⁵⁹ This lack of focus is certainly reflected in the drama of the period where, as I show, conflict between stepmothers and stepchildren features rarely.

Yet when they do appear on stage stepmothers always define themselves or are defined by the wicked stepmother stereotype. Whether old or young, bad or good, the stepmother is constrained by this stereotype and character development is limited. Two plays appear to foreground this character but, unfortunately, these are lost - the anonymously-authored *The Cruelty of a Stepmother* (1578) and *The Stepmother's Tragedy* (1599) by Henry Chettle and Thomas Dekker. It is worth noting, however, that the titles carry a sense of foreboding which suggests that treatment of the stepmother in question would remain within the stereotype.

The stage stereotype of the wicked stepmother emphasises her unfair or downright cruel dealings with the child or children of her predecessor. She is sly and clever, able to conceal her machinations from her husband, and her aim always is to supplant in favour and, possibly, inheritance the children of his first marriage with her own offspring. The mature stepmother brings added anxiety because such offspring will be those from a previous marriage of her own, so that a family structure is threatened with disruption by strangers. In her exploration of fairy tales and their tellers Marina Warner shows that the wicked stepmother figure actively imaged negative female power in folk tales and legends, long before the first collection of fairy tale

¹⁵⁹ D.M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England Under the Later Tudors 1547-1603* (London: Longman, 1992), p.54.

formalised the Cinderella story, so this would be a recognisable literary figure for the Early Modern audience.¹⁶⁰ Clearly, the use of this character enables the playwright to establish audience expectation - trouble in the family, whatever its status - and to manipulate immediate audience response to the woman in question. In two plays only, *Fortune By Land and Sea* (1609) by Thomas Heywood and William Rowley, and Massinger's *A New Way To Pay Old Debts* (1621), do the dramatists subvert that response. They commence, however, with the negative stepmother stereotype. The majority of stepmother characters are mature women with adult offspring of their own but I include here examination of stepmothers of indeterminate age, to show the prevalence of the stereotype.

In *The Revenger's Tragedy* Middleton uses this stereotype to reinforce the evil nature of the Duchess. Having pleaded unsuccessfully for the release of her appalling son from the due process of law her apparently unselfconscious comment, 'Was't ever known step-duchess was so mild/ And calm as I?' (1.2.93-94), is an ironic prelude to her plans to punish the husband who has refused to support her appeals - 'One of his single words/Would quite have freed my youngest dearest son' (1.2.101-02). Here the Duchess cuckolds her husband with his illegitimate son rather than plotting against his legitimate offspring to benefit her own, but the effect of her vengeance is as disruptive since it undermines family stability and encourages the bastard Spurio's equally vengeful nature.

The Queen in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is entirely focused upon the advancement of her son as she schemes to subvert the relationship between

¹⁶⁰ Marina Warner, *From The Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales And Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 218-240.

Innogen and her father and insert Cloten into Cymbeline's favour.¹⁶¹ Interestingly, she uses stereotypical stepmother imagery when reassuring Innogen of her kindly intentions,

be assured you shall not find me, daughter,
After the slander of most stepmothers,
Evil-eyed unto you.

1.1.71-73

However, her stepdaughter is not fooled (1.1.85-86) and the Queen soon confirms her own hypocrisy. She is seen subtly influencing her husband against Innogen while apparently defending the young woman, and her poisonous behaviour is linked with the making and administering of actual poisons. So her ambition to 'have the placing of the British crown' (3.5.65) on her son's head is decidedly 'evil-eyed' because she undermines the relationship between Innogen and Cymbeline and doesn't care what happens to the unhappy young woman -

Gone she is
To death or to dishonour, and my end
Can make good use of either.

3.5.62-64

In William Rowley's city comedy *A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vexed* (1625) Mistress Foster also accesses traditional images of the wicked stepmother in exchanges with her adult stepson Robert, though without the hypocrisy evident in Cymbeline's Queen. Robert tries to be friendly, calling

¹⁶¹ I have used the spelling of this character's name preferred in *The Complete Works: Oxford Edition*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.1131.

her "Mother", but she responds violently - 'Mother? hang thee, wretch! I bore thee not' (2.C4^f). Her language grows more colourful and sensational as her fury mounts:

thou hadst been better
To have been born a viper, and eat thy way
Through thy mother's womb into the world,
Than to tempt my displeasure.

2.C4^f

Yet she is revealed as a figure of ridicule rather than of danger, thoroughly ill-natured, grumpy and complaining, in contrast to her friend, who is the easy-going woman of the title. So Mistress Foster admits that even if Robert were her son she wouldn't like him -

Were thou mine own, I'd see thee stretch'd (a handful)
And put thee a coffin into the cart
Ere thou shouldst vex me thus.

2.C4^f

and although she boasts of her stepmotherly ability to influence the young man's father against him - 'I'll make thy father turn thee out for ever,' (2.C4^f) - she really has little effect on a family feud already well established. For Old Foster is opposed to his son's loyalty to and support of his uncle, Stephen, and the conflict between the brothers is the true focus of the play. However, Mistress Foster does exacerbate the situation, by drawing her husband's attention to the spendthrift actions of Stephen and Robert and, though this is part of her generally sour and disaffected nature, her aggravation of family disruption is rooted in the actions of a stereotypically wicked stepmother.

In all these plays the wicked older stepmother either comes to a sticky end or is schooled in some way. The Duchess in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is publicly pronounced 'foul incontinent' and banished (5.3.8) - the fact that her traducer is the amoral Lussurioso only emphasising Middleton's exposure of male hypocrisy in this play. Cymbeline's Queen, 'With horror, madly dying' (5.5.31), is reported to have confessed all her evil plotting, prompting the King to apologise, in absentia, to Innogen for allowing himself to be beguiled by her stepmother's good looks and flattering behaviour - 'Yet, O my daughter,/ That it was folly in me thou mayst say' (5.6.66-67). In *A New Wonder A Woman Never Vexed* reversal of family fortunes provides a sharp lesson for the stepmother. When Old Foster loses all his money and his brother gains great wealth Mistress Foster quickly mends her ways, encouraging a father-son reconciliation and expressing delight when this is achieved:

Crosses of this foolish world
Did never grieve my heart with torments more
Than it is now grown light
With joy and comfort at this happy sight

4.14^f

Much of her joy has to do with Robert's rescue package for his father, which ensures her own security, but we are made aware that she has learned the value of maintaining good family relationships and she remains conciliatory for the rest of the play. The importance of the re-establishment of a sound family structure is reflected in the attention given by dramatists to the undoing of mischief done by the wicked stepmother.

Two stepmothers whose ages are unclear are also defined by the stereotype - Levidulcia in Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1609) and Violante in *The Spanish Curate* by Fletcher and Massinger. Levidulcia plots against her step-daughter and although more attention is paid to her extra-marital adventures, suggesting she is a young second wife, her character is quickly established through her role in the family. Violante is unable to have children by her husband, Don Henrique, so when he brings his illegitimate son into the household she is eager to oust the young man. The play focuses on her retaliatory affair with Henrique's brother rather than her behaviour as a step-mother, but her lack of enthusiasm for the role marks her down as a woman of doubtful moral standing.

It is also worth noting here that in Shakespeare's *Pericles* Dionyza acts in the manner of a wicked stepmother towards Marina, even though she and the girl have no family connection. Dionyza goes back on her promise to care for the girl as she does her own daughter because, as Marina grows, she outshines that daughter, Philoten. In plotting to remove the rival Dionyza shows a caring face to Marina even as she hands the young woman over to her assassin - 'Pray you walk softly, do not heat your blood./ What, I must have care of you!' (15.99-100). In behaving like a stereotypical stepmother, through jealousy of her superior looks but without the usual financial cause (Marina, after all, cannot oust Philoten from any inheritance) Dionyza is imaged as especially wicked. Her 'envy' and 'vile thoughts' are damned by Gower (15.37, 41) and her husband, Cleon, describes her as a 'harpy' (17.47) when he learns of Marina's apparent death. There is punishment too, for both Dionyza and Cleon who, as her husband, is seen as responsible for her

behaviour. When Marina is restored to him Pericles plans to 'strike/Th'inhospitable Cleon' (21.238-39) and is only diverted by a heavenly message which leads to his reunion with Thaisa. However, at the end of the play Gower informs us that Dionyza and Cleon are burned to death in a local uprising sparked off by leaked information about 'their cursed deed' (22. 119). This seems somewhat harsh, given that the 'cursed deed' was not actually carried out, but some kind of retribution is required in the stereotypical presentation of the wicked stepmother figure.

In *Fortune By Land and Sea* (1609) Heywood and Rowley wittily subvert the expectation that a stepmother will be antagonistic towards the children of her husband's first marriage. In private Anne Harding tries to influence her husband against disinheriting the son who has married contrary to his wishes - 'Chide him you may, but yet not cast him off;/ For Fathers ought most chastise where they love' (2.1.B3^r). In public, however, she appears to support Old Harding's harsh decree, against her true feelings, knowing how this will be viewed:

These think because I am their Stepmother, their
chiefest torture is most my content, when I protest,
to see them thus afflicted it grates my very heart-strings
every hour:

2.1.C2^r

However, under cover of the stereotype - 'before their Father's ruthless eye [...] I seem stern' (2.1.C2^r) - Anne is able to help the young people who are forced into household drudgery, by paying servants to do their work. While the stereotype is undermined to a certain extent here the fact that

Anne's behaviour is marked out as unusual shows how rarely this stereotype is examined. Similarly, the positive image of Lady Alworth as stepmother in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is only established by her stepson as a remarkable exception to the rule:

She's such a mourner for my father's death,
And in her love to him, so favours me,
That I cannot pay too much observance to her.
There are few such stepdames.

1.1.100-03

The Lady is tactful in her dealings with the young man, perhaps more so than a mother might be. She encourages personal responsibility by reassuring him that she will not dictate behaviour - 'I will not force your will, but leave you free/To your own election' (1.2.80-81) - and she also tries to instil in him an appropriate attitude towards his future career:

To dare boldly
In a fair cause, and for the country's safety
To run upon the cannon's mouth undaunted;
To obey leaders and shun mutinies; [...]
Are the essential parts make up a soldier,
Not swearing, dice, or drinking.

1.2.106-09, 113-14

A guiding hand laid on lightly in this way is entirely acceptable to Alworth who takes the advice like that of 'an oracle' (1.2.115). Of course, it is relevant that Lady Alworth has no children of her own to compete with the young heir. Though it is Lady Alworth's widowed state that is foregrounded in the play,

this glimpse of her as a good stepmother enhances the integrity of her character, making her an appropriate choice for her second husband, Lovell. It also provides a remarkable contrast to the images of negative maternal power which dominate even this thin area of characterisation in the drama of the period.

The overwhelming reliance upon the wicked stepmother stereotype in drama apparently contradicts the limited evidence we have of the true situation of mature stepmothers in the Early Modern period. We see that this difficult and sensitive area of family life is less closely examined in contemporary drama than might be expected, given the attention paid to other female roles within the family. However, it can be seen from the characters I have discussed that the way in which the mature stepmother is imaged on stage continues to emphasise the importance of containing female power to maintain family stability.

Chapter 4: Older Widows.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613), by Fletcher and Shakespeare, three widowed queens successfully appeal to Theseus to right their wrongs. They command respect and Theseus' support of them reflects well on him, as the queens assure him - 'Thus dost thou still make good the tongue o' th' world' (1.1.225). Yet this positive image of the widow is rare in other plays of the period and the older widow is more often characterised as undignified, foolish, sexually rapacious and an embarrassment to those about her.

No matter what her age she is seen as a problem to be dealt with, for she is imaged as dangerous to herself and others because she lacks the crucial guidance of a husband. This reflects contemporary male anxiety about the independence and potential power of the widow left financially secure and it applies to widows old and young. So, though I mainly confine my discussion to the ageing widow in exploring the stereotypical handling of this character I will consider texts in which the widow is of indeterminate age in order to discuss common characteristics and attitudes towards her.

In three plays, Chapman's *The Widow's Tears* (1605), Middleton's *No Wit No Help Like A Woman's* (1613) and Fletcher's *Wit Without Money* (1614?), the wooing of the ageing widow reveals more about male fears than the supposed shortcomings of that female, but only in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* does the dramatist move beyond the stereotypical in his creation of Livia. Here is a mature widow who appears to be neither an object of pity or derision, nor a target for self-serving wooers but an independent woman of wealth who acts to suit herself.

When exploring contemporary attitudes towards widows, we find much evidence of male concern and confusion and, therefore, conflicting images. Ideally the widow should be devastated by losing her 'intellectual part' and be, 'nothing desirous of life, having lost a moiety of herself', as the authors of 'The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights' (1632) put it.¹⁶² However, it is seen as equally important for the widow to re-marry and once again place herself under the guidance of a man - and this, as I show, applies particularly to the widow who is left financially independent by her husband's death. As Ruth Kelso comments, 'One feels considerable anxiety [...] as to what use widows will make of their freedom from the rule of husbands'.¹⁶³

Male-authored writing on widowhood at this time presents it as an unpleasant state - not, primarily, because of the devastating grief and loneliness implied in 'The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights' but because the widow, lacking the guiding hand of a husband, becomes badly behaved and at the same time sexually rapacious. Robert Burton pictures the ageing widow as 'unseemly' in her eagerness to re-marry to 'have a stallion, a champion' despite being 'so old a crone, a beldame'.¹⁶⁴ This is much in line with the misogyny of Joseph Swetnam (1615) for whom widows are 'the sum of the seven deadly sins, the Fiends of Satan, and the gates of Hell'. Most worrying is the wealthy widow, 'if she be rich, she will look to govern [...] commonly widows are so froward, so waspish and so stubborn thou canst not

¹⁶² 'The Laws Resolution of Women's Rights' (1632), in Klein, pp.27-61 (p.42).

¹⁶³ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p.131.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Burton, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy' (1621), in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.56.

wrest them from their wills'.¹⁶⁵ The idea of a woman who cannot be controlled is very alarming and Swetnam homes in on the fact that it is possession of wealth which empowers the widow in this worrying way.

Male concerns also would have been engaged by the widow's opportunity to construct exclusive networks, often with her own kind. It is important to be aware that the received impression that widows would automatically make their homes with their offspring is incorrect. Peter Laslett debunks the myth of Early Modern extended families - 'It is not true that the elderly and the widowed ordinarily had their married children living with them' and Nigel Goose's work on Cambridge households reveals 'how rare it was for a widowed person to join the household of one of their married children'.¹⁶⁶ Sandra Dunster's exploration of the lives of Nottingham widows indicates that such an idea was considered inappropriate, citing the will of Nicholas Kynnersley who leaves a bequest to his mother provided she does not move in with any of her other children.¹⁶⁷ Yet, in exploring the diaries and writings of Stuart women Sara Heller Mendelson finds that wealthy widows were able to achieve supportive and powerful matriarchies and it seems that even poor widows might create some kind of community.¹⁶⁸ Margaret Pelling finds unrelated widows living together and 'older widows living with unmarried or

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Swetnam, 'The Bearbaiting or the Vanity of Widows, Choose you Whether' in 'The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women' (1615), in Henderson and McManus, pp.190-216 (pp.216, 214).

¹⁶⁶ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost – Further Explored* (London, Methuen, 1983), p.91; Nigel Goose, 'Household Size and Structure in Early Stuart Cambridge', in *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History*, ed. by Jonathan Barry (London: Longman, 1990), p.117.

¹⁶⁷ Sandra Dunster, 'An Independent Life? Nottingham Widows, 1594-1650', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, XCV, (1991), 29-37 (p.31).

¹⁶⁸ Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memoirs', in Prior, pp.180-210 (pp.198-9).

deserted daughters'. These family groupings would sometimes include the illegitimate children of these daughters.¹⁶⁹ Vivien Brodsky identifies them as perhaps forming 'something of a poor widow subculture in the less wealthy London parishes'.¹⁷⁰ The image of a struggling collective is compelling and, while surely less threatening to men than an exclusive amalgamation of women with independent money, could certainly excite as much anxiety.

A widow's financial autonomy, though, is reduced to a liability by the popular stereotype, for in this the wealthy widow is figured as an object of pursuit by poverty-stricken young men who see her as an easy meal-ticket. Martin Parker states in a popular ballad 'The Wiving Age' (1625) that old widows will be snapped up before young single women because, 'Though they have foul faces they're beautiful pursed'. Although such pejorative writing targets mainly young and middle-aged widows it can be seen that the favourite literary image is of the old, sexually repellent widow making a complete fool of herself with younger men. The implication is that, whatever your age, widowhood renders you entirely unpleasant and undesirable. Parker goes on to warn that a young man risks his morality by marrying a widow, 'For he will be toying and playing by stealth'.¹⁷¹ This is borne out by an answering ballad by John Cart, 'The Cunning Age' (1626), where a newly-married widow complains, 'I married a boy, that now holds me in scorn,/ He comes among whores both evening and morn'.¹⁷² So, while the ageing widow

¹⁶⁹ Pelling, p.85.

¹⁷⁰ Brodsky, pp.123, 124.

¹⁷¹ Martin Parker, 'The Wiving Age' (1625) in Rollins, pp.234-238 (pp.235, 237).

¹⁷² John Cart, 'The Cunning Age' (1626), in Rollins, pp.239-243 (p.240).

is mocked for being wooed only for her cash by a young man she is also an object of ridicule because she is unable to keep him faithful.

Reinforcing stereotypes of the three states of female existence, Sir John Davies' satire 'A Contention betwixt a Wife, a Widow and a Maid' (1608) identifies the potential for trouble when a mature and experienced woman gains financial independence in widowhood. In his poem the women meet en route to a shrine and a three-cornered wrangle ensues in which each presents her case for going in first.¹⁷³ The stereotypes are paraded and score points off each other, and Davies' widow is a definite focus for male unease. The other women point out all that she is missing in her solitary state: she has no husband to support her; she is no longer mistress of her family; she has lost the first flush of youth; she no longer enjoys love; she can fall prey to fortune-hunting suitors; she is an object of pity. All this mirrors and reinforces the messages of the advice tracts and other contemporary literature, especially the unkindest cut - delivered by the wife - 'Go widow, make some younger brother rich,/ And then take thought and die, and all is well' (111-112).

But the widow answers back in strong, subversive style. She admits the 'worth' (169) of her dead husband, it's true, but at a stage in the poem when we cannot help but question her interpretation of the word. Is she acknowledging his character, or reflecting on the amount he has left her? Clearly she relishes her freedom and in doing so denigrates the married state. Every wife is 'a slave' (31) but, she says, 'I have my livery sued and I am free' (32). She no longer needs the support of a husband but now 'rules alone' (46)

¹⁷³ Sir John Davies, 'A Contention Betwixt a Wife, a Widow, and a Maid For Precedence at an Offering' (1608), in *The Poems of Sir John Davies* ed. by Robert Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) pp.216-224.

and 'stands alone' (54), made independent by her inheritance - 'My husband's fortunes all survive to me' (150). As for love, 'the widow is awaked out of that dream' (62). Married love is imaged here as an ephemeral ideal or a fantasy, marriage itself mocked as a prison, 'Wives are as birds in golden cages kept' (77). The widow celebrates her own escape - 'Widows are birds out of these cages leapt,/ Whose joyful notes make all the forest ring' (79-80). Far from being cast down about her loss of youth the widow presents herself as being 'like a mild sweet eventide' (104). This could stand as a very proper image of a respectable dame offering restful company, but a more sensual image is superimposed by her saying that widows are also like 'good wine, which time makes better much' (162). This is explored further when the women discuss the sexual side of marriage: the widow and wife from experience. The wife, very correctly, stipulates that if she were widowed her 'merry days were past' (189), but the widow offers a less dismal scenario, 'Nay, then you first become sweet pleasure's guest' (190), and adds provocatively, 'Then sure it is that widows live in bliss' (206). She seems to be suggesting that pleasure does offer its invitations to those in her situation, implying opportunities for sexual satisfaction.

While utilising an available stereotype and focusing on the widow as potential for trouble Davies also presents an interesting and complex image of an independent woman. This is pursued no further, however, and the contention is resolved by the women drawing the argument to a close themselves when the wife warns them to stop rather than be seen as 'chattering pies' (230-1).

Such a strong and challenging image of the widow is rare. In the majority of plays any widow without male support seems to be vulnerable to ribald comment or male derision. When Lady Gray appeals to King Edward for the restitution of her lands in *Henry VI Part 3* (1591) the King's brothers keep up a sniggering background commentary full of sexual innuendo. This in part relates to their knowledge of their brother's sexual habits - 'He knows the game' - but the widow's helplessness, instead of commanding concern, makes her an easy mark for their coarse wit - 'Nay, then her wax must melt' (3.2.51). Lady Gray's security is eventually achieved by her marriage to King Edward, but reversed by the usurpation of Richard of Gloucester when she finds herself helpless, an older widow again without a husband or sons to take her part. In *Richard III* her widowhood proves as unhappy as that of Queen Margaret, one-time matriarch of the Lancastrian faction. Margaret, ousted from the powerful position she once held as Henry VI's wife, provides a reminder of the transient nature of power as she curses those who have worked against her (1.3.192-230) and are triumphant in their turn. However, Shakespeare also makes it clear that because she is a widow without status her words are without true menace. When she sidles into an uncomfortable family conference of Yorkists Margaret lays about her at length and with a sharp tongue and her presence certainly troubles some - 'My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses' (1.3. 302). Yet the effect of her prescient images of Richard - 'Look when he fawns, he bites; and when he bites,/ His venom tooth will rankle to the death' (1.3. 288-89) - are lost in her general ranting against those who deprived her of husband and son. Without such men in her life she has no status and poses no real threat, as Hastings makes clear -

'False-boding woman, end thy frantic curse,/Lest to thy harm thou move our patience' (1.3. 245-46). It is telling that Richard can so easily turn her words against her and throw her off track (1.3. 231-37). His linguistic trickery shows Margaret as ageing, slow and confused and she is dismissed with standard insults against older women - 'foul wrinkled witch'; 'hateful withered hag'; 'she is lunatic' (1.3.164, 212, 252). As a typically loquacious older woman she is also urged to silence by the men about her - 'Peace, peace [...] Have done, have done' (1.3. 271, 277). Margaret has been banished the kingdom but the very fact that no-one has considered the loud, outspoken, self-proclaimed 'prophetess' (1.3.299) intimidating enough to bother enforcing the punishment only underlines the powerlessness of this older widow.

In the popular concept of the widow the vulnerability of her being a woman without a man to support and guide her is augmented by the assertion of her folly or poor judgement when she tries to run her life without such essential guidance. The stage stereotype works on the basic assumption that women are foolish by nature and that this folly completely overtakes them when there is no husband to restrain it. If she is lucky a widow may have another guiding male to get her out of trouble, like Castiza in Middleton's *The Phoenix*, who goes against her son's advice when re-marrying and has to be saved by him from the terrible results of her foolish actions. This kind of rescue is also seen in Middleton's *The Puritan or the Widow of Watling Street* (1606) where his newly-widowed heroine rejects a respectable suitor and also falls for a worthless Captain, thus demonstrating similar folly. This mature widow's poor judgement is apparent from the start when she rejects an entirely appropriate wooer - the choice of the responsible male of the family,

her brother-in-law. In this play Middleton also touches on another cause for concern about widows. This woman is fearful that she won't find such an easy-going spouse next time around - 'I had keys of all, kept all, received all, had money in my purse, spent what I would [...] Oh, my sweet husband! I shall never have the like' (1.1.110-13, 114). This gives an indication as to why the widow's folly must be emphasised. Any measure of independence that has been allowed by a husband within marriage is worrying in a widow now lacking, indeed rejecting, male guidance. Having ignored good, male, advice and chosen the Captain this widow is publicly shamed by his arrest, but her spurned suitor is on hand to save her good name by offering marriage. The folly of the widow is averted by her menfolk and she returns to the controlling structure of family. A contrasting example showing ideal behaviour in a widow is seen in Anthony Brewer's *The Lovesick King* (1617). Although stereotypically eager to re-marry, and so achieve sexual fulfilment, the Widow Goodgift is content to be guided in her choice of second husband by her brother.

Jonson also highlights the folly of the ageing widow, Dame Purecraft, in *Batholomew Fair* (1614). She is daft enough to follow astrological predictions that her next spouse will be a 'gentleman madman' (1.2.58), thus causing concern to her daughter and son-in-law. Yet though he presents her as a foolish older woman who has even taken the hypocritical Puritan, Zeal-of-the-land Busy, as her spiritual adviser Jonson reveals that she has been using the religious connection to feather her own nest, becoming 'a devourer, instead of a distributor, of the alms' (5.2.64-65). She admits this to Quarlous, who is disguised as a lunatic and so has won her heart, also confessing that she has

been stringing her suitors along as a good financial investment - 'I have been a wilful holy widow only to draw feasts and gifts from my entangled suitors' (5.2. 61-63). She has also been well aware of Busy's hypocrisy - 'I know him to be the capital knave of the land' (5.2.77-8). Yet, despite this concealed cunning which has enabled her to achieve a substantial fortune - 'I am worth six thousand pound' (5.2.57-58) - she is foolish enough to be taken in by the prediction and to be entirely bowled over by the phoney madman - 'I love him o' the sudden' (4.6.195). Jonson utilises several stereotypes here; that of the foolish widow, the widow determined to achieve and maintain financial security, and the sexually insatiable widow - 'and shall love him more and more' (4.6.197). The latter stereotypical characteristic results in Dame Purecraft's remarriage and although Quarlous is only feigning lunacy the implication is that the widow with wealth is better off under the control even of a madman than operating on her own.

In reality, of course, widows rarely matched the stereotypes imposed upon them. Charles Carlton counters standard images with demographic evidence to show that rural widows tended to re-marry less frequently than widowers and that marriages of young men to older widows were rare.¹⁷⁴ This is confirmed by Marjorie Keniston McIntosh in her Havering study, while Vivien Brodsky, exploring this female experience in London, finds that where re-marrying did take place the older widow (over 40) would generally choose a partner of her own age or older, while 'comparatively few widows married beyond the age of 50'.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, Barbara Todd, in her consideration of the

¹⁷⁴ Charles Carlton, 'The Widow's Tale: Male Myths and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England', in *Albion*, 10, (1979), 118-129, (p,127).

¹⁷⁵ McIntosh, p.78, Brodsky, pp.130, 132.

women of Abingdon between 1540-1720, finds that only a quarter of women whose marriages had lasted more than 20 years re-married in the 16th century and that this figure dwindled to zero later in the period.¹⁷⁶ So, while the young widow was likely to re-marry this was not typical for the older widow and the incidence of older widows marrying younger men was not as prevalent as male-authored texts suggest. If we look at the legal position of widows during this period possible reasons emerge for any reluctance on their part to re-marry.

Many widows had considerable advantages compared to other women, despite being 'all benumbed, dimmed and dazzled' by their loss. The anonymous writers of 'The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights' point out the many legal benefits enjoyed by a woman made 'free in liberty' by the death of her husband. Whether there is was a will or not she was legally entitled to her dower (usually a third of her husband's property). If the family home was willed away from her she could still remain there until she received her dower (unless the family was grand enough to live in a castle). If an unloving heir broke the law and turned her out she could sue and claim damages. In fact she could venture into all sorts of legal areas which were closed against a married woman. She was able enter independently into contracts and be bound by those contracts; could make her own will; could carry on her own business.¹⁷⁷

Because the law could be 'time-consuming' for the widow over the claiming of her dower, as Tim Stretton points out, many women opted for a

¹⁷⁶ Barbara J. Todd, 'The Re-Marrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered' in Prior, pp.54-92 (p.65).

¹⁷⁷ 'The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights' (1632), in Klein, p.42

holding in jointure lands which became theirs on the day of the husband's death, thus ensuring 'a financially secure widowhood'.¹⁷⁸ The law did not benefit all widows, though, as Mary Prior reveals. Wives of Bishops in the newly Reformed Tudor period could find themselves with no legal right to a dower when widowed. A prudent couple fearing this situation would arrange a separate financial settlement.¹⁷⁹

Certainly widowhood gave women access to previously forbidden areas of business. Steve Rappaport's investigation of London Guilds shows that widows of guild members were allowed by the companies to carry on crafts and trades - 'a status unique among women in 16th century London'.¹⁸⁰ In an exploration of guildswomen in York Diane Willen also finds widows of guild members allowed to maintain family businesses as independent members and comments, 'the overall impression is one of serious and successful business women'.¹⁸¹ Exploring the economic functions of widows in rural society between 1500 and 1900, B.A. Holderness finds that the most prominent of these was money lending – 'Many widows, from gentlewomen downwards, did rely upon income from money lending to augment their livelihood'.¹⁸² This is confirmed by Barbara Todd's research on the effect of the freebench ruling on Berkshire village widows who, succeeding to all or

¹⁷⁸ Stretton, p.27.

¹⁷⁹ Mary Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified Marriages: The Position of Tudor Bishops' Wives', in Prior, pp.118-148.

¹⁸⁰ Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.40.

¹⁸¹ Diane Willen, 'Guildswomen in the City of York 1560-1700', *The Historian* XLVI (1984) 204-218 (p.210).

¹⁸² B.A. Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society: An Essay Upon their Economic Functions', in *Land, Kinship and the Life-Cycle*, ed. by Richard M. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.423-442 (p. 442).

part of their husband's land held by customary tenure, became involved in land buying and money lending.¹⁸³

The independent power conveyed at widowhood might appeal in other ways to a woman previously constrained by male desires and requirements. Henry Clifford records that when Elizabeth came to the throne the widowed Lady Jane Dormer, although 'full of years', chose to follow her Catholic faith abroad and settled in Louvain. There her house became a refuge for widows and orphans as well as for priests and other Catholics also fleeing England. Clifford describes the elderly widow as being famed for her 'virtue, piety, charity and other Christian works' throughout the region.¹⁸⁴ 'Monodia' (1594) a poem dedicated to Helen Branch, the widow of a former Lord Mayor of London, records that on her husband's death she modestly gave up 'flower-powdered mantles, and embroidered gowns [...] and the gaudy pride/Of all her jewels'. However, she gained considerable personal independence, becoming 'herself her self's commander'.¹⁸⁵ This widow, who had buried two husbands and four children, also achieved economic independence and, while living in retirement for the rest of her sixty years, used her financial power to benefit the poor, prisons, hospitals, asylums and also left money for the Draper's Guild and for Oxford and Cambridge universities. So, although both these widows concentrated on devout behaviour and charitable works rather than public activity their generosity in these areas meant that their

¹⁸³ Barbara Todd, 'Freebench and Free Enterprise: Widows and Their Property in Two Berkshire Villages', in *English Rural Society 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, ed. by John Chartres and David Hey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.175-200 (p.197).

¹⁸⁴ Henry Clifford, *The Life of Jane Dormer Duchess of Feria* (London: Burnes and Oates, 1887), p.50.

¹⁸⁵ Joshua Sylvester, 'Monodia' (1594) in Henderson and McManus, pp.329-334 (p.332).

names if not their persons were publicly foregrounded. A final, important, area where the widow might demonstrate her ability to manage her own life was in the arrangements surrounding her death – in that she could take full responsibility for the ordering of mourning and burial rites. As Sara Dunster discovers, the preparation of a will by a Nottingham widow gave her a level of control over the disposition of her remains as well as of her estates which ‘mirrors the control she had over her life and property before death’.¹⁸⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that the idea of the independent widow should seriously exercise male concern. By articulating an apparent anxiety about the widow's vulnerability when bereft of a husband and about the difficulty the lone woman faced in maintaining her good name, male writers were able to disguise as care and concern their attempts to contain and control potentially dangerous expressions of female independence.

The stereotypical widow's inclination towards sexual licence emphasises the importance of a widow retaining her good name and this becomes an area of dramatic possibility for playwrights. In *Henry VI Part 3* the King does, indeed, plan to take advantage of the widowed Lady Gray's friendless state, 'To tell thee plain, I am to lie with thee', but knowing her own vulnerability she refuses this unsubtle approach with equal bluntness, 'To tell *you* plain, I had rather lie in prison' (3.2.69-70). Such rough wooing of the widow and her determined self-defence is a recurring dramatic motif. In *Greene's Tu Quoque or The City Gallant* (1611), by Joshua Cooke, the Widow Raysby is courted at knife-point by Spendall who forces her to sign a contract agreeing to marry him. He says he is after her wealth - 'You are rich in

¹⁸⁶ Dunster, p.33.

money, lands, and lordships,/ manors, and fair possessions' (8.2533-4) - and, though he is poverty-stricken, he presents himself as a good match who can 'at midnight quicken and refresh/ Pleasures decayed in you' (8.2539-40). The widow signs to save herself but as soon as Spendall is relaxed and contemplating his victory she ties him up and destroys the contract. Middleton's *The Widow* (1616) has the widowed Valeria also trapped into promising marriage. Though he is not physically violent Ricardo, who needs her money to re-establish himself, cynically tricks her into compromising herself before planted witnesses and Valeria has to go to law to get out of the match. There is similar callous trickery in William Rowley's *A Match at Midnight* (1622) when the Widow Wag's good name is compromised by Alexander, who hides himself in her bedroom and begins to undress to force her to agree to marry him. The desperate widow believes the house is about to be searched -

Should they come up and see this, what could they think,
but that some foul, uncivil act of shame had this night stained my
house? and as good marry him as my name lost for ever.

4.1.H3^v

This all turns out to be a trick of Jarvis, her servant, but the Widow Wag apparently bows to all-round male pressure, promising to marry Alexander, while secretly agreeing to become Jarvis's mistress. At the end of the play, however, she confounds them all, denouncing Jarvis and saying she will be married only to the memory of the husband whose jealousy drove him abroad to die.

All these plays handle the widow's vulnerability in comic terms and the ability of men to dominate and threaten women physically is covered by the triumph of love. A spirited display of chastity by the mature widow is often seen to domesticate male demands. Edward is charmed by Lady Gray's demonstration of modesty and wit and promptly proposes marriage. In the face of Widow Raysby's defiance Cooke, in *Greene's Tu Quoque or The City Gallant*, has Spendall reveal a new decency of character, confessing that he has been put into 'a horrible fear' by her action (8.2649) and promising that from now on her love will be the source of all his pleasure. She in turn falls for him and a marriage is indeed arranged. Despite Valeria's fear of a forced marriage to Ricardo their boisterous exchanges in *The Widow* reveal that each desires the other and so the comfortable conclusion is signalled well in advance:

Ricardo: Look to't widow;

A night may come will call you to account for't.

Valeria: O, if you had me now, sir, in this heat,

I do but think how you'd be revenged on me!

Ricardo: Ay, may I perish else, if I would not get

Three children at a birth, and I could, o' thee!

4.1.60-65

Nor is the Widow Wag left long in her chaste and solitary state in *A Match At Midnight*. Jarvis reveals himself to be her lost husband, delighted that he has a wife,

whose discreet carriage

Can intimate to all men a fair freedom,

And to one be faithful.

5.1.KI'

Happy endings confirm the stereotypical assumption that re-marriage is the best safeguard for a woman's good name but they also blur the fact that rough wooing of the helpless widow can turn nasty. Charles Sisson's explorations of Star Chamber Proceedings and other sources recording events surrounding a forced marriage in 1624 give an example of this. An elderly widow, Anne Elsdon, was kept drunk for three days and nights and given drugs to force her into marriage to Tobias Audley. Audley was aided and abetted by a group of other men and eventually ended up in court. Sisson states that Dekker used the incident for 'the comic part' of the lost play *Keep the Widow Waking* (1624), and it is unfortunate we cannot see his handling of these unpleasant actions.¹⁸⁷ Only in Barry's *Ram Alley; or Merry Tricks* (1608) is there a chilling reminder of potential violence and violation behind the jolly romping. Whether William Smallshanks is threatening rape or mutilation if the widow Taffeta refuses him is not clear - 'If you be pleas'd, hold up your finger; if not,/ By heaven I'll gar my whinyard through your womb!' (5.1.2114-5) - but his threats are unpleasant and deeply disturbing.

All the stereotypical stage approaches to the character of the widow, whatever her age, which I have explored here have as their common connecting theme the importance of her re-marrying. Only in this way can her folly and her sexuality be contained and if she is too stupid to see for herself the benefits of re-marriage a measure of pressure from her prospective husband is appropriate. Exploring the subversion of this stereotypical imagery

¹⁸⁷ Charles Sissons, 'Keep the Widow Waking: A Lost Play by Dekker' in *The Library*, 8, (1927-28), 41-57 (p.43).

I have found few playwrights who consider the situation sympathetically from the widow's point of view. However, as my discussion now shows, where this does occur a remarkable measure of male prejudice, fear and disgust about the ageing widow is revealed.

It is this kind of exposure of unpleasant male behaviour and the way in which mature women deal with it which enlivens George Chapman's *The Widow's Tears* (1605), a play not generally taken to be sympathetic to widows. Indeed, Lee Bliss sees both plot lines in the play as 'exposing female inconstancy and lust' while Ethel M. Smeak feels the playwright's treatment of the subject 'in keeping with the attitude toward women prevalent in the period.'¹⁸⁸ Smeak also takes the view that Cynthia and Eudora 'have so little self knowledge that they fall easy prey to their emotions', seeming to agree with Hardin Craig's view that Chapman believed women 'inferior to men in their powers of reason'.¹⁸⁹ Albert H. Tricomi even sees Chapman's purpose as exposing the illusory and hypocritical nature of morality via his presentation of 'the universality of female concupiscence'.¹⁹⁰ I argue, however, that Chapman's attitude to his mature widows is much more sympathetic than these critical comments suggest. For, while he foregrounds their need to match up to male ideas of female virtue and correct behaviour he also critically considers male prejudice towards the widow. Though seeming to set up Cynthia and Eudora as stereotypical widows whose ungovernable sexual

¹⁸⁸ Lee Bliss 'The Boys From Ephesus: Farce, Freedom and Limit in *The Widow's Tears*', in *Renaissance Drama New Series*, 10, (1979), 161-183 (p. 163); *The Widow's Tears* ed. by Ethel M. Smeak (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p.xiii.

¹⁸⁹ Smeak, p.xvi; Hardin Craig, 'Ethics in Jacobean Drama: The Case of George Chapman', in Smeak p.xiii.

¹⁹⁰ Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Social Disorder of Chapman's *The Widow's Tears*', in *Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy*, 72, (1973), 350-59 (p. 355).

desires conquer common sense and decent behaviour he does, in fact, present them as more complex characters than they initially appear, as mature women entrapped and judged by immature men. Apparently working with stereotype of the lust-driven widow stereotype he reveals that it is alcohol rather than unbridled sexuality that dries Cynthia's tears as she mourns her "dead" husband, while Eudora - the only true widow of the piece - is more concerned with her personal status than with her wooer's promise of sexual delights.

In his handling of the character of Cynthia Chapman shows us a mature woman who has fully internalised the importance of maintaining a virtuous image in public. Before her own ordeal she is has no sympathy for Eudora and is horrified to hear that the Countess is to marry Tharsalio:

I am asham'd on't, and abhor to think
So great and vow'd a pattern for our sex
Should take into her thoughts, nay to her bed
(O stain to womanhood), a second love.

3.1.116-19

Her own trial comes when her husband, Lysander, tests his wife's vow of chastity in widowhood by faking his own death. Initially Cynthia demonstrates 'an ecstasy of sorrow' (4.1.36-37) which would seem to fit male requirements, but such is the double standard operated that Tharsalio, the author of the plan, is easily able to undermine the widow's integrity. He declares that such an unashamed demonstration of grief must be phoney - 'When did ever woman mourn so unmeasurably, but she did dissemble?' (4.1.106-07). Women are in a no-win situation here – any extreme

demonstration of this kind is automatically suspect. We also see this in Middleton's *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1615), where the widowed Duchess fall under suspicion because, 'she's too constant, that's her fault' (1. B2^v).

At first the stereotype of the widow's unbridled lust is certainly used by Chapman in the seduction of Cynthia by her own husband, disguised as a soldier. She has fasted for five days and is 'weak and quickly seiz'd with swooning and passions' (4.2.23) - a nudging image of a woman desperate for sex after lengthy self-denial. However, Cynthia does not immediately fling herself into the soldier's arms, as might be expected were she driven by lust, but only succumbs when she has consumed much of Lysander's bottle of spirits. Her comment to the disguised Lysander that his 'bottle hath poison'd this wench' (4.3.48) may refer to her drunken maid, Ero, or to herself, but her knowledge of what is happening doesn't stop her toasting the soldier again. Chapman seems uncomfortable with the idea of the mature Cynthia undone by lust alone and provides the demon drink as a substantial cause of her fall from perfection.

Once she learns how she has been tricked Cynthia rallies to protect her reputation. Bravely refusing to hide behind her 'frailties' and the hope that her 'mightiest friends' (5.1.334, 330) will defend her from Lysander, she decides to tough it out - 'I resolve to sit out one brunt more' (4.1.335). She turns on Lysander with all the fury of a wronged wife who saw through her husband's disguise from the start and played along with him to find out just how far he would go. So Cynthia gets away with her "adultery" and the playwright

reserves his mockery for the mortified Lysander - 'What have I done?' (5.1.488).

Tharsalio's sexually-focused schemes to capture the widowed Eudora are also undermined by the playwright. Much emphasis is placed on Eudora's chastity, with not only Tharsalio but also Lycus and Lysander likening her to Penelope, the archetypal chaste "widow" who kept her insistent suitors at bay. Smeak sees Eudora's chastity as 'a pose' revealed as such by her eventual abandoning of her vows of constancy to marry Tharsalio.¹⁹¹ Smeak bases this judgement on the play's exploration of appearance and reality, arguing that Eudora's apparent indignation at Tharsalio hides her real lust for him. I believe that Chapman does indeed consider the appearance of the stereotypical widow in Eudora but then reveals the more complex reality. So, although this widow appears to demonstrate lack of chastity in her enjoyment of word-games involving sexual innuendo she is enough in control of herself to know when this is getting out of hand and is careful of her dignity. Her exchanges with Tharsalio are lively but he goes too far, capping her reference to his waiting on her 'board' with 'That was only a preparation to my weight on your bed, madam' (1.2.69-70). She reacts angrily but in threatening a standard punishment for a presumptuous servant, 'I'll have thee toss'd in blankets' (1.2. 89), she provides Tharsalio with the perfect come-back - 'In blankets, madam? You must add your sheets, and/ You must be the tosser' (1.2.90-91). Eudora immediately withdraws from this battle of wits and she remains silent until Tharsalio's insults against Rebus get out of hand. When she intervenes there is no return to the earlier sexual bantering. Now she

¹⁹¹ Smeak, p.xv.

wants Tharsalio to leave and is furious that none of her people seems capable of standing up to him:

What is he made of? Or what devil sees
Your childish and effeminate spirits in him,
That thus ye shun him?

1.2.133-35

Clearly her own effeminate spirit has spied the devil in Tharsalio. Her equilibrium is shaken by her own reaction to him, and she wants him out of her sight. Chapman reveals a widow neither foolish nor uncontrollably lustful. Rather than having 'so little self-knowledge' Eudora knows herself only too well and is anxious to avoid the kind of temptation now posed by Tharsalio.

Such temptation is reinforced by Arsace, the bawd paid by Tharsalio to fan the flames of Eudora's supposed desire. Arsace attempts this by presenting Tharsalio as a sexual athlete but such titillating tattle initially arouses Eudora to anger rather than lust. She is horrified to learn that gossip is marrying her off to her former servant and is less concerned with Tharsalio's sexual exploits than with her good name and the identity of 'these slanderers of mine honour' (2.2.77-78). If she is stimulated by Arsace's assurances - 'He will so enchant you as never man did woman' (2.2.95) - Eudora restricts her reflection to, 'Beshrew her, would she had spared her news' (2.2.125). She may find the 'news' uncomfortably stimulating but this is scarcely the remark of a woman inflamed by uncontrollable desire.

She does acknowledge to herself, however, that Tharsalio is a serious contender for her favours. It is Eudora's growing awareness of her personal needs and how these conflict with maintaining her public position which

Chapman considers in her confrontations with Tharsalio. The man has served as page to her husband and although he confidently brags that this must place him 'one foot in her favour' (1.1.71) both Lysander and Cynthia give little for his chances with the lady. For she has a reputation as an ambitious snob. It is pointed out that if she marries the ridiculous Rebus Eudora will become a Duchess - 'no mean attraction to her high thoughts' (1.2.22-23). When we first see Eudora she is in procession, with ushers galore preceding her and her women following behind to bear her train. Clearly she enjoys demonstrating her wealth and position. Chapman establishes her as a widow unlikely to stoop to marry someone of servant status.

A direct woman, she confesses to Tharsalio her concerns about how she will be viewed if she marries the man who was once her husband's servant:

am I now so scant of worthy suitors that may advance
mine honour, advance my estate, strengthen my alliance [...]
that I must stoop to make my foot my head?

2.4. 158-60

Tharsalio reveals that he comes from as good a family as hers - 'I once, only for your love, disguis'd myself' (2.4. 167-68) - and eventually all is well. So he wins Eudora but not in the way he planned, for although she is attracted to him physically she will only relinquish her widowed state to a fitting partner and it is this, not unfettered desire, which has influenced her actions. Eudora certainly abandons her self-control once reassured of the appropriateness of Tharsalio's 'descent' (2.4. 169) and the sexually-charged exchanges between

them resume. Eudora pointedly, indeed hopefully, reflects that her wooer's 'desperate boldness' will certainly be matched 'with other infinite rudenesses' (2.4. 205, 206) and finally she flees from her increasingly ardent lover with teasing threats of 'ambush' designed to inflame Tharsalio (2.4.253-57). Chapman mocks the male construct of the uncontrollable, lust-driven widow, however, by having all this occur only after Eudora has satisfied herself that Tharsalio is a proper match for her in social terms.

The apparent ease with which Eudora breaks her vow to her first husband not to remarry is seen by Smeak as part of 'her own misunderstanding of herself'.¹⁹² Yet Eudora's decision should be considered in connection with a shift in the attitudes of husbands towards wives uncovered by Barbara Todd in her research on widows and their re-marrying. Todd demonstrates that while mid-16th century wills showed an acceptance on the part of husbands that a surviving wife would re-marry as a matter of course, this attitude changed in the 17th century.¹⁹³ Across society a number of men were making wills which carried specific penalty clauses restricting the inheritance of wives should they re-marry. Indeed, this was the situation of Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Margaret P. Hannay points out that the will of this widow's husband stipulated that she must remain unmarried if she wanted to retain all her property.¹⁹⁴ Eudora has made a public vow to her husband not to remarry (1.1.83-86) but Chapman does not demonstrate this as being a promise made by a loved and loving wife. The very fact that the vow was made in front of witnesses suggests a legal matter, a business

¹⁹² *ibid.* p.xxi.

¹⁹³ Todd, pp.54-85.

¹⁹⁴ Margaret P. Hannay, "How I These Studies Prize': The Countess of Pembroke and Elizabethan Science', in Hunter and Hutton, pp.108-121.

arrangement by Eudora to keep all her husband's wealth. That she breaks her promise and chooses to remarry is not necessarily evidence of frailty and falsehood but can be seen as a realisation that wealth does not entirely compensate for the single state.

Lee Bliss suggests the irrelevance of judging this play by 'non-dramatic criteria such as contemporary attitudes towards [...] widows' remarriage', but Chapman engages with just these contemporary attitudes in his sympathetic handling of Cynthia and Eudora.¹⁹⁵ This is matched by his exploration of the basic unpleasantness of the two central male characters. Lysander is mistrustful, stubborn and easily manipulated by an embittered younger brother. Tharsalio is summed up by Lycus' scathing comment - 'I marvel what man, what woman, what name, what action, doth his tongue glide over, but it leaves a slime upon't!' (4.1.135-37). Chapman firmly shows the hypocrisy of such men attacking the supposed female inconstancy of Cynthia and Eudora.

Middleton is equally acerbic about male behaviour and sympathetic in his handling of a mature widow in *No Wit No Help Like A Woman's*. Lady Goldenfleece is the comic victim of a revenge plot by the Low-Waters who have been impoverished by her late husband. Mistress Low-Water disguises herself as a young man and Lady Goldenfleece feels immediate attraction - 'The more I look on him the more I thirst for't' (2.1.207). Like Chapman, Middleton challenges the stereotype of the lust-driven widow, however, for the lady understands her own feelings very well and is as firm as Eudora in her determination not to relinquish self-control:

Fly from my heart all variable thoughts.

¹⁹⁵ Bliss, p.164.

She that's entice'd by every pleasing object
Shall find small pleasure, and as little rest.

2.1.268-70

She also acknowledges the prior claim of her wooer Sir Gilbert and determines, with integrity, not to back out of the match - 'This knave hath lov'd me long; he's best and worthiest,/ I cannot but in honour see him requited' (2.1.271-72).

When Sir Gilbert is revealed as plotting a seduction elsewhere Lady Goldenfleece turns on him in righteous anger, not only appalled by his lusting after another behind her back but badly frightened to learn he was planning to spend her fortune on 'adulterous surfeits' (2.1.369). She is grateful to have escaped this fate and decides now to marry for love instead, and chooses the young man who has won her heart. Her disappointed suitors wreak an unpleasant revenge, hi-jacking the celebratory masque and, in disguise, denouncing the bad behaviour of all widows. Sir Gilbert, masked as Fire, expands on the theme of the widow so driven by lust that her judgement is undermined resulting in her choosing a second husband not 'by gravity' but through 'tricks of blood' (4.2.64, 65). The speech condemns the widow's sexuality as unpleasant, unwholesome and unnatural, thus exposing male fears about female desires. Of course, Sir Gilbert personifies the double standard - his own desires being entirely dishonest. The other suitors, disguised as the other elements, attack the widow as untrustworthy, weak and inconstant. She is even seen as tainted by the way in which her first husband made his money - more male hypocrisy, as such inherited wealth supposedly makes any widow an appealing marriage prospect. Lady Goldenfleece has to

be rescued from this degrading situation by a quick-witted man, Beveril, and she is powerless to take issue with the accusations made. Her only recourse is to pass the whole thing off as a joke (4.3.167-170) but this is a sour scene. The articulation of so many male fears about widows shows the vulnerability of a woman suddenly confronted, in a masque, with unmasked male aggression.

Lady Goldenfleece suffers further such aggression but this time from a female, the disguised Mistress Low-water who becomes her second "husband". There is much wedding-night comedy as the sexually-aroused widow pursues her new spouse only to be rejected - 'A married man must think of other matters' (5.1.9) - but, like the wit of the masque, this comedy has a sour taste. The widow grovels and begs for her husband's favour, reflecting sadly, 'I chose you for love,/ Youth, and content of heart, and not for troubles' (5.1.37-38). In dramatising this widow's plight Middleton demonstrates the insidious nature of male fears about the ageing, lone female but he also reinforces received wisdom that widows are always at risk and that best safety lies in sensible remarriage. In the case of Lady Goldenfleece her saviour and eventual spouse is the stalwart Beveril.

The hypocritical double standard applied to male and female behaviour, and how this relates specifically to the widow, is sharply presented by Fletcher in *Wit Without Money*. The hero, Vallentine, is cynical about the unsuccessful pursuit of the secluded Widow by his friends - 'She has found out what dough you are made of, and so kneads you' (2.2.7). He assures them that anyone who marries a widow does so in the shadow of her first husband and that it is far better to 'take a maid' who will be entirely malleable

and therefore a 'tamer evil' (2.2.89). But although he is witty in his castigation of widows much of Vallentine's lengthy lecture to his friends is based on his perception of marriage to any woman as 'a monstrous thing' (2.2.45), so he is set up as the stock single man about to have his beliefs undermined. This happens when he offers to test the worthiness of the Widow for her suitors. There is no rough wooing here, rather a lively exchange of wit and the end result, of course, is a match between Vallentine and the Widow. However, as Fletcher sets this widow to confound Vallentine's expectations and counter his arguments, the playwright also reveals the difficulties of her situation. The Widow is astute on the way in which she is perceived by men. If she dresses attractively and looks well she is deemed foolish and conceited,

if my clothes

Be sometimes gay and glorious, does it follows

My mind must be my Mercer's too

3.3.82-84

If she goes out on the visits Vallentine derides her activities are misinterpreted - 'in us all meetings/ Lie open to these lewd reports' (3.2.103-04). In all things her actions are governed by male rules and judged by male standards:

You may do what you list, we what beseems us,

And narrowly do that too, and precisely,

Our names are served in else at Ordinaries,

And belched abroad in Taverns.

3.2.131-34

Throughout this telling of home truths the Widow maintains her self control and Vallentine is so impressed that he confirms her view of men by awarding

the highest praise: that in spite of being so put upon she takes it like a man - 'Sure tis a man, she could not bear it thus bravely else' (3.2.151). Sadly, this interesting foray into sexual politics is not sustained. Vallentine confesses that his purpose was to try out the Widow's purity - 'I have found you/ Excellent, I thank you' (3.2.184-85) - and she promptly falls for him - 'Such a companion I could live and die with' (3.2.200). However, we are left with a fascinating glimpse of male hypocrisy experienced and articulated by a mature woman. Despite being a particular focus of male anxiety as a mature 'experienced widow' (1.1.27) who has remarried once but chosen not to have a third husband 'bury' her (1.1.52), Livia in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* is, to all appearances, her own woman. Her intervention 'in each plot line' of the play, noted by Martin White, not only marks her out as an important character connecting events which take place, but also emphasises the apparent influence of this woman in the society in which she moves.¹⁹⁶

She is wealthy and influential; not in the marriage market; apparently not reliant on men. Yet instead of foregrounding this financially, socially and sexually independent woman as a target for male conquest because of her overwhelming sexual desires, as a potentially wealthy "catch", and as requiring male control because she is a lone female, Middleton shows her achieving acceptance by men. This is not through any virtuous behaviour on her part. Her apparent autonomy gives her influence over other women and is allowed because she plays the part of high-class bawd for the men around her. Her response when Guardiano urges her to entrap the reluctant Bianca

¹⁹⁶ Martin White, *Middleton and Tourneur*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.116.

for the Duke suggests this is no new activity for her: she'll do it or 'quite give o'er, and shut up shop in cunning' (2.2.27).

In a play peopled by characters behaving badly with remarkable lack of self-consciousness Livia's ability to reflect critically on her own behaviour gives her greater depth than anyone else. As J.R. Mulryne comments in his introduction to the Revels Edition of the play, she is 'almost the only character in an unaware society to know something of her own motives'.¹⁹⁷ However, although this mature woman is aware of her own 'ambition' (5.2.133), Middleton shows her carried away by her own successes. Inga-Stina Ewbank points out that Livia is at the centre of the play's 'progressive perversion of natural relationships' and aware of the control she has over others, 'forever priding herself on her wit'.¹⁹⁸ This boastful pride is also identified by Martin White who comments on her 'challenge to the audience' in the lines 'Who shows more craft t'undo a maidenhead,/ I'll resign my part to her' (2.1.178-89).¹⁹⁹ There are sexual undertones here, but she obviously feels secure enough to use language that might undermine a good name in any other widow.

Livia's self-confidence is also demonstrated in her apparent liberal support for her own sex when consulted by her brother Fabritio about his marriage plans for his daughter, Isabella. Against his loud assertions that he will force Isabella to marry Guardiano's ward, whether she wants him or not Livia is quietly emphatic - 'Maids should both see and like; all little enough/ If

¹⁹⁷ *Women Beware Women* ed. by J. R. Mulryne (The Revels Plays: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp.xix-lxxix (p.lxxv) (first publ. by Methuen, 1975).

¹⁹⁸ Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'Realism and Morality in *Women Beware Women*', in *Essays and Studies* (1969), 57-70 (p. 67).

¹⁹⁹ White, p.121.

they love truly after that, 'tis well' (1.2.32-33). When Fabritio points out that men may also be trapped by monogamy Livia offers a sharp appreciation of female exploitation within marriage:

he tastes of many sundry dishes

That we poor wretches never lay our lips to:

As obedience forsooth, subjection, duty, and such kickshaws,

All of our making, but served in to them.

1.2.39-43

Her ability to hold her own and indeed to dominate in male company with her quick tongue and sophisticated views implies a lively independence. Her advice to Fabritio, that Isabella should be allowed to see her prospective husband before any over-hasty decision is made, is at once acted upon - which suggests that her opinion is both sought and respected.

She is also unconstrained by conventional morality. We next see her in action organising the incestuous union of her brother, Hippolito, with their niece, Isabella, using warmly supportive images in reassuring him - 'This is the comfort', 'I'll minister all cordials now to you', 'Love, thou shalt see me do a strange cure then' (2.1.45, 48, 50). It is a chilling revelation of Livia's lack of conventional femininity that she assumes a nurturing tone when planning the overturning of a major taboo. We are also made aware, through Livia's boastful language, that male problems are being taken on and solved by a woman - 'Sir, I could give as shrewd a lift to chastity/ As any she that wears a tongue in Florence' (2.1.36-37) - and that she can do it alone - 'All lies upon my hands then; well the more glory/ When the work's finished' (2.1.56-57). The trick she sets up to enable Hippolito to become Isabella's lover is based

on a fairly feeble lie - that Isabella is no relation to Hippolito, due to her mother's indiscretion with a passing Spanish grandee - but Livia appears to achieve the necessary 'glory' of success to her own satisfaction.²⁰⁰

Middleton apparently shows us a mature widow shrewd, clever and tough enough to operate side by side with men in a male dominated society. Only when we reflect upon her actions and the behaviour of those she relates to do we see the real limitations of that power. Fabritio may consult her about Isabella's marriage but he does not budge from his determined view (1.2.76-85) and Livia does not speak out again on her niece's behalf. Livia's 'glory' in bringing Hippolito and Isabella together has more to do with their mutual desire for each other than any trickery on her part. The real threat to Bianca is the Duke, not his hired "bawd".

The widow's inventive wit is observed in the scene where she "reveals" to Isabella that she is not related to her Uncle. Livia first hints of secrets and solemn vows not to divulge these, and then reflects that this would be a most suitable time to do so. Naturally Isabella is at first intrigued and then on tenterhooks to know the secret - 'Sweet aunt, in goodness keep not hid from me/What may befriend my life' (2.1.96-97). The pace builds as Livia assures Isabella that she need not concern herself over parental authority - 'That which you call your father's command's nothing' (2.1.119) - and her explanations are convoluted enough to allow this thinnest of lies to be glossed over quickly. It all seems very cunning and clever on Livia's part but Isabella's unquestioning acceptance of her new status shows that her desire for

²⁰⁰ The adulterous union with a passing Spaniard excuse is also used by Leonora, to convince the court that her son is illegitimate, in Webster's *The Devil's Law Case*.

Hippolito has made her an easy victim. Bianca is not such a trouble-free conquest, but then it is not Livia doing the conquering. Although the new bride's seduction by the Duke is set up as Livia's *piece de resistance* in fact all she has to do is get Bianca out of the comparative safety of Leantio's house and she achieves this by wooing the young man's mother, set to guard her new daughter-in-law. She doesn't even have to set out fresh lures, for the Mother is Livia's pensioner, her 'Sunday dinner woman' (2.2.3), who relishes the flattering attention she receives. Once the Mother is admitted comfortably into Livia's confidence she soon reveals the existence of Bianca and is tricked into inviting the young woman to join the party. Livia's hand-wringing response to the Mother's revelation is wonderfully ironic:

Now I beshrew you
Could you be so unkind to her and me
To come and not bring her? Faith, 'tis not friendly.[...]
Oh what's become
Of the true hearty love was wont to be
'Mongst neighbours in the old time?

2.2.214-16, 217-19

With Bianca taken off for a supposed tour of the house which in fact will end in the Duke's predatory embrace, Livia is left to distract the Mother with a game of chess, played out in the foreground while the seduction takes place above. So Livia, directing her 'duke' to overthrow the Mother's 'saintish king' (2.2.300, 306), seems to play an integral part in the real Duke's assault on Bianca. As the board game goes on so does the other game. All Bianca's efforts to escape the Duke's clutches are easily checked by her more skilful opponent,

just as Livia easily counters Mother's every move (2.2.414-16). Livia wins her game and so does the Duke. Through the analogy of the chess game it appears that Livia is in control of the action and the actors in this set piece, but in fact the Duke and Guardiano are really running the show. Livia merely creates a diversion. As the Duke points out to Bianca, the truth is plainer - 'I am not here in vain: have but the leisure/ To think on that, and thou'lt be soon resolved' (2.2.334-35).

So, although she appears to be a person of not inconsiderable power and influence there is no question that Livia operates in a society in which men dominate women. Inga-Stina Ewbank confirms the critical view that 'Livia uses other people like pawns in a game of chess' and while this is true I believe Middleton shows her doing so without completely realising her own vulnerability.²⁰¹ Her apparent success in the male world encourages her to believe that, like Hippolito, she too can attempt 'Things more forbidden than this seems to be' (2.1.47), but when she breaks the rules of her class, by taking a lover of lesser status, her degree and wealth cannot save her from a punishment agreed by men whose own morals do not stand up to question. Here we see similarity between Livia and the Duchess of Malfi, in Webster's play (1614). This younger widow (her children are still young when she is murdered) chooses her steward as her second husband and brings down the wrath of her crazed brothers. It is clear, though, that her actions are deemed socially inappropriate. One of the pilgrims observing her banishment remarks with disapproval on the very idea that 'So great a lady would have matched herself/Unto so mean a person' (3.4.25-26).

²⁰¹ Ewbank , p.68.

So an interesting duality is created by Middleton, who presents an unorthodox and unique version of the widow, only to counter this with the reassurance that Livia's power is subservient to that of the men about her and that she functions only through betraying women. He then reverts to one aspect of the stereotypical widow character by having Livia fall for a younger man, so that she too is betrayed - by her own sexual appetite. Middleton's ridicule of the widow driven by desire is achieved through his exploration of the disruptive effects of sudden passion on Livia. She initially experiences a sense of dislocation, 'I am dumb to any language now/ But love's, as one that never learned to speak' (3.3.136-37), and this is swiftly followed by concern about her looks, a standard response in a love-struck widow. Her words imply that in her determination not to remarry she may have let her standards of self-presentation slip - 'My own fault, I have been idle a long time,/ But I'll begin the week, and paint tomorrow' (3.3.138-40) - and we see that Livia believes that in failing to foreground male requirements she has lessened her sexual attraction. Her independent stance disappears. She will begin using make-up to improve her looks. All her subtlety and wit desert her too and her wooing of Leantio is crude and insistent and she knows it - 'Where's my discretion now, my skill, my judgement?/ I'm cunning in all arts but my own love' (3.3.312-13). She tries sympathy and flattery, but what eventually touches Leantio is her offer of 'worldly treasure' now - 'I have enough, sir,/ To make my friend a rich man in my life' - and more to come - 'A great man at my death' (3.3.360-61, 362). Middleton emphasises her desperation and loss of dignity in the crudeness of her bargaining. In offering Leantio her wealth in exchange for himself - 'Do you but love enough, I'll give enough' (3.3.375) -

Livia has used the same tactics as the Duke when he finally silenced the protests of Leantio's wife - 'But I give better in exchange: wealth, honour' (2.2.369). However, she cannot get away with aping masculine behaviour in this way. Once the Duke learns of her liaison he treats her as a stereotypical widow who is indulging 'her ignorant pleasures,/ Only by lust instructed' (4.2.148-49) and reveals that he always regarded Livia as 'base' (4.1.138). He takes no further action against her himself but hands over responsibility for making Livia 'see her error' (4.1.166) to her nearest male relative, Hippolito, the natural choice to control the dangerous lone female.

The nature and the agency of Livia's death finally confirm the limitations of this widow's power. Hippolito murders Leantio, thus schooling the ageing widow who is not considered worth the kind of punishment inflicted upon the more youthful Duchess of Malfi. Even when Livia exposes her brother's affair with Isabella, confessing her own part in the seduction, she is not targeted for male vengeance. Guardiano is interested only in Hippolito - 'He cannot 'scape my fury' (5.1.35) – implying that Livia's punishment or removal is not worth the effort. The high body-count closure to the play sees Lydia murdered by her niece, the aggrieved Isabella.

Though Middleton moves beyond stereotypical constructs in his exploration of this mature widow he does so, once again, to reveal male hypocrisy. In her dying speech Livia recognises her folly in thinking that her maturity, her single state and her wealth could enable her to share the male power structure - 'My own ambition pulls me down to ruin' (5.2.133). Ironically, in this admission she behaves in a way appropriate to her age and

her widowed state at last, taking upon herself all the blame for actions which stemmed, in part at least, from her original perception of male approval.

On stage the widow can only achieve such approval by placing herself under the kind of control lost upon the death of her husband, so that her natural folly and sexual excitability can be contained. It is telling that male anxiety attaches even to the older widow and that there are no truly positive images of this character in maturity. For the drama of the period the only good widow is married.

Chapter 5: Bawds and Nurses.

Nurse: I desire some confidence with you [...]

Mercutio: A bawd, a bawd, a bawd!

Romeo and Juliet 2.4.133-34, 136

The stage nurse - generally imaged as an older woman - is part of the domestic structure in that she is employed as minder to one or more of a family's female adolescents. The bawd - also an older female character - functions in the uncertain world of commercial sex, a world supposedly far beyond and inimical to the family structure. Yet the stage representations of these characters are remarkably similar, so that Mercutio's deliberate misinterpretation of the intentions of Juliet's nurse is both coarse witticism and confirmation of a recognisably interchangeable stage stereotype.

The most obvious connection between these older female characters is the lack of contemporary information about such women. The stage representations of the mature women I have discussed in this study so far can be considered in the context of personal testimony from such women and set against contemporary ideas about how their lives should be lived. However, we have no personal evidence of the activities, quality of life, hopes and expectations of the bawd or the nurse. Nor does the personal writing which is available offer any insight into the role and character of any particular bawds and nurses. Such material rarely explores intimate relationships in the way our own age delights in - for example, there are no diary accounts of the old

family nurse or revelations about rite-of-passage brothel visits. Indeed, the dominant images of the bawd and the nurse at this time come from the theatre itself.

In this Chapter I discuss the limited contemporary information about bawd and nurse and then go on to show how the stage stereotypes of these characters are established and consider the elements which appear in both, looking at similarities in their language, morality and sexuality. Plays are discussed in relation to these characteristics, rather than in chronological order. I also discuss plays in which the actions of nurse and bawd become interchangeable, and look at the apparent cross-over from bawd to nurse, low-life to social respectability, achieved by Mistress Quickly through her connection to the “resurrected” Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

No dramatist moves beyond the stereotype with either the nurse or the bawd and the limitations of this are particularly telling in the characterisation of the bawd in both *A Warning For Fair Women* and Middleton’s *A Mad World My Masters*, which I consider closely.

Although E.J. Burford’s account of the bawd Elizabeth Holland purports to investigate her reputedly spectacular career, it is based on an anonymous anti-prostitution tract published in 1632 and this must throw doubt on the material’s reliability.²⁰² All we can be sure of is that this woman left behind no

²⁰² E.J. Burford, *Queen of Bawds or The True Story of Madame Britannica Hollandia and Her House of Obscenities, Hollands Leaguer* (London: Neville Spearman, 1973).

testament of her own. Descriptions of the activities of an older woman acting as a bawd appear in Gilbert Dugdale's 'A True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell' (1604) and the anonymous 'Arraignment and burning of Margaret Ferneseede' (1608). It is apparent, though, that while these images match certain social constructs of the bawd they are at variance with other contemporary observations.

Dugdale's account focuses closely on the bawd-like behaviour of Isabel Hall, the 'ancient, motherly woman' paid by Jeffrey Bownd to procure for him a young married woman, Elizabeth Caldwell.²⁰³ After Bownd and Caldwell become lovers - using Hall's house for their assignations - they attempt to poison Caldwell's husband with cakes laced with ratsbane, provided by Hall, and all three are eventually tried and executed. Perhaps because the two lovers are reported as making penitent ends while Hall is said to go to her death 'very stoutly denying everything' it is the older woman who draws down Dugdale's ire.²⁰⁴ However, he is particularly concerned at the way she fools 'all men's judgements in her outward habit', carrying on her activities under the very noses of her neighbours, and he sets a detailed account of Caldwell's final repentant words against the categorisation of Hall as instigator 'both in the adultery and the murder' and the epitome of 'the boldness of sin'.²⁰⁵

Though Hall is not named as a bawd in this tract her role is implicit in her behaviour as paid procurer. The account of Margaret Ferneseede's conviction for the murder of her husband is more explicit, describing her

²⁰³ Gilbert Dugdale, 'A True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell', in *Writing and the English Renaissance*, ed. by William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (London: Longman, 1996), pp.276-292 (p.278)

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.291.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, pp.278; 291; 292.

progress from prostitution to becoming a bawd upon 'growing into disabled years'.²⁰⁶ Remarkably, she is able to continue this trade even after marrying the respectable tailor Antony Ferneseede who is described as 'sober and of very good conversation' as compared with the 'filthily debauched' Margaret.²⁰⁷ As in Dugdale's writing, there is evidence of anxiety about the infiltration of respectable society by such dangerous women.

Margaret Ferneseede's is not a first-hand testament but one written for her and that only when the anonymous scribe is 'creditably satisfied' that the accused woman's temper has settled. Previously the writer noted her as 'given much to swearing' and 'continually scolding'.²⁰⁸ Ferneseede confesses to having supplied her male customers with women which she has drawn into prostitution. Some of these were wives she trapped by undermining their marriages - 'persuading them they were not beloved of their husbands' - while others were innocent young women fresh from the country. Ferneseede boasts of having 'seldom less than ten whose bodies and souls I kept in this bondage'.²⁰⁹ She also confesses to receiving stolen goods, but she denies killing her husband. Her conviction appears to be based as much on her lifestyle as on the evidence of two of her 'loose customers' that they heard her swear to get rid of her spouse.²¹⁰

These images of the bawd as older woman corrupting innocence and undermining the institution of marriage certainly match the stage representations of the character, which I discuss fully below. There can be

²⁰⁶ 'The Araidgment and burning of Margaret Ferneseede' in Henderson and McManus, pp.352-359 (p.357).

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.353.

²⁰⁸ Henderson and McManus, pp.356;355.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.357.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.358.

little doubt that women were involved in the keeping of brothels: Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford confirm this, exploring court records in their assessment of work available to poor women and pointing out that in the world of commercial sex women too old to earn as prostitutes 'had to turn to procuring or keeping a brothel'.²¹¹ However, Paul Griffiths' research into prostitution in Elizabethan London, also using legal records, shows that women did not outnumber the men who kept brothels and indicates that a number of brothels were kept by 'a joint husband/wife team'.²¹² Griffiths also points out that though the bawd was 'the chief target of the bench and literary invective' and always 'addressed in the feminine' court and other records confirm that pimping 'was chiefly a male task'.²¹³ Throughout the period observers certainly indicate that the bawd is not necessarily or predominantly female. In 1556 and 1557 Henry Machyn notes the punishment of bawds in the pillory, by carting and by whipping and he identifies these as male and female.²¹⁴ In the advice tract 'Look On Me London' (1613) the father warns his son, who is off to sample city life, to beware of men in pubs, bowling alleys and gaming houses who will offer to 'procure a woman's acquaintance'.²¹⁵ These 'neat panders' then whisk the young innocent off to 'some blind brothel house about the suburbs' where he can buy sex and probably contract

²¹¹ Mendelson Crawford, p.295.

²¹² Paul Griffiths, 'The Structure Of Prostitution in Elizabethan London', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), 39-63 (p.14)

²¹³ Griffiths, p.46.

²¹⁴ *The Diary of Henry Machyn Citizen and Merchant Taylor Of London From AD 1550-AD 1563*, ed. by John Gough Nichols (London: 1848), pp.104, 107, 161.

²¹⁵ 'Look On Me London – a Countryman's Counsel given to his son going up to dwell at London' (1613), in *Blood and Knavery: A Collection of English Renaissance Ballads of Crime and Sin*, ed. by Joseph H. Mashburn and Alec R. Velie (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1973), pp.159-175 (p.164).

venereal disease at the same time.²¹⁶ Clearly the corrupter of innocence here is male. Other tracts and sermons reveal deep concern about immorality in general and prostitution in particular, but condemnation of commercial sex in these works does not focus upon the female bawd. Indeed, the term "whoremonger" is commonly used and this usually implies a male procurer. Examples of whoremongers cited by Phillip Stubbes in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) are male by a large majority.

It is difficult, then, to agree with the view expressed by Olwen Hufton, in her wide-ranging exploration of women in Western Europe, that 'throughout this period[...]the vice trade was in the hands of women'.²¹⁷ Certainly women were involved in the organisation and provision of commercial sex, even to the extent of procuring their own offspring, as Henry Machyn records.²¹⁸ Yet Hufton's implication of autonomy - 'in the hands of' - is not born out. In reality men maintained control of the business, in a variety of roles including acting as bawds themselves and co-managing brothels. Magistrates also wielded controlling powers by imposing or withholding punishment as Stubbes, for example, is well aware. Advocating stringent methods of ridding society of prostitution he is mournfully realistic about disciplinary action taking place as the magistrates 'wink' at what is going on - 'They see it and will not see it' (K2^r). Ownership of property used for prostitution also gave men control over the trade. As Thomas Dekker points out, the male landlord can be identified as 'the Grand-Bawd and the door-keeping mistress [...] but his under-bawd

²¹⁶ *ibid.* p.165.

²¹⁷ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p.330.

²¹⁸ Nichols, p.112.

sithence he takes twenty pounds rent every year [...] And that twenty pound rent, he knows must be pressed out of petticoats'.²¹⁹

Given the evidence of male involvement in this trade it must be doubtful that a real bawd would ever achieve the autonomy and independence of many of her stage counterparts who appear to have a controlling function in a world where men are clients and, sometimes, victims. In her detailed discussion of "wicked women" on stage, Angela J.C. Ingram suggests that the image of the bawd as sharing 'the "man's world" of manipulation of money and power' is deliberately achieved by dramatists to allow for the creation of 'a more fully developed character' on stage.²²⁰ This is convincing in dramatic terms, as a play gains much from having an independent female "villain", working wickedness among young men and women and undermining the stability of the family, who is defeated and punished by the final Act. Here the presentation of stage bawd matches the presentations of Isabel Hall and Margaret Ferneseede as, first and foremost, agents of social corruption. In reality it seems more likely that the bawd's power would be limited and subservient to that "Grand Bawd" behind the scenes. However, as I show, even in plays where the fact of male agency in prostitution is acknowledged rather than suppressed the focus for evil is still upon the ageing, female bawd.

While our knowledge of the female bawd is limited detail about the older nurse is virtually non-existent. As I show in Chapter 1 many roles were available to the mature woman outside the family circle at this time including

²¹⁹ Thomas Dekker, 'English Villainies Discovered by Lantern and Candlelight' in *The Wonderful Year and Selected Writings*, ed. by E.D. Pendry (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), pp.233-236 (pp.233-4).

²²⁰ Angela C. Ingrams, *In The Posture of A Whore: Changing Attitudes to "Bad" Women in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (Salzburg: Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 1984), p.43.

the nursing care of children, the sick and the elderly and these are mentioned in contemporary sources where rules governing employment and behaviour are discussed.²²¹ Regarding nursing activities in the domestic sphere, however, advice material is designed either for the wife, who would be expected to have some knowledge of medical treatments and administer these or oversee their administration, or for the young woman brought into the household to provide particular care for a new born child. Valerie Fildes' detailed research on the role of the wet-nurse is informative on the advice given to parents about the employment of such a woman at this time and, in her exploration of the lives of Renaissance women, Kate Aughterson draws on 'The art and science of preserving body and soul' (1579) by John Jones as an example of guidance for choosing appropriate nurses for young children.²²² There is no advice literature on the employment of a mature carer for adolescent girls and this very gap suggests that the wet-nurse might remain employed by the family to become, in turn, dry nurse and old nurse, as her charge or charges grew. However, there is no way to confirm this.

Margaret Pelling's consideration of paintings in the genre "the doctor's visit" directs attention to a possible contemporary image of the nurse, as such pictures feature a girl, who may be lovesick, attended by an older woman in the presence of the doctor. Pelling comments that 'it is the knowingness of the old woman, based on her experience and familiarity with the girl's body, which is crucial for the observer' and this certainly suggests a trusting

²²¹ Mendelson and Crawford cover this aspect of women's work in Chapter 6 of *Women in Early Modern England*.

²²² Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History From Antiquity To the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Aughterson, p.204.

relationship between ageing attendant and young woman.²²³ However, Pelling also notes that these are stock characters of this type of picture, so the placing of the old woman might be more significant in terms of contrasting knowledgeable age and inexperienced youth, rather than as a definite “portrait” of a nurse. We find that the stage persona of the older nurse provides imaginative detail to counteract lack of contemporary information about this woman and her position in the family and it is telling that, on stage, the nurse is created in the image of the bawd.

The similarities between these two characters in plays at this time augment the negative images of the older woman which I discuss in Chapter 1 and indeed utilise the general stereotype of this woman - loss of looks, increase of sexual appetite and inappropriate outspokenness. Interestingly, the older woman in either category is rarely encumbered with a husband and children of her own. That the widowed Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure* (1604) has disposed of nine husbands and Juliet's Nurse has lost both daughter Susan and her 'merry man' (1.3.42), allows these characters the dramatic freedom to focus entirely on their employment, and this is generally what happens. Where exceptions occur the woman's own family members are not seen as requiring her time and attention, as good wife or mother. The nurse in *Wily Beguiled* (1602) has a daughter who takes part in the action, but she is cared for by Mother Midnight, her grandmother. In *Cupid's Whirligig* (1607) by Edward Sharpham the bawd, Mistress Correction, has a husband but finds his presence an impediment to her activities and is in the process of ridding herself of him. So, both stage nurse and bawd are

²²³ Pelling, in Hunter and Hutton, p.66.

imaged as entirely committed to a surrogate family unit - the employing parents and daughters in the case of the nurse; prostitutes, and sometimes a pimp for the bawd. On stage nurse and bawd also share considerable freedom of movement beyond the workplace - the nurse usually acting as go-between for separated lovers, the bawd out and about procuring girls and setting up meetings with clients and prostitutes. Clearly, it is dramatically useful for these women to be beyond the constraining ties of marriage and family and to enjoy such mobility, but the fact that this freedom is so often used for immoral purposes reflects contemporary anxiety about the older female who lacks, or can evade, such control structures.

However, the strongest connections between the two characters are that both are imaged as garrulous, outspoken, salacious and lust-driven - all recognisable aspects of the stereotypical older woman. It is often through linguistic confusion that nurse and bawd will demonstrate their seeming stupidity and become figures of fun on stage. In Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604) Nurse Putifer unconsciously presents a double meaning when boasting of her dancing skills - 'my traverse forward, and my falling back' (3.1.194-95) - and this confirms her as a foolish old woman. She has already failed to give promised advice to her two charges on 'how you shall behave your selves to your husbands, the first month of your nuptial' (3.1.159-62) being easily distracted by the quick-witted Crispinella. The same play finds the bawd, Mary Faugh, eager for praise 'as well as any old lady' (1.2.27-28) and mocked for this by the witty Coqueldemoy. She is also blamed by the prostitute, Franceschina, for the girl's downfall, despite her outraged and outrageous protests of good faith - 'I ha made much a your maidenhead, and

you had been mine own daughter! I could not ha' sold your maidenhead off'ner than I ha' done!' (2.2.10-12). The limited intelligence of both nurse and bawd is a source of humour and of anxiety. The nurse's stupidity results in lack of care and control of her young charge: the bawd's mindless greed exploits hers.

The fact that nurse and bawd are imaged as irrepressibly verbose and outspoken is also a source of both comedy and concern. Juliet's talkative nurse rattles on mindlessly when arranging the tryst between her charge and Romeo - 'What wilt thou tell her, Nurse? Thou dost not mark me' (2.3.165-66) - and in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) we see Madam Moria ridiculed by Cupid as 'A lady made all of voice and air, talks anything of anything' (2.3.14-15). Both bawd and nurse also have dramatic licence to be humorously outspoken in their assessment of men. The nurse in *Wily Beguiled* confronts her charge's favourite wooer, remembering her own husband's failings:

he took to his legs and ran clean away:

And I am afraid you'll prove e'en such another

kind piece to my mistress

12.1428-30

while the bawd Scapha, in Heywood's *The English Traveller* (1625), presents a scathing view of male behaviour:

here's nothing but prodigality and

pride, wantoning and wasting, rioting and revelling,

spoiling and

spending, gluttony and gormandising. All goes to havoc.

1.2.175-77

However, the bawd's advice, addressed to the prostitutes in her charge, often reveals the cynical exploitation at the heart of commercial sex. Like Moria in *Cynthia's Revels* she will urge them to 'make much of time' (3.1.124) cashing in on their sexuality while it is still a saleable commodity which 'cannot endure above a year' (3.1.127). Or, like Splay in *How a Man May Choose A Good Wife From a Bad* (1602), attributed to Heywood, she will encourage her girls to ignore the physical shortcomings of their customers and simply lie back and think of the money:

gold hides deformities [...]

Gold can make limping Vulcan walk upright,

Make squint eyes look strait

969-71

Comic verbosity is also seen as a worrying trait. Juliet's Nurse warns Romeo 'if you should deal double with her, truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any gentlewoman, and very weak dealing' (2.3.158-60) but then is too busy chattering to check the young man's response. Madam Moria fantasises about learning all the secrets of the court:

I would tell

you which madam loved a monsieur, which a player,

which a page; who slept with her husband, who with her

friend [...] who with her monkey

3.1.152-55, 156

and does not seem aware of the threat in Phantaste's response - 'Fie, you'd tell all, Moria. If I should wish/ now, it should be to have your tongue out' (3.1.158-59). So the verbosity of nurse and bawd, like that of all old women,

is allowed as comic and entertaining, but is also seen as problematic because the speaker lacks self-control.

As well as this shared outspokenness there is frequent use of vulgar jokes, double-entendres and sexual imagery in the language of both women. A fine example is the deliberate coarseness of Juliet's Nurse in re-telling an old joke 'dost fall upon thy face?/ Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit' (1.3.41-42) and her, perhaps unwittingly, lewd encouragement of the downcast Romeo, 'Stand, and thou be a man/ [...] rise and stand!' (3.3.87-88). In contrast we find the seeming subtlety of the bawd Sweatman in Cooke's *Greene's Tu Quoque or The City Gallant* who complains that her 'forepart [...] is worn so bare' (4.357) during a discussion apparently about gowns. Far more blatant sexual imagery is used by the bawd-like Abbess of Dunmow in Anthony Munday's *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1598). Set on by King John to procure the young woman, Matilda, in her care the Abbess reflects upon supposed spiritual challenges:

if I lie on my back awhile
I am, past recovery, sure of a bad dream.[...]
For the foul fiend comes to me many a night,
As like the monk, as if he were the man. [...]
Once gotten in, then do I fall to work.

17.2465-66, 2470-71, 2473

As "nunnery" was a euphemism for a brothel at this time perhaps the behaviour of the Abbess is not unexpected.²²⁴ Of course, the nurse and the

²²⁴ Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 1 and 2, (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp.1, 963-4.

bawd are not the only stage characters to speak in this way and provide comedy through sexual innuendo, but their use of such language generally has deliberate titillation as a common purpose. The nurse will use it to spark off her charge's interest in the concept of marriage and to excite the male suitor; the bawd to maintain the interest of her male clients and, like the Abbess, to persuade any woman she is procuring of the pleasures to be found in the arms of the pursuer. Such language can also provide titillation for an audience, of course. This shared purpose in their use of bawdy language, along with the language itself, also ties these women together in terms of status on stage, traditionally placing both at the lower end of the social scale.

Bawd and nurse share a propensity for sexual adventure on their own account, which stereotypes them as inappropriately sexually active old women and renders them easy targets for mockery and loathing. When the love-god Cupid takes on the persona of Dido's son Ascanius in *Dido Queen of Carthage* (1587) Marlowe shows how his libidinous influence finds a willing recipient in the aged Nurse:

Say Dido what she will, I am not old;

I'll be no more a widow; I am young,

I'll have a husband, or else a lover.

5.1.21-23

Cupid's disgusted response - 'A husband, and no teeth!' (5.1.24) - encourages an audience to laugh at such unseemly desires in one who is clearly past it. Equally discourteous is Cuningame in Fletcher's *Wit At Several Weapons* (1609). The callous fellow uses the infatuation of the ageing Guardianess to attract the attention of the woman he is really after. The Guardianess makes

a complete fool of herself, showering Cuningame with gifts and moping after him until he realises his plan isn't working and promptly discards her with some unpleasant parting words:

I took thee down a little way to enforce
a Vomit from my offended stomach, now thou'rt up again
I loath thee filthily.

(2.2.191-93)

Nor is the ageing bawd proof against inappropriate longings. Mistress Quickly in *Henry IV Part Two* (1597) is seen in Act 2 pursuing the unlovely Falstaff, who has promised to marry her, while Mistress Correction in *Cupid's Whirligig* hopefully chats up Young Lord Nonsuch - 'though I am an old woman, yet I hope your worship will not despise age' (3.2.94-95). I have already discussed male anxiety about the expression of sexual desire in the ageing woman. Confrontation of this issue can be avoided by reducing such a woman to a figure of fun on stage and so diminishing her through ridicule, reprobation and repression, so it is not surprising that this happens regularly to the nurse and the bawd.

Alongside such comic images of these older women we often find another powerful, dramatic presentation of bawd and nurse as being especially dangerous to other, younger women. Here, shared characteristics in nurse and bawd also include cupidity and deceit, as the older woman supplements her earnings with extra gifts from males desiring access to the young woman in her charge or over whom she has influence. Nurses like Juliet's, though modestly refusing payment for their 'pains' (2.3.172) have it thrust upon them anyway. Others, less fastidious, take the tips without fuss,

as in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600) where Piero, wooing the widowed Maria, works successfully through her nurse and servant, as the "dumb show" at the start of Act 3 makes clear:

Piero bribes Nutriche and Lucio; they go to her, seeming to solicit his suit. She riseth, offers to go out. Piero stayeth her [...] embraceth and kisseth her, and so they all go out in state.

The Nurse figure in Chapman's *May Day* (1602) actually angles to be bribed. First Temperance presents one of her charge's suitors with a tempting picture of Leucetia asleep:

Lord do I think to myself [...]

Now if I were a man and should bear my Mistress an ill will,
what might I do to her now.

2.3.37-39

And when the wooer takes the bait Temperance has her initial terms ready:

you may mar the bed [...] and that I would not for
the best gown I shall wear this twelve month.

(2.3.54-58)

Bawds can be bribed with jewels and cash as Maquarelle is in Marston's *The Malcontent* or, as in the case of Arcase in *The Widow's Tears*, by an offer of property ownership - 'thy manor house gratis' - or the chance of restitution of her reputation through marriage - 'to some knight or other, and bury thy trade in thy ladyship' (2.3.31-33). Indeed, the offering of extra perks is shown as an essential part of any commercial arrangement with the bawd and may well reflect that in reality a flat payment for services would be top-sliced by the man in charge.

Deceit is part and parcel of the *modus operandi* of the bawd. For example, Birdlime, in Dekker's *Westward Ho!* (1604), provides services for the three city wives while secretly juggling their husbands in and out of the bed of her most popular prostitute. Yet the nurse, too, will often behave as though deceit is second nature. Ideally, her position is one of trust, because she is so close to her charge and an influence upon her. Indeed, if she had been her charge's early wet-nurse the bond would be doubly powerful. Diana E. Henderson images the wet-nurse 'linked to an early modern family by milk rather than blood' and becoming 'as close to a child as were its parents'.²²⁵ We see aspects of this in a number of plays. In *Romeo and Juliet* the privileged involvement of Juliet's nurse when Lady Capulet decides to test the water regarding a match for her daughter is a clear mark of family trust. Initially barred from this 'counsel' (1.3.10) the Nurse is hastily co-opted and allowed to contribute, albeit bawdily, throughout the *tete-a-tete* between mother and daughter. The devotion of the nurse Lychorida to Marina in *Pericles* is emphasised by Marina's strewing her grave with flowers (15.65-69) and the way in which dangerous Dionyza plays on this in her smooth assumption of the caring role - 'Do not consume your blood with sorrowing./ Have you a nurse of me' (15.75-76). In Fletcher's *The Night Walker* the Nurse takes her mistress to task over that Lady's choice of husband for her daughter:

Nurse: Well Madam, well, you might ha chose another.

A handsomer for her years.

²²⁵ Diana E. Henderson, 'The Theatre and Domestic Culture', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kaston (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp.173-194 (p.185).

Lady: Peace he is rich Nurse,

He is rich and that's beauty.

Nurse: I am sure he is rotten,

Would he had been hang'd when he first saw her.

1.3.12-15

Such criticism from a paid servant, coupled with the Lady's somewhat discomfited response - 'Termagant! What an angry quean is this!' (1.3.16) – again indicates that the nurse occupies a position in the family where her views carry some weight. The fact that Juno in *The Silver Age* deliberately takes the shape of Beroe, Semele's nurse, to achieve immediate intimacy with the young woman also underlines the trust placed in the nurse figure.

Yet rather than use her position to restrain her charge the nurse will connive with, and even encourage, disobedience of parental ruling by the girl for whom she is responsible. For example, in Samuel Daniel's *Hymen's Triumph* (1614) the nurse, Lydia, encourages her charge to lie about her pursuit of a young man, and in *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* (1613) by Robert Taylor, the nurse connives with Maria to pretend this young woman is dead, in spite of Maria's husband showing every sign of going crazy at the news. Deception may be in the cause of true love and may result in a happy-ever-after ending with the parents finally accepting their daughter's choice, but it is clear that the nurse's actions are not what an employer would wish in a paid and trusted servant. More importantly, they can result in disaster for the young woman concerned. Juliet's Nurse betrays family trust in actively supporting her charge's relationship with Romeo: even after the killing of Mercutio she helps the lovers consummate their secret marriage. In an

interesting extension to this nurse's deceit Shakespeare shows her urging Juliet to cut her losses, once Romeo is banished, and marry Paris who is the parental choice. Perhaps the Nurse truly believes that Juliet's first marriage is as good as dead and that a second will not be bigamous, or perhaps she belatedly realises where her family loyalties should lie. At all events her attempt to stimulate Juliet's enthusiasm with romantic images of Paris:

An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath.

3.5.219-221

ironically harks back to, and falls short of, the language she employed previously in promoting Romeo's charms:

and for a hand and a foot and a body, though they are not
to be talked on, yet they are past compare.

2.4.41-42

The Nurse in *The Night Walker* also acts subversively in supporting her charge's own choice of a husband. Although, as we have seen, the Nurse in *Wily Beguiled* challenges Saphos over his intentions towards Lelia, she is also active in the plotting which outwits the girl's father and other assorted suitors, by acting as postman and go-between for the lovers and helping set up their marriage. It is not surprising therefore that taking on the persona of a nurse in *The Silver Age* allows Juno to act with deceit, using that nurse's command over Semele for her own revengeful ends. It is an expected element of the character she is "performing". For the Queen of Heaven's faithless husband, Jupiter, is pursuing Semele and Juno wants to arrange a lovers' tryst so that

she can eliminate the competition. She acts the bawdy nurse, urging Semele - 'Thou shalt be on flame,/so great, the Ocean shall not quench the same' - so that the girl is fired up enough to insist on Jupiter's providing her with 'celestial wonderment' (3.12^v). Juno's delighted exit speech - 'Thy death's upon thy boon' (3.1^v) - doubly emphasises the danger of taking such advice from a supposedly trusted confidante. She might be a disguised goddess and wronged wife bent on retribution or she might be your ordinary nurse abrogating her duties. Indeed the only nurse in this group discussed who maintains her integrity for her virgin charge, Marina, and her family is Lychorida who, in *Pericles*, dies before the girl has to face challenges to her innocence.

Like the nurse, the stage bawd can aid and abet women eager for sexual adventure. These are not the prostitutes under her charge in the brothel but women like the wife of Elbow the constable who has been a regular visitor to the Overdone establishment in *Measure for Measure*, as the interrogation of Pompey reveals,

Escalus: Now, sir, come on.

What was done to Elbow's wife, once more?

Pompey: Once, sir? There was nothing done to her once.

2.1.133-5

Similarly, the wives in *Westward Ho!* use the bawd, Birdlime, to cover their tracks when planning an outing with three young gallants and when the wives are shopped to their husbands it is Birdlime who rushes off to warn them - 'It may be I may come before them' (4.1.34-36). However, her intervention

proves unnecessary as these canny wives are well able to extricate themselves from the clutches of their companions and an awkward situation.

While providing services for such wives appears to be a sideline to Birdlime's main line of work the bawd Maquerelle in *The Malcontent* has the unfaithful Duchess Aurelia as her prime client. However, we see here that a bawd's essential greed and cunning can render her untrustworthy. Maquerelle is bribed by another hopeful wooer to persuade Aurelia of her current lover's treachery and then proves herself a useless look-out by allowing the Duchess to be caught in flagrante - 'I, like an arrant beast, lay in the outward chamber, heard nothing' (4.2.19-20). There is a similar moment in Gervase Markham's *The Dumb Knight* (1608), which emphasises this worrying carelessness in the bawd. Collaquintida stands helplessly by when the husband of her client, Lollia, arrives home early while the unfaithful wife is entertaining the lover:

Lollia: O Mistress Collaquintida, what shall become of us.

Collaquintida: Nay, I'm at my wit's end and am made

Duller than any spur-gall'd, tired jade.

(3.1.F2^v)

It is some fast footwork by Lollia which eventually saves the day for her. Aurelia is not so lucky, though she defends herself when discovered. It is amusing and ironic that Maquerelle now piously uses the Duchess as an example to the other court women she deals with:

Maquerelle: O beauties, look to

your busk points - if not chastely, yet charily; Be sure the

door be bolted – [...]

Emilia: How bears the duchess with this blemish now?

Maquerelle: Faith, boldly; strongly defies defame, as one
that has a
duke to her father. And there's a note to you: be sure
of a stout friend in a corner, that may always awe your
husband.

4.1.22-23, 36-39

Another, major stage activity for the bawd is to procure honest young women for dishonest men, and we see Maquerelle engaged in this, later in *The Malcontent*, when she is hired to tempt the virtuous Maria. A bawd's skill in this area is often demonstrated by reference to her already having drawn a number of young women into her trade and playwrights surround the bawd with an atmosphere of sleaze and corruption imaging her as a thorough-going danger to other women. Malevole says that Maquerelle is 'able to set a/ thousand virgins' tapers afire' (2.2.8-9) and other bawds, like Malena in *All's Lost By Lust* (1619) by William Rowley, will boast of being 'the pattern that a great/Many has taken out pictures by' (1.B2^r). Yet the bawd is often unable to entrap the honest and innocent woman and Maquerelle's failure with Maria is not untypical in dramatic terms. Attempting to persuade the young woman to submit to the desires of another man, Maquerelle cynically attacks Maria's character - 'she was a cold creature ever [...] she had almost brought bed-pressing out/ of fashion' (5.2.84, 89-90) – and dismisses her loyalty

what's

honesty, what's constancy, but fables feigned, odd old
fools chat, devised by jealous fools to wrong our liberty?

(5.3.12-14)

However, she cannot prevail. Similarly, Birdlime in *Westward Ho!* is unable to procure the wife of Justiniano for the lustful Earl, even though Mistress Justiniano has been deserted by her unpleasant husband and is well aware of how difficult life will be on her own. Birdlime focuses on the deserted woman's fears, offering common-sense solutions: Mistress Justiniano should make use of her 'commodity of beauty' (2.2.186) while she can. But this wife has a strong will - 'Witch, thus I break thy spells: were I kept brave/On a King's cost, I am but a King's slave' (2.2.197-98) - and is able to walk away from temptation. Even though Birdlime, Maquerelle and their like may not prove a great deal of use to their predatory male clients this is not meant to detract from the threat they pose to innocent women nor undermine the sense of satisfaction, within the play, when their blandishments are rejected. Because she is established stereotypically as a corrupter of innocence her actual lack of success in this area does not make the bawd less malevolent and blameworthy.

When innocence is overcome, despite resistance, blame also focuses on the bawd, even though she may not be the immediate agent of the young woman's downfall. The happily married Lucina, in Fletcher's *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, is beset by two court procurers, Ardelio and Phorba, who are paid to entice her into the Emperor's bed. They use familiar techniques: mocking Lucina's 'idol, honour' (1.2.1) and urging the young matron to maximise her assets - 'all that blessed beauty/Kept from the eyes that make it so, is nothing' (1.2.15-16). They also offer her jewels. But they add an intriguing spin to

their procuring by suggesting that as Valentinian's mistress Lucina can become a power to do her country good:

Ardelia: And if anything redeem the Emperor

From his wild, flying courses, this is she [...]

She has the empire's cause in hand, not love's [...]

Phorba: I look by her means for a reformation.

1.2.66-67, 72, 76

When Lucina mounts a passionate counter-attack it is almost entirely directed at these two women - 'Ye are your purses' agents, not the Prince's' (1.2.106) - who she castigates as traitors to their own sex - 'You sell the chastity of modest wives' (1.2.140). Valentinian she refers to as 'god-like' (1.2.145) even while she is resisting 'The honours that he offers for my body' (1.2.148).

In this play, though, the honest woman is not able to walk away from the threat against her. Lucina is tricked by Valentinian into going to court and there is raped by the "god-like" Emperor. Where Ardelia and Phorba fail in their psychological entrapment the man in the case succeeds by use of physical force. In the same way, when Malena fails to entice Jacinta into King Roderigo's bed, in William Rowley's *All's Lost By Lust* (1619), the King intervenes to achieve his ends:

Roderique: Speak, is she pliant?

Malena: Stubborn as an elephant's leg, no bending in her.

You know what you have to do my liege; trees that

Will not yield their fruit by gentle shaking must

Be climbed, and have it pulled by violence.

2.G3^v

The suggestion comes from Malena and her involvement in what happens cannot be dismissed but Roderigo has no qualms about using physical force and this scene ends with him dragging Jacinta away.

Although close reading reveals the bawd as unsuccessful compared to the male pursuer, it is the image of the struggle of youthful female innocence against older female corruption which has the dramatic impact in these plays. The male agent of female dishonour is subsumed into the actions of the bawd. Equally, the triumph of virtue in plays where the purity and honour of a young woman at risk miraculously converts the male pursuer is seen as a victory over the bawd and all she represents rather than a defeat or deflection of inappropriate male desire. A powerful example appears in Shakespeare's *Pericles* where Marina, trapped in a brothel, will not be 'bowed' (4.2.83) and ignores the Bawd's hopeful instructions, 'You must seem to do that fearfully which you commit willingly' (4.2.111-20). Marina is subverting best practice for prostitutes as the outraged Bawd discovers:

When she should do for clients her fitment and do

me the kindness of her profession, she has me her quirks,
her reasons, her master reasons, her prayers, her knees,
that she would make a puritan of the devil if he should
cheapen a kiss of her.

4. 6.5-10

Marina's goodness overcomes the lust of both the high-status Lysimachus and the pimp Boult, but we are diverted from the exploitative roles these men play in the brothel by the callous wickedness of the Bawd. Deciding that rape is the only way to bring the evangelical innocent into line she chillingly orders

the pimp, 'Use her at thy pleasure. Crack/The glass of her virginity, and make the rest malleable' (4.6.139-141).

Similar diversions are achieved in Dekker's *Match Me in London* (1611) and Davenport's *The City Nightcap* (1624) where blame again is fixed upon the bawd. In the first the lascivious King of Spain is defied by his prey, Tormiella and, seeing the error of his ways, swears 'By heaven I will not force thee 'gainst thy blood;' (2.2.85). However, he turns on the bawd, Lady Dildoman, who he set to entrap Tormiella - not because her efforts on his behalf cut so little ice but because her trade and person now offend him, 'By help of such a hag as thou, I would not/ Dishonour her for an Empire' (2.2.102-03). In *The City Nightcap* Abstemia, a good but rejected wife, takes sanctuary in an establishment 'Where gentlewomen lodge' (4.E2^v) but of which she grows increasingly suspicious. The bawd, Timpania, tries to procure her for Antonio, son of the Duke of Verona, and when she fails Antonio tries on his own behalf. Shamed by the young woman's purity, Antonio is not angry with her, but with his erstwhile helper:

Timpania: Ye found her pliant?

Antonio: Y'are rotten hospitals hung with greasy satin!

4.F1^f

His reverential farewell to Abstemia - 'Here's a new wonder: I have met heaven in hell' (4.F1^f) - masks the reality of the power he and other men have in the world of commercial sex, through physical superiority and financial control. Thus the evil work of the bawd appears to be driven solely by motiveless malignancy towards her own sex.

Typically, dramatists present the warning "Women Beware Women" but it is worth noting an engaging exception. In *The Custom of the Country*, by Fletcher and Massinger, Sulpitia is Mistress of the Male Stews and a tough employer at that. When she moans about the lack of 'a lusty man' (3.3.1) for her establishment she is reminded, 'You do so over-labour 'em when you have 'em,/ And so dry-founder 'em, they cannot last' (3.3.2-3). Sulpitia is concerned to supply the needs of her clientele - 'my custom with young Ladies,/And high-fed City dames, will fall' (3.3.24-25) - and also wants some sexual satisfaction for herself. So, when she lights upon Rutilio and buys his freedom in return for his sexual services it seems she has found a winner. Rutilio boasts 'Bring me a hundred of 'em: I'll dispatch 'em' (3.3.77) and also offers to satisfy his new employer - 'I'll make you young again, believe that Lady/I will so frubbish you' (3.3.90-91). Alas, despite his frubbing attentions Rutilio and Sulpitia fall out when he proves reluctant to tackle his work-load, including 'two coaches of young City dames' and 'An old dead-palsied Lady in a litter' (4.3.25, 28) and announces that he would rather be shot or racked. The main difference between Rutilio and his female counterparts (apart from the obvious one) is that this bawd has not had to attempt to entice or entrap him into this wearying life. And although he is "rescued" it is not by a client but by another man.

Despite the often ineffective entrapment technique of the bawd she is the one who most regularly receives public punishment while the nurse, who is more likely to have succeeded in influencing her charge, rarely receives public condemnation of her actions. The Nurse in Rowley's *A Shoe-Maker, A Gentleman* neatly side-steps criticism of her part in the secret marriage of her

charge by emphasising 'I was asleep when 'twas done i'faith' and although Diocletian is sure 'She winked a purpose' she is not punished for her involvement in the love-plot (5.L1^r). In *May Day*, Temperance, though branded a woman who 'sells complexions, helps maids to services, restores maidenheads, brings women to bed, and men to their bedsides' (5.1.299-300), also evades punishment and is married off at the end of the play - a fate she seems to accept with equanimity. Often the nurse disappears from the action well before the play's end and is not mentioned again, though this does not necessarily imply that she goes unpunished for any wrong-doing. Dramatists of the period may simply be reflecting the fact that the head of a family would deal privately with an erring servant. In the same way, the stage bawd's public punishment can also reflect the social regularisation deemed necessary at the time. Because the bawd operates in the public sphere she cannot be dealt with in private and social order is only seen to be restored when those in power publicly allocate punishment to the bawd.

The apparent rewarding of the bawd Arsace, in Chapman's *The Widow's Tears*, may seem to imitate the marrying off of Temperance in *May Day*. Arcase is another unsuccessful procurer, bribed to present Tharsalio as a super-stud to the widowed Eudora. As I show in Chapter 4, Eudora is intrigued and perhaps aroused, but she has already engaged in bold and sexually charged exchanges with Tharsalio and has no intention of falling helplessly into his arms. Arsace is not given any verbal response to Tharsalio's neat disposal of her future so we cannot know if she is as sanguine about her lot as Temperance appears to be. The deal includes the free gift of her property, which Arsace currently rents from Eudora, but as a

married woman the bawd would have no claim to this and so a wedding might be more constraining than rewarding for her. It is unusual to find a bawd rewarded as in Thomas Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), when the old woman is given pride of place at the happy-ending weddings. Generally, bawds are imprisoned, like Mistress Quickly and Mistress Overdone, whipped through the city, like Dildoman in *Match Me In London*, or banished to the suburbs like Birdlime and Maquerelle. The latter two have been operating individually in the City and at Court so their relegation to the area where many brothels functioned implies that they will face greater competition from now on and their trade draw in fewer perks. Whatever the punishment the bawd's squeals of protest add comedy to the final scenes of many a play.

In *Valentinian* Fletcher images a kind of "natural justice" when Phorba and Ardelia, who tried to entrap Lucina, are murdered by 'the women of the town' (5.2.58), though he does not indicate whether those administering punishment are "honest" women or disgruntled madams. Perhaps the most chilling closure appears in Robert Daborne's *The Poor Man's Comfort* (1617) where the bawd, Mrs Gulman, is banished 'Six mile from any City' (2185). Although her daughter, the whore, has been murdered by the play's hero and his wife it is the bawd who is castigated for seeking justice - 'such deserve not common right of men' (2013). All sympathy goes to the killers while their victim is described as 'a creature' whose existence would 'bankrupt' the world (2138-40). So, there is great relief all round when the King overturns the court ruling against the killers and targets for punishment Mrs Gulman, the person everyone recognises as the real villain, 'Hell's Harbinger/this Bawd' (2182-83).

Daborne's grim view certainly suggests that justice is not one of the comforts available to those who operate beyond accepted social morality.

This divergence as far as punishment is concerned marks the only substantial difference between the characters of nurse and bawd in their stereotypical presentation on stage. The rest of the time their similarities are so strong that boundaries may even become blurred. For example, Mistress Quickly's care of the sick whore Doll Tearsheet in *Henry IV Part Two* (2.4) and Mistress Overdone's fostering of Lucio's bastard child by Kate Keepdown, (*Measure for Measure* (2.2), are not unlike the concerns of the nurses for their charges in *A Shoe-Maker, A Gentleman* and *The Night Walker*.

I have already discussed the equivocal role of the Abbess in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* where this erstwhile carer has the young Matilda wielding her crucifix to ward off her evil intentions, and there is a similar sense of multiple identity with the character of the Landlady in *The Chances* (1625). Fletcher shows her acting in a bawd-like capacity for her male lodgers despite her comic protestations of respectability - 'I pay the rent and I will know how my house/Comes by these Inflammations' (3.1.23-24). Like other nurse and bawd figures she is mocked and abused by the young men and provides a humorous focus with her sexual fantasies about them - 'oft I am forc'd/To fight off all four for my safety' (3.4.29-30). Her agreement to care for a foundling child is achieved by the offer of 'gold for the bringing up on't' (1.8.89), which links with the image of nurse and bawd being easily bribed.

Elsewhere in Fletcher's work there is more obvious crossing of boundaries. In *The Humorous Lieutenant* (1619) he has the bawd Leucippe co-opt the governess of the young woman, Celia, she is paid to procure. So

Celia has the machinations of two older women to contend with and one of them is a companion she obviously cares for, as we see in her immediate contrition after upsetting her Governess - 'You know my nature is too easy, Governess,/And you know now, I am sorry too' (3.2.67-68). This older woman's cold-hearted connivance in the entrapment of Celia - she is concerned the young woman will prove 'too honest for us all' (2.2.90) - is as unpleasant as Leucippe's haggling over the purchase of a new virgin for her brothel - 'what do you pitch her at?/ She's but a slight toy - cannot hold out long' (2.3.70-1). The similarities between these two unpleasant older figures are very clear.

Writing with Massinger, Fletcher also features a nurse character who plays the bawd in *The Little French Lawyer* (1619). Later, writing alone, he shows the duplicity of an old bawd, Cassandra, in *A Wife For A Month* (1624). Employed as a waiting woman, she soon reverts to her old ways when her mistress, Evadne, is pursued by Duke Frederick. In trying to promote the Duke's cause this unreformed bawd presents an idiosyncratic new slant on the rape of Lucrece - 'She was before a simple unknown woman,/When she was ravished, she was a reverent Saint' (4.3.41-42). Like all bawds in this type of situation, Cassandra fails in her temptations and also loses her new post. Incensed at her treachery Evadne sends her back to the old trade - 'go follow your fine function,/ There are houses of delight that want good Matrons' (4.3. 89-90) - and threatens her with mutilation if she reappears. Small wonder that Cassandra exits in tears, having failed in both areas of employment, as bawd and nurse!

A most remarkable crossing of the line between bawd and nurse is seen in the woman who apparently succeeds where Cassandra and her like fail. Mistress Quickly, a bawd in both parts of *Henry IV* and in *Henry V* is re-invented in a much more respectable persona in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. As Anne M. Haselkorn points out, despite having 'ministered to Prince Hal's wants' Mistress Quickly and Doll 'remain legal and social castoffs' and are duly punished by their illustrious client.²²⁶ In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, however, Mistress Quickly is housekeeper to Dr Gaius - 'in the manner of his nurse' (1.2.3) - and in this social position becomes the accepted confidante of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page and a nurse figure to Anne Page (2.1.149-155). This shift is not entirely inappropriate to the character. Discussing Shakespeare's prostitutes Jyotsna Singh points out that in her appearances in *Henry IV 1 and 2* Mistress Quickly is 'constantly asserting her own respectability' and is eager to rise above her position, which makes her an easy target for Falstaff who promises marriage while robbing her blind.²²⁷ Her nurse-like role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is an ideal transformation and Shakespeare uses the similarity of the stereotypes to show how little adaptation is needed. Indeed, Quickly's bawdy talents may not have been entirely shaken off. Her exchange with Peter Simple includes a litany of seemingly innocent domestic tasks, some of which carry sexual innuendo - she will 'wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink, make the

²²⁶ Anne M. Haselkorn, *Prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedy* (Troy: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), p.47.

²²⁷ Jyotsna Singh, 'The Interventions of History', in Dympna Callaghan, Lorraine Helms and Jyotsna Singh, *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.7-58 (p.36).

beds' - for which she is 'up early and down late.' (1.3.91-92, 97-98). Her services to Dr Caius may not be entirely domestic.

When she and Falstaff are reunited he makes use of Mistress Quickly again in a bawd-like capacity, to act as messenger to and from the wives and to procure these women for him. Another aspect of the bawd stereotype is referenced here, for the honest and faithful wives are more than a match for her. At the same time the nurse-like Quickly is approached by the various suitors of Anne Page and encouraged to promote their cause. Stereotypically she bemoans her torn loyalties:

I would my master had Mistress Anne; or I would Master
Slender had her; or, in sooth, I would Master Fenton had her.
I will do what I can for them all three, for so I have promised,
and I'll be as good as my word.

3. 4.101-05

However, she acts 'speciously for Master Fenton' (3.4.106) who has given her a cash bribe and who she finds the most attractive - 'A woman would run through fire and water for such a kind heart' (3.4.101-02).

There are references here, then, to the deceitful nurse involved in subverting parental wishes and the deceitful bawd, out to entrap honest women but failing to do so. There is comedy drawn from the nurse/bawd stereotype in Mistress Quickly's bawdy innuendo and in her making a fool of herself linguistically, applying a coarse reading to schoolboy Latin:

Evans: What is your genitive case plural, William? [...]

William: Genitive - horum, harum, horum.

Mistress Quickly: Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie upon

her! Never name her, child, if she be a whore.

4.1.52, 55-57

So, although Mistress Quickly appears to have crossed over into respectability, from bawd to nurse, Shakespeare makes use of the similarities between these stereotyped characters to show the equivocal nature of this transformation. It is not so much that Mistress Quickly's old habits have died hard but that she, and the dramatist, can utilise them again in her new capacity. In a play supposedly designed as a vehicle for the resurrected Falstaff the re-animation and doubtful alteration of the one-time bawd provides parallel comedy to the portrait of a man who has not changed at all.

Such a transformation from bawd to nurse relies entirely on audience appreciation of the similarities between these characters. It is also apparent that the unpleasant, older woman stereotype utilised is one which playwrights are reluctant to abandon, even when it imposes severe limitations on character development. This is seen most clearly in the bawd characters in the anonymous *A Warning For Fair Women* and Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters*.

As Betty Travitsky points out in her exploration of contemporary dramatised accounts of husband murder, Anne Drury, is the 'more interesting female villain' in *A Warning For Fair Women* although it is her neighbour, Anne Sanders, who commits the crime of petty treason.²²⁸ This certainly reflects the bias of the accounts of Isabel Hall and Margaret Farneseede discussed above. Drury is, indeed, a potentially more exciting bawd than any discussed so far because her machinations end in death rather than

²²⁸ Betty Travitsky, 'Husband-Murder and Petty Treason in English Renaissance Tragedy' in *Renaissance Drama*, 21 (1980), 171-198 (p.178).

dishonour. Based on real events, the play dramatises the murder of George Sanders by Captain George Browne who has seduced Sanders' wife and wants to marry her. Drury is bribed by Browne to procure Mistress Sanders and stereotypical elements of the bawd character are used to establish her role in this part of the plot. Drury claims to have skills in 'surgery' (1.190) but her true calling is quickly revealed. She uses sexual innuendo to inflame Browne's interest - 'Mistress Sanders hath a sovereign thing/ To help a sudden surfeit presently' (1.200-01) - and when he urges the bawd to help him she presents herself as both the defender of her chaste neighbour and open to bribery - 'I will not wrong her for a thousand pound' (1.232). Like other bawds Drury also boasts of how easily she will achieve Anne Sanders' capitulation - 'she shall have much ado/ To hold her own when I begin to woo' (1.1.314-15). We hardly need the confirmation of Drury's servant, Roger, that Anne Sanders will not be not the first 'That you have won to stoop unto the lure./It is your trade, your living' (3.450-51).

Drury's "wooing" takes the form of a grim fortune-telling - 'You must be, mistress Anne, a widow shortly [...] It is most certain, you must bury George' (4.682, 684) - followed by reassurance that once her husband is dead the young woman can marry Browne. Not surprisingly Anne Sanders is somewhat taken aback, but despite her assertion that 'I do not find me any way inclined/To change, or new affection' (4.758-59), Anne Drury seems convinced of her own success:

I never could have found
A fitter way to compass Browne's desire,
Nor in her woman's breast kindle love's fire.

4.764-66

The evil influence of the bawd turns the situation from seduction into husband-murder so, although it is Browne who carries out the killing and brings down the law on all concerned, use of the stereotype demands that considerable blame focus on Drury. Her own sexual appetites are aroused by the whole business - she offers Browne a bed at her house if the killing is successful - thus emphasising her complete lack of morality. We are meant to sympathise with Browne's reminder to her that he is 'Undone by that that thou hast made me do' (13.1754).

Although Drury is punished like other stage bawds she is, unusually, shown in a state of repentance - 'My soul was ignorant, blind and almost choked/With this world's vanities' (21.2635-36) - and there is an assumption of eventual redemption - 'I am as well resolved to go to death/As if I were invited to a banquet' (21.2637-38). This conclusion for the character is linked with the real events from which the play is adapted and is the only alteration of the bawd stereotype. It draws attention, though, to the limitations of that stereotype. Like Hall, and to some extent Ferneseede, Anne Drury is shown to be accepted as a respectable member of her neighbourhood community: Sanders addresses her politely and even urges his wife to ask her to supper - 'She'll play the wag, tell tales and make us merry' (2.410). The unknown playwright utilises the stock image of the dangerous older woman who insinuates herself into respectable society with the intention of corrupting innocence. Possible reasons for Drury's creating mayhem among her neighbours are not explored and though there is mention early in the play that she will use the bribe money from Browne for her daughter's dowry, to marry

her to 'some rich attorney, or gentleman' (3.466), this is not pursued and not referred to again by Drury in mitigation of her guilt.

Though he, too, maintains the bawd stereotype in *A Mad World My Masters* Middleton allows the Mother's actions and behaviour to reveal the effects of the precarious world of commercial sex upon those who must make their living in it. I have already commented in Chapter 3 on the way this older woman seems to fit the "bad mother" stereotype, by securing her own financial comfort at the expense of her daughter's morality. Yet in prostituting her daughter, the Courtesan, this Mother has a clear agenda to benefit them both. She will achieve the financial security which, by implication, she has previously enjoyed - 'The sums that I have told upon thy pillow! I shall once see those golden days again;' (1.1.150-51) - as a result of the young woman using her wiles to entice a rich fool into marriage. The bawd is aware that such a marriage is the only way for her daughter to achieve 'the opinion for a virtuous name' (1.1.164) but calculates that once she is settled in this respectable state her daughter 'May sin at pleasure, and ne'er think of shame' (1.2.165). This cynical image of married life reflects the way in which women become commodities in the world of commercial sex and how they may be able to work the system to their own advantage. The Courtesan refers to Sir Bounteous Progress as her 'keeper' but adds that,

there's no park kept so warily but loses flesh
one time or other, and no woman kept so privately but
may watch advantage to make the best of her pleasure.

1.1.129-31

The Mother is a stereotypical bawd. When she identifies Follywit as the fool whose inheritance will ease their existence she uses standard bawd tricks to catch him, talking up the Courtesan's 'bashful spirit' and offering her as an enticing 'foolish virgin' (4.5.30, 36). Yet within the stereotype we glimpse the greater complexity of a woman striving to move her daughter out of the dog-eat-dog world in which they live. Clearly it is becoming harder to keep ahead of the game, as the Mother reflects,

The shallow ploughman can distinguish now
'Twi't simple truth and a dissembling brow.
Your base mechanic fellow can spy out
A weakness in a lord, and learns to flout.

1.1.139-42

Once Follywit is trapped into marrying the Courtesan Mother and daughter unblushingly weigh up Sir Bounteous Progress's probable reaction, agreeing that the old man's continued access to the Courtesan's services will resolve any problem and be a small price to pay:

Courtesan: 'Twill scarce please him well.

Mother: Who covets fruits, ne'er cares from whence it fell;

Thou'st wedded youth and strength, and wealth will fall.

Last, thou'rt made honest.

Courtesan: And that's worth 'em all.

4.5.134-37

Though vilified by Sir Bounteous Progress, when the marriage is revealed, the Mother's satisfaction is reflected in a final defiance of him which focuses

completely and triumphantly upon her daughter - 'She was married yesterday' (5.1.86-87).

Given the relish with which some writers at least explore non-stereotypical images of the other mature women I have discussed so far the reluctance of playwrights at this time to move beyond the interchangeable stereotypes of nurse and bawd is interesting. Both nurse and bawd characters serve a similar dramatic purpose - the bawd is always an agent for sexual connection and the corruption of innocence while the nurse plays a comparable role in relation to her charge, acting as go-between in the arrangement of a liaison which is against parental wishes. So, on stage, discussion of immoral sexual behaviour need not focus on such problematic aspects of social structure as the male-controlled commercial sex industry, sexual politics, or poor parenting. Instead the older nurse or bawd (or both) are seen as instrumental in promoting such behaviour and blame for its consequences can be laid at their door. That both stage bawd and stage nurse are foolish, avaricious, garrulous, lecherous, uncontrolled and uncontrollable ageing woman makes them perfect targets. Certainly the dramatic stereotyping of the bawd is also seen in contemporary society where the women involved in commercial sex are denigrated, but little attention is paid either to the causes of such involvement or to male agency.

Because there is such limited contemporary evidence about "real" nurses and bawds we need to be aware of this stereotyping, and of the part played by contemporary drama in influencing our images of them. Otherwise we risk internalising an entirely fictitious history for these older women.

Chapter 6: 'Of boundless tongue', *The Winter's Tale* (2.3. 91-2).

As the preceding chapters show, in presenting the majority of older female characters dramatists limit the range of their stage discourse to their domestic position and their relationships to husband, or potential husband, and children. The older women who do operate beyond the family - nurse and bawd - are constrained by their stereotypical depiction which extends to the language each can access. Therefore, they are never developed as characters responding to the kinds of freedom other women do not appear to experience. As I stated in my Introduction to this study, only four older women speak out in public from positions of centrality which are not related to the domestic sphere and I will now discuss these characters in detail.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra is the ruler of a Roman puppet state and long-time lover of that state's representative in her country, while the Queen in Fletcher's *Bonduca* leads the British resistance to Roman invasion. Madge is the teller of a romantic story in Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*, and Paulina has a similarly creative role in *The Winter's Tale* and is the focus of principled action in the play. All are, or have been, wives, which indicates a grounding within the domestic arena, but their activities on stage have little or no connection with domesticity and we see these women operating freely beyond constraints of marriage and family. Yet they are linked by more than their unusual dramatic freedom. The playwrights concerned finally reject the stereotypes of older woman in presenting these characters and they do so by accessing and then repudiating such stereotypes. So we see examples of the older woman fearful of losing her looks; demonstrating her inappropriate sexual appetite;

being disobedient in rejecting male guidance; showing self-will in ignoring sound male advice; daring to behave like men. Most importantly these particular women share a specific characteristic which, as I have demonstrated, is regularly allocated to the older woman in drama - they are garrulous. That 'boundless tongue' of Paulina's (2.3.91) is seen wagging in each of them. However, while playing with all these characteristics and apparently showing these women as examples of the need for vigilance in restraining female actions and speech, even – perhaps especially – in maturity, the playwrights set aside the stereotypes to present dramatically invigorating women who operate beyond appropriate social structures. Through their language they challenge and defy accepted patterns of female behaviour. It is fascinating to see that the dramatists achieve this by presenting these older women in their own image, as creators and directors of their own stories. The ways in which Cleopatra and Bonduca present themselves may be in response or reaction to male constructs of what a powerful ruler should be, but they maintain their own creations in the face of fierce male opposition and finally defy male intervention to take their own lives. Madge is placed as narrator and, initially at least, the director of the play within a play. Paulina creates, directs and performs in the drama which restores a marriage and enables reconciliation.

As the outspoken woman is a cause for much anxiety at this time it is not surprising that although the playwrights play positively with the idea of the uncontrollably garrulous female all but one of these are finally silenced. Both Cleopatra and Bonduca maintain personal independence but, after they have committed suicide, the final judgements upon them are uttered by

representatives of the patriarchy. Bonduca is reduced by this to the stereotypical bad older woman, but exciting theatrical structuring allows the image of Cleopatra to remain undiminished, even though death has silenced her. Madge is returned to domesticity under the control of a husband. Only Paulina is still vocal and still alive at the end of a play which owes its conclusion to her direction and, although she is married off and apparently reclaimed for control by patriarchal rules at this point, the central male character of the play, Leontes, acknowledges her power and influence. Shakespeare's own acknowledgement of the continuing importance of the older woman in contemporary society is fleeting but unequivocal here.

There are intriguing similarities and differences in the treatment of Cleopatra and Bonduca and so I will discuss their plays together. In the creation of their Queens Shakespeare at first presents the stereotype of the lust-driven older woman fearful of losing her sexual attraction, while Fletcher utilises the image of the older woman who speaks out too loudly and too often. Shakespeare subverts the stereotype to explore Cleopatra's genuine anxieties focused around the fact that she is ageing, setting her vanity alongside her trepidation about her waning sexual powers and showing the importance of these matters to herself and her country. He also gives his Queen language which reveals her ability to conform to appropriate female behaviour and at the same time defiantly sweep this aside. Fletcher has so organised his play as to apparently belittle Bonduca. Paul D. Green sees

Fletcher's treatment of the Queen as imaging masculine Rome in a positive way against 'certain negative values' of a Britain ruled by a woman.²²⁹ While this is true I argue that Fletcher also shows a woman struggling to access appropriate language and behaviour as she attempts to take on a man's role. So he engages with and at the same time rejects the negative stereotype preferring greater complexity of characterisation.

Much has been written about Cleopatra's self-presentation in *Antony and Cleopatra* but I am surprised by the lack of critical attention given to her as an older woman. In Chapter 1 I have referred to the ageing of Queen Elizabeth and how this influenced the way she presented herself to public view, in terms of real and sexual politics, and the stage presentation of Cleopatra engages fully with this aspect of female rule. It is interesting, therefore, that few literary critics address the issue of Cleopatra's age. Janet Adelman, in an early essay, considers this but only in relation to 'the antiquity of her race' and she places Cleopatra 'outside the range of time altogether'.²³⁰ Writing more recently, Joyce Carole Oates acknowledges that Antony and Cleopatra 'are not youthful lovers', but concentrates discussion on the relevance of the age difference between Antony and the youthful Caesar.²³¹ Generally, critics ignore the age issue. Linda Bamber concentrates on the imaging of Cleopatra's artifice and ambiguity, a 'representation of the Other as against Antony's representation of the self', while Jyotnsa Singh sees

²²⁹ Paul D. Green, 'Theme and Structure in Fletcher's *Bonduca*', *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982), 305-316 (p.305).

²³⁰ Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on 'Antony and Cleopatra'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p.138.

²³¹ Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Tragedy of Imagination: Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra' in *Celestial Timepiece: A Joyce Carol Oates Home Page* <http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/southern/antony.html>. (16 Oct. 2000), p.6.

Cleopatra as 'marginalized as the temptress, witch, adulteress' despite her 'dazzling' performances, and places her critique of the character within a discussion of contemporary anxiety about the feminising influence of theatre.²³² Theodora A. Janowski touches on the changes Cleopatra's body undergoes but explores the ways in which these differ from the usual stereotype which she categorises as 'silent, dismembered, or a male plaything'.²³³ Francesca T. Royster and Mary Floyd-Evans engage with the staging of the character in relation to race, as does Ania Loomba who pointedly comments that she enjoys the play more now than as a student when she 'wasn't allowed to comment on the racial difference' within the play.²³⁴ Age has no part in these discussions, however. Even in her consideration of pictorial images of Cleopatra, Mary Hamer comments on Jan de Bray's painting of 1669, in which his parents appear as the ageing Antony and Cleopatra, as reflecting 'the role of patriarchal authority within marriage' without considering that de Bray is also painting a couple of realistic age. Nor does Hamer explore the far from youthful appearance of Cleopatra in other

²³² Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), p.45; Jyotnsa Singh, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Renaissance Drama*, 2 (1989), 99-121 (pp.100, 99).

²³³ Theodora A. Janowski, "'As I Am Egypt's Queen": Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and the Female Body Politic', *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 5 (1989), 91-110 (p.102).

²³⁴ Francesca T. Royster, 'Cleopatra as Diva: African-American Women and Shakespearean Tactics', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-visions In Literature and Performance*, ed. by Marianne Novy, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989); Mary Floyd-Evans, 'Transmigrations: Crossing Regional and Gender Boundaries in *Antony and Cleopatra*', in Comensoli and Russell, pp. 73-96; Ania Loomba, 'The Colour of Patriarchy: Critical Difference, Cultural Difference and Renaissance Drama', in Chedgzoy, pp.235-255 (p.243).

illustrations she considers - a woodcut from the Ulm Boccaccio of 1473 and Hans Weiditz's illustration to the Augsburg 1532 edition of Petrarch.²³⁵

Yet Shakespeare shows that for Cleopatra the ageing process and its attendant uncertainty, is central to her self-presentation. Her apparently self-congratulatory acceptance of being 'wrinkled deep in time' (1.5.29) is speedily undermined by the news of Antony's re-marriage. Her physical attack on the messenger who brings the information, and the words she uses - 'Rogue, thou has lived too long' (2.5.73) - reflect her more realistic acknowledgement of her own age. Her rage and confusion in this scene carry great dramatic power but, of course, undermine royal dignity. This treatment of the character is opposite to that of Samuel Daniel in *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*. His Queen meditates more soberly upon her situation, presenting herself as Antony's 'debtor' because he gave up so much for a woman past her best. She considers her age and lost looks in elegiac form:

And yet thou came'st but in my beauty's wane,
When new appearing wrinkles of declining
Wrought with the hand of years, seemed to detain
My grace's light, as now but dimly shining,
Even in the confines of mine age

(1.171-75)

The calm acceptance by an ageing woman of 'this Autumn of my beauty' (1.181) is confirmed as appropriate behaviour through the dignity of the language. By contrast the loss of self-control in Shakespeare's Cleopatra is cause for discomfort in all who witness it. The battered messenger takes to

²³⁵ Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.24.

his heels; Charmian urges restraint upon her mistress - 'keep yourself within yourself' (2.5.65). The audience is made equally uneasy by the older woman's lack of restraint. Yet the hysterical response of this Cleopatra reflects far more forcibly female fears about ageing and its consequences.

However, Shakespeare does not leave this issue with a stereotypical image of the jealous, scared, over-excited older woman. Cleopatra's questioning of the messenger in 3.3 is calmer and more measured and focuses very specifically on the looks of Antony's new bride. Her response to the revelation of Octavia's age is a sharp question about the woman's face - 'Is't long or round?' (3.3.29). She does not want to dwell on the age difference, once this is revealed, but seeks reassurance that her own looks and sexual attraction are superior still. This is crucial to her for, although we have Enobarbus' assertion that 'Age cannot wither her' (2.2.241), Shakespeare makes it clear that this lyrical description of the way she 'pursed up' (2.2.193-94) Antony's heart at Cydnus relates to the start of their relationship. When the play opens they have been together for some time and have a number of children. Though the comment by Enobarbus that she 'makes hungry/Where most she satisfies' (2.2.243-44) provides an image of Cleopatra as an eternal, entrancing, sex-fantasy object for all men Shakespeare shows that in reality her sexuality now centres solely upon Antony. Though she recalls her earlier affair with Caesar she places it firmly in the past, 'When I was green in judgement, cold in blood' (1.5.73). Her present is entirely occupied by Antony and all past actions judged against her behaviour with him, 'Did I, Charmian,/ Ever use Caesar so?' (1.5.65-66). Cleopatra is not coquettishly tallying up conquests here but reflecting on

youthful love and comparing this with her present, mature, relationship. There may have been other loves in her life but Antony is now her only focus, her 'man of men' (1.5.71).

It is clear, too, that this passionate partnership has worn into a companionable relationship. A few lines after Philo's salacious comments about Antony's sexual enthrallment to Cleopatra (1.1.10-13) we learn that what the couple actually have planned for tonight is an outing 'to wander through the streets and note/The qualities of people' (1.1.55-56). Cleopatra's reminiscences of exciting times with Antony include fishing trips, all-night drinking bouts and cross-dressing romps (2.5) and, while such activities need not preclude sex of the most inventive and satisfying kind, the image of this couple is also that of companions in pleasure. That Cleopatra's first wild response to the news of Antony's marriage is followed by probing questions reveals the acute consternation of an ageing woman who has lived with her lover for years and is suddenly facing a rival who is younger and potentially more sexually attractive. Though she welcomes them, the messenger's responses, now thoroughly well-judged, do not truly reassure her as the uncertainty of her final remark makes clear - 'All may be well enough' (3.3.46). Shakespeare opens up the panic experienced in this situation even by a woman whose physical attractions are confirmed as timeless by male observation. He also shows the problematic political situation which will arise if Cleopatra has lost Antony. When Alexas flatteringly justifies the messenger's fear by saying that even 'Herod of Jewry' (a name with grim New Testament connections for a contemporary audience) could not face an irate Cleopatra the Queen boastfully asserts 'That Herod's head I'll have'. She

then has to acknowledge the limitations of her power - 'but how, when Antony is gone, / Through whom I might command it?' (3.3.3, 4-5, 5-6). Her own political position and influence is entirely dependant upon continuing support from her lover.

Bonduca's political power is not reliant upon her sexual attraction - the crucial male in her life and her military commander is her cousin, Caratach - but Fletcher makes it clear that this mature woman has deliberately abandoned all female attributes which might make her attractive to men and is not even able to lay claim to these when they might be politically or personally useful to her. This indication of Bonduca's folly and failure as ruler is supported by the fact that she has to be regularly schooled in what she says and does by her outraged male relative. Caratach is seen tackling this task with increasing frustration as he tries to right the wrongs done by Bonduca. He intervenes in the harsh treatment she, and her daughters, mete out to captives and countermands her orders. Caratach, we understand, is a bluff, honest soldier attempting to run a decent, honourable war against the Romans in the face of constant female subversion and manipulation.

Language is important to both Queens, but in different ways. Cleopatra is astute in her belief in the power of words, while Bonduca adopts what she believes is appropriate language to image masculine strength and aggression. Their use of language shows them as garrulous and in need of containment and at the same time reveals the power they can access through outspokenness.

Cleopatra's understanding of the importance of how language is used is seen clearly in her initial exchange with the luckless messenger as she picks at almost every utterance:

Messenger: First madam, he is well

Cleopatra: we use

To say the dead are well [...]

Messenger: But yet, madam -

Cleopatra: I do not like 'But yet'; it does allay

The good precedence.

2.5.30-32, 49-51.

She is always aware of what language can conceal and reveal. When Thidius brings her the terms which will allow her to repudiate her relationship with Anthony she does not miss his reference to Caesar's protection as a 'shroud' and she refers to Egypt's 'doom' in her flowery and ingratiating response (3.13. 71, 78). Thidius is not sharp enough to realise that her obsequious words of apparent agreement - 'I kiss his conquering hand. Tell him I am prompt/To lay my crown at's feet' (3.13. 75-76) - in fact shroud a refusal. She too is Egypt: she lays down her own crown and hears her own doom because she will not give up Antony. Her almost superstitious reliance on the power of language is revealed when Antony is dying, for she tries to use speech to hold off the inevitable, imaging herself as controlling fate in this way - 'let me rail so high/ That the false hussy Fortune break her wheel' (4.16.45-46). Even in her angry response to Caesar's renewed overtures, 'He words me girls', we see the recognition of one skilled speaker by another (5.2.187). The only time her own complex speech patterns collapse is after

the moving domestic moments when she helps Antony arm himself for the coming battle. 'He goes forth gallantly' (4.4. 36) is positive enough, but her final line, 'Then, Antony - but now. Well, on' (4.4.38) is fractured and almost incoherent. At this time of private despair she is, uniquely, lost for words.

Cleopatra maintains Antony's focus upon her by using language that is witty, direct, over-emphatic, often self-pitying, and by spinning words cleverly to hold his attention. This is demonstrated at the start of the play when she turns the interruption from Rome to her own advantage by talking Antony out of seeing the messengers. It is he who has all the beautiful language here as he confirms his love for her. Even his 'wrangling queen' admonition (1.1.50) is qualified by tenderness. Her speech, on the other hand, is brisk, mocking and direct, delivered in a clipped and aggressive style:

Perchance? Nay and most like.

You must not stay here longer[...]

Where's Fulvia's process - Caesar's I would say - both?

(1.1.27-28, 30)

Yet the end result of her "wrangling" is that the messengers are spurned and she takes Antony away with her. Of course he receives the news eventually but for now, in public and before her court and his friends, it is Cleopatra's 'messenger' (1.1.54) who has his exclusive attention. Yet Cleopatra's use of language for such manipulative purposes is not just a politician's public gimmick. Their confrontation, in relative privacy, when Antony is leaving for Rome sees her scolding and ranting deliberately becoming so uncontrollable that Antony cannot get a word in edgeways. Despite the apparent hysteria her words are chosen for maximum effect to show him how much he is hurting

her - she is 'mightily betrayed!' (1.3.25) and, though aggressively couched, her reference to the 'heart in Egypt' (1.3.41) acts as a prompt for Antony's reassurance that his 'full heart' (1.3.43) is still hers, whatever the changing political situation.

However, Shakespeare shows that even a woman so skilled in use of language as this can fall victim to the garrulousness of age, lacking full control over her tongue. Having achieved confirmation of Antony's continuing commitment to her in 1.3. - vital to her political and personal survival - it is ill-judged of Cleopatra to begin a second sharp-worded attack when Fulvia's death is mentioned. Maybe she is genuinely taken aback by Antony's callous comment on this news 'At the last and best' (1.3.61). At all events she allows her language to become so provocative and mocking that Antony closes down into cold courtesy - 'I'll leave you lady' (1.3.86) - making it clear she has gone too far. She has the wit and sensitivity to recognise this and retrieve the situation by allowing her own words to falter:

Courteous lord, one word.

Sir, you and I must part; I but that's not it.

Sir, you are I have loved; but there's not it.

That you know well. Something it is I would -

O, my oblivion is a very Antony,

1.3.87-92

The result is an image of mouthy woman suddenly and vulnerably seeking for appropriate words of appeasement. Antony's response is one of fond exasperation (1.3.92) and the situation is saved. A similar lack of control in Cleopatra appears when the dying Antony is carried to her monument.

Protesting that she dare not set foot outside she images herself as safe there from both Caesar and 'Your wife Octavia with her modest eyes/ And still conclusion' (4.16.28-29). It seems extraordinary that she should still be getting at Antony about his marriage at such a time. Again, though, she retrieves the awkward moment - here with the 'sport' (4.16.331) of drawing Antony up to her.

In each case the moments serve to emphasise the male discomfort which can be the result of female outspokenness with Shakespeare utilising this aspect of the stereotype. The tension created by Cleopatra's inability to control her tongue is then defused by her quick use of that tongue, and the stereotype is overturned so we see a woman skilful in adapting her language when necessary. When their roles are reversed, with Antony ranting at her apparent warmth to Thidius and Cleopatra reduced almost to monosyllables by his fury, she eventually calms him with a soothing and appeasing refutation of his suspicions - 'Ah dear' (3.13.161). Similarly, when she is blamed for his actions in the debacle of the first sea-fight she doesn't attempt to talk or argue her way out of the situation but uses simple apology - 'Forgive my fearful sails'; 'O, my pardon!'; 'Pardon, pardon' (3.11.55, 61, 68). This wins over her lover almost at once and he urges, 'Fall not a tear, I say. One of them rates/All that is won and lost' (3.11.69-70). The positive response elicited in each case confirms the appropriateness of her tactful and self-deprecating language. When she wants to Cleopatra can lay tongue to the right words and we see her mollifying the conquering Caesar with similarly appropriate female language, confessing the 'frailties which before/Have often shamed our sex' (5.2.119-120). Here she creates an image of herself as ill-served by her

treasurer and embarrassingly caught out by his audit, interested only in frivolous 'lady trifles' and generally 'to be pitied' (5.2.161, 175). Caesar is entirely taken in by all this verbal triviality, assuring her of his 'care and pity' (5.2.184), and so, unwittingly, gives her the opportunity to plan and carry out her suicide.

When we first see Bonduca her mockery of the defeated Romans shows that she has internalised male standards of female weakness. Presenting the received images of the enemy's strength - they are 'hardy', 'fortune makers', able to 'measure the end of nature' and to turn the world into 'one Rome' (1.1.1, 4, 5-6) - she then utilises feminine language to illustrate the attitudes which she believes have resulted in their defeat. Brought up to value pleasure and sensuality - 'love's allurements,/Not lusty arms' (1.1.10-11) - they have become 'Roman girls' (1.1.11). Her final crowing, 'A woman beat 'em [...] A woman beat these Romans!' (1.1.16, 17), is illogically boastful - if such men become as physically weak as women they might well be overcome by another woman - and Caratach soon points this out. However, Bonduca's apparent illogicality is rooted in her understanding of stereotypical male disgust at female weakness, a disgust expressed later by Caratach in similar derogatory terms when he castigates the Queen as 'The woman fool', demanding 'who bid you/Meddle in men's affairs?' and ordering her to go home 'and spin, woman, spin, go spin' (3.5.128, 133-34, 135). This string of what are obviously meant as insults culminate in extreme repugnance, rooted in gender - 'scurvy woman, beastly woman' (3.5.138). Similar, derogatory female images are utilised by Petullius who, when discussing ways of committing suicide, describes poison as suitable only for 'the death of rats and

women' and entirely inappropriate for one who wishes to 'Die like a man' (4.3.139, 141). It is not surprising, therefore, that Bonduca should appropriate of this kind of male language to emphasise and celebrate her own successes. It earns her no approval, though, only a lecture on honourable attitudes towards the enemy from Caratach - 'A man would shame to talk so' (1.1.18). Bonduca responds by suggesting that Caratach is getting soft, 'I think/You dote upon these Romans' (1.1.55). This is the kind of male jocularity established between Petullius and Junius but is obviously wrong for a woman. Bonduca is informed by her cousin, at length, of his valour against the enemy and her own bragging dismissed as further evidence of female disrespect - 'impudence, Bonduca' (1.1.83).

It is apparent that she wants to acquire correct language and behaviour. She expresses relief that Caratach has saved her from 'a flight of honour' (1.1.126) and, glad that he has shown her the error of her ways, she executes a tactful U-turn - 'Shall we have peace? for now I love these Romans' (1.1.150). Yet this is also seen as extreme by Caratach - 'Thy love and hate are both unwise ones, lady' (1.1.151) - and it is not until she agrees, more moderately, that 'These Romans shall have worthy wars' (1.1.176) that Caratach feels she has learnt her lesson to 'Allow an enemy both weight and worth' and can be called a 'worthy lady' (1.1.186, 184). Fletcher handles Bonduca's schooling here with a light touch, emphasising the dangers of an older woman exercising public power when, as her words reveal, she is at the mercy of emotions which swing from one extreme to another. Beneath the comedy, though, lies the confusion of a woman trying and failing to express male attitudes and command male language.

Once again it is her misappropriation of male language that evidences Bonduca's lack of fitness as a ruler when she unsuccessfully seeks the support of her gods at the Druid temple. The Queen's appeal for help is rooted in dark images:

on our pikes

This day pale terror sit, horrors and ruins

Upon our executions; claps of thunder

Hang on our armed carts: and 'fore our troops

Despair and death;

3.17-21

Such expressions are not at all unsuitable in a leader: Marlowe's Tamburlaine, for example, powerfully images 'my servant Death' (5.1.117) sitting on the spears of his soldiers. However, Bonduca's appeals and her daughters' demands for vengeance for the rapes they have suffered are set aside as 'fretful prayers' and 'whinings' by Caratach who asserts that 'The gods love courage armed with confidence' (3.1.53, 54, 55). It is he who has the right kind of manly and robust language in which to petition:

Give us this day good hearts, good enemies,

Good blows o'both sides, wounds that fear or flight

Can claim no share in;

3.1.64-66

Bonduca does not learn from this example, but demands to speak to the god again and has to put her in her place:

Caratach: Tempt him no more.

Bonduca: I would know further, cousin.

Caratach: His hidden meaning dwells in our endeavours,
Our valours are our best gods.

3.1.80-82

In trying to be manly the Queen has once again misjudged the language of leadership and we see further failure when the battle goes against her and she tries to stem the tide of fleeing Britons:

Shame! whither fly ye, ye unlucky Britons?

Will ye creep into your mothers' wombs again? Back, cowards!

Hares, fearful hares, doves in your angers.

3.5.147-49

Once more the language fits stage convention, this time for battlefield harangues in the face of defeat. Talbot in Shakespeare's *1Henry VI* (1592) describes his beleaguered force as 'A little herd of England's timorous deer/ Mazed with a yelping kennel of French curs' (4.2.46-47), while Coriolanus castigates his retreating troops as 'shames of Rome' with 'souls of geese' (1.5.2, 5). Such speeches are designed to re-energize downcast troops or humiliate potential cowards into returning to the fray. Yet while both male commanders end on a note of encouragement - Talbot imaging the deer at bay turning upon their attackers 'with heads of steel' (1.2.51) and Coriolanus urging - 'Come on./ If you'll stand fast we'll beat them to their wives' (1.5.11-12) - Bonduca collapses her rhetoric into a female, personal appeal for help:

leave me?

Leave your queen desolate? her hapless children

To Roman rape again, and fury?

3.5.149-151

Clearly her language defines her as a woman aping male behaviour but unable to sustain it.

When all is lost both Bonduca and Cleopatra commit suicide rather than submit to Roman rule. In doing so they exercise the only power remaining to them and achieve independence from the men who would govern their lives. However, while the language given to each woman creates some similar images of dignity and defiance, we have different perceptions of the deaths of these stage Queens. Fletcher ensures that any dignity and bravery Bonduca may demonstrate is undermined and that the suicide of this Queen can be comfortably forgotten in the final glorification of patriarchy. The death of Shakespeare's Queen, however, is so memorable as to conflict with and defeat male attempts to diminish her actions.

The actual placing of the suicides is relevant. Bonduca dies at the end of Act 4 with another Act to come in which her character is marginalised in favour of that of Caratach. He is now established as 'the play's true centre',²³⁶ and acknowledged as a worthy ally by the Romans - 'through the camp, in every tongue,/ The virtues of great Caratach be sung!' (5.3.203-04). Cleopatra, though, kills herself at the end of the play, the final action of which is the removal of her body. This Queen, in all her costumed glory, is still before us as Caesar attempts to reduce the impact of her death and her presence subverts his intention. Also, although both Queens are attended by other women in their deaths, the fact that Bonduca insists on taking her daughters with her, and the conflict which ensues when one objects, marks her down as an 'Unnatural woman' (4.4.93). Cleopatra has not directly

²³⁶ Clifford Leech, *The John Fletcher Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p.167.

influenced the choice of Iras and Charmian to die with their mistress, thus enhancing the picture of a woman who inspires remarkable loyalty in her attendants.

The importance of taking each Queen alive is emphasised. Suetonius insists of Bonduca, 'There's nothing done/Till she be seized: without her, nothing won' (4.1.70-71) and Caesar acknowledges, of Cleopatra's capture, 'her life in Rome/ Would be eternal in our triumph' (5.1.65-66). So the defiance of each woman is seen as worthy of admiration, even though they enact this defiance in different ways. From her fort Bonduca can appear publicly, challenging the besieging enemy force whose leaders see her as strong, gallant and still a possible threat:

See the Icenian queen in all her glory,
From the strong battlements proudly appearing
As if she meant to give us lashes!

4.4.6-8

These actions emphasise her continuing aspirations to masculine power.

Cleopatra, already captured by Caesar, asserts her refusal to submit in private, acknowledging her value as a trophy and sharing her fears with her women - 'I shall see/ Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness' (5.2.215-16). This focus upon personal degradation contrasts with Bonduca's public refusal of Suetonius' offers of mercy in language which eulogises her country above the power of Rome:

tis fitter I should reverence
The thatched houses where the Britons dwell
In careless mirth; where the blessed household gods

See nought but chaste and simple purity.

4.4.19-22

Bonduca's initially dignified approach to death, in which she might truly match the manliness she has been striving for, is gradually collapsed by Fletcher into a verbose wrangle and finally becomes the focus of sexual comedy. However, the playwright does allow her to regain dignity and a measure of wit in her final speech. Cleopatra's suicide, however, builds from her fear of personal indignity to a strong and glorious end from which there are no distractions.

Bonduca's rich yet measured language in addressing the Romans conjures pictures of herself and her daughters about to be liberated and, at the same time, empowered by death:

In spite of all your eagles' wings, we'll work
A pitch above you; and from our height we'll stoop
As fearless of your bloody soars, and fortunate,
As if we prayed on heartless doves.

4.4.74-77

This inspires respect in Suetonius, the Roman general, and selfless loyalty in her own commander, Nennius, who offers to hold the breach in the fortress wall long enough for his Queen to take her life. Bonduca's self-possession wavers only when her second daughter makes it clear that she is less than absolute for death and urges her mother to make terms. Then the Queen uses male bullying tactics - 'Show such another fear, and, by the Gods/ I'll fling thee to their fury' - and she spurns the fearful daughter as 'a whore' (4.4.43-4, 99). Bonduca's lack of maternal tenderness is rebuked by

Suetonius - 'Woman, woman/Unnatural woman!' and she is urged to yield, retain her title and become 'A mother, and a friend' (4.4.92-93, 97). To the last, though, Bonduca refuses to occupy a traditionally female role and instead places herself in stereotypically female situations only to subvert them. She boasts that her 'friend' is Death (4.4.144), easily commanded, and the contemporary linking of the term "friend" with "lover" mocks the idea of Bonduca as sexual object.²³⁷ She also places herself in the position of giving 'counsel' to the watching men, wittily inverting her own situation throughout a play in which she has been at the receiving end of never-ending male advice (4.4.151). However, the final image of Bonduca's strength and wry defiance is diminished by Petillius. He has found the attitude of Bonduca's first daughter a turn-on - 'S'death, I shall love her!' (4.4.68) - and, as the poison is administered, Petillius is increasingly aroused - 'I am in love! I would give an hundred pound now/ But to lie with this woman's behaviour' (4.4.120-21). While his squirming provides a comic come-uppance for the man who mocked a brother officer for loving Bonduca's second daughter this is not appropriate behaviour in a witness to the suicide of an enemy head of state, even if she is a woman. The fact that Fletcher abandons dramatic convention here suggests that he wants to diminish sympathy for Bonduca by undermining any real sense of tragedy.

So, while Bonduca's final words create a stirring image of British valour as she advises the Romans, 'If you will keep your laws and empire whole,/ Place in your Roman flesh a Briton soul' (4.4.152-3), and Suetonius orders 'Give her fair funeral;/ she was truly noble, and a queen' (4.4.155-56), Petillius

²³⁷ Williams, pp.553-4.

diverts attention from Bonduca's suicide to his own lust-driven feelings - 'A love-mange grown upon me?' (4.4.157). The scene ends with his comrade's jubilant crowing over Petullius's sexual frustration.

While it is not unusual for characters on stage to speak as they die - and often at surprising length, given the circumstances - Shakespeare's intense focus upon Cleopatra's language at her death not only ensures total engagement with her actions but maintains her presence after her death. Her calm responses to the Clown who brings the means of her death suggest quiet amusement, showing a woman at ease with herself. Yet there is no abandoning of her state and her insistence upon being dressed in her robes and regalia reflects her sense that she is engaged in a momentous act, one which Antony will approve as honourable - 'I see him rouse himself/To praise my noble act' (5.2.279-80). However, she is not going passively to her death and the wit and facility with words that have marked her out in life are not lost. When Iras dies before her she sensually portrays death as 'a lover's pinch/Which hurts and is desired', while urging herself on in case her servant should receive Antony's kiss, 'Which is my heaven to have' (5.2.290-91, 298). Even as the asp does its work she is sharply mocking Caesar as an 'ass/Unpolicied' (5.2.302-03). She remains remarkable with her final, ironically feminine image of herself as a young mother - 'Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,/ That sucks the nurse asleep?' (5.2.304-05). We have had no cause to consider Cleopatra's maternal attributes in this play but at the moment of her death she wittily uses the means of that death to create another dramatic role for herself. The words finally run out - 'What should I stay -' (5.2.308) - but it is telling that she should die in mid-sentence, vocal to the last.

Both women are judged after their deaths and are still the focus of male criticism and blame, as they have been in life. Act 5 of Fletcher's play opens with Caratach rehearsing all his country's sufferings and laying these firmly at Bonduca's door:

Oh, thou woman,
Thou agent for adversities, what curses
This day belong to thy improvidence!

5.1.3-5

He goes on to blame her for the 'sad millions/Of widows' weeping eyes', and the disappointment of hopes for the future in a land 'left a wilderness of wretches' (5.1.6-7, 15).

Initially, the comments made about Cleopatra seem more positive than this. Caesar refers to the way in which death has not undone the Queen's physical attractions, imaging her as able still to 'catch another Antony/In her strong toil of grace' (5.2.341-42). Yet this language and his insistence upon her being buried with Antony, creating a picture of this 'pair so famous' (5.2.354) clasped together for eternity in their shared grave, serve to maintain the reductive stereotype of Cleopatra as lustful gypsy imaged in the play's first scene. His term 'noble weakness' (5.2.338) warns that her suicide ought not to be viewed in the same way as Antony's and his description of her seeking 'easy ways to die' (5.2.350) tries to reduce Cleopatra's suicide to something less admirable than that of her lover. In death she should be subsumed into Antony, and Caesar insists it is 'his glory which/Brought them to be lamented' (5.2.366-67). However, the presence of Cleopatra's robed body on stage as

he speaks, coupled with the recent memory of her rich linguistic approach to death entirely subvert any attempt to reduce the powerful impact of that death.

Both Queens have limited success in their attempts to create and control their own destinies, Cleopatra by self-presentation as an eternally desirable, utterly feminine woman, Bonduca through contrived masculine performance. In choosing suicide they are able to direct and perform the drama of their dying. However, as I show in the case of Cleopatra, only a sympathetic playwright allows the drama to succeed after death.

In the plays I now consider the influence of the mature woman as director of drama is wider, involving her own life and actions but also reaching beyond these. Although, in *The Old Wives Tale*, Madge's voice is overtaken by the action of the story being performed before her listeners and the audience, it is her speaking which releases the magic of the tale. She becomes the playwright's substitute on stage and this play is unique in having a woman as narrator. Again we see the playwright initially drawing on stereotypical images of the caring, ageing female in establishing this character. The three pages lost in the wood are welcomed and offered food - 'a piece of cheese and pudding of my own making' (61-62) - and there is confirmation of her sound behaviour and attitudes when she is praised as 'a good example for the wives of our town' (63-64) by one of the guests. That such a proper old party will have a collection of tales to tell to entertain the visitors is taken for granted by Frolic - 'I am sure you are not without a score' (87) - and Fantastic images such stories as ideal refreshment (88-89). Madge

duly agrees to provide entertainment while her husband goes to bed. Her comment 'they that ply their work must keep good hours' (95-96) indicates that she is dutifully attendant to her man's physical requirements.

Peele's subsequent handling of Madge reveals a character capable of accessing a range of linguistic styles. As the play begins her language takes on a lyrical quality for her introduction of the 'fair daughter' who is 'as white as snow, and as red as blood' (114-15). However, she smartly and coarsely closes down any logical objections to a fantastic story - 'either hear my tale, or kiss my tail' (120). The narrative is not smoothly achieved for Madge, as impromptu storyteller, is creating the tale as she goes along, running ahead of herself on occasions and then having to insert characters and actions she has left out:

O Lord I quite forgot, there was a Conjurer[...]
O I forget! She (he I would say) turned a proper young
man to a bear in the night, and a man in the day, and
keeps by a cross that parts three several ways, and
he made his lady run mad. Gods me bones! who comes here?

(122, 128-32)

She directs the action of the performers, cueing the song of the harvest men, explaining Huanebango's behaviour and filling in Jack's background. Peele works with the image of the comical, long-winded older woman, potentially disrupting the narrative flow with inconsequential chatter:

this is he; and this man that came to him
was a beggar, and dwelt upon a green. But soft, who comes
here? O these are the harvest men; ten to one they sing a song

of mowing.

(256-59)

But because she herself is the narrator the stereotype yields to a fascinating insight into how the author of such a text handles plot development, clarifies aspects of story and character, and has to bow to audience expectation in relation to some characters. Clearly, the introduction of the harvest men signals a musical interlude! We see examples of Madge's creative involvement in the play through her intervention - 'this is one that is going to the conjurer' (266). Certainly her discussion of characters is designed to encourage response - 'O, this Jack was a marvellous fellow./ He was but a poor man, but very well beloved' (556-57).

After Madge introduces Huanenango as 'a choleric gentleman' (566) and sets up a confrontation with the conjurer Peele keeps her silent for the remainder of the play within the play and we find that at the end she has fallen asleep over her own story, thus surrendering the role of narrator to the playwright. Madge is now shifted back into being simply a home-maker and provider - 'let us in. We will have a cup of ale' (964). In denying the character final centrality Peele appears endorse the containment of the woman within the domestic sphere, caring for husband and guests and limiting any storytelling to the realms of home and private entertainment. However, this does not negate his challenging images of female creativity, active and engaging in public, as the older woman constructs and directs *The Old Wives Tale*.

Shakespeare's presentation of Paulina as dramatist, actor and director in *The Winter's Tale* goes a stage further in that these roles are not taken from

her at the end of the play. From her first appearance, after Hermione has been imprisoned by Leontes for supposed adultery, Paulina is shown as a manipulator - not only of the situation but of the men she is dealing with - and while her manipulative skills are initially undermined by her stereotypical garrulousness we see her becoming increasingly confident in her use of language as a tool for direction and control.

Her bossy behaviour at the prison - 'The keeper of the prison, call to him/ Let him have knowledge who I am' (2.2.1-2) - her annoyance at being refused access to Hermione and her domineering attitude imply that Paulina is just a stereotypically talkative older woman who gets her own way by being loud and aggressive. Equally, her sweeping reassurance to the jailer, 'Do not you fear. Upon mine honour,/ I will stand twixt you and danger' (2.2.68-69) seems the boasting of a mature woman full of her own importance. Shakespeare subverts the stereotypes, though, by showing that Paulina's manipulative powers get her the information she needs. More importantly she recognises the potential power of her own language, to help Hermione:

I'll use that tongue I have. If wit flow from't

As boldness from my bosom, let't not be doubted

I shall do good.

2.2.55-57

Paulina's maturity gives her that 'boldness' which is necessary in standing up to a monarch who is also a jealous husband, and when she confronts Leontes she shows tact in presenting her words as 'medicinal' (2.3.37) and herself as a mother figure or caring nurse to the King, one who has 'come to bring him sleep' and 'purge him of that humour/ that presses him'

(2.3.33, 38-9). Yet she has already decided against being 'honey-tongued' (2.2.36) and is determined to force Leontes into accepting the truth about Hermione and their new-born child, rather than 'creep like shadows by him' as the other courtiers are doing (2.3.34). Her comment about 'gossips' (2.3.41) may be unfortunate. She is referring to god-parents for the baby but "gossip" has a different connotation for Leontes, obsessed with being talked of as a cuckold - 'They're here with me already, whisp'ring, rounding' (1.2.217-18). However, it may be deliberately done to shock him: certainly it shakes him out of his unhealthy brooding. His angry mocking of Antigonus as another put-upon husband, 'What canst not rule her?' enables Paulina to open her argument - 'From all dishonesty he can' - and point up Leontes' error in imprisoning an honest wife (2.3.46, 47). Again she emphasises herself as the King's 'loyal servant [...]physician [...]obedient counsellor,' (2.3.54-5) but her language is too direct. Her announcement that she comes from Leontes' 'good queen' (2.3.58) results in his ordering her ejection. The fierce conflict which follows distracts from our understanding that Paulina is morally correct. Leontes actions are, indeed, 'dangerous, unsafe' (2.2.33), and Shakespeare has already established that the men about him are helpless to influence him, so that it is not inappropriate for a strong-minded, mature woman of integrity to attempt 'the office' (2.2.34). Yet her shouting match with Leontes, her threats of physical violence to anyone who attempts to eject her, her defiance of her husband all undermine her true intentions and establish her as lacking in dignity and circumspection. When she denounces him as a 'tyrant' and 'scandalous to the world' (2.3.116, 121) Leontes' is able to dismiss her as an uncontrollable wife while his age-specific insults - 'witch', 'bawd', 'crone' 'gross

hag' (2.3.69, 77, 108) - access the standard image of a mature woman lacking mature self control. This is reinforced by Antigonus's inability to 'stay her tongue' (2.3.11) and his seemingly feeble attitude to Paulina's defiance, 'When she will take the rein, I let her run;/But she'll not stumble' (2.3.51-52). This is clearly an older wife who has emasculated her husband. Shakespeare shows the sound intentions of this woman of integrity, who attempts to restore her King's sanity by honest speaking, undermined by carefully targeted male aggression.

Very speedily, Paulina acquires strict control of her own language in order to control the actions of others. At the same time she utilises the male-imposed stereotype of herself as a garrulous, interfering older woman to conceal her true intentions. In Act 3 scene 2 when Leontes defies the oracle, losing both wife and son, it is Paulina who publicly and with exact detail catalogues his sins. Her words imply that she is completely overcome by grief - 'O, cut my lace, lest my heart cracking it,/ Break too' (3.2.172-73) - but she is in command of the situation as we see from her immediate reference to Leontes as a 'tyrant' and her taunting image of this 'tyranny' devising spectacular punishments for her truth telling (3.2.174, 178). Like the King, we are reminded of his denial of Paulina's earlier charge of tyranny. Then he controlled the situation, now that control has shifted to Paulina who goes on to denounce him as 'a fool inconstant', a poisoner of honour, worse than a devil, 'a gross and foolish sire' (3.2.185, 191). Her revelation of Hermione's supposed death couples female tenderness with unbending outrage - 'the sweet'st, dear'st creature's dead, and vengeance for't/ Not dropped down yet' (3.2.200-01) - in such a way as to divert possible

suspicion. In the same way the manipulative nature of her next words - 'I say she's dead. I'll swear't' (3.2.202) - and her defying her listeners to restore the Queen forces their acceptance of the death. Leontes, certainly has no doubts, allowing Paulina to continue her castigation of him, this time in terms of the impossibility of his ever doing penance enough. Although what she says is just and welcomed by the guilty Leontes himself, - 'Go on, go on:/ Thou canst not speak too much' (3.2. 213-14) - it is clear that her manner is considered unsuitable by her other male listeners, for she is warned for the 'boldness' of her speech and told to be quiet. (3.2.217). Still playing the outspoken old woman she apologises, wordily, and emphasises her 'rashness' (3.2.220) only to extend that rashness and, as 'a foolish woman' (3.2.226) revisit all the areas most painful for Leontes:

The love I bore your queen – lo, fool again!
I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children.
I'll not remember you of my own lord,
Who is lost too

3.2.227-30

In referring to herself as rash and foolish even as she continues to speak out in rashness and folly Paulina seems to underline the faults of the garrulous ageing female, while in fact emphasising the crimes Leontes has committed, so manipulating his response which acknowledges those crimes:

Thou didst speak but well
When most the truth, which I receive much better
Than to be pitied of thee.

3.2.231-33

Paulina has taken control of Hermione's death and Leontes' response to it by utilising the seemingly uncontrollable loquacity of the older woman.

When we next see Paulina, 16 years on, she is still manipulating Leontes, as a sharp-tongued and constant reminder of his past errors. Though he promised daily acts of repentance (3.2.237-241) there was no mention of a role for Paulina at that time, so it is evidence of her influence that she has established herself as keeper of the King's conscience. This she regularly pricks with painful reminders of Hermione and Mamillius, which he finds no easier to bear with the passage of time:

Killed?

She I killed? I did so [...]

Now, good now,

Say so but seldom.

5.1.16-17

His courtiers resent Paulina's interference in the politically sensitive issue of his possible remarriage but again she utilises the stereotypical behaviour of old women in harking back to the past to encourage Leontes to set aside concern about the future - 'Care not for issue,/ The crown will find an heir' (5.1.46-47) - and ensure his continuing foregrounding of the memory of Hermione. This enables her to maintain control of the King, extracting a promise that he will only remarry with her approval and he acknowledges her right to do so,

O, that ever I

Had squared me to thy counsel! Then even now

I might have looked upon my queen's full eyes,

Have taken treasure from her lips.

5.1.51-54

Paulina's verbosity in her dogged refusal to bury the past is imaged as part of Leontes punishment and can be seen as positive. Eugene England believes that Paulina creates,

a painful, educative and ultimately generative drama
that moves inside the sinner's mind and shocks him to [...]
the shame which is necessary for rebuilding basic
concepts.²³⁸

Shakespeare is also engaging here with the tension between the need for remembrance of the past as essential to the process of rediscovery and reconciliation (and, of course, to the development of the plot), and natural human discomfort at the tendency of the ageing remembrancer to be so outspoken. There is similar discomfort expressed in *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) by Middleton and Rowley, where the talk of old women looking back to the past is considered 'a torment' (K1^v). Like Paulina, Guimara recalls for her brother the death of his wife and loss of his daughter and is criticised for her perceived cruelty in doing so.

That Paulina's 'boundless tongue' has enabled her to control events becomes apparent in the play's final scene when she uses it to draw all concerned into the magic that is Hermione's restoration. Like Madge in *The Old Wives Tale*, she becomes a female play-maker and director, organising the action and manipulating the responses of her performers who are also her

²³⁸ Eugene England, 'Cordelia and Paulina, Shakespeare's Healing Dramatists', *Literature and Belief* (1982), 69-82 (p.79).

audience. Added to this she is a performer herself in the drama she has devised, in the crucial role of magician and controller of the denouement.

Leontes, released from a measure of guilt by the restoration of Perdita and reunion with Polixenes, publicly recognises the 'grave and good' Paulina who has given him 'great comfort' (5.3.1) and she confirms that her manipulation of events has been honestly meant - 'What, sovereign sir,/ I did not well, I meant well' (5.3.2-3). Now she abandons the loud and challenging tones of the verbose old woman and her language becomes increasingly soft and hypnotic as she reveals the statue of Hermione. Her manipulation now is that of a playwright who can alter time, for when Leontes exclaims at Hermione's wrinkles Paulina has an explanation - 'So much the more our carver's excellence' (5.3.30). She encourages her audience, on stage and beyond, to believe in the fabrication then reinforces their need for that belief by threatening to close down the show. At their protests she tantalises further by offering greater, forbidden delights - 'I could afflict you farther' (5.3.75). It is not only the "statue" but Paulina's performance which is 'Masterly done' (5.3.65).

When she offers to make the statue of Hermione move her calm, directorial authority takes on a religious quality - 'It is required/ You do awake your faith' (5.3.94-95) - and she takes total control of the situation. She cues the music, directs Hermione's action - "'Tis time. Descend. Be stone no more' (5.3.99) - instructs Leontes in how he must react - 'Start not', 'present your hand' (5.3.104, 107) - contains the responses of other characters in the drama - 'Mark a little while' (5.3.119) - and places Perdita appropriately to 'pray your

mother's blessing' (5.3.121). Paulina's play is performed exactly as she wishes and the result is reconciliation and concord.

Shakespeare shows in Paulina a mature woman using and subverting the stereotype placed on her age and gender by her society to achieve the kind of control no such woman should admit to desiring or having, and wielding it with admirable integrity. Having presented his audience with such images - every bit as remarkable as a statue coming to life - he then tantalises by threatening their removal. For it now seems that Paulina must forfeit the independence and autonomy she has acquired and resume the role of the mature widow who must re-marry. Dorothea Kehler sees it as inevitable for the restoration of male control that 'Paulina take a new mate who will rule her' because the hierarchy has been reversed by 'Leontes sickness and Paulina's wisdom'.²³⁹ It seems, too, that Leontes is reverting to controlling behaviour in matching her with Camillo, who has demonstrated greater strength of character than Antigonus, in his earlier defiance of the then tyrannical king. The implication is that Camillo will hardly allow Paulina to 'take the rein' (2.3.51). So, in marrying this older widow off to an 'honourable husband' already prepared for the role - 'I partly know his mind' (5.3.144, 143) - Leontes seemingly enacts the stereotypical securing of silence in a garrulous old woman - 'O peace, Paulina!' (5.3.136). It appears, too, that, as David Schalkwyk's asserts, this play will conform to other 'romantic comedies' in

²³⁹ Dorothea Kehler, 'Shakespeare's Emilies and the Politics of Celibacy', in Kehler and Barker, pp.157-178 (p.165).

which 'the transfer of power into the hands of women is temporary; it is always restored to the patriarchy'.²⁴⁰

Yet Shakespeare wittily offers 'more amazement' (5.3.87) with regard to Pauline, the mature woman of 'worth and honesty' (5.3.145), having Leontes confirm that she still occupies a position from which she will guide others - 'Good Paulina,/ Lead us from hence [...] Hastily lead away' (5.3.152-53, 156). I believe that, given his unconventional handling of Paulina's character, the dramatist in fact leaves the issue of her being silenced and controlled by marriage very much open to question. Although Leontes is clearly in charge again, now that his sanity and balance is restored, his words indicate that he has no intention of losing the good influence and leadership of Paulina. She achieves dramatic autonomy, like the other three older women discussed here, through the refusal of her creator to maintain a stereotypical approach to the character. The difference with Paulina is that this autonomy does not diminish.

²⁴⁰ David Schalkwyk, "'A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's": Women, Word and Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 22 (1992), 242-272 (p.259).

Conclusion.

The four older women characters discussed in the previous chapter justify this research by the very fact of their existence, emerging as they do from the rejection of the prevailing stereotypes by the dramatists who have created them. I have established the presence of older women on stage in large numbers at this time, and have identified the stereotypical ways in which the majority of these characters are presented. Set against such a quantity of conventionally imaged older women the characters of Cleopatra, Madge, Paulina and Bonduca - all unconventional, creative, autonomous older women - could be considered dramatic experiments by, or aberrations on the part of the playwrights concerned. Yet although the challenging images of the older woman presented here by Fletcher, Peele and Shakespeare may not be present in most of the other plays at this period I have shown that, in some at least, dramatists are interested in subverting, albeit briefly, the conventional limitations of this character. Dramatic engagement with the older woman is certainly evident in the large-scale containment of her character through stereotyping. In the few, but challenging instances of subversion of the stereotypes the character is developed further. Centrality is only achieved, however, in the four plays in which the older woman is freed entirely from the restraint of stereotyping.

The character of the older woman has merited, and rewarded, the attention I have given to her in this study, and the result is an accessible and significant body of work which illustrates a process of stereotyping and the challenging of this process. Yet while this work relates specifically to the

Elizabeth and Jacobean stage I believe it is also relevant to our own time, where the position of the older woman is still uncertain and her behaviour still a focus for male anxiety.

I have established strong connections between the images of the older woman on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage and the contemporary social attitudes towards her, evidenced in personal and public writing. While pointing out the danger of assuming that such attitudes reflect, absolutely, actual social behaviour I have shown that both the dramatic and contemporary evidence emphasise the older woman's potential for disobedience and disorder. It is seen that within the patriarchal structure of Early Modern society the containment of such potential was deemed essential. Images of the older woman on stage and elsewhere show distinct stereotyping of "good" and "bad" behaviour, providing evidence of attempts to influence and control her actions and attitudes. Her maturity itself places her in a position to provide an example for younger woman and her perceived influence requires policing. The methods used to ensure her compliance with appropriate standards of behaviour relate closely to her age. Like her young counterpart the older woman is steered towards patterns of behaviour and thought deemed appropriate in the patriarchal society she inhabits. For Early Modern man the ideal woman is chaste, silent and obedient and, while this pattern of perfection may be similar for women of all ages, this study reveals that very specific methods are used for the steering and controlling of the mature woman.

Amy Boesky notes that as Elizabeth I approached the menopause she began receiving timepieces as 'a new kind of gift [...] to be worn on her body',

and points out that this needs to be considered in the context of the Queen's ageing 'and the anxieties it elicited'. Indeed, male anxiety about the physical effects on women's bodies of the passing of time is confirmed by Boesky's exploration of this fashion for "giving time to women" in this way, which increased during the Early Modern period. She argues that 'the aged crone emblemized the body clock gone wrong: disordered, intemperate, injuring man' and confirms that while 'strong associations between timepieces and women's bodies' were already well established by the Early Modern period, such associations also carried negative imagery.²⁴¹ The female experience of time is acknowledged as different from that of the male. As a site of regular alteration, through menstruation, child bearing and the menopause, a woman's body, and so the woman herself, becomes less knowable and thus a cause for male concern. Boesky's view of the timepiece gift is as an alarm-call for women is convincing. What better means of controlling women with their problematic bodies than the use of time itself, the passing of which can so alter the physical attractions of youth? Boesky points out that women's bodies 'are especially reviled in those places which, in young mistresses, were so idealized', particularly their breasts.²⁴² So we see that male disgust about female ageing is passed on wholesale to women. Instead of valuing, even celebrating, their changing physicality women themselves come to see all alteration in negative terms through internalisation of male standards of what is physically attractive.

²⁴¹ Amy Boesky, 'Giving Time to Women: the Energising Project in Early Modern England', in *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. by Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 123-141 (pp.123-4, 136, 134).

²⁴² *ibid.*, p.135.

The ageing woman losing her youthful looks faces male condemnation of an inescapable process, an irony hardly ever explored in Early Modern drama. Rather, the stereotypical ageing female whose increasingly repulsive appearance is matched by an increasingly distasteful and alarming sexual rapacity is a regular stage presence. Even when depicted positively, as a “good” example, the character is deliberately constrained. As I show in Chapter 1 of this study, there is considerable evidence that older women of the Early Modern period did not sit at home hiding or lamenting their increasing decrepitude but were vital and useful members of society, often going out of the home to work or pursue some other important activity. Yet on stage and in contemporary writing this social and civic involvement is not foregrounded, let alone praised, and older women are depicted almost exclusively in family roles, as wife, mother or stepmother, widow, or connected to a family as a nurse to its adolescent girls. The only older woman operating outside the family circle is the bawd, and her *raison d’être* is imaged as the undermining of the values and structure of the family. Thus she epitomises a specific negative stereotype of ageing female behaviour, still connected to the family, and on stage her character is despised, abused and publicly punished.

Constant imaging of the older woman’s ongoing involvement in the male-governed family confirms this institution as the means of controlling her potential for disorder, intemperance and disobedience, all characteristics which undermine male governance and which may encourage similar behaviour in younger women. The older woman herself can be reassured that however old and, implicitly, ugly she may become with advancing years

respect and security will be achieved by maintaining her place within the family and by continuing to carry out her various roles correctly.

The drama and other contemporary writings of the period indicate that such stereotypical restriction of the activities of the older female to the family was only part of the pressure to conform exerted upon her. There is condemnation and ridicule if the older woman attempts to halt or delay the ageing process by use of cosmetics, while any evidence of her experiencing sexual desire and seeking sexual satisfaction massively increases male mockery and disgust. The older woman pursuing a younger man is a character imaged on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage as both comic and repellent. An additional means of limiting and diminishing the influence of the older woman, the rendering of her as pathetic in these ways, augments the emphasis placed on the importance of her maintaining an appropriate role within the family.

It is the older woman's outspokenness which is especially problematic, providing as it does a doubly bad example to younger women. Accessing her own experience and knowledge she may speak out against men and male institutions thus encouraging disobedience to, and subversion of, male governance - not the kind of behaviour to be encouraged in the wives and mothers of the future. However, the very fact of the older woman's loquacity is itself an uncomfortable and unavoidable reminder of male inability to silence the female tongue. Men make much of general physical decay in the older woman as a weapon of control and punishment but, as I have shown, it is the continuing vitality and subtlety of her tongue which is most alarming to them.

In Chapter 2 I have explored the emphasis placed upon continuing chastity and obedience in the older wife, whatever the behaviour of her husband. On stage it may be implied that the stereotypically good wife will not find herself unduly penalised by her loss of looks if she remains virtuous, but this is no real guarantee against her finding herself betrayed by a husband who, like Gnotho in *The Old Law*, is in search of 'a chicken' (3.1.356). It is telling that the stereotypically bad wife's behaviour is pictured as resulting from lack of proper control and supervision by her husband so that any autonomy, even through bad behaviour, is denied her. Challenges to the conventional images of the older wife appear in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry VIII*. Here the stereotypes are temporarily subverted and older women are seen struggling to achieve personal security in a world where male favour is changeable while male disapproval remains fixed. Yet the dramatists conclude by reinforcing the importance of appropriate marital behaviour. The Windsor wives only pretend to misbehave in order to assert their good characters; Queen Katherine finally has no choice but to accede to her husband's demands.

The importance of the older woman as a pattern of good behaviour is most clearly seen in my exploration of older mothers, in Chapter 3. Here the good mother is loving towards and caring of her adult offspring, but never to the point of flouting convention, or morality, for this would give a wrong example. Mothers who fail are typically imaged as driven by their own desires, for power, security or sexual satisfaction, all of which are seen to run counter to what is best for the offspring concerned, usually a son or sons. Selfish maternal interference is criticised and silenced in *Rollo Duke of*

Normandy and *Coriolanus*, where the ageing mothers are finally imaged as pitiable in their attempts to control their sons' lives. Male discomfort over female ageing gains the added weight of a son's disgust at the idea, or evidence, of his mother's continuing sexuality as we see in *Lust's Dominion* and *Thierry and Theodoret*. Only in *The Devil's Law Case* is a more subtle reading of desire in the older woman achieved, but this, too, is converted into maternal self-serving when Leonora brings a false action in law to punish her son. *Hamlet* provides a unique example of the older mother who obeys all the rules of a patriarchal society, personified by her son and her new husband. Even having excised her own personality to this end she still finds herself in the wrong. Equally, the mature stepmother appears to experience the worst of all worlds. On stage and in contemporary society she is subject to all the male-generated control mechanisms which apply to the older wife, and at the same time she is measured against an image of entirely negative female power – that of the “wicked stepmother” - which threatens the happiness and coherence of family life.

Clearly, serious anxiety is generated by the older widow who does not follow the expected pattern of behaviour and demonstrate devastation at the loss of one husband along with immediate eagerness to re-marry into the governance of another. Once again disruption of family life is often imaged as resulting from the widow's rebellion, as I show in Chapter 4, and this is coupled with examples of her folly, helplessness and unbridled sexual licence. Although contemporary evidence contradicts the idea of the older widow eager to re-marry, this image is perpetuated on stage, along with a warning of possible physical harassment by suitors facing any female reluctance to

hasten to the altar. No plays directly address the difficulties facing the older widow whose financial independence enables her to take control of her own life, and who is thus perceived as a threat to a patriarchal system. However, both *The Widow's Tears* and *Women Beware Women* explore male hypocrisy towards the widow and the latter demonstrates how such a mature woman, who is tolerated by the male ruling group because she can provide specific services, can easily come to believe that this gives her licence to behave as a man might do.

The predominant image conveyed by both nurse and bawd on stage is that older women are dangerous to young women. This extends the general concept of older women offering bad examples to their youthful counterparts in that these particular ageing women actually tempt the young with ideas of romantic or sexual fulfilment – involvement in a love affair or the experience of sexual pleasures. While supposedly serving the interests of the family which employs her, the nurse more usually mimics the behaviour of the bawd by encouraging the young woman in her care to pursue a secret, or even a forbidden, relationship with her lover. The nurse is open to bribery by the man in the case and may arrange meetings where the young lovers are able to consummate their illicit relationship. In this she mimics the actions of the bawd who provides the same kinds of services on a commercial basis. The stereotypical bawd preys on young and innocent girls - usually newly-arrived in town - tempts them with offers of wealth and universal desirability, speedily corrupts them and sets them to work. The only difference in effect is that the nurse's machinations usually lead to a love-match while the bawd's rarely do. A danger specific to the bawd is that as well as corrupting young, single

women she also encourages sexual freedom in married women. She may provide a venue and opportunity for a wife to meet a particular lover, or offer a range of sexual experiences for wives intent on serial cuckolding. Of course, in the general pursuit of her trade the bawd is shown as undermining the institution of marriage and threatening family stability but her encouragement of disobedience and deceit in married women is of particular concern. Plays make much of the fact that it is her evil influence alone that is culpable here. The involvement of men in the world of commercial sex goes unexamined in the drama of the period.

As I have shown in Chapter 5, there is scant evidence as to the nurse's work at this time and we have no knowledge of how such a woman was viewed by society. There is slightly more information about the bawd but these findings suggest that she lacked the power and autonomy accorded her stage persona. The similarity between both these older women on stage reinforces anxiety about the influence of bad older women who are disorderly, outspoken, sexually knowing and often sexually incontinent themselves, and encouraging of sexual licence in others.

In the creation of Cleopatra, Bonduca, Madge and Paulina the dramatists play with some of the stereotypical images of older women before rejecting these, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 6. The convention of the older woman losing her looks while gaining increased sexual appetite appears to be central to the character of Cleopatra, the lust-driven gypsy. Similarly, Fletcher plays with the image of Bonduca as a conventionally "bad" mother, whose example to her daughters encourages their flouting of patriarchal rules and leads to their deaths. Madge is shown as a wife caring for her husband

and, at the end of *The Old Wives Tale*, she returns without complaint to her domestic duties - a pattern of the “good” wife. Paulina, on the other hand, is initially shown as a disobedient and ungovernable wife, while at the end of the play she is a widow who must, like all widows, be married off and placed once again under male control.

The playwrights then reject these stereotypes and focus on the ways in which these older women access and use language, so that it is through their words that we appreciate their uniqueness. We find that Cleopatra’s self-presentation and her sexuality relate only to Antony. As a woman and the leader of a country she is bound as strongly as her lover by the ‘fetters’ (1.2.109) which, at one stage, he attempts to break. Cleopatra does not want to break free, and does not try. It is the relationship between two ageing lovers, set in the framework of Rome’s expansionist policies, which is explored in this play rather than sexual misbehaviour by an outrageous and overheated older woman. Bonduca, too, slips the constraints of the maternal stereotype in becoming a complex and troubled character – a female monarch striving and failing to match male standards. Although Madge takes up the domestic duties of feeding and ministering to guests, at the end of *The Old Wives Tale*, she steps completely outside such activities to take on the role of creative narrator of a fantastic and magical entertainment. Paulina, too, may be heading back into family life as *The Winter’s Tale* concludes but, as Barbara Hardy points out in her discussion of storytellers in Shakespeare, this ‘old wife [...] the Queen’s friend and midwife of spring’ is the one who creates a ‘good fantasy’ in opposition to Leontes’ ‘irrational, fantastic, false, rambling, disjointed and incoherent story’. Such creativity gives Paulina great power

within the play and Hardy justly concludes that the final triumph is 'Paulina's and women's'.²⁴³

While this study has focused on the drama of a specific historical period it is relevant to our own time and our own society. As I stated at the start of this work, recent research has shown that the stereotyping of older women takes place in our own media and this is especially true of popular drama on television. Analysing portrayals of older women in prime time television situation comedies Bradley C. Osborn finds 'no older woman' at the centre of such a show. Most are 'relegated to playing mothers and aunts, in secondary [...] roles'. Specific female characters tend to disappear after the age of 40, 'reappearing as matrons, grandmas, aged/infirm' and, while finding a large percentage of older women characters portrayed as sexually active, Osborn records that 'the instances of mistresses or lascivious older females' are also high. It would seem that negative stereotyping of older women is still rife and they appear as contained within the family structure. Their ongoing sexuality is still a cause for concern - they are seen as 'over-the-hill sexpots'.²⁴⁴

Nor have we achieved an enlightened attitude towards the physical effects of ageing. Exploring present-day engagement with the notion of "beauty" Germaine Greer points out that 'whatever a woman does, she must not look her age' and it is obvious that the pressure here falls most heavily upon older women. Greer's evidence of women using injections of 'botulin toxin', as a wrinkle preventative may be anecdotal but her comment on the consumer

²⁴³ Barbara Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers: Domestic Narration* (London: Peter Owen, 1997), pp.163-4.

²⁴⁴ Bradley C. Osborn, 'Portrayals of Older Women in Prime Time Broadcast Network Television Situation Comedies: A Summer 2001 Content Analysis', in *Jour 7320: Mass Media and Diversity*, (2001) 1-17, (pp.10, 7, 11).

research which shows that ‘nothing applied to the surface of the skin can [...] prevent ageing, and still the anti-ageing products sell’ is more telling. When 21st -century women are ‘exhorted to fight and deny their age by every means in their power’ the only real difference between them and their Early Modern counterparts is that “painting” is now approved - a focus for the big business of cosmetics rather than a focus for condemnation and mockery.²⁴⁵

In her collection of poems on ageing women the Polish poet, Anna Swir, considers the different kinds of beauty which could be celebrated in the older female, such as the ‘belly that is beautiful’ because it has borne many children; the fact that she is ‘fat like the sun’; beauty which ‘is like Atlantis/It has yet to be discovered’.²⁴⁶ She reflects:

A thousand humorists have written
about her sexual hunger.
The most brilliant of them
have found their way into the schoolbooks [...]

mankind has invented for her
the most abusive
language in the world.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld, 2000), pp. 27, 29, 28.

²⁴⁶ Anna Swir, ‘Her Belly’, ‘The Reaper’, ‘Old Woman’ in *Fat Like the Sun* trans. by Margaret Marshment and Grazyna Baran (London: The Women’s Press, 1986), pp.128, 130, 142.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.142.

Certainly it is through society's use of language in relation to the older woman that we can most clearly see that our attitudes towards her remain unexamined.

Two recent examples, on my own doorstep, convince me of this. In February this year the *Cornish Times* newspaper featured two front-page stories concerning older women. One highlighted the situation of an American widow, living in Cornwall for over 30 years, whose son was refused residency in the UK to stay with and look after his ageing mother. The other news story was about an older woman arrested at a demonstration by the Campaign Against Nuclear Storage and Radiation, against the arrival of the Vanguard nuclear submarine for re-fitting at Millbay Docks, Plymouth. There was no hint of surprise in the story of the son prepared to give up his home in Washington to care for his mother - a family task still taken on more frequently by daughters. The headline 'Devoted son refused permission to look after mother (83)' perfectly demonstrated the newspaper's politically correct credentials with regard to the acceptability of a man carrying out what was considered, in less enlightened times, "women's work". The headline about the nuclear protester, referring to the terms of her bail, was different, however - 'Peace protesting granny (62) must not use Torpoint Ferry'.²⁴⁸

Between the ages of 16 and 30 I worked as a journalist on provincial newspapers and I fully understand the reasons for focusing the second story on the protester as grandmother. This woman was arrested and her liberty curtailed, and attacks of any kind on grannies are newsworthy. Much is made

²⁴⁸ "You can't stay here" - Devoted son refused permission to look after mother (83)', 'Banned - Peace protesting granny (62) must not use Torpoint Ferry', *Cornish Times*, 8 February 2002, p.1.

of the fact that the woman's actions were entirely peaceful - she attempted to burn incense at the main gate of the dockyard, she sat down and chatted to another protester, she carried prayer flags - and there is an air of reproof in the reporting of her being held for over six hours at a police station after her arrest. All this makes a far better "story" than the arrest of any youthful and, by implication, more resilient protesters. Here the central character matches an accepted stereotype of the grandmother as gentle, caring, yet self-deprecating (the protester even describes herself as 'a nobody') and therefore worthy of respect and kind treatment.²⁴⁹ The story utilises this age-linked stereotype to trigger sympathetic reader response. However, it is important to be aware of the likelihood that if this particular protester had behaved violently, if she had attempted to storm the dockyard, attacking the police in the process, and had wrecked the police station during her hours of confinement, her behaviour still would have been set against the grandmother stereotype - this time in outrageous contrast. Other images - the old woman with the "toy boy" lover or, as noted in Osborn's research, 'the ageing minx' - are informed by just this contrasting process.²⁵⁰ We are meant to laugh at the idea of an older woman apparently behaving badly. We do not reflect on the assumptions which underpin this response. Of course, it must also be noted that modern use of the stereotype is selective and often class-specific. We do not see headlines informing us 'Grandmother (72) celebrates 50 years as Queen of UK'.

In the first news story the *Cornish Times* reflects and acknowledges the apparent changes which have taken place in our thinking about what are

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.1.

²⁵⁰ Osborn, p.11.

appropriate activities for men and women and whether gender differences need apply. In the second it shows that despite obvious improvement and alteration in the health, behaviour, life expectancy and economic circumstances of much of the ageing female population, we still use unexamined stereotypes of older women in everyday discourse.

My research identifies a canon of work through which images of older women on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage are presented, examined and challenged and it is clear that there are direct connections between this work and our own images of older women. Given that certain attitudes towards the older woman do not appear to have altered in over 400 years it is crucial to continue identifying the stereotypes and exposing and subverting these. To do so with the vigour and humour of some of the Early Modern dramatists would make this a positive process. Certainly it is something which should engage all older women. Maxine Myers bemoans the fact that when she calls herself old other people 'sometimes seem embarrassed [...] as if it were some horrible disfigurement, or a disease they're worried about catching'. However, she confirms powerfully, 'I like calling myself an old woman – it makes me feel strong and wise and important'.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Maxine Myers, 'Coming Out Of The Age Closet', in *The Hen Co-op, Growing Old Disgracefully: New Ideas For Getting The Most Out Of Life* (London: Judy Piatkus, 1993), pp.62-66 (p.66).

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