

**COMPETING DISCOURSES OF LOVE AND SEXUALITY**

**IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

**IN RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

by

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## Synopsis

### **Competing Discourses of Love and Sexuality in the Relationships of Men and Women in Renaissance Drama**

This thesis is an examination of the ways in which competing discourses of love and sexuality, ranging from the literary and philosophical to the religious, have influenced the portrayal of men and women in the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The structure of the thesis is in two parts: the first concerns what might be termed normative relationships, underlying which is the ideal of mutual affection in marriage, and the second, relationships which undermine, or challenge that ideal. My central proposition is that the conflict between the demands of the body and the spirit, rooted in the ascetic heritage of the Middle Ages, lies at the heart of all discourse on love and sexuality. This is demonstrated in the tension between the Petrarchan idealisation of love and women, and their denigration; between sublimation and sexual fulfilment. Underlying the idealism associated with love is the fear of disillusionment and betrayal, arising out of a deep-rooted association of sexuality with sin, which finds expression in anxiety about female sexuality. The playwrights dramatise these tensions, placing them in a context of changing values in which traditional views of morality come into conflict with a cynical acceptance of human frailty.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the ways in which competing discourses of love and sexuality, ranging from the literary and philosophical to the religious, have influenced the portrayal of men and women in the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The discourses to which I refer are those which are employed to describe, discuss and regulate love and sexual behaviour. Predominant amongst them is the Petrarchan language of courtship, which seems to promote a different set of values to those of the moral and religious treatises of the time. My aim is to explore the way in which the tensions arising from these sources are reflected in the drama of the period. In my discussion I have taken a thematic approach, rather than adopting one of the more traditional and convenient methods of ordering material: by author, genre or chronology. These well-established approaches have their advantages but impose their own particular pattern from the outset. I have chosen, instead, to consider the patterns which emerge from the study of a sample which includes a range of author and genre, and which encompasses drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The clearest pattern that arises is that of a repeated conflict between the demands of the body and the spirit, rooted in the ascetic heritage of the Middle Ages, and given renewed urgency by the demands of Protestantism on the individual conscience. This conflict, which is expressed in a questioning of the values of love in what is perceived to be a changing society, lies at the heart of all discourse on love and sexuality. The word love resists definition, then as now, but I have taken it as it was used in the period to cover a whole range of emotions from platonic admiration to what is sometimes referred to as lust. 'Sexuality' is a term which was not in use in the period but I have used it, according to the Oxford English Dictionary's definition, to describe what is 'relative to the physical intercourse between the sexes, or the

gratification of the sexual appetites.' To make a distinction between love and sexuality is not necessarily any easier now than it was in the Renaissance but it is a distinction which was important to writers in a period in which love was perceived as being hierarchically structured, with chaste affection at the pinnacle of which lust formed the base.

The portrayal of love and sexual relationships on stage has often provoked an emotive response in critics. Traditional chronological and author-centred approaches have led a number of critics to shape the dramatic portrayal of love and sexuality in the period as one of decline into what Muriel Bradbrook calls 'the decadence.'<sup>1</sup> The term is used to refer to a decline in moral, as well as artistic standards. The process is effectively summed up by Una Ellis Fermor as 'the sinking of the clear exaltation of the Elizabethan age into the sophisticated, satirical, conflicting mood, deeply divided, of the Jacobean drama.'<sup>2</sup> More recently Alexander Leggatt, though he acknowledges that cultural change is a gradual process, suggests that there are distinct differences between Elizabethan and Jacobean drama which relate to sexual and moral issues. He describes the Jacobean Age as being characterized by 'the excitement of living in a sharply felt present, one in which the driving forces are material and sexual appetite', pointing out that, although the tradition of moralising persists in the drama, it is accompanied by a 'gleeful fascination with the vice and folly under attack,' 'a quality we hardly ever see in Shakespeare.'<sup>3</sup>

Leggatt's argument is less of a value judgement than that of some of the critics to whom I refer on the following pages, but in excluding Shakespeare from the 'gleeful fascination' with vice exhibited by his contemporaries he is following the tradition of associating Shakespeare, not only with a golden age of drama, but with a more wholesome attitude to the portrayal of sexuality; of making him the yardstick,

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<sup>1</sup> Muriel Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Jacobean Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) pp. 240-67

<sup>2</sup> Una Ellis Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (London: 1957) p. 10

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Leggatt, *Elizabethan Drama: Shakespeare to the Restoration, 1590-1660* (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1988) p. 103

not only of quality but of a moral sensitivity, by which his fellow dramatists are to be measured, and must inevitably fall short. The concept of decadence is thus not only associated with chronology, but with the ethical shortcomings of Shakespeare's fellow dramatists. As Francis Barker argues 'the reception of the Jacobean text has proceeded in a fashion entirely subjugated to the partitive sign of the literary greatness of Shakespeare.'<sup>4</sup> In the portrayal of sexual relationships with which we are concerned, this falling-short tends to be expressed in terms of charges of sensationalism and to involve disapproval of the writer's moral standpoint as well as his artistic achievements. Shakespeare is credited with the creation of comedies which celebrate love, and tragedies which have established an archetypal point of reference for passionate commitment. In contrast, other playwrights are criticised for exploiting the themes of love and sexuality for effect. Marston's approach, for instance, according to Eudo C. Mason, reveals an obsession with 'revolting images of sexual appetite and activities, and so ultimately with sex itself as a condition of our existence.'<sup>5</sup> According to Salinger, Marston's pretence at objectivity is 'strained by the knowingness and vindictiveness in his treatment of sex.'<sup>6</sup> To the end of his career', Salinger continues, he was 'unable to bridge the gap between rhetorical idealism and rhetorical disgust.' To Middleton is attributed, by Leggatt, a 'morality of expediency', 'a matter of rhetoric alone, over-inflated and spiritually dead.'<sup>7</sup> The extremes of moral indignation are reserved for Beaumont and Fletcher, to whom, according to William Appleton, 'the extremities of chastity, lust, moralizing and pornography inexorably appealed.'<sup>8</sup> They are accused by J.B. Tomlinson of being

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays in Subjection* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) p.6

<sup>5</sup> Eudo.C. Mason, 'Satire on Women and Sex in Elizabethan Tragedy' *English Studies* 31:1950, 1-10,p.2

<sup>6</sup> L.D. Salinger, 'Tourneur and the Tragedy of Revenge' in *The Age of Shakespeare* ed. Boris Ford, (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1953) p.341

<sup>7</sup> Leggatt, p.151

<sup>8</sup> William W. Appleton *Beaumont and Fletcher: A Critical Study* (London: Allen and Unwin,1956)p.60

'lightly irresponsible' <sup>9</sup> and by Ornstein of 'calculated prurience' and 'ethical frivolity'...'the toying with moral as well as erotic feeling'. <sup>10</sup>

The ideological distinction between Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries which is implied by the above is given a firmer critical foundation in Harbage's book: *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*. <sup>11</sup> To Harbage the growing divisions between the public theatre and private theatre came to represent the dual vision of sexuality characteristic of the period. What he refers to as the dominant philosophy, which rejected the medieval association of sexuality with sin and made it the foundation of a happy marriage, was represented by the public theatre and the popular playwrights. The alternative view, which associated the sexual impulse with uncleanness and belonged to a well-established tradition of cynicism and misogyny, was expressed by writers for the private theatre. According to this analysis, Shakespeare represents a more celebratory view of love and a more positive view of women than Marston, Webster and Middleton. He is associated with a popular drama which idealised marriage, as opposed to private, or 'coterie drama', aimed 'to serve appetite and curiosity with erotic stimuli.' <sup>12</sup>

The dual vision that Harbage describes pervades, not only the drama, but a whole range of writing about love and sexuality in the period. The distinction that he makes between Shakespeare and his contemporaries is, however, sometimes arbitrary. We know, for instance, that many writers, among them Chapman, Webster, Jonson and Dekker, wrote for both public and private theatres. David Farley-Hills goes so far as to suggest that, with the exception of Shakespeare, who held a commercial share in his own company, 'playwrights tended to shop around between theatres.' <sup>13</sup> Market forces, fashion and rivalry, as well as ideology, played an

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<sup>9</sup> Tomlinson, J.B., *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) p.256

<sup>10</sup> Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison : Wisconsin, 1960) p.163

<sup>11</sup> Harbage, Alfred, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* ( New York: Macmillan, 1952) p.188

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.188

<sup>13</sup> David Farley-Hills, *Shakespeare and the Rival Playwrights: 1600-1606* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990)

important part in determining the content of the product, and although we may acknowledge a distinction between those plays which seem to uphold chastity and wifely virtue and those which paint a more pessimistic picture, they could be regarded as different approaches to the same theme. It is a theme played out again and again at different times and by different writers, as these chapters will demonstrate. Constant wives abound in the popular drama, and lustful women appear in many of the plays performed in the private theatres but both are a feature of the literary heritage of the period and cannot be considered to be exclusive to any particular writer, or theatre. The ideal wife may represent a comforting wish-fulfilment, the adulterous wife a fear of betrayal: they represent an opposition of desire and anxiety which is reflected in a range of published material aimed at a variety of readers from different walks of life. The theme of virtue under attack is as popular with Shakespeare as it is with Marston, Middleton and Fletcher. The fact that Shakespeare's Desdemona, Hermione and Innogen, though much maligned and suspected, remain constant and virtuous, whilst Middleton's Bianca and Beaumont and Fletcher's Evadne become corrupt themselves, and corrupt others, may be attributed, in part, to a difference in emphasis but Shakespeare's vivid recreation of the world of the cuckold is as disturbing in its falseness as the reality of adultery confirmed in the later plays. A consideration of Shakespeare in the context of his contemporaries, and in a wider context of Renaissance thought reveals more similarities than differences: they might be termed, to borrow Valerie Traub's phrase, 'circulations of anxiety' which recur throughout the period.<sup>14</sup> It is those anxieties, amongst which can be counted the obsessional concerns with female chastity and the *leitmotiv* of cuckoldry which reverberate throughout the period, which have been the focus of recent critics who have sought

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<sup>14</sup> Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992) As Traub acknowledges, her subtitle 'Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama' is indebted to Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. See p. 5

to highlight the tensions and the conflicts within society rather than attempting to build a unified picture.

It might appear from a reading of historicist and feminist critics, in particular, that to view a period as governed by increasing tensions and anxieties as regards sexual relationships is as convenient and indiscriminating as to consider it an age of decadence. Discussions of love and sexuality in the twentieth century have been inevitably influenced by the psycho-analytical studies of Freud, which place sexuality as the motivating force of human action. These have in turn been challenged by materialistic and anthropological interpretations, influenced by the work of Foucault, in which sexuality is perceived, primarily, as a cultural construct. Despite their obvious differences, these influential figures have in their various ways, led critics to question the traditional idea of the unique individual and the nature of desire in its social context. The effect of this questioning has been to throw a new light on the representation of gender relations in the past. Psycho-analytical criticism ranges from studies based primarily on character analysis, like Jones's reading of *Hamlet* in terms of the Oedipus complex<sup>15</sup> to a broader examination of sexuality, an example of which is Jacqueline Rose's article on the relationship of aesthetic form and sexual difference in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*.<sup>16</sup> Foucault's ideas on the social and cultural construction of sexuality have inspired a number of writers to look for the hidden, or repressed discourses of homo-eroticism in the Renaissance text. As far as male-female relationships are concerned, Stephen Greenblatt's essay on what he calls 'self-fashioning' has been an influential one. The Renaissance 'self', according to him, is a construct, created in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile. 'This threatening Other heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, Anti-Christ- must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.'<sup>17</sup> For many

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<sup>15</sup> Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London: 1949)

<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'Sexuality in the reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*' pp.95-118 in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 1985)

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago:

historicist and feminist critics, perhaps the most significant 'other' for men in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is woman, and male selfhood is threatened by female transgression, rebellion or betrayal.

The concept of an embattled masculinity has become an important point of reference for many critics. The construction of masculine identity is the theme of Coppelia Kahn's book *Man's Estate*, in which she uses psychoanalytic theory to examine the way in which culture defines masculinity. In describing the way in which male fears and fantasies influence the perception of both men and women, she draws attention to an anxiety about the uses of patriarchal power, specifically, about men's control over women's sexuality. She goes on to argue that the heroes of Shakespeare's plays reflect that anxiety, whilst the women are projections of it.<sup>18</sup> Lisa Jardine also draws attention to the concept of anxiety in the relationships between men and women, extending her discussion to a wide range of both dramatic and non-literary sources.<sup>19</sup> She describes women in the drama as representing 'worries which could be made conveniently concrete in the voluminous and endemic debates about "the woman question".' Kathleen McLuskie, like Lisa Jardine, draws from a range of contemporary texts in exploring the issues of sex and gender in the sociological and theatrical conditions of the time, including the problem of the construction of sexuality in a theatre in which boy actors played the part of women.<sup>20</sup> Although it is now increasingly recognised that discourses of love and sexuality admit more than the traditional hetero-sexual interpretations, the relationships between men and women, what Catherine Belsey in *The Subject of Tragedy* calls the 'production of woman in contra-distinction to man' has been a continuing focus of interest.<sup>21</sup> As

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University of Chicago Press, 1950) p.250

<sup>18</sup> Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate : Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981)

<sup>19</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (London : Harvester, 1983)

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980)

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) p. 9

Juliet Dusinberre points out in her introduction to the second edition of *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1996), there has been a 'revision of traditional thinking about women' creating 'a ferment of new questions which animated the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.'<sup>22</sup>

In looking at the work of sixteenth and seventeenth century playwrights through what D.H Lawrence calls 'the long telescope of time' I have inevitably been influenced by the competing discourses of contemporary criticism as well as those of the texts themselves. Like the literary theorists, of whom the above provide only a sample, I recognise that love and sexuality are inextricably linked with wider cultural issues which the dramatists, keen to exploit the commercial viability of their work, exploit and reflect. I have drawn, as far as possible on discourses available to Renaissance readers and playgoers, ranging from the literary and philosophical to the religious; from the book to the pamphlet and the sermon. It is those works, rather than twentieth century psycho-analytical or feminist readings which have influenced my discussion, though I have found in them ample evidence to justify the use of terms like 'anxiety' in relation to attitudes towards sexuality. At the same time, if we discount the emotive word 'gleeful', there is no doubt that Leggatt's term 'fascination' sums up the attitudes of audiences and dramatists to the representation of love and sexuality on the stage. The revolution in the print culture, as these chapters will indicate, allowed the subject to be available to a wider readership, and Stubbes's comments about the popularity of 'bookes and pamphlets of scurrilitie and baudrie' over the 'godly treatise, reprovng vice and teaching vertue', make it clear that there was a ready market for erotic literature.<sup>23</sup> Dramatic reference is made to this preference for what Stubbes calls 'baudrie' over books of moral instruction in

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<sup>22</sup> Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (Houndmill: Macmillan, 1975, 2nd edn. 1996) p.xx

<sup>23</sup> Stubbes, *The Anatomy of the Abuses in England* I. ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner and Co. 1877-9) p.185

Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters*.<sup>24</sup> The theatre inevitably reflects that interest, pushing back the barriers and making not only romantic love and courtship, but a whole range of emotional and sexual relationships its subject. It is tempting to make comparisons with the kind of sexual revolution which acquired momentum in the 1960's, and which reached a wide audience through the media and popular culture. Whereas the sixties saw a relaxation of censorship, however, the 1690's witnessed its enforcement in the burning of books, and plays were strictly regulated as far as content and language were concerned. The conflict between the idea of sexuality as a pastime and as a sin; the ceaseless questioning of the value of love and the struggle between the flesh and the spirit take place in the context of a belief in damnation. We have no direct evidence of how deeply that belief affected people's lives; some may have rationalised like Lussurioso: in *The Revenger's Tragedy* 'It is our blood to err, though hell gap'd loud.' (I.iii.75) What we can deduce is that the contradictory voices which were accessible to the literate in poetry and prose, sermon, pamphlet and jestbook create for the theatre audience a lively debate on the theme of love and sexuality and underline the tension between the two. They hail married life as a union of souls but mock it with motifs of male infidelity and female sexuality. They praise love and women, and denigrate them in bitter and cynical terms. Alongside them, given the fact that church attendance was compulsory, must be weighed the messages given out regularly in the litany, the bible reading, sermon or homily and calculated to enhance the tension that may have existed in the mind of any man or woman who tried to reconcile the pleasure of love with its inevitable association with sin. The prospect of being watched by 'an eternal eye / That sees through flesh and all' gives a sharper edge to the struggle than can be imagined by any one living in a post-Darwinian age in which the 'sea of faith' has almost ebbed away. Conflict is an essential part of drama and what Linda Woodbridge terms 'a radical discontinuity

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Four

between Christian theory and human inclination' provided Renaissance dramatists with endless variations on a theme.<sup>25</sup> If Protestantism raised awareness of marriage as a desirable institution it also put sin very firmly on the theatrical agenda.

It is impossible to discuss love and sexuality in the period without considering the way in which women are constructed in the language of drama, but, since they are constructed largely by men, male attitudes to love and women provide the basis for much of my discussion. In order to place some limitation on the amount of material used I have restricted the discussion to encounters between men and women. That women were played by boys hardly needs to be said, and there is no doubt that this factor adds yet another dimension to the enactment of scenes of love and courtship, but I have restricted myself to a discussion of what the scenes appear to reflect about the nature of heterosexual relationships. The play texts are chosen from the abundance of material available, and include work by Kyd, Shakespeare, Chapman, Middleton, Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher. Despite valuable attempts to foreground the work of female writers in the Renaissance, it must be acknowledged that writing for the theatre was a male preserve. It is understandable therefore that in the portrayal of the relationships of men and women the focus, like that of much of the poetry in the period is on male desire; male fears of and betrayal, and the need of men to demand expiation of the woman who transgresses. Despite this, again and again, as the following examples demonstrate, the dramatists both acknowledge the stereotypes of femininity and misogyny, and mock them; uphold traditional attitudes, and undermine them. It is the great achievement of the increasingly flexible medium of drama that through the continuous interplay of ideas it is able both to portray and to shape some of most important conflicts and tensions of its time.

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *Women in the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood 1540-1629* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984) p.325

## CHAPTER ONE

### 'THE HEAVENLY RHETORIC OF HER EYE '..

*If love, dear God, what is its quality?*

The discourse of love in early modern England is characterised by a duality which alternatively idealises and demystifies it; hails it as the highest expression of intense emotion, or condemns it as the depth of folly; views it as a transcendent spiritual experience or as a degrading surrender to unruly passion. The poets explore its many moods in their verse; the philosophers and moralists define and redefine it; classify it into categories, analyse and codify it in an attempt to pluck the heart of its mystery. The complexities and contradictions in the discourse of love which are central to the literature and thought of the period arise from tensions in the religious belief which underpins all thought in the period. Implicit in the Christian faith is the concept of the duality of human nature, which is both physical and spiritual, poised between earth and heaven. The demands of the body and the soul are inevitably in conflict, the body being associated with sin and corruption, and the soul with heaven and the divine. St. Paul, one of the most influential of Christian writers, reinforces the concept of human nature as essentially sinful and life as a never-ending struggle against the temptations of the flesh. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he exhorts his disciples to 'Walke in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrarie to one another, so that ye cannot doe the same things that ye would.' (V.16-17) <sup>1</sup>

In St. Paul's list of examples of the works of the flesh (Galatians 19), adultery, fornication, uncleanness and lasciviousness are ranked first, before idolatry, witchcraft, and even murder. After all, for most individuals, the temptation to lust is far more likely to occur in daily life than the temptation to murder. If the flesh is to be

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following quotations are taken from the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible, first publ. in 1560

subdued, then its most urgent demands must be recognized and suppressed, or sublimated. The ideal state is therefore that of chastity, an ideal reinforced by the miraculous birth of Christ to a virgin mother, and by the need of early followers of Christ to 'forsake all others' and spread the word of God. It is upheld by St. Paul, who assures the Corinthians, in a famous passage, 'It were good for a man not to touch a woman'.( I.Cor.vii.1) He acknowledges the need to marry, but expresses it in terms of a weakness, rather than a positive choice, with the words, 'for it is better to marrie than to burne.' (I.vii.9) Those who burn with the fires of lust run the risk of everlasting damnation. The ascetic tradition, reinforced by the works of St Jerome and St. Augustine, continued to elevate the spiritual over the physical. To Augustine, sexuality was a potentially dangerous force. The struggle between body and spirit is, according to him, 'our congenital conflict.'<sup>2</sup> As he puts it, 'Lust alone can defy the will and seize control of the will.' The concept of sexuality as sinful and of chastity as an ideal state persisted, given substance by the insistence on celibacy in the clergy of the Catholic church, and by the establishment, over the years, of communities of men and women, dedicated to the celibate life. Although the reality of human existence and the ideal may have clashed in the private world of the individual and in the scandal of public life, the ideal persisted, even after the Reformation, as a standard against which men and women might measure themselves and fall short.

The conflict between flesh and spirit and between the exaltation and the denigration of humanity is reflected in the literary discourse of love, including that of Petrarch, who, with his followers, gave love its most effective and widely used scheme of language.<sup>3</sup> In his love poetry, Petrarch draws on two types of discourse: the poetry of the troubadours, and the neo-platonic representations of the lady as a symbol of goodness and virtue, pathway to the divine. His beloved Laura is a model of perfection but she is also a real woman, whose physical presence excites him. His love for her

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God, Vol. IV*, trans. Philip Lowe (London: Heinemann, ) p.179

<sup>3</sup> Petrarch's *Canzoniere* were first printed in 1470. The first English translation was that of Chaucer but it was Wyatt and Surrey who popularised his style in the early sixteenth century.

represents a desire for beauty and virtue but it is not a virtue in itself. He recognises it as passion and therefore sinful. The endless duality between the spirit and the flesh which underlies Petrarch's poetry is demonstrated in the resolution of the sonnet sequence, in which the poet renounces his mistress for the sake of his soul. It is out of this dualism, which associates the body and its urges with sin, that Petrarch forges a language of love; a language of paradox, in which pain is inseparable from pleasure and freedom from servitude, a language eminently suitable for a society in which the joys of sexuality could never be dissociated from an awareness of the sin of lust. The rhetoric of Petrarchanism is one of admiration, adoration and even enslavement; a helpless surrender to Cupid's arrows. Love is a painful pleasure and an exquisite pain. The discourse of Petrarchanism is focused on male desire. It is essentially one-sided, based not on inter-action, but on adulation. The artificial, codified language of admiration distances the lover from his mistress, and the language of introspection centres on his subjectivity rather than the relationship between them.

Despite, or perhaps because of its stylised quality, Petrarchanism became the conventional language of love and courtship. As Leonard Forster suggests, 'it provided the framework within which genuine love-making and courtship leading to marriage could be (and often was) conducted.'<sup>4</sup> It could be frivolous and light-hearted, or serious; a mask behind which the suitor might hide his feelings, or a means of expressing sincerely felt emotion. The language which he created became, what Gary Waller terms, 'one of the most hospitable conceptual schemes by which we have discussed sexual desire and its relation with language'.<sup>5</sup> The self-questioning which is typical of the poems is evident in this extract from Sonnet 132 :

Can it be love that fills my heart and brain?  
If love, dear God, what is its quality?

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) p.66

<sup>5</sup> Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1981) p.76

If it is good, why does it torture me?  
 If evil, why this sweetness in my pain?  
 If I burn gladly, why do I complain?  
 If I hate burning, why do I never flee/  
 O life in death, O lovely agony,  
 How can you rule me so, if I'm not fain? <sup>6</sup>

The many imitators of Petrarch included Bembo, who appears as a character in Castiglione's *The Courtier*. In this influential and widely translated work, Bembo rarifies the emotions of love into a transcendent experience. The fundamental assumptions of Petrarchanism are illustrated by his description of the ladder of love, which is essentially idealistic in its emphasis on sacrifice and liberation from the self:

Let us climbe up the staires, which at the lowermost steppe  
 have the shadow of sensuall beautie, to the high mansion place  
 where the heavenly, amiable and right beautie dwelleth which  
 lieth hidden in the innermost secretes of God, lest unhalowed  
 eyes should come to the sight of it...' <sup>7</sup>

Castiglione's Bembo places a high value on love but sublimates it beyond the physical. Where he admits to the desires of the body he associates them also with frustration. Desire is fraught with tension and doomed to unfulfilment:

And therefore who so thinketh in possessing the bodie to enjoy  
 Beautie, he is farre deceived and is moved to it, not with true  
 knowledge by the choice of reason, but with false opinion by the  
 longing of sense. Whereupon the pleasure that followeth it, is also  
 false and of necessitie full of errors. For either as soone as they (the  
 lovers) be come to the coveted ende, they not only feele a fulnesse

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<sup>6</sup> Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire* trans. p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Courtier* trans. by Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561 ( London: Dent. 1975) p.320-321

and a loathsomnesse, but also conceive a hatred against the wight beloved. <sup>8</sup>

Satiety is accompanied by a sense of disgust and rejection. Bembo's idealisation of love is accompanied by a rejection of sexual passion, expressed in terms of a conviction that surrender to the physical can only result in disillusionment. Although Castiglione recognises the need for sensual love in the young, the implication is that a mature, civilised society transcends sexuality. Like the humanism of the philosophers, Petrarchanism was unable to free itself completely from the traditional dualism that relegated the body and its urges to an inferior plane. The Petrarchan idealisation of women was based on a concept of love, which, in its highest form, was free from sexual desire.

*It is man with whom we have always to doe...*

Alongside this rarified vision of love co-existed what Jean Hagstrum terms 'a strengthened eroticism;' a greater acceptance of human sensuality in the art and literature of Western Europe. <sup>9</sup> Whilst the Bible might be enlisted by theologians to assert 'to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life' ( Romans 6), Montaigne, whose works were widely popular, reminded his readers 'it is man with whom we have always to doe - whose condition is marvellously corporall.' In his essay 'On Some Verses of Virgil' he asks ' Why was the act of generation made so naturall, so necessary - and so just, seeing we feare to speake of it without shame and exclude it from our serious and regular discourses?'<sup>10</sup> Montaigne's sceptical view of human potential is expressed in his earlier work, in the form of a questioning of the arrogance with which 'this miserable and puny creature, who is not even master of himself, exposed to the attacks of all things, should call himself master of the universe,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid,p.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Hagstrum, *Esteem Enlivened By Desire: the Couple from Homer to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1992)p.293

<sup>10</sup> Michel de Montaigne *Essays: Vol.III*, trans. John Florio (London: Dent,1910, rpr.1980) p.70

the least part of which it is not in his power to know, much less to command'<sup>11</sup> His views contrast with the expansive claims of earlier humanists like Pico della Mirandola, but they pave the way for a more modest view of human nature, one which acknowledges the animal, without degrading it. Melchiorre Zoppio boldly disagrees with the old platonic ideal, remarking that 'Plato, indeed, seems to be portraying love more for eunuchs than for men capable of progeny.' He goes on:

Since in fact we are men we ought not to be like beasts, but we are not incorporeal substance and the delights of the senses have been given by nature for use. If man had nothing beyond sense no other love would come to him but the libidinous. If again man were pure intelligence and immaterial, there would not come to him other love than from the divine, which loves divine beauty. But we are animals and rational beings too.' (1583 )<sup>12</sup>

The claims of Montaigne, Zoppio and others for an acceptance of man's dual nature without condemnation, had their support. Erotic art and literature co-existed with idealistic, Petrarchan-style discourse and stern biblical exhortations to avoid sin. If the visual arts had a limited audience, the written word was more widespread; the spoken word of the play, even more so. The *novelle* of Boccaccio, Bandello and Marguerite de Navarre were widely popular and the two volumes of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (published in 1566 and 1567) offered stories deriving from these sources. Ovidian poetry like Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* appealed as much to the senses as the intellect and the poetry of Shakespeare and Donne, though it paid tribute to chaste virtue, represented also the extremes of sexual passion and jealousy.

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<sup>11</sup> Essays, Vol II, p. 13

<sup>12</sup> Melchiorre Zoppio, *Psafone trattato damore del Caliganos Gelato* trans. by Ruth Kelso in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956) p.147

If Petrarch gave the Renaissance the literary basis for the language of courtship, Ovid could be said to have provided a point of reference for eroticism. One of the most widely read and influential poets, his *Metamorphoses* were reproduced, imitated and translated, notably by Golding.<sup>13</sup> The preface to his translation is an attempt to reconcile the contents with the traditional Christian viewpoint on sexuality. Commenting on the transformation of men into swine for following their 'filthie lust', he adds:

For why this lumpe of flesh and bones, this bodie is not wee:  
 We are a thing which earthly eyes denyed are to see.  
 Our soul is wee, endowed by God with reason from above:  
 Our bodie is but as our house, in which wee woorke and move.  
 Tone part is common too us all, with God of heaven himself:  
 The toother common with the beastes, a vile and stinking pelf.  
 (101-6)

This pious reminder of the Medieval legacy of the contempt for the flesh did not prevent his readers from enjoying the tales, and the proliferation of erotic poetry in the period suggests that they might have been read for more than the moral commentary which they offered. Nevertheless, as Golding's preface illustrates, the tension between the idealisation of love and the acceptance of sexuality was one not easily resolved.

The anti-romantic approach, in the style of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, acknowledges the frank enjoyment of sexuality, but is often accompanied by a cynicism which devalues passion, and by implication, the woman who is its object. If idealisation could lead to a sublimation of the physical, acceptance often led to degradation. A more earthy view of relationships resulted in sexual satisfaction being regarded as a reward in itself, with women as objects to be possessed, and once possessed, inevitably diminished in value. The concept of pleasure as ultimately disappointing pervades the

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Golding in W.H.D. Rouse, ed. *Shakespeare's Ovid: Arthur Golding's translation of the 'Metamorphoses'*, (London: Centaur, 1961)

love poetry of the time and colours male attitudes to women. If sexual love was inseparable from disillusionment, the idealised mistress, once won, could never live up to her image.

The Protestant celebration of marriage added a further dimension to the discourse of love. It emphasized, in particular, two things. One was the importance of mutuality of affection, and the other was the acceptance of a sexuality neither sinful nor exploitative, but chaste within the confines of marriage. The ideal and the reality, as always, were not necessarily compatible, and old habits of thought were not cancelled out by the new. In the poetry of Spenser, however, neo-platonism merges with Christian doctrine, the end of loving being union with the beloved in marriage. In Sonnet LXXXIII, he rejects sensual desire as damaging:

Let not one sparke of filthy lustfull fyre  
 breake out, that may her sacred peace molest:  
 ne one light glance of sensuall desyre  
 Attempt to work her gentle mindes unrest  
 But pure affections bred in spotlesse brest.  
 And modest thoughts breathd from wel tempred sprites,  
 goe visit her in her chaste bower of rest,  
 accompanyde with angelick delights.

Lust is condemned in biblical terms and sensual desire repressed, but without the self-reproach of Petrarch. There is a suggestion that sexual pleasure awaits, if the lover can modify and restrain his desires. Spenser's *Amoretti* contain tensions and contradictions but the sensual thoughts that are increasingly expressed towards the end of the sequence are resolved in marriage. Spenser's ambivalence about sexual love, as a source of both guilt and of joy is a reflection of the dualistic tradition but it is an ambivalence resolved in the belief that sexual passion can be sanctified and transformed in the loving relationship between man and woman in holy matrimony.

*..that I may be like a lover, and then I will sigh and die..*

The literary language of Petrarchanism, with its paradoxes, its conventions of style, and its assumptions about the relationship of the lover and his mistress provided, for the dramatist, a vehicle capable of expressing a range of emotions, from sincerely felt passion to deceit. Its elaborate imagery of eyes darting fire and hearts pierced by Cupid's arrows proved to be readily adaptable for the stage lover. In the romantic comedies of Lyly and Shakespeare the game of courtship is played according to Petrarchan rules, which provide both a means of expressing passion and of ridiculing it. The competing discourses of idealisation and denigration meet in the drama, and are revitalized by its inter-active nature. The idealistic lover, worshipping his disdainful mistress in the time-honoured fashion, meets the mocking cynic, to whom love is a game, and woman no more true than he intends to be. The two discourses meet and clash, with the added dimension that, unlike the sonnet, drama provides a built-in response. The essentially one-sided nature of Petrarchanism is transformed into inter-active dialogue, providing a means of exploring a complex range of relationships, from idolatry to reciprocal love, culminating in marriage. The mistress, disdainful or otherwise, is granted the right of reply to her lover and sometimes, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, (1599), takes over the courtship script herself.

The context of performance gives rise to some difference in emphasis: the plays of Lyly were enacted before the Queen and by boys' companies. They acknowledge and pay tribute to Elizabeth's virginal status. Unlike some of the plays enacted at court, which had the overt political purpose of persuading the Queen to marry, there is evidence that they succeeded in pleasing their royal audience. Lyly acknowledged the happy resolution of courtship in marriage but the movement of his plays is often towards sublimation, service and devotion: an idealised, and sometimes chaste version of Petrarchan love. This echoes the theme of his prose works, *Euphues* and *Euphues in England*. When, in the latter, he describes the experience of the two young men as 'skirmishes between reason and appetite, love and wisdom, danger and desire' Lyly

expresses the conflicts which are to underlie the treatment of love and sexuality in drama throughout the period.<sup>14</sup>

In *Gallathea* (1585) the debate about love is enacted in the form of a struggle between love and chastity personified by the two goddesses Diana and Venus. As they wrangle over the exploits of Cupid, whose darts have played havoc amongst Diana's chaste nymphs, the two heroines, both disguised as youths, fall impossibly in love with one another. The overwhelming force of love is expressed by Ramia in her protest to Diana:

Madam, if love were not a thing beyond reason, we might then  
give some reason of our doings, but so divine is its force that it  
worketh effects as contrary to that we wish as unreasonable against  
that we ought

(III.iv.59-62)

But what, to Ramia, is a divine force, is to her chaste mistress, a matter of 'loose and untamed appetites.' (III.iv.74) Lyly pays tribute to the virtue of chastity by allowing Cupid to be captured and punished by Diana and her nymphs, but it is the goddess of love who imposes the comic solution. Whilst Diana's lovesick nymphs recover from the symptoms of love to devote themselves once again to chastity, the two heroines are allowed to marry once Venus has worked the miracle of miracles by transforming one of the heroines into a man.

The alternative idealisation and denigration of love which occurs again and again in the drama is demonstrated in Lyly's *Endymion* (1588). The hero is in love with the most remote of mistresses, the Moon queen, Cynthia, to whom he protests:

Desirest thou the passions of love, the sad and melancholy  
moods of perplexed minds, the not-to-be expressed torments of

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<sup>14</sup> John Lyly, 'Euphues and his England' (1580) in *The Complete Works of John Lyly: Vol.II* ed. Warwick Bond (Oxford, Clarendon, 1902) p.89

racked thoughts? Behold my sad tears, my deep sighs, my hollow eyes, my broken sleeps, my heavy countenance. Wouldst thou have vowed me only to thy beauty and consume every minute of time in thy service?

(II. i.9-15)

Characteristically he emphasizes his sufferings and her unattainability. All the ingredients of Petrarchan love are there: the idealisation of the mistress, the pain of the lover and the sublimation of love in service. Endymion protests his pain with an almost masochistic relish of his suffering, an unrequited devotion which would place him high on Bembo's ladder of love. This model of Petrarchan love is not without its detractors. The words of Endymion are parodied by the pages; their high-flown sentiments undercut by mockery. Dares asks his companions, 'Come, Samias, didst thou ever hear such a sighing,...for moonshine in the water?' (II.ii.1-3) He warms to his theme, ridiculing the symptoms of love, and the posture of the lover by wordplay that makes literal the metaphorical and draws attention away from the spiritual to love's effects on the body.

How say you, Favilla, is not love a lurcher that taketh men's stomachs away that they cannot eat, their spleen that they cannot laugh, their hearts that they cannot fight, their eyes that they cannot sleep, and leaveth nothing but livers to make nothing but lovers?

(II.ii.9-13)

Dares does not allow desire to be a matter of moods and minds but insists on its relationship to bodily functions, with an emphasis on the liver, which was thought to be its source. His humour relies on an assumption that the body, if not, as in the Middle Ages, regarded as contemptible, is vulnerable to ridicule. This emphasis on the physicality of love is repeated later in the play, when the protestations of Sir Tophas are comically contrasted with the aspirations of Endymion. Sir Tophas denies being in love

but his words parody those of the Petrarchan lover, with the emphasis on the physical, rather than the spiritual:

...love hath, as it were, milked my thoughts, and drained  
 from my heart the substance of my accustomed courage. It worketh  
 in my head like new wine, so I must hoop my sconce with iron,  
 lest my head break and so I bewray my brains: But I pray thee, first  
 discover me in all parts, that I may be like a lover, and then I will  
 sigh and die.

(III. iii.23-29)

There is none of Bembo's 'holy light' in Sir Tophas's vision but a series of ridiculously concrete images. The head, which houses the brain, the source of reason, becomes, in his graphic description of the effects of love, a mere wine barrel. His mistress, far from being the epitome of beauty, is the epitome of ugliness. His feelings are firmly and comically associated, not with heavenly aspiration, but with earthly fulfilment. As he says, 'I feel all *Ovid de Arte Amandi* lie as heavy at my heart as a load of logs.' (III.iii.54-5) True or false love is, he declares, meaningless to him; in the end, he is prepared to have any woman 'so she be a wench.' (V.iv.293)

Comic as Sir Tophas is, his words sound a note of cynicism about love and women which is to be amplified in later drama. Here he effectively draws the laughter onto himself allowing the plight of other lovers, such as Endymion and Eumenides to be viewed with sympathy as well as amusement. Shakespeare uses a similar technique in *As You Like It*, exploring conflicting ideas of love through contrast and parody. The homage paid to love by Orlando and Silvius is subjected to the critical scrutiny of Rosalind and the ridicule of Touchstone, who, like Tophas, himself plays the lover on yet another level. Silvius is the archetypal romantic lover. He declares

So holy and so perfect is my love,  
 And I in such a poverty of grace,

That I shall think it a most plenteous crop  
 To glean the broken ears after the man  
 That the main harvest reaps.

(III.v.100-4)

In elevating his feelings to the level of 'holy' love he emphasizes the purity of his motives. It is a love which appears to transcend passion and reduce the lover to humble adoration, suing for grace from the deity he worships. As in the case of Endymion, it is a love directed towards an unattainable mistress. Like Silvius, Orlando is obsessed by love, which he expresses in a series of verses which decorate the trees in the forest of Arden. He praises Rosalind in extravagant terms:

From the east to western Ind  
 No jewel is like Rosalind.

(III. ii.86-7)

In contrast to the joyful outpourings of Orlando and the masochistic devotion of Silvius is the attitude of Touchstone, who has much in common with Lyly's Sir Tophas. He rewrites the Petrarchan verse of Orlando on a more basic level of physical need.

If a hart do lack a hind,  
 Let him seek out Rosalind.  
 If the cat will after kind  
 So, be sure, will Rosalind.

(III.ii.99-102)

His summary of his own courtship of Audrey takes a similar form: 'As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, And the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires.'

(II.ii.72-3) He rejects poetry as 'feigning', though, like Sir Tophas, he makes joking reference to Ovid, and his mistress is also the antithesis of beauty. Like Sir Tophas, he represents love at its lowest level, according to contemporary belief, but his

commentary, though it deflates some of the pretensions of the lover, allows the sincere affection of Orlando to stand in positive relief against an essentially negative and reductive view of love.

Both Phoebe and Rosalind make fun of the extravagance of their lovers' language. Accused by Silvius of a cruelty more stern than that of the common executioner, Phoebe mocks his conceits by rendering them in literal terms and turning them into weapons against him: 'Now do I frown on you with all my heart,/ And if my eyes can wound then let them kill thee.' (II.v.15-6) The posturing of Silvius as courtly lover is, however, no more self-conscious than that of Phoebe as cruel mistress and the ridicule here is tempered by Rosalind's intervention in Silvius's favour. It is Rosalind who draws attention most effectively to the competing discourses of love, teasing Orlando for 'deifying' her name. She points out the follies of love and the literary artifice of courtship, cutting through the stylistic excesses of Silvius and Phoebe, and reducing him to 'a foolish shepherd' and his mistress to a mere creation of his flattery; one who is 'not for all markets.' In her role as Ganymede, she assures Orlando that 'Love is merely a madness.' (III.ii.386) She proposes a parody of courtship in which she takes on the role of master/ mistress, alternating violently between liking and loathing, welcome and rejection. Her response to both Silvius and Orlando seems particularly designed to undermine the concept of worship and adoration in love in favour of a more balanced and realistic relationship. She denies them the right to 'die' for love: Silvius is not to allow Phoebe to be his 'executioner', and Orlando is assured that 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' (IV.i. 99 -101)

*'Tis Hymen peoples every Town'..*

Thus, it is not only by contrasting different couples that Shakespeare draws attention to a range of attitudes towards love, but through the challenge to linguistic convention thrown down by one of the lovers. Rosalind having already confessed her

feelings for Orlando, acts, to use her own words, the part of 'a whip to love', but admits that 'the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.' (III. ii. 389-390) Yet, although she plays with Orlando's emotions in a mock courtship game, we are never in doubt of her underlying feelings. Even as she denies him the right to die in 'a love cause', she links him with the great lovers of legend. In ridiculing romantic tradition, she also acknowledges it, striking a poignant note which is an appropriate precursor to the underlying seriousness of her subsequent suggestion that she will be Rosalind 'in a more coming on disposition.' (IV. i. 105-6) Rosalind reduces the idealisation of love *ad absurdum*, laughs at its characteristic manifestations, yet rejoices in her own love for Orlando, offering him the promise of reciprocal affection.

The fulfilment of love in marriage is, to some extent, a contradiction of the Petrarchan predicament. The mutual attraction of Rosalind and Orlando is made clear from the start, as is that of Oliver and Celia. The stylised relationship of Phoebe and Silvius is less easily resolved, with Phoebe becoming, temporarily, like one of the heroines in *Gallathea*, a victim of unfulfillable desire for the disguised Rosalind. The triumph of Hymen, at the end of the play, is, however, a triumph of mutual love in marriage. Desire is not to be sublimated, but fulfilled. Like Lyly's Venus, Hymen resolves the 'confusion' of tangled relationships and celebrates a 'blessed bond' which is also a union of the flesh:

Wedding is great Juno's crown,  
O blessed bond of board and bed.  
'Tis Hymen peoples every town  
High wedlock ever honoured.

(V.iv.139-142)

Although *As You Like It* depicts many facets of love, the emphasis is on a resolution through marriage. Shakespeare makes a firmer commitment to married love in his romantic comedies than Lyly, for whom the conflict between love and chastity is of greater significance.

In *Endymion*, although more than one marriage is celebrated, Endymion himself continues in his selfless devotion to Cynthia. If the union between Rosalind and Orlando in *As You Like It* can be envisaged as being at the peak of a hierarchy of relationships, that of Endymion and Cynthia occupies a similar position. The difference is that, whereas the former is based on mutual affection, the latter is based on sublimation and servitude. Conflict between the two concepts of love also arises earlier in the play, when Eumenides is confronted with the need to choose whether to obtain his heart's desire, in the form of Semele's love, or to free his friend Endymion from his enchanted sleep. Even as he expresses his love for Semele, there is a hint that fulfilment can be too intense, or cloying.

I pray thee, Fortune, when I shall first meet with fair  
Semele, dash my delight with some light disgrace, lest,  
embracing sweetness beyond measure, I take surfeit without  
recure. Let her practise her accustomed coyness, that I might diet  
myself on my desires. Otherwise the fullness of my joys will  
diminish the sweetness, and I shall perish by them before I  
possess them.

(III. iv.101-7)

The structure of Lyly's prose opposes delights to disgrace and also links them. It is the hint of disillusionment at the very heart of pleasure, what Bembo calls the 'lothsomnesse', which so often accompanies the discourse of love, which is emphasised here. In the event, Eumenides chooses Endymion, thus placing friendship on a higher plane than love. He justifies his decision by saying, 'The love of man to women is a thing common, and of course, the friendship of man to man infinite, and immortal' (III.iv.121-3) It is a choice which can be interpreted solely as the privileging of male friendship over love but it is also one which reinforces the hierarchy of the spiritual over the physical.

Eumenides is reinforced in his choice by Geron, who assures him:

Love is a chameleon, which draweth nothing into the mouth but air, and nourisheth nothing in the body but lungs. Believe me, Eumenides, desire dies in the same moment that beauty sickens, and beauty fadeth in the same instant that it flourisheth. Where adversities flow, then love ebbs; but friendship standeth stiffly in storms.

(III.iv.136-142)

The alliteration of the lines draws attention to an almost phallic suggestion in the description of the enduring qualities of male friendship, which is contrasted with the association of love as transitory. Words like 'dies', 'sickens', 'ebbs' contribute to an image of love as a sickly growth, fed only by a beauty which cannot last. The scene might be compared with the one in *As You Like It* where Rosalind, as Ganymede, enacts the role of male friend to Orlando, and promises to cure him 'by counsel.' (III.ii.390) Although awareness of the boy actor might have given an additional resonance to the scene however, Rosalind's cure is in itself a form of courtship and her meetings with Orlando rely, for their dramatic impact, on the audience's knowledge of her love for him. The lovers of *Endymion* express their desire in extravagant and idealistic terms but it is, at times, devalued in comparison with what is regarded as a purer emotion. In *As You Like It*, unlike Shakespeare's earlier comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which Valentine is prepared to give up his claims to Sylvia for the sake of his friend, Proteus, there is only a hint of the superior claims of male friendship .

*'Let us ...seek our own torments'..*

The note of disillusionment which characterises the speeches of Geron is expressed from the outset by the three shepherds in *Love's Metamorphosis*, (1590). Although they express Petrarchan devotion to their unwilling mistresses, they deny

love the divine qualities which are associated with 'the high mansion place' on the highest rung of Bembo's ladder:

SILVESTRIS: I do not think Love hath any spark of divinity in him, since the end of his being is earthly. In the blood he is begot by the frail fires of the eye, and quenched by the frailer shadows of thought. What reason have we then to soothe his humor with such zeal, and follow his fading delights with such passion?

RAMIS: We have bodies, Silvestris, and human bodies, which in their own natures being much more wretched than beasts, do much more miserably than beasts pursue their own ruins. And since it will ask longer labor to subdue the powers of our blood to the rule of the soul, than to satisfy them with the fruition of our loves, let us be constant in the world's errors, and seek our own torments.

(I.ii)

The plight of the lovers is comic and the tone is light but it is this kind of questioning of the nature of love which is repeated, with variations, throughout the period. Underlying it is the tension between the spiritual and corporal nature of humankind. The struggle between the powers of the blood and the rule of the soul is one that is re-enacted in both comic and tragic contexts. The wretchedness of the body's needs and the 'fading delights' of pleasure draws on the ascetic heritage of the times. A further disillusioning note is struck by the character of Fidelity, metamorphosed into a tree, after having been pursued by a satyr. As a result of this experience she perceives love only in terms of lust, asking, 'What is that chastity which so few women study to keep and both gods and men seek to violate?' and concluding that 'there is nothing more hateful than to be chaste, whose bodies are followed in the world with lust and prosecuted into their graves with tyranny.' (II.i) The lovers,

fortunately for the audience, put aside philosophical matters, resign themselves to their humanity, and busy themselves in seeking their own' torments'. This involves paying tribute to Cupid, who rewards them by using his magical powers of transformation on the three cruel mistresses. Love is allowed to triumph over celibacy, as demonstrated in Cupid's conversation with Ceres. Whereas she defends chastity by declaring: 'though to love, it be no vice, yet spotless virginity is the only virtue', Cupid reasserts the 'divinity' of love denied by Silvestris. In his reply he equates love with chastity; the 'pure affection' described by Spenser, rather than lust: 'Why, Ceres, do you think that lust followeth love? Ceres, lovers are chaste. For what is love, divine love, but the quintessence of chastity' (II.i). As in *Gallathea*, though full tribute is paid to virginity, in this case represented by Ceres rather than Diana, Cupid insists on love as essentially chaste, differentiating it from what he terms 'lust'. The varied cast of characters which Lyly assembles, both human and legendary, are asked to revere love and marriage, and it is marriage, rather than sublimation, which forms the happy conclusion, .

The debate between desire and sublimation is given a more realistic context by Shakespeare, in *Love's Labour's Lost* (1595), in that he dispenses with love's deities as stage persona. The use of adult actors may have contributed to his ability to develop the struggle as one which takes place primarily within the mind of the individual. It is Biron who is the focus of this struggle, as, like Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* he first resists and then gives way to love. Like Ramis, he speaks with a degree of cynical detachment about love but we are given a detailed exposition of the way in which his feelings change and develop. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the initial conflict is between the ascetic, celibate life, and worldly pleasures. Like Lyly in *Endymion*, Shakespeare sets, side by side, different levels of aspiration; the King of Navarre's aim to sublimate 'the grosser manner of the world's delights ' (I.ii.29) with the cynical reluctance of Biron and the earthy appetites of Costard; but it is the debate within Biron's mind which highlights most effectively conflicting attitudes to love. It is Biron who mocks the unreal aspirations of abstinence as 'barren tasks, too hard to keep'

(I.i.47), recognising love, not as literary posturing but as bodily need, 'not by might mastered, but by special grace.' (I.i.150) Yet it is also Biron who admits to a lively cynicism about his own susceptibility:

And I, forsooth, in love - I that have been love's whip.  
 A very beadle to a humorous sigh,  
 A critic, nay, a night-watch constable,  
 A domineering pedant o-er the boy,  
 Than whom no mortal so magnificent.  
 This wimpled, whining, purblind, wayward boy,  
 This Signor Junior, giant dwarf, Dan Cupid,  
 Regent of love rhymes, lord of folded arms,  
 Th'annointed sovereign of sighs and groans,  
 Liege of all loiterers and malcontents,  
 Dread prince of plackets, king of codpieces,  
 Sole imperator and great general  
 Of trotting paritors -----

(III.i.169-181)

The tone is light-hearted but it effectively juxtaposes the literary language of love with the basic bodily needs which inspire it. If Cupid is 'regent of love rhymes' he is also 'prince of plackets' and 'king of codpieces'. Biron makes it clear that love is more than idolatry and chaste worship; that it is a matter for body as well as spirit.

In contrast with Biron's mockery is Longueville's Petrarchan sonnet to his mistress:

A woman I forswore, but I will prove,  
 Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee.  
 My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;  
 Thy grace, being gained, cures all disgrace in me.

(IV.iii.61-4)

Longueville wittily turns the Petrarchan deification of women to his own advantage, dignifying his love as 'heavenly'. It is Biron who supplies the deflationary comment, insisting, like Sir Tophas, on the bodily need that underlies the emotion: 'This is the liver vein, which makes flesh a deity,/ A green goose a goddess. Pure, pure idolatry.' (IV.iii.71-2) His words also attack the idealisation of women upon which Petrarchan courtship is based. The supreme irony is, of course, that Biron himself protests too much in order to conceal his own feelings for Rosaline, and it is he who pays the most moving tribute to love, after an essentially comic exchange about the nature of beauty. It is love which 'adds a precious seeing to the eye'; love which is 'more soft and sensible/ Than are the tender horns of cockled snails.' (IV.iii., 309, 313-14) As Mark Breitenberg points out, 'what was formerly conceived as masculine debasement is now celebrated: woman-as-Other has been transformed from debased corporeality to the source of idealised love.'<sup>15</sup> Biron's Rosaline, from representing, like all women, 'the grosser manner of the world's delights' is become, first of all, mistress in the anti-Petrarchan style, the antithesis of the customary fair beauty, 'with two pitch balls stuck in her face for eyes', and finally, 'the heavenly Rosaline', reducing the man that gazes on her to 'a rude and savage man of Ind', 'blinded by her majesty.' (IV.iii.219-226)

The lack of traditional closure in marriage highlights the complexity of the play's dialogue on love and desire. The Petrarchan courtship script is wittily exposed by the women to whom it is addressed, and it is Biron himself who admits that it is compiled of:

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,  
 Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,  
 Figures pedantical ---  
 (V.ii. 407-9)

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.142

The women assert their independence, insisting on postponement and penance. Although the play celebrates mutuality in its exchanges between men and women, desire is sublimated by means of the delay imposed by the women.

The ending of *Love's Labour's Lost* is unusual in Shakespeare's comedies of love. Though Shakespeare shares with Lyly a satirical view of the excesses of love and language, he makes a deeper commitment to marriage as a resolution. Mary Beth Rose perhaps over-emphasises Lyly's 'basically negative and skeptical portrayal of love and sexuality' but there is no doubt that the harmonious ending achieved in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* appears to rest on a firmer foundation than the precarious resolution of *Gallathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis*.<sup>16</sup> This is partly because of the greater emphasis placed by Shakespeare on character and dramatic development. The essentially static nature of Lyly's comedies has been remarked on.<sup>17</sup> In comparison, the emotional development of Biron, for example, gives greater credence to his commitment to love, as does the developing relationship, expressed through soliloquy and inter-active dialogue, of Beatrice and Benedick. Moreover, the human actors dominate the stage; they are not reduced in stature by debating deities, like Lyly's Venus, Diana and Cupid. Even at its most positive, however, the presentation of love can be shadowed by a dual perspective: the threat of cuckoldry is ever-present even in the happiest of comedies. On one level, expressed in light-hearted banter, it is an acknowledgement of the gap between the ideal and the real world. Its repeated emphasis on female, as opposed to male infidelity represents, however, the antithesis of the idealised Petrarchan relationship between the lover and his chaste mistress. She ceases to be regarded as a deity and becomes 'one that will do the deed'; what is more, one whose sexual desires become a threat to her husband's honour.

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988) p.26

<sup>17</sup> Michael R. Best, 'Lyly's Static Drama', *Renaissance Drama* n.s 1,(1968) 75-86, p.76.

*Give me a lover; let the husband go...*

The fear of cuckoldry and of woman's unruly sexuality which underlies this remark reflects a failure of faith in both love and women. The disillusionment, which to some of the more cynical commentators accompanies fulfilment, is given substance in the form of the act of infidelity. It is hinted at in the conclusion of *Love's Metamorphosis*, where the three cruel mistresses, transformed in shape by Cupid to a rock, a rose and a bird, and now restored to human form, remind their husbands that any future coldness, hardness or shrewdness in their behaviour must be put down to Cupid, or, more accurately, perhaps, to the husbands who enlisted his help in their wooing. In particular, Niobe reminds Silvestris that, if ever he finds her not to be at home, he must curse himself for having been the one who gave her wings to fly abroad. She quotes Ovid: '*Non custodiri, ni velit ulla potest.*' (No guard at all is to be set). The suggestion of cuckoldry is a delicate one but it illustrates Celia's remark that, in the midst of the 'sweet delights' of love, some 'bitter overthwarts' may be found. A more cynical view of Petrarchan love and female virtue is to be found in *The Woman in the Moon*, (1593), in which three shepherd-lovers compete in their admiration of the beautiful Pandora. To Learchus, she is 'divine'; to Melos she is 'a heavenly nymph', 'sweet Nature's pride'. It is Stesias, who sums up the pains of unrequited love, when he says of Pandora :

Her hardest words are but a gentle wind;  
Her greatest wound is but a pleasing harme;  
Death at her hand is but a second life.

(II.ii.)

Lyly draws our attention to the use of the same cliched vocabulary by all three suitors, for a woman who is characterised almost entirely by her fickleness. Pandora's promiscuous behaviour makes the adoration of the lovesick shepherds appear ridiculous in its incongruity, Love, to Pandora, has no relationship to chastity:

I think of honor and of chastity?  
 No, love is fitter than Pandora's thoughts  
 Yet not the love of Stesias alone.  
 Learchus is as fair as Stesias,  
 And Melos lovelier than Learchus far;  
 But might I choose, I would have Iphicles,  
 And of them all Stesias deserves the least.  
 Must I be tied to him? No, I'll be loose,  
 As loose as Helen, for I am as fair.

( III.ii)

Lyly's last play is Ovidian in style and cynical in flavour. Although Pandora, being manipulated by Venus, is not, strictly speaking, responsible for her actions, the implication is that women are by nature untrustworthy, and men foolish for loving them. Beauty, normally associated with goodness, is linked with the archetypal adulteress of legend, Helen of Troy. Far from presenting marriage as an appropriate conclusion, Lyly has Pandora mock the concept of married love:

A husband? What a foolish word is that!  
 Give me a lover; let the husband go.

(III. ii)

She makes it clear that Stesias is likely to be wearing the cuckold's horns before long. At the end of the play, Nature addresses Pandora:

Now rule, Pandora, in fair Cynthia's stead.  
 And make the moon inconstant like thyself;  
 Reign thou at women's nuptials and their birth.  
 Let them be mutable in all their loves,  
 Fantastical, childish, and foolish in their desires,  
 Demanding toys, and stark mad  
 When they cannot have their will.

(V)

The portrayal of Pandora is at odds with the idealised women of Petrarchanism. Rather, she represents the opposing view of woman as essentially fickle and unworthy, confirming the idea of love as folly. It is this view of women which is implied by the whole subtext of references to horns and cuckoldry which pervade the discourse of love. Even Rosalind, as Ganymede, jokingly suggests to Orlando that he must beware of a wife who is witty enough to deceive him into thinking that when visiting her neighbour's bed, she merely went there to find her husband. (IV. i.159-62)

Touchstone's marriage is contrasted with those of the other couples in that he applies his customary cynicism to his own situation, with his comment on the priest, Martext,

I were better to be married of him than of another, for he is not like to marry me well. and not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife.

(III.iv. 81-4)

His reasons are themselves a parody of the marriage ceremony: 'Come, sweet Audrey, / We must be married or we must live in bawdry.' (III. iv. 86-7) Marriage to an unattractive woman might well, as he suggests, preempt the fate of cuckoldry but Touchstone reminds his audience that horns are an inevitable part of a wife's dowry. (III.v.)

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is Biron himself who acknowledges that the woman he desires is typical of her sex

like a German clock,  
Still a repeating; ever out of frame ,  
And never going aright, being a watch,  
But being watched that it may still go right.

(III.i.185)

The image, a popular one in the period, carries with it a sense of the comic inevitability of woman's inconstancy. In the manner of the misogynist, Biron transfers to all women his doubts of his mistress, and attributes to her the errors of women in general. She is 'a whitely wanton'; 'one that will do the deed/ Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard.' (III.i.191-194) The association of love with the fear of betrayal and the need to guard against female indiscretions is typical of the process of transformation from lover to husband. The lover's admiring gaze becomes the husband's anxious watching, mocked in the song at the end of the play, with its chorus; 'Cuckoo, -O word of fear/ Unpleasing to a husband's ear.' (V.ii.884-87) Cuckoldry is, the song suggests, as natural and inevitable as Spring after Winter.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, (1598) jokes about cuckoldry accompany the exchanges of Beatrice and Benedick, providing a counterpoint for the more idealistic approach of Claudio to Hero. Benedick uses the belief that cuckoldry is the inescapable price of marriage in order to justify his decision to remain single, arguing, 'Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none.' (I.ii.227-9) He caps Don Pedro's quotation 'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke' with the reply:

The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it,  
pluck off the horns and set them in my forehead, and let me be  
vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write 'Here is  
good horse for hire, let them signify under my sign 'Here you  
see Benedick the married man .

( I ii.245-250)

Benedick is matched against a 'Lady Disdain' who also jokingly associates husbands with horns; in her case, she protests: 'No husband, therefore, no horns.' The resistance of Beatrice and Benedick to marriage is contrasted with the readiness of Hero and Claudio to make a match. To Beatrice, marriage can only end in regret : 'wooing,

wedding and repenting.' (I.iii. 65-66) Yet the apparently negative voices of Beatrice and Benedick are, like that of Biron, voices that protest too much. Unlike Touchstone, who is thoroughly imbued with cynicism and, like Lyly's Sir Tophas, who represents an earthy alternative to the romantic outpourings of the Petrarchan lover, they assume masks to protect their susceptibility. R.A.Foakes, commenting on Beatrice and Benedick, suggests, 'their wit is a mark not only of their freedom and equality, but of their understanding of their limitations, and a high degree of self-control: they do not take themselves too seriously. This sense of proportion and balance in them makes us recognise in them a voice of reason in this play.'<sup>18</sup> Ironically, it is this quality of reason, so frequently opposed to desire in the rhetoric of the period, which makes their departure from reason so convincing. Because Beatrice and Benedick are so humorous, sceptical and determined to deny love and avoid marriage, once they commit themselves to each other, the case for love is all the more convincing. Their self-deprecating, almost apologetic admission that they love, only out of pity, and 'no more than reason' makes the unruly passion of love seem all the more reasonable to the audience. Whilst *The Woman in the Moon* ends with a warning of woman's inconstancy, *Much Ado* ends by celebrating mutual affection in marriage. Although the spectre of infidelity is raised more painfully than in any of Lyly's plays, it is put to rest by an emphasis on the positive aspects of love which are demonstrated in the relationship of Beatrice and Benedick. As Mary Beth Rose concludes, 'Just as the negative components of sexual desire are largely displaced onto Claudio and Hero in *Much Ado*, so the other couples in the procession at the end of *As You Like It* suggest the less attractive aspects of sexuality, leaving the Rosalind-Orlando union relatively free of ironic qualification.'<sup>19</sup> In *Love's Labour's Lost* it is Biron who expresses the negative vision of desire, converted into an ever-watchful jealousy, but it is he who dispels it. Having acknowledged love, in terms of sexuality, as a basic need, he turns his back on it and is

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<sup>18</sup> R.A. Foakes, 'The Owl and the Cuckoo: Voices of Maturity in Shakespeare's Comedies' in *Stratford upon Avon Studies* 14, 121-159, p.132

<sup>19</sup> Mary Beth Rose, p.40

then forced, reluctantly, to give way to his feelings for Rosaline. It is he who finally pays tribute to the transcendent power of love's 'precious seeing.'

The overriding message of Shakespeare's romantic comedies is that love is attainable and fulfilled in marriage. The point is made overtly by Biron, who protests that the delay imposed by the ladies at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* is 'too long for a play.' The assumption is that romantic drama, if not life, should be resolved in mutual love and marriage. Like Lyly, Shakespeare acknowledges that love can be played as a game, on many levels, but that it is a game with serious implications. Men and women play their parts in the Petrarchan script, highly conscious of linguistic and social conventions, yet shown, at times, by the power of the dramatist, to be surprised out of their roles. The re-thinking, or reversal of attitudes that this involves reinforces a view of love as a powerful and significant emotion. There is some truth in Wilson Knight's claim that in Lyly's work, 'Love has become, for the first time, dramatic, challenging the religious consciousness which, through the centuries preceding, held a monopoly over drama.'<sup>20</sup> For Shakespeare too, love is the stuff of drama. The competing demands of asceticism, desire, transcendence and denigration, friendship and honour are given life through the inter-action of men and 'women' on stage.

The competing discourses of asceticism and desire, of idealisation and denigration, to which I have referred in this chapter are frequently presented in a comic light. The idealistic discourse of love is gently mocked; the earthy realism of Sir Tophias and Touchstone is the subject of a broader humour. But, to borrow Keith Thomas's phrase, the laughter which is invited 'brings us right up against the fundamental values of society.'<sup>21</sup> As he points out, the subject matter of jokes can be an indication of tensions and anxieties. The tensions and anxieties surrounding love, encapsulated in Petrarch's question, 'If love, dear God, what is its quality?' are the

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<sup>20</sup> G. Wilson Knight, in *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Ralph J. Kaufmann (New York: Oxford University Press) p.51.

<sup>21</sup> Keith Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England' *TLS* January 21st, 1977: pp. 77-81, p.77

subject of continuing debate. Although love may have offered, as Wilson Knight suggests, a challenge to the religious consciousness, the struggle between the demands of the body and the spirit remains unresolved.

## CHAPTER TWO

## TO LOVE EXTREAMELY PROCURETH EYTHEER DEATH OR DANGER

*'Man ought to beware of this Passion.'..*

The tension which expresses itself in the romantic comedies of the preceding chapter lies in the conflict between desire and sublimation; between the expectation of mutual joy in marriage and the dread of being cuckolded. In tragedy, it centres on the opposition between love and death. The mutuality which the lovers achieve is intense but short-lived. The spectre of cuckoldry which haunts so many of the comedies is replaced by that of mortality. Death is present, not only in the tragic denouement, but in a pattern of images and references which are traditionally associated with the language of love. The duality of Renaissance discourse is highlighted in this opposition, with its implication that death is the resolution of a passion that can never be fulfilled on earth. The death of the lovers can be interpreted as a form of sublimation, according to the tradition of courtly love which links love, in its ideal form to the desire of ultimate union with the Absolute. Such a union is achieved through devoted service to the beloved, despite all the obstacles which might be encountered. It is expressed in terms of a desire which remains constant, whatever the demands made upon it. The gateway to this union is what Denis de Rougemont calls 'the triumph of the lovers in transfiguring death.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, the tragedy of love is linked more closely than comedy to the ascetic tradition, in that it moves towards a union in death, rather than a resolution in marriage. Although the lovers achieve sexual fulfilment, the obstacles which test their faith and constancy prove insurmountable and they pay a heavy penalty for their pleasure. Although love may be, as Roger Stilling points out, recognised as 'a genuine good', it appears to be punished, rather than rewarded at the conclusion of the drama.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society* (London: Faber, 1940) p.9

<sup>2</sup> Roger Stilling *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Wisconsin Press, 1954) pp.3-4

The sublimation of desire through postponement, or by association with death or destruction, is a manifestation of the mistrust of sexuality which accompanies so much of the contemporary discourse on love. It is also linked with the fear of disillusionment which accompanies fulfilment both within and outside marriage. G. Wilson Knight, commenting on Eumenides' speech in *Endymion* suggests that 'full possession with full enjoyment is an impossibility. As though in love there is a necessary fiction, not to be actualised, fatal, or maybe enjoyed in death: perfect love on earth being a self-annihilating paradox.'<sup>3</sup> The Medieval ascetic viewpoint represented in the idealistic form of Petrarchan discourse, places human love on a lower level than that of the divine: something to be aspired to, but never fully achieved. If not fully articulated, it persists as a point of reference, as yet another of the tensions surrounding desire and its fulfilment; a reflection of what Franklin Dickey calls the 'jungle of paradoxes' surrounding the subject of love.<sup>4</sup> He quotes two contradictory examples from Bodenham's commonplace books. One is taken from his *Politeuphuia* (1597): 'The meane love is the surest love, to love extreamey procureth eyther death or danger.'<sup>5</sup> The key word here is 'meane', implying moderation. To it can be opposed the statement from *Belvedere* (1600) which is a validation of love, though not without qualification: 'Firme and untainted love, had never meane.'<sup>6</sup>

The observation that danger arises from immoderate behaviour is frequently made in the period. Ficino, in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, defines three levels of love: 'love of the contemplative man, called divine; that of the practical man, human; and that of the voluptuous man, animal.'<sup>7</sup> Although he admits that the 'mean' or middle way is to seek bodily union, it must stay within the bonds of 'natural and civil laws' and of reason. 'Those who lower themselves to the depths of carnal pleasures... are 'lowly' because they think about

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<sup>3</sup> G. Wilson Knight in *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. J. Kaufmann (New York, 1961) p.49

<sup>4</sup> Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well : Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntingdon Library, 1957) p.34

<sup>5</sup> John Bodenham, *Politeuphuia: Wits Commonwealth* (1597) f. 130

<sup>6</sup> Bodenham, *Belvedere*, or *The Garden of the Muses* (1600) p. 28

<sup>7</sup> Sears Reynolds Jayne *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato* (Columbia: Missouri University, 1944) p.193

nothing high or nothing great; they are 'helpless' because they give in to shameful desire.'<sup>8</sup>

Bacon classifies love in a neater, if less philosophical way by concluding: 'Nuptial love maketh mankind; Friendly love perfecteth it but Wanton love corrupteth and debaseth it.'<sup>9</sup>

He reminds his readers that '...it was well said, *That it is impossible to love, and to be wise.*'

It is passion, not the 'friendly love' of marital affection which is the danger.

....Men ought to beware of this Passion, which loseth not only other things but it selfe.... They do best, who, if they cannot but admit *Love* yet make it keep quarter: And sever it wholly, from their serious affaires, and Actions of life: for if it checke once with *Businesse*, it troubleth Men's Fortunes, and maketh Men, that they can, no wayes be true, to their owne Ends.<sup>10</sup>

Robert Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) acknowledges that love has the power to 'make fooles become wise'.. 'base fellowes become generous, cowards courageous' but he emphasises the dangers of immoderate sexuality:<sup>11</sup>

The major part of lovers are carried headlong like so many brute beasts, reason counsellis one way, their friends, fortune, shame, disgrace, danger, and an Ocean of cares that will certainly follow; yet this furious lust, *praecipitates* [it], counterpoiseth, weighs downe on the other: though it be their utter undoing, perpetuall infamy, losse, yet they will doe it, and become at last, *insensati*, void of sense; degenerate into doggs, hogges, asses, brutes; as *Jupiter* into a bull, *Apuleius* into an Asse, *Lycaon* into a Wolfe and *Grillus* into Swine by Circe. For who else may we thinke those ingenious parts to have shadowed in their witty fictions and Poems, but that a man once given over to his lust .... *is no better than a beast.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.198

<sup>9</sup> Sir Francis Bacon, *Essays or Counsels, Civill and Morall* ed. by Michael Kiernon (Clarendon: Oxford, 1985) p.33

<sup>10</sup> Bacon, p.32-33

<sup>11</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas Kiessling and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: O.U. P, 1994) Part III, Section. 2, p. 182

<sup>12</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* Part III, Section. 2, p.163

The opposing concepts of love as a transcendent, life-enhancing experience and love as a debasing passion come into conflict in love tragedy, and in other dramatic contexts throughout the period. The drama gives poetic expression to passion without 'meane' whilst at the same time demonstrating that to love immoderately is a dangerous business.

Immoderate love and danger are the themes of *Gismund of Salerne: in Love*, performed before Elizabeth in 1566, and revised by Robert Wilmot as *The Tragedy of Tancred and Gismund* in 1591.<sup>13</sup> Like *Romeo and Juliet* it is based on a story already popular, taken, in this case from Bocaccio's *Decameron*. The story of Tancred and Gismund asserts the power and value of human love, but alongside this celebratory quality there exists the suggestion that desire can never be fully satisfied on earth. Although the lovers are prevented from marrying by Gismund's father, the moralising commentary of the play condemns the fulfilment of desire outside marriage. A dualistic effect is achieved by a sympathetic portrayal of the lovers as warm, if fallible human beings, and a pious condemnation of their actions by the Choruses. In the revised version, from which the following quotations are taken, Wilmot gives increased weight to the didactic element of the play. It is introduced by a warlike and aggressive Cupid, far removed from the witty, if sometimes mischievous deity of Lyly's comedies. According to Wilmot's stage directions, he enters 'out of the heavens in a cradle of flowers', drawing on the stage a twist of silk in each hand; in the left, 'Vaine hope, Brittle joy' and in the right, 'Faire resemblance, Late repentance.' He is, from the outset, associated with what are assumed to be the destructive effects of passion, rather than the positive joys of love. Like the Cupid of comedy, he is an active force in the drama, but there is a malevolent quality about him. The language he uses is more like that of a Senecan revenger than a god of love. His words convey the images of devouring appetite most commonly associated with lust:

I drinke the louers blood,  
And feed upon the heart within his breast. (I.i.18-19)

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<sup>13</sup> I have used the revised version because it is closer in its date of performance to the other plays in the discussion. There is extensive re-writing of the original; the most notable structural alteration being the expanded last act.

He threatens to 'inflamm the faire Gismunda' with 'firie love, that she shall feele much woe' warning the audience 'But after me, comes death, and deadly paine.' (I.i 73-5,80) Pain and pleasure are, as we have seen, an integral aspect of Petrarchan love, but, as described by this Cupid, they are not so much an expression of contradictory states of emotion but of the punishment which inevitably follows passionate indulgence.

In contrast to Cupid's 'devouring' image of love is Gismund's description of the loss of her first husband: 'In whome was all the fulnes of my joy; / To whome I gave the first frutes of my loue.' (I.iii.175-6) The emphasis here is on love as natural fulfilment, associated with growth and fruition, rather than sin. Gismund asks:...'if I should my springing yeares neglect. / And suffer youth, fruiteles to fade away: / Whereto liue I?' (II.i. 302-4) Her desire to remarry is expressed as a positive desire to make her life fruitful, rather than live with sterile grief. Her aunt Lucrece points out, in her defence, to Tancred, that Gismund's life did not cease with her husband's death:

But as she yet lives, so living may she feele  
Such passions as our tender hearts oppresse,  
Subject unto th' impressions of desire:  
For well I wot my neece was never wrought,  
Of steele, nor carved from the stonie rock.

(II.ii.393-7)

Against the combination of fatherly possessiveness and an intractable show of royal authority the women's voices have a sympathetic appeal but the Choruses appear to undermine Gismund's submission to her father's will, by pointing out how far there has been a decline in female virtue from the days of 'mirrors' of womankind like Lucretia and Portia. This suggestion of woman's fickleness belongs to the misogynistic tradition rather than the idealistic legacy of Petrarch and events confirm the choric interpretation. Cupid takes the credit for the feelings aroused in Gismund, but he represents them in terms of lust, as opposed to love.

*Gismund* I have entised to forget  
 Her widdowes weedes and burne in raging lust:  
 Twas I enforst her father to denie  
 her second marriage to any peere:  
 Twas I allur'd her once againe to trie  
 the sower sweetes that Louers buy too deere  
 (III.i.594- 599)

Cupid occupies an uneasy position between that of the pagan god of love and the contemporary moralist. Ironically, he is the chief detractor of what might be termed his own product, insisting that the sweets of love are sour to the taste and do not reward the effort put into gaining them. This conviction that the game of love is not worth the candle, which informs the more cynical discourse of the period, conflicts with the passionate commitment of the lovers. Cupid's stance is not that of the neo-platonist, but of the cynic. The Fourth Chorus, on his behalf, draws attention to the conventional and misogynistic tradition of the lustful widow and of the consequences of 'idle love':

..... if ye wisely looke  
 What slie snake lurkes under those flowers gay,  
 But ye mistrust some clowdie smokes, and feare  
 A stormy shower after so faire a day,  
 Ye may repent, and buy your pleasure deare,  
 For seldome times is Cupid wont to send  
 Unto an idle love a ioyful end.  
 (III. ii-847-853)

Against a manipulative god of love who seems to relish human misery and a relentlessly judgemental chorus is set the sympathetic voice of Lucrece, who gives to the audience an account of Gismund's suffering. Although it is mediated through an observer and lacks the directness of the choruses' moralising, Lucrece's narrative is successful in bringing to life the predicament of the heroine. The love of Guisnard and Gismund is demonstrated,

not through dramatic interaction but in words: a discourse of courtly love which contrasts with the sermonising of the commentators. Thus, Guisnard, whose surrender to passion might be regarded, on the scale of condemnation, as anything from folly to degeneration into the bestial, embraces danger as a means of testing his love and determination.

Not onely through a darke and dreadfull vault  
 But fire and sword, and through whatever be.  
 Mistres of my desires, I come to thee.

(III.iii.799-801)

The choric commentary which follows goes some way towards negating the effect of the scene. Having acknowledged the 'mightie' power of love to be so great that even Jove cannot resist it, the Chorus embellishes the tribute with a moral:

For Love assaults not but the idle heart  
 And such as live in pleasure and delight,  
 He turneth oft their gladsome ioyes to smart,  
 Their play to plaint, their sport into despite.

(III.iii.820-824)

There is a marked contrast between the forceful and positive image of Tancred as a romantic lover defying fire and sword to reach the 'mistress of his desires' and the Chorus's dismissal of love as the occupation of the 'idle heart.' As if to reinforce this negative message, Act IV begins with the figure of Megaera rising from Hell, accompanied by two Furies, and calling for vengeance on Gismund's house. These Senecan trappings of tragedy, however, do not overshadow the central theme of the play. Although the discovery of the lovers and the cruel punishment allotted to Guisnard might seem to confirm the necessity of some kind of retribution, it is the cruelty that repels and the lovers' courage which engages audience sympathy. Guisnard himself is prepared to face execution gladly for Gismund's sake. His words are reminiscent of the courtly lover whose service to his lady transcends earthly satisfaction. It is as though death is the ultimate expression of desire:

Then this hath been my fault, for which I ioy  
 That in the greatest lust of all my life,  
 I shall submitte for her sake to endure  
 The panges of death. Oh mighty Lord of love  
 Strengthen thy vassall, boldlie to receave  
 Large wounds unto this body for her sake.

(IV. iv. 1252-7)

Giuszard's words have almost religious overtones, establishing a link between the tradition of courtly love and the religion of love and sacrifice which is Christianity. 'The mighty Lord of love' is a title which fits the Cupid figure who is orchestrating the drama but it cannot be disassociated from the Christian God of love to whom a man facing death would be expected to pray. The implication is that sexual love inspires altruism and courage and is therefore ennobling; a concept which is in direct opposition to the repeated messages of the choruses.

The commentary which follows these events predictably links Guiszard's death, not with service and sacrifice but with the destructive effects of passion demonstrated by the overthrow of Priam, the fall of Troy and the death of Leander. His passion for Gismund is contrasted with the chaster kind of love:

But he in vertue that his Lady serves  
 He wils but what unto her Honor longs,  
 He never from the rule of reason swarves,  
 He feleth not the pangs ne raging throngs  
 Of blind Cupid.

(IV.iv.1330-4)

The emphasis is on virtue and honour, on an idealised love expressed in service rather than sexual desire: a love governed by reason, rather than passion. The picture which the Chorus paints, of a poet-lover expressing his feelings in 'rondelaies / Of learned conceit' (1357-8) contrasts with the violent emotions expressed in the play. Against the image of the Petrarchan lover, to whom the loss of a heart is literary metaphor, is set the cruel death and mutilation of Guiszard, whose heart is torn from his body and delivered to his mistress. The

dramatic enactment of this scene has an emblematic quality which goes beyond words, but it is Gismund who, by means of words, transforms a lump of bleeding flesh into a symbol of love. In Guisnard's heart she reads neither death nor dismemberment:

...in this wound I see mine owne true love,  
 And in this wound thy magnanimitie,  
 And in this wound I see thy constancie.

(V.ii.1635-7)

The butchered flesh is restored to dignity and individuality. However effective the preaching of the Chorus, it cannot compete dramatically with the rhetoric of love.

The triumph of love lies not in its happy resolution but in the fact that the lovers, strengthened by their feeling for one another are able to face death with courage. Love is ennobling, in that it renders both Gismund and Guisnard capable of self-sacrifice. Gismund's speech, before she commits suicide, is a condemnation of a world which does not acknowledge love. On this occasion, the intervention of the Chorus does little to undermine her actions. Indeed, the structure of the exchange gives weight to her rebuttal of the Chorus's advice:

CHO 3 : Think on the King. GIS: The King? the tyrant King.  
 CHO 3 Your father. GIS: Yea, the murthrer of my love.  
 CH 4: His force. GIS: the dead fear not the force of me [men]  
 CH 1: His care & grieffe. GIS: That neither car'd for me  
 Nor greeved at the murther of my love...

(V.ii.1707-11)

Gismund interprets her love for Guisnard as part of a pattern of loving relationships which has been destroyed. She rejects what she perceives as a loveless society in favour of the 'pleasant land of love' which is her view of heaven:

...now doth my soul begin  
 To hate this light, wherein there is no love,  
 No love of parents to their children,

No love of Princes to their subject, true,  
 No love of Ladies to their dearest Loves.  
 Now passe I to the pleasant land of love,  
 Where heavenly love immortall flourisheth.

(V.ii.1720-6)

In a world of obsessive, vengeful acts, of bitterness and violence, her words carry a clear and convincing note of condemnation. In condemning the lack of love and loyalty that she observes around her, she denies the earthly world in favour of 'the pleasant land of love': the love of man and woman in favour of 'heavenly love.' It is a feature of love tragedy that the lovers create a world which seems to possess its own values. In this case the reality of their predicament is the brutal triumph of death, represented by the grotesque emblem of Guisnard's heart. The audience is crudely reminded of the consequences of their passion but the powerful image of Gismund with her lover's heart, declaring: 'But not alone thou diest my loue, for I / Will be co partner of thy destinie.' (V. ii.1688-9) is not diminished by the Chorus's dismissal of her 'headstrong rage.'

It is impossible to recapture the effect of the play on its original audience. The sententiousness does intrude at times, punctuating and even replacing some of the action but it must be borne in mind that the narrative commentary in itself was an integral part of Senecan tragedy, in keeping with the overall style of the play, and that the clash between the dramatic and the didactic was well-established in the theatrical tradition of the Morality plays. Its warnings against love and its misogyny are illustrated by examples of the traditional 'mirrors of modesty', called upon to exhort women to virtue. Yet it is Tancred who admits, in the end, in a long speech of penitence that he is 'the author of this Tragedie' (V.iii.1793) and who agrees to have engraved on the lovers' tomb, 'some Royale Epitaph of Love.' (V.iii.1821) His final words are a warning to fathers to be more tender to their daughters. If the moralising tone of the play is reinforced by the Epilogue, it perhaps owes as much to the social context as to the requirements of the drama, being addressed to the Queen's ladies, whom it praises for their 'vertues bold / With blisful chastitie so well

content', (1881-2) and exhorts them to 'avoid the shames / That follow such as live in wanton lust.' (1888)

The fact that such tribute to chastity should be paid is not surprising in view of the context of the play's performance. Like Lyly, Wilmot acknowledges the presence of the Queen in his praise of virginity, but he turns a complimentary reference into a moral lesson. There is no reason to suppose that an audience would be unfamiliar with this kind of conflict or unable to respond to the human interest provided by the lovers' story. The fact that suicide was considered sinful by the Christian church does not prevent its use as a dramatic denouement in the classical tradition. Similarly politically correct conduct-book advice to young women on preserving their chastity does not preclude the enactment of a story about those who ignored that advice. What is evident is that in this early tragedy the tensions between desire and its fulfilment, between sexuality and morality are made all the more clear-cut because of its mode of presentation. In later plays the tradition of moral commentary and chorus persists but they are more fully integrated into the action. The tensions are not resolved but expressed with greater complexity.

*'Dangerous suspicion waits on our delight'..*

*The Spanish Tragedy*, (1587) and *Romeo and Juliet*, (1595) presented in the public theatre, are addressed to a wider audience, and contain less obvious moralising than the earlier play but, as in *Tancred and Gismund* the lovers are placed in opposition to forces of death and destruction, apparently helpless to prevail against them. Like Guisard and Gismund, they exalt love and acknowledge sexual fulfilment as an inevitable and joyful part of it. The impact is all the more powerful because the audience is allowed to witness the exchanges between the lovers. The debate about the nature of love and desire is conducted, not so much by means of action framed by Chorus and commentary, though chorus plays a part in both plays, but by dramatic contrast and interaction, presented in terms of contrasting styles of courtship. Both plays contrast the enjoyment of love with cynical detraction. The

deflationary effect is comparable with that of the intrusion of the chorus and Cupid in *Tancred*, but it also has the contrary effect of throwing into relief the sincere and mutual affection of the lovers.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the rhetoric of love is mocked in the person of Balthazar, whose shallow posturings make his courtship seem hollow and meaningless. In keeping with the Petrarchan mode he declares himself to be 'slain by beauty's tyranny' (I.iv.121) but the lack of mutuality in his encounter with Bel-imperia, instead of drawing sympathetic attention to his role as unsuccessful suitor, makes him and his love ridiculous. It is exposed as such by Bel-imperia herself, who, in a tradition continued by Shakespeare's witty comic heroines, throws back the stilted images at her suitor. Balthazar offers his compliments with all the conviction of originality, describing Bel-imperia as one 'on whose perfection all my thoughts attend/ On whose aspect mine eyes find beauty's bower.' (I.iv.95-96) His description of his heart 'lodged' in Bel-imperia's 'translucent bosom' has, however, a static and inappropriately pictorial quality; the image is restricted and even comical. For Balthazar, dying for love is a literary convention, which Bel-imperia mocks. To his announcement: 'I die if it return from whence it lies' she replies 'A heartless man and live? A miracle!' (I.iv.87-88) The line between the ridiculous and the sublime in love is a fine one.

In contrast the discourse of the lovers is characterised by its mutuality. Bel-imperia and Horatio speak the language of courtly love but what is emphasised is the feeling of reciprocity between them: 'with looks and words we feed our thoughts.' (II.ii.3) Love for Bel-imperia is a haven for the heart, a port after stormy seas. Her reference to the heart is reminiscent of earlier wordplay with Balthazar but the context is different. The challenge to the lovers appears, not so much in the form of deflationary comment, or moral condemnation, as in *Tancred and Gismund*, but from a world where patriarchy and class are determining factors in human relationships and where policy counts for more than love. The



audience is forcibly reminded of the vulnerability of the lovers as Bel-imperia's loving words are punctuated by those of Horatio's jealous rival, Balthazar and her brother, Lorenzo.

BEL-IMPERIA: But whereon dost thou chiefly meditate?

HORATIO: On dangers past and pleasures to ensue.

BEL-IMPERIA: What dangers and what pleasures dost thou mean?

HORATIO: Dangers of war, and pleasures of our love.

LORENZO: Dangers of death, but pleasures none at all.

(II.ii.26-31)

There is an almost hypnotic, incantatory quality about the dialogue; its patterned linking of danger and pleasure making them seem inextricably linked, but with 'danger' carrying all the weighting. The sense of foreboding, which Horatio expresses in the words; 'Dangerous suspicion waits on our delight' is underlined by Lorenzo's threat 'Aye, danger mixed with jealous despite / Shall send thy soul into eternal night.' (II.ii.55-57) The scene in Hieronimo's bower, where the lovers meet, is overshadowed by fear, although the emphasis is on the destructive power of outside agencies, rather than on that of passion itself. Briefly, love is allowed a dramatic triumph. Bel-imperia and Horatio imagine themselves and their love as the centre of the universe. In the rarified atmosphere of this garden of love, Flora decks the scene with flowers for the lovers' delight, and, 'Luna hides herself' (II.iv.19) to give them the benefit of darkness. The lovers become part of this idyllic landscape, transcending human identity to become gods and goddesses of the classical world: she is Venus, he is Mars.

HORATIO                    If Cupid sung, then Venus is not far;  
                                  Aye, thou art Venus, or some fairer star.

BEL-IMPERIA            If I be Venus thou must needs be Mars..

(II.iv.32-4)

The language is playful rather than adulatory; the emphasis is on inter-action. The game of words is not part of an empty courtship ritual but a movement towards greater intimacy. In

contrast to the imagery employed by Balthazar and Lorenzo, of Bel-imperia's yielding to the 'yoke' or 'lure' of a man, it is Mars who yields to Bel-imperia as Venus. The imagery of love and death is taken up by Bel-imperia, who demands of Horatio 'O let me go, for in my troubled eyes/ Now mayst thou read that life in passion dies.' (II.IV.46-7) The pun, familiar to contemporary audiences is a reference to the 'little death' of orgasm, but in this case, there is to be no consummation.

The scene is cut short by the brutal intervention of the conspirators. As Lorenzo stabs Horatio, he reminds him 'these are the fruits of love', whilst Bel-imperia, to save her lover, denies his love for her, but not hers for him. (II.iv.55) The brutal impact of the scene is achieved through contrast: the idyllic setting of the lovers' meeting is disrupted by violence. It is at this point that the contemporary moralist might conclude that death and danger are the inevitable consequences of passion. In a society which values control and conformity to authority, it might be argued that this outcome, like the deaths of Tancred and Gismund demonstrates the effects of 'idle love'. Certainly Horatio and Bel-imperia are not what Burton calls 'discreet lovers', able to 'containe themselves, and moderate their passions, to curbe their senses.'<sup>14</sup> Like the love of Gismund for Guisnard, that of Bel-imperia for Horatio is in opposition to family expectations: Horatio, to Lorenzo is 'an ambitious villain', and, as her father puts it, 'Young virgins should be ruled by their friends' (II.iii.43).

Bel-imperia's active attempt to pursue her own happiness is contrary to contemporary belief about the nature and role of women, and its ultimate failure may be interpreted as an illustration of the dangers of passion. Brooke's *Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* refers to 'the shameful and wretched endes of such, as have yelded their libertie thrall to fowle desires.'<sup>15</sup> Kyd does not condemn his lovers, however, and the 'wretched' end of their love cannot be justified, as is the execution of Guisnard, as a punishment: it is clearly murder. The dramatic structure places Bel-imperia at the centre of a

<sup>14</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Book III, Section 2, p.211

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Brooke, trans. *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I (London, 1562).

conspiracy with Horatio as its victim. Lorenzo's method of coercing his sister into conformity is demonstrably a brutal and criminal act. Bel-imperia's and Horatio's love is central to the dramatic action and, though it is short-lived, it makes its impact on the audience precisely because it is overshadowed by 'dangers of death.' Passion is defeated by policy but Bel-imperia's love unites her with Horatio's father, Hieronimo, in a final act of revenge.

*'Let love-devouring-death do what he dares'...*

In *Romeo and Juliet* the politics are those of family rather than court and country but Shakespeare enters more fully than Kyd into the debate about the nature and importance of love, and places the lovers at the centre of events throughout the play. As in *Tancred and Gismund* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, it is sexual love and its fulfilment which is celebrated, as opposed to chaste and unproductive idolisation. This is emphasised by Romeo's transferring of his affections from Rosaline to Juliet, and by Juliet's warm response. The mockery of love in *Romeo and Juliet* works partly through devaluing its rhetoric. In this case it is Mercutio, Romeo's friend, who applies his reductive, sometimes whimsical humour to the subject. He scoffs at Romeo's talk of Cupid's arrows, sieges of loving terms, and assailing eyes, remarking, 'If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.' He invites us to laugh at a young man emasculated by love, transformed into the quintessential lover of the sonnets, worshipping in words what he cannot attain in the flesh. To Benvolio's greeting, 'Here comes Romeo' Mercutio adds cynically :

Without his roe, like a dried herring. O flesh, o flesh, how art thou fishified! Now he is for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in. Laura to his lady was a kitchen wench, marry - she had a better love to berhyme her - Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a gipsy, Helen and Hero hildings and harlots, Thisbe a grey eye or so, but not to the purpose.

(II.iii.35-41)

Mercutio mockingly consigns Romeo to literary tradition, deflating the legendary status of famous lovers and rendering them commonplace. Moreover, he forces us to



accompany them. The repetition of 'hands' and 'lips' emphasizes the urgency of physical contact.

ROMEO: O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET: Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

(I.v.102 -5)

Punning on her words with 'move not', in this case, stand still, he kisses her. Her response, 'You kiss by the book' is an acknowledgement of his expertise in the courtly convention but it is playful and not dismissive. There is a solemnity to the occasion, enhanced by the images of shrines, pilgrims and holy palmers but accompanied by a sexuality which is not diminished by references to sin; indeed, Romeo demands 'Give me my sin again.' The use of the word 'sin' in this context is challenging to any member of the audience who might be inclined to be judgmental, but there is no moralising Cupid, as in the case of *Tancred and Gismund*, to redefine their love in terms of lust. If anything may be said to overshadow audience appreciation of the intensity of the lovers' first meeting it is the threatening presence of Tybalt.

The threat of death overshadows Romeo and Juliet throughout the play. The Chorus, though it plays a relatively minor role compared with the moralising voices in *Tancred and Gismund* and the figures of Don Andrea and Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, makes it clear from the beginning that these are 'star-crossed lovers'. The association of danger and pleasure which is so important in the earlier plays is suggested in the reference to 'the fearful passage of their death-marked love' in the Prologue, and in the commentary before Act II: 'But to his foe supposed he must complain/ And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks.' Yet the darkness of foreboding which is reflected in so much of the play's imagery and in its many references to night, is illuminated by the imagery of light which pervades so many of the lovers' speeches. The sense of a closed, separate world which is created in the scene of the

lovers' first encounter is repeated in the balcony scene, but the language is shot through with images of light in the midst of darkness, conveying a mood of exaltation which sets danger, temporarily, at a distance. The rhetoric is that same 'religion of the eye' that inspired Romeo's love for Rosaline but the emphasis again is on communication rather than adulation: 'Her eye discourses; I will answer it.' He continues:

'Tis not to me she speaks.  
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eye were there, they in her head  
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars  
As daylight doth a lamp; her eye in heaven  
Would through the airy region stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.

(II.i.56-64)

To Leonora Brodwin this is an expression of the mystique of courtly love. She suggests that the poetry has moved from the 'patchwork of conventional Petrarchanism which characterised [Romeo's] love for Rosaline' to a 'profoundly mystical exploration.'<sup>16</sup> Patchwork this is not, as one image builds upon another to create the impression that love can transform night into day. The exultant quality of Romeo's words is reminiscent of Ficino's description of a lover's passion in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (1584):

the passion of a lover ... desires the splendour of the divine light shining through bodies, and is amazed and awed by it .../ Certainly it is not a human passion which seizes and breaks them.... but that glow of divinity, shining in beautiful bodies, like an image of God, compels lovers to awe, trembling, and reverence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Leonora Leet Brodwin *Elizabethan Love Tragedy: 1587-1625* (London: University of London Press, 1972) p.46

<sup>17</sup> Sears R. Jayne *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato* p. 140-141

The 'splendour' of light streaming through the universe is vividly conveyed by Romeo but the 'glow of divinity' to which Ficino refers, is implied, not stated. Romeo's aim is to fulfil his love for Juliet in marriage rather than sublimate it in reverence. Nevertheless, he offers an alternative discourse to that of Mercutio, with its emphasis on love as an expression of the body's grosser needs. Nor are there any dissident or moralising voices present to comment on the scene. If, as Dickey suggests, the audience was expected to draw a moral it is one which conflicts with the mood created by the dramatic poetry. If there is a counterpoint it is supplied by Juliet, both visually and verbally. As Romeo, appropriately for an aspiring suitor, gazes upwards, Juliet looks down, away from the stars. It is she who tells him: 'The orchard walls are high and hard to climb/ And the place death, considering who thou art' (II.ii.64-5) and who points out: 'If they do see thee they will murder thee.' (II.ii.70) Against Juliet's warning is set Romeo's defiance. Like Guisard he sets the rhetoric of love against the reality of danger. Having climbed the orchard's walls 'with love's light wings', he demands of the Friar:

Do thou but close our hands with holy words,  
Then love-devouring death do what he dare --  
It is enough I may but call her mine.  
(II.v- 6-8)

Romeo's challenge to death is matched by his commitment to love. It is a commitment shared by Juliet, though she expresses momentary doubts:

I have no joy of this contract tonight  
It is too rash, too ill-advised, too sudden  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say it lightens.  
(II.ii.117 -20)

Her words are reminiscent of those of the Chorus and the earlier words of Romeo, and seem to reflect the kind of caution which might be advised by the moralist, except that in this case,

it is short-lived. After the couple are secretly married by the Friar, Shakespeare places Juliet in the role of the impatient bridegroom of the epithalamia. This reversal of traditional roles has the effect of emphasising Juliet's positive response to love, as opposed to that of the admired, but distant, Rosaline. The eager sensuality of Juliet's speech is further evidence of that response but lays Juliet open to a charge of immoderation which has, perhaps surprisingly been taken up by twentieth century, as well as earlier critics. James H. Seward acknowledges that a modern audience might interpret her reaction as 'refreshingly wholesome', but suggests that an Elizabethan audience might have been disturbed by the impression that 'desire seems to be out of control.' He goes on to refer to the 'ugliness which to an Elizabethan audience would have been implicit in the rawness of her sexual hunger.'<sup>18</sup>

It is true that the literature of the period contains many references to women as creatures of appetite more vulnerable to temptation than men, and that the many tributes paid to chastity had, as their counterpart, diatribes against female sexuality. The discussion in subsequent chapters of this thesis refers to examples of the latter, and illustrates the way in which female sexuality, in particular, was regarded with ambivalence, if not deep distrust. There are, as we have seen, echoes in the early romantic comedies of this distrust, which is developed into a central theme of some of Shakespeare's later plays, as well as those of other dramatists. In attempting to place the play in its contemporary context, Seward rightly acknowledges some of the negative associations relating to love and sexuality, but does so at the expense of the positive portrayal of love which is central to the tragedy. Although the play as a whole is full of sexual innuendo, there is nothing to undermine the effect of Juliet's speech. It is varied in tone, passionate and playful. Its echoing of Romeo's earlier imagery suggests a sharing of his feelings, but whilst Romeo spoke of exchanging Juliet's eyes for stars, in a vision of their illuminating the whole universe, Juliet goes one step further and turns the ethereal, poetic vision into one which also carries sexual implications:

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<sup>18</sup> James H. Seward, *Tragic Vision in Romeo and Juliet* (Washington DC: Consortium Press, 1973) p.130

Give me my Romeo and when I shall die  
 Take him and cut him out in little stars  
 And he will make the face of heaven so bright  
 That all the world will be in love with night.....

(III.ii 21-24)

Here, unequivocally, is Shakespeare's portrayal of female desire, but it is without judgemental commentary. As Stilling points out 'Juliet's innocence and her joy have the very important effect of giving new life to the language of sexuality so badly debased in different parts of the play by the male.'<sup>19</sup> The concept of mutuality is celebrated in the play, and taken a step further than the comedies in that it is shown to lead to the consummation of marriage. *Romeo and Juliet* goes further than any previous drama in portraying the joy and exaltation of love, a union of body and spirit, in which sexuality is portrayed, not as lust but as the ultimate expression of unity by two young people between whom there is no impediment but parental disapproval.

For Juliet, mock death is an ordeal to be undergone for the love of Romeo. It is not perceived as a gateway 'to the pleasant land of love,' as in *Tancred and Gismund* but as incarceration in 'the vault /To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in.' (IV.iv. 32-3) To Romeo death is personified as Juliet's ravisher, the dark king of the underworld. Although the Juliet with whom he hopes to be re-united is, in the Friar's words, 'advanced / Above the clouds as high as heaven itself' (IV. iv. 100-110) Romeo challenges the tomb where Juliet lies buried:

Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,  
 Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,  
 Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,  
 And in despite I'll cram thee with more food.

(V.iii. 45-48)

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<sup>19</sup> Stilling, p.79

For him darkness is made light by Juliet's presence. The illumination of darkness by images of light which characterised the balcony scene is repeated in the image of Juliet, whose beauty, for Romeo, 'makes /This vault a feasting presence full of light.' (V.iii.85-6) It is true that despite the imagery of light and its associations with spirituality, it is Juliet's physical presence that Romeo seems to celebrate : the 'honey' of her breath, the 'crimson' cheeks, the lips that he must kiss. Seward suggests that this is a perversion of love, illustrating his argument by referring to the 'grotesque imagery of Juliet as death's 'paramour', a fate from which Romeo will protect her by remaining with the 'worms that are her chambermaids', or as Seward puts it 'these slimy consumers of human flesh.'<sup>20</sup> This interpretation of the image works on one level, embellishing Romeo's words with an emotive reminder of the part worms play in the cycle of death and corruption, but it robs them of their dignity. Seward does not allow for the transforming vision of love in which Romeo perceives himself to be like Orpheus pursuing his Eurydice to the Underworld. In this context, the lovers' suicide, which he rightly points out is an act condemned by the church and leading to damnation, becomes an act of courage and resolution.

The 'violent end' of the lovers could be regarded as a realisation of the Friar's prophecy. Although he acts as a facilitator and go-between for the lovers, it is he who warns Romeo :

These violent delights have violent ends,  
 And in their triumph, die like fire and powder,  
 Which as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey  
 Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,  
 And in the taste, confounds the appetite.  
 Therefore love moderately.

(II.vi.9-14)

The violence of Romeo's passion for Juliet does not burn out in the course of the play but it is extinguished by death. The Friar's warning carries the traditional advice against excess:

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<sup>20</sup> Seward, 192

'love moderately', implying the inevitability of disappointment in fulfilment, as well as the paradox at the heart of so much of the period's discourse on sexual love, that what is most sweet can also be most loathsome. Like Mercutio, though in more subtle terms, he reminds Romeo that love is a matter of bodies, as well as souls, but that to allow the needs of the body to dominate over those of the soul leads to perpetual hunger. Appropriately in a man of the cloth, the Friar's words have an ascetic quality; Romeo and Juliet like their predecessors, 'love extreamely,' and, according to the saying, inevitably court both death and danger. The moral commentary which is implied here, and which dominates the tragedy of *Tancred and Gismund* is taken up by Franklin Dickey, who like Seward attempts to place the play in its contemporary moral and philosophical context. He strips the tragedy of its romantic associations and insists that 'the theme of the play is not *amor vincit omnia* but that "Death is the common catastrophe" of those who love unwisely.'<sup>21</sup> There is no doubt that love does not conquer all, let alone death, which forms the tragic conclusion, but the play is more than a moral lesson to the audience. Although Shakespeare makes frequent reference to the anti-romantic and the ascetic tradition, it is love which is the dramatic centre of the play. The mockery of Mercutio, the earthy commentary of the Nurse and the Friar's warnings against excess represent a range of alternative discourses but it is the poetry of love which is given priority.

***'These violent delights have violent ends'..***

The discordant voices which challenge the values of romantic love are multiplied in the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*.(c.1607) Antony and Cleopatra's indulgence in pleasure is mutual; it takes the form of lavish public display and self-indulgence which continue over a period of time long enough to confound their critics. It defies moderation. Far from being hidden from hostile onlookers, the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra is enacted, as Maecenas puts it, 'in the public eye.' (III.iv.11) Yet, as in the earlier plays, it is a relationship which carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. North's translation of

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<sup>21</sup> Dickey p.116

Plutarch sums up the situation from Antony's point of view in these terms: 'the last and extreamest mischief (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him, who did waken and stirre up many vices yet hidden in him.'<sup>22</sup> The events of history supply Shakespeare with the story of the downfall of two great lovers, and their many interpreters supply the moral. The conflicting messages of the play are reflected in its critical reception. George Bernard Shaw comments: 'after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespeare finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business and to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain.'<sup>23</sup> Derek Traversi asks whether the play could be considered 'a tragedy of lyrical inspiration, justifying love by presenting it as triumphant over death, or is it rather a remorseless exposure of human frailties, a presentation of spiritual possibilities dissipated through a senseless devotion to passion?'<sup>24</sup> It is, of course, precisely these tensions which Shakespeare examines in the play.

Like the tragedies which precede it, *Antony and Cleopatra* presents competing discourses on love, much of which are centred on the nature of Cleopatra herself. Shaw's description reflects the Roman viewpoint which informs much of the commentary accompanying the action of the play. His 'debauchery' echoes Caesar's 'lascivious wassails'; his 'wanton', Philo's dismissal of Cleopatra as a 'strumpet.' Yet, as he points out, Shakespeare's use of rhetoric and 'stage pathos' is a powerful counterbalance.<sup>25</sup> The lovers are, as Traversi suggests exposed as weak and even foolish, yet their love is not diminished, but enhanced by the poetry of its expression. The familiar pattern of detraction and assertion, characteristic of the romantic comedies discussed in Chapter One, highlights the conflicting

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<sup>22</sup> Plutarch trans. by Sir Thomas North in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Vol V: The Roman Plays* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) p.273

<sup>23</sup> George Bernard Shaw in Edwin Wilson (ed.) *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare* (New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1961) p.204

<sup>24</sup> Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare 2 :Troilus and Cressida to The Tempest* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1969) p. 208- 9

<sup>25</sup> *Shaw on Shakespeare*, p.215

views of love and sexuality in the play. The opening scene presents the audience with a condemnation of lust, followed by a demonstration of love which seems, paradoxically, to illustrate and to contradict the criticisms. Philo's opening remark is reminiscent of the contemporary moralist, with his distrust of extremes. 'Nay, but this dotage of our General's / O'erflows the measure.' (I.i.1-2) Philo and Demetrius appear like the moralising chorus of earlier plays, defining Antony's love for Cleopatra in reductive terms: the great Captain is become 'the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gipsy's lust'; he is transformed into 'a strumpet's fool.' (I.i.8-9,13) An added dimension to their discourse is the reduction of Antony to an object, a plaything in the hands of an unscrupulous and lustful woman. In other words, she is held responsible for the temptation of Antony away from his duties. The 'behold and see' of the two Roman commentators gives them momentary authority as presenters until Antony picks up the opening lines of the play and challenges them:

ANTONY: There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

CLEOPATRA: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

ANTONY: Then thou must needs find out new heaven, new earth.

(I.i.15-17)

Antony's words are expansive and exhilarating whilst Cleopatra playfully suggests a limit to his extravagance. To Philo and Demetrius the 'bourn' to which Cleopatra refers represents her control over him. Her response is interpreted by Terence Hawkes as equally restrictive. As he puts it, 'the bourns Cleopatra imposes on love will prove very confining indeed. They extend, in the event, to only half what we are, for their limits are those of the body. And Antony finds himself accordingly committed to a way of life in which the body predominates.'<sup>26</sup> Hawkes draws attention to the traditional opposition between the life of the spirit and the flesh, placing himself in the unlikely company of the medieval moralist. There

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<sup>26</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare's Talking Animals: Language and Drama in Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973) p. 112 3

is no doubt that a contemporary audience would recognise Antony's reply to Cleopatra as a deliberate commitment to the physical world, emphasised by his outrageous declaration:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay: Our dungy earth alike  
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life ---  
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do it---

(I.i.35-41)

The image is, at the same time, grandiose and absurd. As Hawkes suggests, and as Philo and Demetrius have told us, he is confining himself with the bonds of love, rejecting the nobility of achievement in the political world of empire. This dismissal of the values of the world is a dismissal, not in favour of asceticism, but of love. Moreover, it is soon made clear that love, for Antony, is inextricably linked with pleasure. His words are not those of the Petrarchan lover but of the hedonist: 'There's not a minute of our lives should stretch/ Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?' (I.i.48-49) It is Cleopatra herself who deflates his protestations of love by remarking: 'Excellent falsehood! / Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?' (I.i.42-3) and who teasingly suggests that he put duty before pleasure and hear the ambassadors. Thus from the outset, there is a tension created between ironic and moralising commentary and lyricism; between the image the lovers build of themselves and their perception in the eyes of others.

The tension is heightened by contrasting commentators like Enobarbus, who sees love entirely in terms of sexuality, and Octavius Caesar who conjures up an ascetic Antony from the past to contrast with the libertine of the present. If Enobarbus can be said to represent the anti-romantic view, Caesar and his sister Octavia embody the virtues of restraint. To Caesar, Antony's excessive passion is a degrading indulgence of appetite. It is, on the one hand, to be dismissed: 'Let us grant it not amiss/ To tumble on the bed of Ptolemy'

(I.iv. 16-17); and on the other to be deplored as 'lascivious wassails.'(l.55) The moralising commentary which reduces the love of Antony to a 'tumble on the bed of Ptolemy' is centred in the Roman world. There, Cleopatra is Antony's 'Egyptian dish' (II. vii.123), his 'trull' (III.vi.95), his 'whore', and Antony is 'th' adulterous Antony, most large/ In his abominations.' (III.vi.93-4) The action of the play confirms his adultery, his disloyalty, his weakness, and even his cruelty. It also confirms Cleopatra's manipulative nature, her unscrupulousness and her past indiscretions. Despite this, the fact that the lovers place a high value on themselves and the audience is invited to share their exaltation. Ironically it is Enobarbus himself who pays tribute to Cleopatra's 'infinite variety', adding:

...other women cloy  
 The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
 Where most she satisfies.  
 (II.ii.242 -5 )

Cleopatra, it appears, is the answer to the paradox at the heart of Renaissance views on sexuality: she performs the miracle of fulfilment without satiety; of always promising more, so that there can be no disappointment. Enobarbus' attitude is typical of the ambiguity which so often accompanies attitudes to love in the period. Whilst he recognises that Cleopatra appears to offer, like the goddess of love, 'perfection' (II.v.235), he is aware of her human frailties and her power to take from Antony's 'heart, his brain, his time / What should not be spared.' (II.vii.11-12) The beauty of his description is like that of Spenser's Bower of Bliss, in its appeal to the senses, and in this context, Antony is like Grille, transformed, as Burton puts it, 'into a beast', his reason dominated by his will, with Cleopatra playing the role of Circe. If she can be said to represent the enchantress, Antony becomes the man whom Burton describes as being 'carried headlong' by his lust into 'perpetual infamy' and 'losse.' In Garnier's *Tragedie of Antonie*, Lucilius describes the effect of this enslavement: <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Garnier *The Tragedie of Antonie* trans. by Mary Herbert 1595 edn., in Geoffrey Bullough, *Vol V: The Roman Plays*

Enchanting pleasure, *Venus'* sweete delights,  
 Weaken our bodies, over-cloud our sprights,  
 Trouble our reason, from our hearts out chase  
 All holie vertues lodging in their place:  
 Like as the cunning fisher takes the fishe  
 By traitor baite whereby the hooke is hid  
 So Pleasure serves to vice in stede of foode.

(III.1172-78)

It is a description which could equally well apply to Shakespeare's Antony. He, too, makes a commitment to pleasure which appears, at times, to 'out chase' his sense of duty. Garnier's image of 'the cunning fisher' with his 'traitor baite' of pleasure is enacted dramatically in Cleopatra's:

I will betray  
 Tawny finned fishes. My bended hook shall pierce  
 Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up  
 I'll think them every one an Antony,  
 And say, 'Ah ha, you're caught.

(II.v.11-15)

The gloomy prognostications of the Roman commentators are amply demonstrated in the course of the action. Cleopatra is wilful, provocative, disastrous to Antony's career and to his military campaign. Antony is vacillating, irresponsible, even incompetent. For Antony, the love of Cleopatra is tied up with failure and dishonour; as Spenser puts it, a 'sad end...of life intemperate /And mournfull meed of ioyes delicious.' (*Faerie Queene* II.xii) By choosing his 'Egyptian dish', by rejecting the 'holy, cold and still disposition' of Octavia, he makes inevitable a conflict between himself and Caesar. His love affects his military judgement, so that in his men's eyes he appears to follow her retreating fleet 'like a doting mallard.' (III.x.19) Pompey's version of future events is fulfilled

Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both  
 Tie up the libertine, in a field of feasts  
 Keep his brain fuming; Epicurean cooks  
 Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,

That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour,  
Even to a Lethe'd dullness ----

(II.i. 22- 27)

The excesses of love are demonstrated in Antony's blunders. His captainship, as Enobarbus puts it, is marred by 'the itch of his affection.'; he 'would make his will/ Lord of his reason.' (III.xii.7,3-4) He does, indeed, lose himself 'in dotage'; in a passion which, according to Bacon's description, 'loseth not only other things but it selfe.' To Octavia he says 'if I lose mine honour/ I lose myself' (III.iv.22-3) and he later describes Cleopatra's betrayal as beguiling him 'to the very heart of loss.' (IV. xii.29) His behaviour conforms to Bacon's concept of the folly of one who cannot keep love from 'their serious affaires, and Actions of life.' Unlike Alexander, the hero of Lyly's play *Campaspe*, Antony is unable to 'command himself.' (IV.iv.15) In the mood of doubt and disillusionment which follows defeat in battle he views his love for Cleopatra as bewitchment and his queen as the 'whore' and the 'gipsy' who has beguiled him. Like Garnier's Antonie, he admits to the overpowering of his reason by love and re-interprets his experience in terms of entrapment by an 'entising' foe, lured away from the paths of honour, to wallow in sensual pleasure. Like Antonie, he feels himself to be emasculated, 'falne from a souldior to a chamberer', ...' All thoughts of honor troden under foote.' (III.1153,1157).

Antony's recognition of his own folly is a moment of tragic awareness and the ultimate confirmation of the predictions of the cynics. Even his death, being, in the end a gesture made for love rather than for military honour, has its elements of bathos and absurdity, being a response to information of the death of Cleopatra which proves to be untrue. Even so, despite the fact that Antony's body has to be hauled in an undignified manner up the monument where Cleopatra has hidden herself away, the last encounter of the lovers is moving in its intensity. Despite the recriminations, and the sense of loss and waste which accompanies the last acts of the play, it is as a tragedy of love that it makes its greatest impact. The moral commentary which exists throughout the play has never been enough to subdue the dramatic appeal of the lovers. Like other tragic lovers, Antony and Cleopatra

create a world apart from that of the self-appointed denigrators of their love. The fact that their relationship is well established enhances the impression of a bond that unites this 'mutual pair.' It is a love which withstands jealousy, disappointment, and even betrayal. Both are ageing, yet they envisage their love as timeless.

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows bent; none our parts so poor,  
But was a race of heaven.

(I.iii. 35-37)

The fact that the play seems to insist on the physical has, as the earlier discussion indicates, led some critics to be sceptical about its portrayal of love. John F. Danby sums up this view when he claims that there is no 'love-romanticism in the play.' He argues that 'the flesh has its glory, its passion, its witchery. Love in *Antony and Cleopatra* is both these.' Anticipating Hawkes, he goes on to say that 'The love of Antony and Cleopatra ..... is not asserted as a 'final value.'<sup>28</sup> It is true that 'eternity' to which Cleopatra refers is associated not with the soul, but the body and Antony's vision of the afterlife is hardly one of sublimation, but an imagined continuance of the joys of love:

.....I come, my queen. - Eros ! - Stay for me.  
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,  
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:  
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,  
And all the haunt be ours.

(IV.xv. 50-54)

Yet it is precisely this triumphant insistence on the sexual nature of love which has such an impact in the play. The fact that the lovers are mature and experienced in the ways of the world robs their love of its innocence but not of its romantic aspirations. It is the power of their imaginations which creates the world of immediacy in which the most trivial event can

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<sup>28</sup> John F. Danby *Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher* (London 1952) p.52

seem important. What to Caesar is to waste 'the lamps of night in revel' (I.iv.55) is to Antony a defiance of 'the strong necessity of time' (I.iii.42), a mockery of the 'midnight bell.' (III. xiii.187) What is to Caesar a reckless indulgence is an enrichment of each moment of life. If it is appetite that leads to excess, it is an appetite for life. Whilst Shakespeare acknowledges and demonstrates the dangers of loving 'extreamely' he allows it a generous poetic expression which resists attempts to demean it.

As Antony and Cleopatra challenge the Roman definition of their love, they also challenge death. Just as they frequently renew their commitment to one another in life, they envisage a continuation beyond the grave. The images of death which they conjure up are bound up with images of love. Antony's final decision to die an honourable death combines the action of a Roman soldier with the words of a lover: 'I will be/ A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed.' (IV. xv. 99-101) Cleopatra, like Antony, anticipates not an ending but a continuation of their relationship as she cries: 'Husband, I come./ Now to that name my courage prove my title.' (V.ii.282-3) To the lovers, who have created a world of celebration and hedonism, love and death are intimately related. To Cleopatra, 'the stroke of death is as a lover's pinch / Which hurts, and is desired.' (V.ii. 290-1) The power of rhetoric diminishes death and subordinates it to love just as, in the same way, the power of rhetoric elevates the lovers to godlike stature. Significantly this elevation takes place in their absence. Enobarbus creates his vision of a Cleopatra for his Roman audience whom 'age cannot wither', 'o'er- picturing that Venus where we see/ The fancy outwork nature.' (II.ii.241, 207-80) Cleopatra recreates a heroic Antony, whose

...legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm  
 Crested the world; his voice was propertied  
 As all the tuned spheres - and that to friends;  
 But when he meant to quail and shake the orb  
 He was as rattling thunder..

(V.ii.81-85)

These visions of Antony and Cleopatra contrast with the lovers as we see them in many of their roles on stage, just as their vision of their love as a transcendent and enriching experience is in contrast to the interpretation of their commentators. As we have seen, subsequent critics of the play also reflect this dichotomy. The romantic view of Antony, defying convention and duty in a world well lost for love is not that of those Renaissance writers for whom love was folly and passion dangerous, but, like Romeo and Juliet, his voice and that of Cleopatra make a strong dramatic statement. Shakespeare puts a convincing case for the destructive nature of passion in the downfall and death of Antony and Cleopatra, but he also pays tribute to its life-enhancing power.

*'This is flesh and blood, sir'.*

The decision to die is made independently by Antony and Cleopatra; death is not cruelly inflicted, as in the case of the execution of Guisard, or the murder of Horatio. Yet in the deaths of all these lovers, there is an element of sacrifice and suffering, as if the body must atone in some way for the unruly passion that has consumed it. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, (1614) a play which has many features in common with the earlier love tragedies, the suffering is a long drawn-out torment building up to the climax of the heroine's death, and followed in the last act by the murder of her lover. One of Webster's major sources of the play, Painter's version of the story by Bandello, describes the Duchess's love for Antonio in terms of 'the reckless instigation of her wanton flesh'.<sup>29</sup> Antonio is credited with doubts as to the folly of an enterprise which seems 'to the prejudice and peril' of his 'honor and life'. He asks himself:

ought the wisdom of a gentleman to stray and wandle through  
the assaults of appetite rising of sensuality, and that reason give place  
to that which doeth participate with brute beasts deprived of all reason  
by subduing the minde to the affections of the body. <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure*, Novella XXIII, p.10

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.10

Painter puts love firmly in its place as what Ficino terms 'animal', the 'depths of carnal pleasure.'<sup>31</sup> In Webster's play, although Antonio is hesitant to accept the Duchess's love, there is no trace of this kind of self-condemnation. The censorious voice is given dramatic expression in the characters of the Duchess's two brothers, whilst Antonio's hesitation appears to derive more from his low status in relation to the Duchess than to his moral scruples. As in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* some twentieth-century critics have attempted to historicise the play by placing it in a context of contemporary opinion. Clifford Leech reminds his readers of the fact that the remarriage of widows, though lawful, was viewed with disapproval in the period.<sup>32</sup> Inga-Stina Ewbank (Ekeblad) refers to Painter's account of the Duchess as an '*exemplum horrendum* to all women contemplating a second marriage' and of the Duchess's 'double "crime" ' in marrying again and in marrying beneath her.<sup>33</sup> James Calderwood links the Duchess's passionate lack of inhibition with her failure to respect the values of her class<sup>34</sup>

If we accept these interpretations, the punishment of the Duchess confirms the play as a cautionary tale, rather than a story of grand passion. An alternative viewpoint is provided by William Empson, who refutes this approach, assuring his readers that 'the theatre was in favour of the young couple, and against the arranged marriage; this has always been a basic source of popularity for a popular theatre.' He adds 'If you settle down to interpret Elizabethan plays with the rancid piety of Iago, there is no limit to the absurdity you may attain.'<sup>35</sup> Empson's spirited defence is not backed by detailed evidence, and Iago is not so much a moralist as a misogynist, but it is true that to view *Othello* from his viewpoint would be to narrow the vision of the play. In the same way, to view the world of *The Duchess of*

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<sup>31</sup> See page 43

<sup>32</sup> Clifford Leech, *John Webster* (London:1951) pp.68-77

<sup>33</sup> Inga-Stina Ekeblad 'The "impure art" ' of John Webster', in *Elizabethan Drama: Modern essays in Criticism* p.258

<sup>34</sup> James L. Calderwood '*The Duchess of Malfi* : Styles of Ceremony', *Essays in Criticism*, 12 (1962) 133-47

<sup>35</sup> William Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature: Volume 2 : The Drama*, ed. by John Haffenden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.117

*Malfi* through Ferdinand's eyes would be to distort it. As Nicholas Brooke points out, 'The Duchess and Antonio achieve a private domesticity' .. which is the play's most powerful vision of living virtue and can only be vice to the mad vision of the great men, her brothers.'

<sup>36</sup> It is Ferdinand's viewpoint that is privileged by Lisa Jardine, however. <sup>37</sup> Reminding the reader of contemporary views on female sexuality, she suggests that the warmth of the portrayal of love in this scene cannot outweigh the impression created of the Duchess by her brothers' estimation of her motives in marrying again. She goes on to say that the encounter in Act One, Scene Two 'controls our assessment' of the Duchess's character, adding that her behaviour 'reveals the accuracy of her brothers' accusations (confirming their dark travesty of female lasciviousness and "doubleness") simultaneously. ' In other words, the Duchess is defined, for the audience, like Gertrude, as 'a beast that wants discourse of reason.'

It is true that the Duchess is shown, in the following scene, to be deceitful in that, having vowed 'I'll never marry,' she proposes marriage to Antonio, her steward. Indeed, the situation which he envisages when he declares 'What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale / Make a woman believe' (I.ii.258-9) is reversed. It is the Duchess herself who does the persuading; the Duchess who acts as wooer and who must make Antonio believe in her sincerity. If anything, she could be said to be making a better case than her brother for female transgression. As Jardine points out, it is not only her brothers' judgement, but her own behaviour, which might be said to condemn her in the eyes of a seventeenth century audience. The effect of the play is complex, however. Contemporary thought, like a theatre audience, is not a single, monolithic body but is full of tensions and oppositions, and Webster, like Shakespeare, reflects these tensions in his work. Like Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra* , he raises the question of whether it is love or lust that brings the lovers together, and offers a range of answers. One of them can be found in the language and conduct of the lovers themselves, rather than those who comment on their behaviour.

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<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: Open Books Ltd.,1979) p.50

<sup>37</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* 2nd edn. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester,1983)p.70

If Webster had wanted to create a picture of the archetypal lustful widow, a familiar figure in the drama of the period, he could easily have done so. The Duchess of Malfi is clearly distinguishable from characters like Marston's Isabella, in *The Insatiate Countess* (1610), who embodies all the faults which misogynists associated with her kind. She is fickle in her affections, and governed by her insatiable appetite to the extent that, having chosen a second husband, she is unfaithful to him on their wedding night. Isabella's bold choice of her partner might be compared with that of the Duchess, but there is a world of difference in the presentation of the two women.<sup>38</sup> The Duchess's marriage, far from being a stepping stone to further freedom, represents a commitment to a lasting relationship. Although she rebels against her brothers' wishes, her behaviour is more conventional in many ways, than theirs. Ferdinand appears to live a solitary existence, whilst the Cardinal indulges, despite his vows of celibacy, in a liaison with a married woman. The Duchess's story is central to the play. Her courtship, her marriage and the birth of her children are events in that story. The Duchess's fertility and her continued happiness in marriage represent a force for life compared with which her enemies, Ferdinand and Bosola, seem locked in a sterile partnership of death.

It is Ferdinand who makes explicit the link between love and death familiar in tragedy. In this case it takes the form of a warning to his sister about the consequences of a second marriage: 'Such wedding may more properly be said/ To be executed than celebrated.' He adds 'And those joys/ Those lustful pleasures are like heavy sleeps,/ Which do forerun man's mischief.' (I.ii.242-3,245) Ferdinand's language, like that of Tancred, betrays an obsessiveness which demonstrates itself in images of his sister's sexuality. To him, the desire to marry twice is a sign of lasciviousness. Joining him in a persistent, reductive commentary is Bosola, one of a long line of dramatic malcontents, which includes Hamlet, Thersites and Malevole. His political cynicism is linked to a profound contempt for

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<sup>38</sup> Even the Countess, despite the play's uncompromising title, is not unequivocally condemned. See the discussion in Chapter 7

humanity. It is expressed in a disgust of the flesh, which is in direct opposition to the lovers' pleasure in one another:

Though we are eaten up of lice, and worms,  
 And though continually we bear about us  
 A rotten and dead body, we delight  
 To hide it in rich tissue.

(II.i.58-61)

The denigration of love in the play is almost inseparable from the denigration of women. If Bosola despises the body as a reminder of its mortality, Ferdinand despises it as an emblem of female sexuality. Yet whilst Bosola's comments are generalised and satirical, those of Ferdinand are painfully specific. It is his sister's body and his sister's sexuality that obsess him and which he transforms into images of debasing sexuality. The undercutting commentary which so often accompanies the idealisation of love is rendered in terms of denial and distortion.

Like Gismund, Bel-imperia and Juliet, the Duchess makes a positive move towards the man she loves. The scene in which she makes her feelings known to Antonio is an intimate one, charged with feeling:

You do tremble  
 Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh  
 To fear, more than to love me. Sir, be confident.  
 What is't distracts you? This is flesh and blood sir,  
 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster  
 Kneels at my husband's tomb

( I.ii.366-71)

Like Gismund, conscious that her youth must 'fade away', she deliberately dissociates herself from death and widowhood, at the same time insisting on being recognised as 'flesh and blood'; a warm human being in her own right, not merely her husband's relict. Her words challenge Antonio's earlier description of her as the idealised beloved, to be admired but not considered as a sexual being:



picture of natural harmony, growth and fruitfulness. When the Duchess talks of making her will, Antonio urges her towards a renewal of life.

Begin with that first good deed begun i' the world  
 After man's creation, the sacrament of marriage ---  
 I'd have you first provide for a good husband,  
 Give him all.

(I.i.385)

Again, marriage is given a positive context, with the misogyny which is so often associated with the Fall giving way to an emphasis on the sanctity of the union. The association of love and death which is implied in this scene is only faintly suggested. What is vividly conveyed here, as in the other scenes of domestic intimacy, is a sense of warmth and humanity that encloses the lovers, the Duchess's servant Coriola, and the children in a world apart from the court and its intrigue. As Rowland Wymer points out, 'Much of the emotional effect of the play derives from its intimation of how precarious personal and domestic happiness are, how vulnerable to tyrannical violence and to the exigencies of life in general.'<sup>39</sup>

The motif of death and danger which has been present throughout is underlined by Coriola's judgement on her mistress:

Whether the spirit of greatness, or of woman  
 Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows  
 A fearful madness. I owe her much of pity.

(I.ii.416)

The madness is not defined but it is clear from the context that, like Gismund, Bel-imperia and Juliet, the Duchess, in choosing Antonio, is offending against the patriarchal code, just as Antonio, like Horatio, is reaching beyond his station. The sense of doom which has overshadowed the lovers is given a particular focus when Ferdinand intrudes into the intimate world of his sister's apartments in Act II. Antonio, Cariola and the Duchess exchange pleasantries in the Duchess's bedchamber. The picture which is created of the

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<sup>39</sup> Rowland Wymer *Webster and Ford* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1950) p 60

Duchess brushing her hair, unaware that her brother is approaching, dagger in hand, has an emblematic quality. Whereas a post-Freudian audience might interpret the scene in terms of the phallic symbolism of the weapon, a contemporary audience would recognise a familiar scene, one which Keith Sturgess describes as 'a Renaissance moral emblem of shattering power: the vain woman visited by Death as a retribution for the moral laxity of which the play never forgives her.'<sup>40</sup> Images of this kind abound in the Medieval tradition which deplores vanity and attributes it chiefly to women. It is not exclusively Death who is the unwelcome visitor, however, as Sturgess points out. The Devil also plays an important part in these tableaux. Ferdinand brings about his sister's death, as well as performing the diabolic function of attempting to drive her to despair, in the tradition of the morality play. The Duchess's remarks to Antonio form an ironic comment on the action:

We shall one day have my brothers take you napping.  
 Methinks his presence, being now in court  
 Should make you keep your own bed; but you'll say  
 Love mixed with fear is sweetest.

(III.ii.63-7)

They take up the central refrain of love tragedy with its interlinking of love and death. Here it is heightened by the fear of discovery. Like Horatio in his meeting with Bel-imperia, she suppresses her apprehension, transforming it into an indirect challenge to her brother's hostility, assuring herself that Antonio's love is given an edge of 'sweetness' by fear.

The Duchess's punishment is lengthy and sadistic, an elaborate orchestration by Ferdinand, and by Bosola, on his behalf, of mental and physical suffering. The dramatic importance of these scenes compared, for instance, with that of the death of Antonio in Act V, might be thought to give weight to the argument that Webster is inviting disapproval of the Duchess's conduct. She is one of the many tragic heroines of Renaissance drama who undergo suffering as a form of castigation for their sins. To Lisa Jardine, it is a 'ritual chastisement, worthy of a flagrant breach of public order', conforming to the traditional morality which asserts that

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<sup>40</sup> Keith Sturgess, *Jacobean Private Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1987) p.114

excessive passion leads to destruction and to the misogynistic viewpoint which gives greater emphasis to the transgressions of women than to those of men.<sup>41</sup> There is a difference, however, in the chastisement inflicted on the Duchess of Malfi and that which is suffered by, for example, Tamora in Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* and Anne Frankford in Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*.<sup>42</sup> The difference lies in the fact that the Duchess is not guilty of adultery, but only of contracting a secret alliance. Webster acknowledges contemporary disapproval of such unions but makes it clear, as Shakespeare does in *Othello*, that it is misogyny as much as alleged female misconduct which is on trial here. The enactment of Ferdinand's scheme for punishing the Duchess directs the audience to the recognition of female sexuality as sin, but it is a sin, not in the eyes of the church, but in those of her brother. Even if she is to be interpreted as foolish or wayward, she is not necessarily to be assessed in his terms.

Bosola has more in common with the medieval moralist than Ferdinand in the roles he adopts in relation to his victim. He elaborates on the traditional ascetic theme of 'the dunghill flesh' in his final encounter with the Duchess.

Thou art a box of wormseed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy: what's this flesh? a little cruded milk, fantastical puff-paste: our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in: more contemptible; since ours is to preserve earthworms: didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our head like her looking glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.

(IV.ii.123-131)

It is an echo of his earlier comments on the 'rotten and dead body' which is so highly valued and so carefully nurtured by men and women but in this context it carries the weight of a sermon on the *de contemptu mundi* theme. This exposition of the relationship of the body

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<sup>41</sup> Jardine, p.77.

<sup>42</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 4

and the soul reduces physicality to insignificance but the Duchess defies Bosola's dismissal of the world and the flesh with the declaration; 'I am Duchess of Malfi still.' Her words are an assertion of selfhood, even of status, reminiscent of Antony's 'I am / Antony yet'. (III. xiii.92-3)

Death is not, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* perceived as 'a lover's pinch'; it is inflicted rather than sought. It is neither a partner in love, nor a gateway to new experiences. Nevertheless there is, as well as resignation, determination and the semblance of hope in the Duchess's response. In this tragedy which celebrates, not only love but what Mary Beth Rose call 'the heroics of marriage', the Duchess dies confirming her right to choose and making it clear that, like Gismund, she recognises the corruption of this world for what it is.<sup>43</sup> She defies Bosola's 'Doth not death fright you?' with

Who would be afraid on't?  
Knowing to meet such excellent company  
In th 'other world.  
(IV. ii.207-9)

The Duchess's stoic acceptance of her fate, her courage and defiance, are demonstrated to the audience. Her death has a profound effect, both upon Bosola, who is directly responsible for it, and upon Ferdinand who set the tragic events in motion. If it is to be interpreted as any kind of atonement, it is not acknowledged as such by the Duchess herself. It is those responsible for the Duchess's death who are forced to confront the consequences of their actions. Although Ferdinand might have appeared at one point to be acting as spokesman for contemporary values, now he turns on Bosola, demanding; 'Why didst thou not pity her?' (Iv.ii 267). Faced with the visible evidence of his sister's death, Ferdinand is forced to question his own actions and his judgement.

Was I her judge?  
Did any ceremonial form of law

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Beth Rose *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988)

Doom her to not being? did a complete jury  
 Deliver her conviction up i' the court?  
 Where shalt thou find this judgement register'd  
 Unless in hell?

(IV.ii. 293-8)

In his conclusion he damns himself. The brother who reduced his sister's sexuality to a bestial level becomes himself animal-like in his madness. He is tormented by images of himself in the form of a wolf, its skin a hair shirt of repentance. (V.ii. 13-19) With equal irony, it is Bosola who, having preached his contempt for the flesh, is moved to call back the Duchess from death, in a series of images which are both physical and immediate.

She stirs; here's life.

Return, fair soul from darkness, and lead mine  
 Out of this sensible hell. She's warm, she breathes:  
 Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart  
 To store them with fresh colour.

(IV. ii.335-339)

The divided catastrophe of *Antony and Cleopatra* is echoed in the ending of *The Duchess of Malfi* but the high note of assertiveness on which the Duchess dies is not duplicated on her husband's death. The actions of Antony and Cleopatra complement one another, so that, as Jyotsna Singh points out, 'If Antony dies by imaginatively evoking the values of love - what the Romans decry as effeminate in him - Cleopatra resolves her suicide by infusing into her feminine being the masculine constancy claimed by the Romans.'<sup>44</sup> The deaths of the Duchess and Antonio are linked by the echo of the Duchess's voice, which seems to act as a warning and as an indication of her watchful presence, but Antonio dies expressing a disillusionment which almost equals that of Bosola :

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<sup>44</sup> Jyotsyna Singh, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*' in *Renaissance Drama* n.s.20, (1989) pp.99-117, p.110

Pleasure of life what is't? only the good hours  
 Of an ague, merely a preparative to rest,  
 To endure vexation.

(V.iv. 66-8)

The 'cheering romanticism' which Stilling attributes to the early love tragedies is overshadowed in *The Duchess of Malfi* by destructive forces and by the sense of a chaotic universe which pervades the last act.<sup>45</sup> The conclusion, nevertheless, with the appearance of the Duchess's son and the proverbial reference to 'Integrity of life' being 'fame's best friend' (V. v.119) is a reminder of the integrity of the Duchess and her married life with Antonio.

The impact of the play is complex. Like its source in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* it incorporates a moral commentary but the commentators are suspect from the beginning. As Shakespeare adds a new dimension to Brooke's tale of the 'shameful and wretched endes' of Romeus and Juliet, so Webster builds upon 'the miserable discourse of a Princesse love, that was not very wyse, and of a Gentleman that had forgotten his estate, which ought to serve for a Lookinge Glasse to them which bee overhardy in makinge enterprises.'<sup>46</sup> He extends this caution into a bitter contemporary version of medieval morality in which hypocrisy and sexual obsession masquerade as a concern for family honour. He equates contempt for the flesh and its pleasures with contempt for life and pits it against the joys of marriage. Like Shakespeare he recognises the ascetic tradition and its associated misogyny but pays tribute to the alternative view of sexuality as a 'genuine good' and of marriage as a fulfilling and loving relationship.

It is the clash between these discourses which forms the essence of the tragedy of love. The drama has the advantage over its narrative sources in being able to present conflicting voices in interaction with each other within the dynamics of a performance. The argument, familiar to a contemporary audience, about the nature and the value of love and its relationship with lust, is enriched by characterisation and action. The moralising which

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<sup>45</sup> Roger Stilling *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1954) p.33

<sup>46</sup> Painter, p.43

accompanies this kind of debate is represented in *Tancred and Gismund* by choruses which act as a commentary on the lovers' words and actions. In later plays, as we have seen, it becomes either more or less authoritative, according to the character who delivers it. In the rapid development of the drama, from the late sixteenth century to the early seventeenth, the debate becomes, at times, more sophisticated and more complex, but the tensions remain unresolved. It is clear from the examples provided in this chapter that the tensions revealed in the tragedy of love can still be felt by twentieth century commentators. The criticism of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Antony and Cleopatra* and of *The Duchess of Malfi* is an example of the kind of ambivalence which can still be associated with love and sexuality. There is, in the work of Dickey, and Seward, to take just two examples, a tendency to dwell on the moralising discourses of the period, to the exclusion of more positive representations of love. That moral judgements are frequently expressed by various dramatic characters is not in question but they are placed in tension with other considerations, and often with dramatic action. At the time when the plays were written, the idealisation of love meant that it was more commonly associated with spirituality than it has been in the later years of the twentieth century and the corresponding debasement of love was, in contrast, more strongly felt. In the tragedy of love the moral and the ascetic viewpoint and the idealistic and pragmatic meet and clash. As Molly Mahood points out 'It is the prerogative of poetry to give effect and value to incompatible meanings' and that is precisely what happens in the drama.<sup>47</sup> The poignancy of love tragedy lies in the fact that it acknowledges the importance of love whilst giving expression to the forces against it. In the conclusion, the lovers die as if to fulfil the warnings of their cynical detractors whilst they remain convinced, in the world that they have created for themselves, of the value of their experience.

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<sup>47</sup> M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957) p.72

## CHAPTER THREE

### A REMEDYE AGAYNST SINNE?

*'That men may live modestly with their wives'.*

The duality which is intrinsic in the language of love and courtship inevitably pervades the discourse of marriage. In the previous chapter the marriage of the Duchess of Malfi is condemned by her brother as the expression of a depraved sexual appetite. To the Duchess herself, marriage is 'that first good deed begun i' the world/ After man's creation'; it is a 'sacrament'. (I.i.385-6) The two extremes of opinion are expressed in different contexts within the play but they represent the fundamental contradiction imposed by the traditions of Christianity on the relationship of marriage. A tension exists between the concept of a ceremony which was regarded as, at the same time, symbolic of 'the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church' and as 'a remedy against sinne and to avoid fornication.' The elevated spiritual concept of a 'mystical union' clashes with the idea of 'brute beastes' satisfying their carnal lusts, yet both are to be found in the words of the marriage service.

The idea that marriage should be regarded as a positive source of love and companionship, rather than a means of avoiding 'fornication' was an attempt to resolve the Pauline legacy of the clash between flesh and spirit. The arguments against celibacy had been expressed effectively by Erasmus in his *Encomium Matrimonii*. In this influential work, translated into French, German and English (thirteen editions had been published in Latin up to 1540 ) Erasmus contradicted the church fathers, who claimed that sexuality was sinful in itself, asserting that the holiest life was not that of monks and nuns but of married men and women. He defended human sexuality as natural rather than sinful:

Whereas all other things be ordained by nature with most high reason, it is not likely that she slumbered and slept in making only this privy member. Nor I hear not him which will say unto

me that the foul itchings and pricks of carnal lust come not of nature but of sin. What is more unlike the truth? As though matrimony (whose office can not [sic] be executed without these pricks) was not before sin. <sup>1</sup>

Even the Virgin Mary was enlisted to support his argument in the defence of matrimony. As Erasmus assured his readers, though virgin, she was married. He turned the paradox of the virgin birth on its head, insisting that by her example as a married woman, rather than her status as chaste maiden' she signified unto us what we ought to do.' <sup>2</sup>

Although Erasmus remained loyal to the church, and later published an explanation aimed at modifying the effect of his argument, his positive ideal of mutual love between men and women in marriage was widely adopted in subsequent Protestant discourse, such as Becon's *Preface to The Christian State of Matrimony*. <sup>3</sup> Becon describes marriage as a state:

wherein one man and one woman are coupled and knit together in one flesh and body in the fear and love of God, by the free, loving, hearty and good consent of them both, to the intent that they two may dwell together, as one flesh and body, of one will and mind, in all virtue and godliness, and spend their lives in the equal partaking of all such things, as God shall send them with thanksgiving.

There is a joyful ring to the words 'free, loving, hearty and good consent' and an emphasis on positive choice. Marriage is perceived, not as a remedy against sin but as a state of 'virtue and godliness.' To William Perkins, in his *Christian Economy* (1609), marriage was a state 'in itself far more excellent than the condition of single life.' <sup>4</sup> Like Erasmus, he

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<sup>1</sup> *Encomium Matrimonii*, trans. by Richard Taverner, 1536, repr. in Joan Larsen Klein, ed. *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England 1500-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) p.79. This edition of the work was originally published eighteen years after it was written. Its popularity can be gauged by the fact that twenty-eight editions in all were published in Erasmus's lifetime, and at least sixty by the end of the century.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.74

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Becon, *Preface to the Christian State of Matrimony*, 1543, p. 244

<sup>4</sup> William Perkins, Selections from *Christian Economy: or A Short Survey of the Right manner of*

sees marriage, not as a remedy for sin, but as a state 'ordained by God in Paradise above and before all other states of life in Adam's innocency before the fall.' Of course love and companionship in marriage were not new phenomena discovered by the Reformed faith, however enthusiastically its adherents praised the union. What was new was the proliferation and the popularisation of printed material which celebrated marriage, rather than celibacy.

The Geneva Bible moderates the unpalatable message of I. Corinthians vii:1 'It were good for a man not to touch a woman', by advising the reader to interpret 'good' as 'expedient', though it concedes, in the commentary, 'For marriage bringeth many griefes with it, and that by reason of the corruption of our first estate.' Paul's reference to celibacy as a gift of God (1 Corinthians vii.7), is glossed to the effect that 'the gift of continencie' comes by 'a peculiar grace of God' to only a few. St. Paul's more positive statement, that marriage is an honourable estate (Hebrews, 13: 4) was frequently quoted. Thus, the fundamental contradictions implicit in the Bible were not dispelled, but a more positive interpretation was placed upon them, with Paul being recruited as unlikely champion of the married state. The idealisation of marriage did not automatically lead to a celebration of human love and sexuality in general, however. The language of religion remained essentially uncompromising. Although Martin Luther states that 'the marriage bed is pure in the eyes of God', he stresses the changes brought about by the Fall, with the taint of lust, 'epileptic and apoplectic lust' poisoning relationships between Adam and Eve.<sup>5</sup> Calvin places even greater emphasis on chastity and virginity than Luther. Though he attacks the concept of celibacy, declaring that 'the children of God may embrace a conjugal life with a good and tranquil conscience and husbands and wives may live together in chastity and honour', he also maintains that 'we must oppose the lasciviousness of the flesh in order that

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*Erecting and Ordering a Family according to the Scriptures in Daughters, Wives and Widows* p.158

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, Works 51 trans. by John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959) p.365

men may live modestly with their wives.<sup>6</sup> A distinction between holy matrimony and fornication was firmly established in the teaching of the reformed church in England.

The congregation of the 1590s was regularly reminded of that distinction in the Homilies which were read out in place of sermons in most churches.<sup>7</sup> Although attitudes towards marriage were more positive, the language of the Homily, the Litany and the marriage service itself still paint a picture of desire as dangerous. The discourse of love and sexuality, in religious terms, is associated with appetite, sin, and corruption. In the words of the Litany, the congregation prayed 'From fornication and all other deadly sin and from all deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil, Good Lord deliver us.' The marriage service, though it acknowledged the fleshly bond between man and wife with the additional words, 'with my body I thee worship' also included the instruction that marriage was

not to be enterprised, or taken in hande unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly, to satisfye menne's carnall lustes and appetytes, like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, discretely, advisedly, soberly and in the feare of God, duly consideryng the causes for which matrimony was ordeined.  
(121)

Though these causes included 'mutual society, help and comfort', they also defined marriage as a 'remedy agaynste sinne and to avoide fornication, that suche persones that have not the gifte of continencie might mary and kepe themselves undefiled membres of Christes body.' The words are reminiscent of St. Paul, in that they define continency as a gift and marriage as a remedy, rather than a positive choice.

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, publ. in Latin in 1554 and in English in 1578, trans. and ed. by John King London: The Banner of Truth Trust, p.134

<sup>7</sup> The Homilies were first compiled by Bishop Bonner and others, under the authority of Henry VIII and published in 1547, after his death. They were placed next to the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer in churches, and were regarded as next to them in authority. Frequently revised, (at least nine versions were made of the first edition) a second book was published in 1563, by Archbishop Parker, Bishop Taverner Pilkington and others.

A further tension existed between the expectations of the propertied classes and Reformation ideals of marriage. Traditional family interest dominated, and the financial and political constraints involved in choosing a partner, combined with the rarity of divorce, made marriage a serious business. The wedding represented the culmination of courtship and the celebration of love but it was, at the same time, a legal contract, involving the transfer of property, the setting up of a new household, and the establishment of a new kind of relationship between man and woman. According to Lawrence Stone, however, the 'elite' were 'subjected by the poets and playwrights to propaganda for an entirely antithetical ideal of romantic love, as expressed for example in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays.'<sup>8</sup> Stone argues that the long tradition of love poetry that existed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century 'ran directly across the norms and practices of its readers'. He highlights a conflict of values:

between the ideal of love by some poets, playwrights and the authors of romances on the one hand, and its rejection as a form of imprudent folly and even madness by all theologians, moralists, authors of manuals of conduct, and parents and adults in general. Everyone knew about it, some expressed it, but only a minority of young courtiers made it a way of life, and even they did not necessarily regard it as a suitable basis for life-long marriage.<sup>9</sup>

That a conflict of values existed is evidenced by the range of viewpoints that can be found addressing the subject. Stone's generalisation does not, however, take into account the possibility that arranged marriages, as Edward Berry points out, do not necessarily preclude love.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it clear that poetry and literature can be so summarily divorced from life, or drama from its audience. The concept of marriage as what Mary Beth Rose calls 'the spiritual foundation of society' and ....'the repository of personal happiness' was widely

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1977) p.180.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.180

<sup>10</sup> Edward Berry *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p.28

accepted by Protestant writers.<sup>11</sup> The romantic comedies of Lyly and Shakespeare, in celebrating love and marriage may have represented an ideal, but it is one which reflects a positive belief in what Tilney, in *The Flower of Friendship*, terms the 'true and perfect love' between man and woman.<sup>12</sup>

The tensions surrounding the Protestant discourse of 'true and perfect love' and the idea of marriage as a means of satisfying carnal appetite form the basis of much of the discussion in this chapter. The comments of Lavatch in *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602) effectively parody the language of the marriage service and the Homily and focus on the tensions within it. To the Countess he admits that he intends to marry, for two reasons: 'to curb lust and to produce progeny'. He elaborates on this theme by adding, 'My poor body, Madam, requires it. I am driven on by the flesh and he must needs go that the devil drives.' (I.iii.28-30) His words acknowledge the body's needs, linking the flesh, according to long-standing tradition, with the devil, but recognising the function of marriage as a means of containing lust. His reference to 'holy reasons' reflects the sanctity of marriage but contains the suggestion of an earthy pun. The bawdy note in Lavatch's commentary and his cheerful acceptance of the body's needs strikes a different note from that of the Protestant writers who seek to justify sexuality within marriage in more idealistic terms. Stubbes refers to 'mutual copulation' as 'pure Virginitie'<sup>13</sup> and Perkins describes sex as a 'holy and undefiled action.'<sup>14</sup> Despite their undoubted enthusiasm to raise the status of sexuality within marriage, however, both Stubbes and Perkins express themselves with an ambivalence which reflects the tensions of the period. The use of words like 'pure', 'holy' and 'undefiled' imply a need to justify sexuality by divorcing it from the physical. It is praised, paradoxically, in terms associated with denial, rather than indulgence. The newly

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Urbana: Cornell University Press, 1988) p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage 1573* ed. by Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p.110

<sup>13</sup> Stubbes, *The Anatomy of the Abuses in England* I. ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner and Co. 1877-9) p. 91

<sup>14</sup> Perkins, p.169

married couple, hearing the *Homily on the State of Matrimony*, which was commonly read after the ceremony, were reminded that they might now

live lawfully in a perpetual friendly fellowship, to bring forth fruit, and to avoid fornication: by which means a good conscience might be preserved on both parties in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of 'perpetual friendly fellowship' pays tribute to the ideal of companionate marriage but the emphasis on the corruption of the flesh is a reminder of the negative view of marriage as a 'remedy against sinne'.

The idealisation of marriage as a perfect union, a 'heaven on earth' coexists with the cynical view of a state which is very much of the world, as Lavatch reminds us. In accepting his own sexual needs, a husband must by implication accept those of his wife, yet as a member of the frailer sex, she was regarded as more susceptible to temptation and, once her sexual appetite was awakened, more voracious. Thus, Lavatch moves from a cheerful and cynical acceptance of the sinfulness of sexuality to an equally cynical reflection on the nature of women, there being but 'One good woman in ten.' (I.iii.80) He unites both Puritan and Papist as being destined to the common fate of man, that of cuckoldry. Like the worldly-wise commentators, who provide a counterpoint to the lovers in Chapter One, he makes fun of deep-rooted anxieties about female sexuality and the relationships between men and women by associating marriage automatically with sexual betrayal. As the opening chapter demonstrates, references to cuckolds pervade the literature and drama of the period. Even in the happiest of comedies, where lovers triumph over adversity and the obstruction of the older generation, 'there also runs a vein', as Coppelia Kahn puts it, 'of critical commentary on marriage as tantamount to cuckoldry.' In this vision of marriage, women are betrayers and men their victims; wives turn to whores and men become monsters.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Homilies* p. 535

<sup>16</sup> Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) p.119

For the romantic idealist, cuckoldry is no laughing matter. The synthesis which is established between the spiritual and the sexual, based on love and companionship, founders on the fear of feminine infidelity.

*' Their chastity, that should be his alone'...*

The transformation from lover to husband and mistress to wife was more than a change of name only. The courtly love tradition inverted the customary nature of the relationship between man and wife by making the man pose as servant to the idealised lady. In comedy and romance the balance of power is in the woman's favour; in Kahn's words, the witty heroines are able to 'mock their lovers' affection and teach them to love wisely and well...lead them out of the forests of desire and towards the altar of marriage.'<sup>17</sup> The married relationship is, on the other hand, patriarchal, with clear rules laid down for man and woman. The rite of passage for the bride is particularly significant. As John Donne puts it, she 'puts on perfection and a woman's name', moving from the ideal of the beloved to that of the wife. The transformation is expressed less poetically in the following lines from Wilkins' *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1607):

To be a wife is to be delicate,  
 Not to be youthful, wild and unsteady,  
 But to the soul of virtue, obedience,  
 Studying to please and never to offend.  
 Wives have two eyes created, not like birds  
 To roam about at pleasure but for sentinels,  
 To watch their husbands' safety as their own.  
 Two hands; one to feed him, the other herself.  
 Two feet, and one of them is their husbands.  
 They have two of everything, only of one,  
 Their chastity, that should be his alone.  
 Their very thoughts they cannot term their own.  
 Maids, being once made wives, can nothing call

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<sup>17</sup> Kahn, p. 119

Rightly their own; they are their husbands' all. <sup>18</sup>

The lack of lyrical quality in the verse serves to underline the nature of this marriage contract as not so much the conclusion of a loving courtship, but as a form of subjection. Despite the claims for reciprocity made by some Protestant divines, in marriage a wife became her husband's property. Chastity, the jewel in a maiden's dower was also regarded as the chief virtue in a married woman. The demands of marital chastity were exacting. As Ruth Kelso points out, a married woman must remain faithful to her husband 'not only in act but in thought as well, and not only in fact but in seeming.'<sup>19</sup> She must avoid not only sin but the appearance or the thought of sin. The *Homily on Marriage* makes it clear that the woman's raiment should express both 'shamefastness and sobriety'. Yet, paradoxically, marriage, although it gives the husband authority over his wife, makes him vulnerable. If the wife's honour 'belongs' to him, so is his honour intrinsically tied up with hers. As Sir Thomas Whythorne succinctly expresses it in his Autobiography, 'a man's credit and honour doth depend and lie in his wife's tail.'<sup>20</sup> An unfaithful wife confers on her husband public humiliation, making him into an object of derision and undermining both his masculinity and his pride.

The adored and idealised beloved is, of course, as stereotyped a figure as the ideal wife: though poetry and pamphlet celebrate both, neither has necessarily much to do with reality. There existed, nevertheless, conventional acceptance of an ideal of female virtue to which real women were compared. The winning of that ideal is frequently a subject of comedy; the clash between that ideal and reality, a subject of satire and of tragedy. The interrupted marriage ceremonies of the comedies *Much Ado About Nothing* and *All's Well that Ends Well* underline the tensions that surround the changing relationship from

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<sup>18</sup> Reprinted in, ed.W. Carew Hazlitt, *Old English Plays Vol. IX* (London: Reeves and Turner,1874) p.479

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Kelso *Doctrine For A Lady of The Renaissance*, p.97

<sup>20</sup> *The Autobiography of Sir Thomas Whythorne*, ed. James M. Osborn (London:Oxford University Press,1962) p.17

courtship to marriage. The plays' titles add their own ironic emphasis. There is, indeed, much ado about nothing: Hero's supposed unfaithfulness to her betrothed is a fabrication of Don John's making and Bertram commits adultery .... with his own wife. All *is* well that ends well. The question of female honour which is the focus of the tragedy in *Othello* is raised in *Much Ado*, but both plays concern themselves with the complex relationships between love, sexuality and marriage. The tone of *Much Ado* is jarred by the interruption of Claudio's wedding to Hero, and his savage public rejection of her. The information upon which he acts is false, but the rationale for his credulity is established in an earlier incident, in which Claudio is overcome by doubts as to whether he was right to let the prince act as go-between in his courtship of Hero. His doubts find expression, significantly, not only in terms of a criticism of his friend's disloyalty, but in a superstitious fear of the effect of women's sexuality : 'beauty is a witch / Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.' (II.1. 169)

Like Iago, Don John determines to prove Claudio's love a whore, knowing that any evidence he supplies will be supported by the deep-rooted and commonly held assumption of women's frailty. Claudio is quick to believe a fulfilment of the stereotype. In his bitter denunciation of Hero he moves from idealisation to denigration, seeing Hero in a dual vision of chastity and sexuality, as both Diana and Venus:

You seem to me as Dian in her orb  
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;  
But you are more intemperate in your blood  
Than Venus or those pamp' red animals  
That rage in savage sensuality. ( IV. i. 57-61)

This is the Hero of whom he asked, earlier, 'Can the world buy such a jewel?' (I.i.171) The painful duality of the image of Hero as a prized possession, now devalued, and a symbol of chastity, transformed into insatiable appetite, cannot be resolved. It is easier for Claudio to reject Hero and all women:

But fare thee well, most foul, most fair, farewell,  
 Thou pure impiety and impious purity.  
 For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love ..  
 ( IV.i.103-5)

The paradox, beloved of the sonneteers, is here related to the concept of woman as a creature of irreconcilable contradictions: as Venus, goddess of love and Diana, goddess of chastity. It might also be interpreted as reflecting the fundamental duality which was associated with love. The tightness of the syntax emphasizes the impossibility of separating love and sexuality, sexuality and sin. Just as Hero herself could seem both foul and fair, so the act of love could easily be transformed into 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame.' For Claudio, piety and purity are essential aspects to his concept of female virtue and his own desire. The revelation of Hero's intemperance, as he puts it, is a revelation, not only of her own 'savage sensuality' but of the demands of the flesh which underlie the idealistic language of love. It is Beatrice and Benedick who acknowledge the worldly aspects of marriage, and who seem, despite their 'merry war' to be closer to understanding and accepting one another.

The purity and impiety which Claudio envisages as embodied, paradoxically, in Hero are also given expression by Helena, in *All's Well That Ends Well*. She is a faithful wife who deceives her husband; a virtuous woman who deliberately allows herself to be seduced. The apparent contradictions in Helena's behaviour are an effective means of illustrating the contradictions surrounding expectations of male and female behaviour. Denied a consummation of her marriage by her reluctant husband, she tricks him into sleeping with her. She abandons her role of chaste and constant wife, and substitutes herself for the woman he is trying to seduce. She sums up the consummation of her marriage by means of a paradox that illustrates not only her behaviour but that of her husband, as:

.....wicked meaning in a lawful deed,

And lawful meaning in a wicked act,  
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact .

(III.vii. 45-47)

The consummation is lawful but it is arrived at by deception on Helena's part and desire for another woman on the part of Bertram. The dual nature of women is underlined by a polarisation suggested initially by their names: Helena as Lavatch (unnecessarily to the contemporary audience) points out, bears the same name as the notorious Helen of Troy; Diana recalls the chaste goddess of the moon. Yet Helen combines the two roles of Diana and Venus by acting both as a chaste wife and as a willing sexual partner. The fairy-tale qualities of the scene in which she cures the King and is given by him the right to choose a husband are undercut by the lively resentment of Bertram, the man of her choice.

Bertram's reluctance has been interpreted, not only as an unwillingness to accept a woman of humbler social status than himself, but as an evasion of marriage. He rejects Helena in order to pursue his military career, but, unlike Claudio, he does not shun women altogether. It is clear from his encounter with Diana that he is happier in the role of seducer than of husband. A double standard is implied if not stated in his behaviour. It is Diana's reluctance rather than Helena's eagerness that awakens his response. Unlike Helena, she plays the traditional female role in the courtship ritual, not only in her protestations of chastity but in her apparent submission. The winning of Diana is, to Bertram, 'a heaven on earth.' (IV. ii.68), but his rhetoric is later undercut by Paroles who informs the king that Bertram loved Diana 'as a gentleman loves a woman,' that is, 'He loved her and loved her not.'(V. iii. 248-251). The ambivalence of men's attitude towards sexuality is summed up by Helena:

But O, strange men  
That can such sweet use make of that they hate,  
When saucy trusting of the cozened thoughts  
Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play  
With what it loathes, for that which is away -

(IV. iv. 21-25)

Her juxtaposition of 'sweet use' and 'hate' implies, like Sonnet 119, a degradation associated with sexuality. Lust here is inseparable from loathing, and the union of the lovers is achieved only by trickery. The neatness of the bedtrick in resolving problems is given a greater resonance by the ironies that surround it. Bertram's 'use' of Helena has a 'wicked meaning'; his promises to Diana, whom he thinks he is seducing, merely, as Mariana puts it, 'engines of lust.' (III.v.19) The transition from lust to loathing is later made clear in Bertram's attempt at self-justification. Accused by Diana in Act V, he admits:

Certain it is I liked her,  
 And boarded her i' th' wanton way of youth.  
 She knew her distance, and did angle for me,  
 Madding my eagerness with her restraint,  
 As all impediments in fancy's course  
 Are motives of more fancy; and in fine  
 Her inf'nite cunning with her modern grace  
 Sudued me to her rate.

(V.iii. 213 - 220)

The interpretation of restraint as coyness, aimed to stimulate rather than discourage, is familiar in the period as a way of displacing the blame onto woman as tempter, rather than man as tempted. Here it serves to underline Bertram's attitude towards women and sexuality. His sexual need is displaced on to the woman who 'angled' for him. He interprets the encounter in ambivalent terms, as, on the one hand, the aggressive male act of boarding, and at the same time as an act of submission to the infinite cunning of a calculating whore. His acceptance of his marriage is brought about by Helena herself, who stage-manages the final reconciliation. To the king she describes herself as merely 'the shadow of a wife ...'the name and not the thing' (309-310) and it is Bertram who insists 'Both, both.' (310) The sexual roles are reversed: it is Helena who has 'doubly won' Bertram; he who is, once again, claimed by her. To Anthony Lewis it is a resolution of the chief paradox of the play; the relationship between chastity and sexuality. According to him, without Helena's determined pursuit, 'Bertram would never have learned the "wonder" of

sex within the bounds of marriage and the odd way in which his wife really is both Helena and Diana, a sexual creature and the goddess of chastity at one and the same time.' <sup>21</sup>

Wonder is not, perhaps, the most appropriate word to describe the reactions of Bertram, who, having found himself trapped by an illicit liaison with one woman, finds himself trapped by the consummation of his marriage, to another. Nevertheless, in accepting Helena as his wife and the mother of his child, Bertram effectively reconciles his version of love with sexuality.

*'An act which is so natural, just and necessary'..*

It is this issue of sexuality within and without marriage which Marston confronts in *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604). The play in many ways parallels *Much Ado* by setting in opposition two pairs of lovers who might be said to represent a realistic and a romantic attitude to love, like Beatrice and Benedick and Hero and Claudio respectively. A further dimension is added in the person of the courtesan herself, Franceschina. Marston explores the tensions surrounding marriage and sexuality and goes to the heart of Renaissance dualism about love and lust in portraying the heroes, Freevill and Malheureux and their relationships with women. At first, Freevill appears to be able to reconcile conflicting ideas about women and sexuality in his relationships with Franceschina and Beatrice, the woman he loves, whereas his friend, Malheureux is uncompromising in his condemnation of lust, which he terms 'the strongest argument that speaks/ Against the soules eternity' (1.i.87-8). Freevill argues: 'I would have married men love the stews' (I.i. 65-6) yet he acts the Petrarchan lover with his chaste Beatrice, whom he addresses, Romeo-like, on her balcony. He later rationalises this apparent contradiction by declaring to Malheureux, 'I lov'd her (Franceschina) with my heart until my soule shewed me the imperfection of my body, and placed my affection on a lawful love, my modest Beatrice.' (I.ii. 92-4) Malheureux, on the

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony J. Lewis, *The Love Story in Shakespeare's Comedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992) p.188-189.

other hand, having appeared at the opening of the play as an advocate of celibacy, modifies his views when he falls in love with the Dutch courtesan herself.

The contradictions are resolved when Freevill ceases to be the irreverent champion of lust, and his eagerness to enjoy his mistress is transmuted into a commitment to moderation and marriage. On the advice of his Beatrice, 'be not so passionate,' (II.i. 49) he embraces what he later terms:

The modest pleasures of a lawful bed  
 The holy union of two equal hearts  
 Mutually holding either dear as health  
 The undoubted issues, joys of chaste sheets,  
 The unfeigned embrace of sober ignorance..

(V.i. 68-72)

In his description of the 'modest pleasures' of marriage, Freevill appears to be rejecting his earlier views in favour of Protestant idealisation. Like the author of *The Divine Weeks*, du Bartas, who pays tribute to marriage as the 'chastest friendship, whose pure flames impart/ Two Soules in one, two Harts into one Hart' (vol.i.1057-8) Freevill stresses the mutuality of marriage. He also, like du Barthas, emphasizes the 'modest pleasures' of the marriage bed, the necessity for temperance within marriage, as opposed to the uncontrolled desire which has overtaken Malheureux. A third union in the play seems to represent a compromise between the two extremes. Crispinella, Beatrice's sister and Tysefew offer a more worldly approach. Like Shakespeare's Beatrice, Crispinella resists the idea of marriage and the inevitable change in status that it brings. She vows to 'strive against the flesh' and be her 'own woman.' (III. i. 69,81) At the same time, echoing the words of Montaigne which are quoted in Chapter One, she draws attention to the false modesty that prevents acknowledgement of sexual pleasure: ' We pronounce boldly robbery, murder, treason, which deeds must needs be far more loathsome than an act which is so natural,

just, and necessary as that of procreation'. (III.i.30-3) <sup>22</sup> She challenges Tysefew directly, asking 'Do you think ye shall prove a cuckold', and teases him by describing, with deliberate sexual innuendo, how she lay on her back that morning, dreaming 'the strangest dreams.' (IV.i.72-6 ) His promise to her implies an acceptance of her sexuality.

If you will be mine, you shall be your own. My purse, my body,  
my heart is yours, only be silent in my house, modest at my table,  
and wanton in my bed, and the Empress of Europe cannot content,  
and shall not be contented better.

(IV. i. 79-83)

The resolution of 'merry nuptials' in *The Dutch Courtesan* is reassuring but the transformation of Franceschina from a comic figure to an unscrupulous woman who will not stop short of murder to attain her ends, and the idealized relationship of Freevill and Beatrice leaves questions unresolved. Tysefew and Crispinella are appealing in their candour and their high spirits, but, by opposing the extremes of lust, and its effects, as represented by the relationship between the Dutch Courtesan and Malheureux, and temperance, as represented by Freevill and Beatrice, Marston is not necessarily implying that they are meant to be exemplary. We may conclude, with Malheureux, that 'He that lust rules cannot be virtuous', but, as in *Much Ado*, we are presented with two very different styles of marital relationship. In *All's Well That Ends Well* it is the King who assures the audience 'All yet seems well' but it is not the business of romantic comedy to go beyond a happy ending.

***'Do you ever think to find a chaste wife in these times?'***

The uneasy balance of attraction and revulsion which, at times, characterises Claudio's relationship with Hero and Bertram's with Helena and Diana plays an important

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<sup>22</sup> Montaigne, *Essays: Vol: III* p.70

part in Shakespeare's *Othello*, (1604), *Cymbeline* (1609) and *The Winter's Tale* (1610). In each play, a virtuous woman is slandered and the three husbands, Othello, Leontes and Posthumus, like Claudio, are forced to confront the unpalatable vision of themselves as cuckolds. In their obsessive jealousy they transform their wives into 'intemperate' creatures who rage 'in savage sexuality'. They experience what Ford, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* calls 'the hell of having a false woman,' (II. ii. 298) though it is made clear to the audience that their wives are loyal and chaste. Central to each play is false accusation. In *Othello* and *Cymbeline*, as in *Much Ado* 'evidence' is provided by a slanderer, like Ill Report in Garter's *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susannah*, (1569), based on the apocryphal story of Susanna and the Elders. In *The Winter's Tale* it is the product of a suspicious husband's imagination alone.

The innocence of the female victims serves to highlight the unreasonable behaviour of their husbands. Masculine mistrust of women and sexuality was expressed in extreme terms in some of the pamphlets and similar publications of the period. It is a mistrust which derives, in part, from a generalised view of declining standards of morality, but also from a deep-rooted misogyny. The stage misogynist was a well-recognised figure, who might be parodied or presented seriously, but like the cuckold, he was a vehicle for the expression of important concerns of his society. As Truewit says to Morose in Jonson's *Epicoene*, (1609),

Alas, sir, do you ever think to find a chaste wife, in these times? now? when there are so many masques, plays, puritan preachings, mad folks, and other strange sights to be seen daily, private and public? If you had lived in King Ethelred's time, sir, or Edward the Confessor's, you might, perhaps, have found in some cold country-hamlet then, a dull frosty wench would have been contented with one man; now they will as soon be pleas'd with one leg or with one eye.

( II. ii.35-41)

Truewit expresses with comic resignation the central concern of so many plays which deal with marriage and adultery. He is exaggerating for effect but his words rely on a masculine recognition of commonplaces about female behaviour. Similarly Corvino in *Volpone* interprets his wife's innocent behaviour as a deliberate invitation to lecherous onlookers. In *The Broken Heart* (1629), John Ford's Bassanes, one of a long line of dramatic characters to suspect his innocent wife of cuckolding him, sums up the clash between the idealisation of marriage and what he perceives as the reality. Anxious to vindicate in public the honour which he is convinced has been undermined by his wife's behaviour, he declares:

The joys of marriage are the heaven on earth  
 Life's paradise, great princess, the soul's quiet,  
 Sinews of concord, earthly immortality  
 Eternities of pleasure; no restoratives,  
 Like to a constant woman [*aside*] -- (But where is she?  
 It would puzzle all the gods but to create  
 Such a new monster) --- I can speak by proof,  
 For I rest in Elysium.

(II. ii.86-93 )

He pays tribute to the concept of the faithful woman but is unable to overcome the doubts that plague him. The parenthesis effectively sets private agonising against public dignity --- Bassanes' conviction of his wife's unfaithfulness is based on the spectre of inconstancy in women that haunts the period. Marriage is paradise but what John Donne, in his poem, *Twicknam Garden*, calls 'that spider love', can 'transubstantiate all, / And can transform manna to gall.' Like Donne, the suspicious husband brings his own serpent of mistrust into the garden.

It is mistrust which proves destructive to Posthumus, Leontes and Othello. As in the case of Hero, in *Much Ado*, Shakespeare highlights the fragile nature of female honour, demonstrating how 'trifles light as air' can influence the jealous mind and illustrating

Thomas Overbury's view, expressed in his poem, *A Wife*, that a woman's reputation is even frailer than herself.

hard to be disproved, lusts slanders are.  
 Their carriage, not their chastity alone,  
 Must keep their name chaste from suspicion.<sup>23</sup>

Overbury reflects a view that was widely held. The demands of chastity were as stringent for the wife as for the idealised beloved: indeed, for the married woman, it was not enough to avoid sin ; it was necessary to avoid any occasion for suspicion to arise. Vives had summed up the situation by declaring that ' a married woman ought to be of greater chastity than an unmarried.'<sup>24</sup> According to this strict interpretation, Hermione might be considered to be at fault for the warmth she shows to Polixenes, and Desdemona for her championing of Cassio. The giving of hands in marriage can all too easily be reinterpreted. Leontes describes the way in which Hermione was persuaded to become his wife:

Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death  
 Ere I could make thee open thy white hand  
 And clap thyself my love.

(I.ii.102 -4)

Hermione's hand has now become, in her husband's eyes, 'a paddling palm,' hot and eager, but not for him. Similarly, Desdemona's hand, which she 'gave away' in marriage to Othello becomes to him, an indicator of sexuality, offering its own signals which can be read by any man who chooses. It is 'hot, hot and moist' (III.4.35), 'a young and sweaty devil... / That commonly rebels.' (III. iv.38-9) What was to him 'a good hand,/A frank one' is now open and liberal in its favours. It is clear, that it is masculine insecurity which is under scrutiny here rather than female transgression, intentional or unwitting.

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<sup>23</sup> Sir Thomas Overbury, *A Wife* publ in *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edward F. Rimbault (London: John Russell Smith, 1856)

<sup>24</sup> John Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman in Daughters, Wives and Widows* p.112

Iago and Giacomo create fantasies of adultery which are believable, not so much because of the husband's doubt of his wife as an individual but because of the deep-rooted, generalised view of women on which they are able to draw. Against this, faith in an individual has no currency. It is this cynical, generalised vision which takes possession of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. He places his doubts in the context of a greater landscape of uncertainty, as if to give them greater credibility. Having, like Othello, no 'ocular proofs' of his wife's infidelity, he blames an immoral society. Like the Homilist, he reminds the audience 'tis a bawdy planet' and warns them:

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

(I.ii.191-201)

The urgency and intensity of Leontes' feeling is expressed as he moves from the personal, to the local and the general, inviting the audience to acknowledge that adultery is commonplace and calling the men to join him in the uneasy brotherhood of the cuckold. Without the evidence to support his views, he creates an imaginary world of intrigue, in which his wife and her lover exhibit all the symptoms of adultery as though it were a disease to be diagnosed by the discerning. He defies Camillo to challenge his interpretation:

..Is whispering nothing?  
 Is leaning, cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?  
 Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career  
 Of laughter with a sigh? ---- a note infallible

Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot?  
 Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift,  
 Hours minutes, noon midnight?

(I.ii. 286-92)

The repeated present participles create an impression of the urgency of desire. Polixenes' 'gracious Queen' (II.1.459) and Paulina's 'sweet'st, dear'st' creature has become to Leontes, a 'hobby horse'; a 'slippery', unreliable creature, ruled only by her passions. (I.ii.275, 278) Camillo, and the audience might well answer the King's rhetorical questions by saying 'Yes, in the circumstances, all this is nothing but the product of your mind.' To Leontes, it is his wife who is 'nothing.' The spectre of infidelity is more real than the virtuous wife. The instability of Leontes's reaction has little justification compared with that of Othello or Posthumus, who are deceived by the elaborate inventions of a slanderer. Iago and Giacomo share the vision of the world presented by Leontes and use it cynically to counter the idealism of the men they set out to deceive. As Iago remarks to Othello, 'There's millions now alive/ That nightly lie in those beds/ Which they dare swear peculiar.'(IV.i.656-8) Venice, according to Iago, is a world where love is merely 'a permission of the will' (I. iii. 333) and where 'women do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands.' (III.iii. 206 -7) He offers the alternative view of women to that of the courtly lover who admires 'that divine Innogen' and 'the divine Desdemona.' As Iago says of Desdemona, 'the wine she drinks is made of grapes.' In other words, she is no goddess, but only too human. Giacomo, dehumanising the process a step further, jokes as he presses Posthumus to a wager on his wife's virtue 'If you buy ladies' flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from tainting.' (I.iv.132-4)

The way in which this transformation of attitude is wrought is explored in particular detail in *Othello*. When we are first introduced to the hero, we are impressed by his poise and confidence in the public sphere, and the respect that he commands. His love for Desdemona and hers for him are publicly declared. Desdemona is his 'fair warrior', his

'soul's joy.' (II.i.83-5) The gap between his transcendent declaration of love and his subsequent vilification of his wife is a wide one. In contrast, it could be argued that Posthumus, who indulges in a wager on Innogen's honour, seems to protest too much. Although he declares his complete faith in her chastity, he is not above putting it to the test. The testing of virtue in this way, which is to become an increasingly popular theme in the drama, is not so much a reflection on the character of Posthumus but an indicator of a fundamental male anxiety which cannot be resolved.<sup>25</sup> When he learns of his wife's 'betrayal', Posthumus is struck by the conflicting image of the chaste and virtuous wife he knows and the woman who welcomed Giacomo into her bed:

Me of my lawful pleasure she restrain'd,  
 And prayed me oft forbearance; did it with  
 A pudency so rosy, the sweet view on't  
 Might well have warmed old Saturn; that I thought her  
 As chaste as unsunned snow.

(II.v.9-13.)

His belief in Innogen's chastity is based on her restraint; her moderating influence on his own desires. For him, as for Freevill in *The Dutch Courtesan*, the marriage bed offers 'modest pleasures.' Unlike Freevill, however, Posthumus is forced to confront, as Claudio did, the dual vision of a virtuous wife and a whore. The Innogen who behaved with a modest reluctance is, it seems, the same Innogen who put no obstacles in the way of her lover. Posthumus's anguish at this incongruity is understandable, but in dwelling on it he underlines for us a male ambivalence about sexuality in general and about women in particular. This is demonstrated, not only in the obvious contrast that he draws, but in his admiration of his wife's restraint, and of her 'pudency so rosy' that it would have 'warmed old Saturn.' Paradoxically, chastity has the power to arouse, whilst sexual enjoyment engenders disgust.

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<sup>25</sup> The testing of female virtue is a major theme of Chapters Five and Six.

The concept of restraint and moderation within marriage, which might be taken as evidence of a woman's 'shamefastness' has significance in the opening scenes of both *Othello* and Marston's *The Wonder of Women* (1605). Each play begins with a marriage, though the context is different in that Desdemona has eloped with Othello without her father's knowledge, whilst Sophonisba and Massinissa marry with full parental approval and elaborate ceremony. In each case, however, the consummation of the marriage is interrupted by news of war. It is necessary for the respective husbands to choose between love and duty. Duty, as might be expected, comes first, and both Othello and Massinissa recognise the fact. It is their wives who differ in their response. Sophonisba, introduced early in the play as confident and assertive, like Shakespeare's heroine, is a loving wife, a woman eager for marriage who speaks of coveting the bonds of matrimony 'with an unfeigned fervour.' (I.ii. 53-4) Yet, unlike Desdemona, when duty calls, she bids her husband goodbye without hesitation. By elaborately portraying the ceremonial surrounding marriage, including the putting to bed of the bride, Marston seems to be underlining the stoic self-denial of his heroine, who submits almost eagerly to the higher call of duty which leaves her on her wedding night, 'a very maid.' (I.ii.162) She insists:

...no low appetite  
Of my sex' weakness can or shall o'ercome  
Due grateful service unto you or virtue.  
(I.ii.178-80)

Though it is restraint rather than lack of warmth that is being emphasized, it is impossible to escape the implication that chastity is synonymous with virtue and that restraint in a woman is indeed a wonder. This stoic acceptance contrasts with Desdemona's impassioned refusal to be parted from her husband; her insistence:

That I did love the Moor to live with him  
My downright violence and storm of fortunes  
May trumpet to the world.  
(I. iii. 248-50)

The expansive images in Desdemona's speech relate to love, rather than duty, or war. Sophonisba, on the other hand, dismisses love as 'the low appetite of my sex's weakness' (I.ii. 178) and the rites of marriage as 'faint pleasures' to which 'the fruit of honour' cannot be compared. For Desdemona, love is not to be so easily dismissed. She declares 'if I be left behind / A moth of peace, and he go to the war, / The rites for why I love him are bereft me.' (I. iii. 255-7) Her words carry a convincing resonance, compared with Sophonisba's dismissive 'faint pleasures'.

To a seventeenth century audience Sophonisba might seem to represent traditional ideals of womanly virtue: obedience to her father in making an approved match, loyalty to her husband and modest self-denial, comparable with the 'pudency' of Innogen. Desdemona, on the other hand, exhibits what Stephen Greenblatt calls a 'frank acceptance of pleasure and submission to her spouse's pleasure' which, he argues is as much the cause of her death as Iago's slander, in that it 'awakens the deep current of sexual anxiety' in her husband.<sup>26</sup> There is no immediate evidence in the text for this, but it is notable that Othello is quick to make it clear that his desire for Desdemona is not to 'please the palate of [his] appetite', (I.iii.362) and to assure the assembled company that he has no intention of neglecting his duties. Later, in anguish, he calls out 'O curse of marriage/ That we can call these delicate creatures ours /And not their appetites.' The appetite, or desire which he takes pride in being able to control in himself, is imagined to be beyond control in his wife. Iago, as an onlooker of the scene, is able to build on the image of woman as a creature of appetite, dominated by her desires. He skilfully mingles the personal and the general, in his observations. Desdemona's deceiving of her father is evidence of her capacity to deceive her husband, of 'a will most rank / Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural!' (III. iii. 237-8) . It is also, in his interpretation, a way of life for the women of Venice.

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) p.250.

*'Hard to be disproved, lusts slanders are'..*

The plots which Iago and Giacomo construct are carefully orchestrated so that dramatic interest focuses on the male psyche as much, if not more than on the female victim. The exception is, perhaps, Innogen, who makes a spirited defence of herself against Giacomo's attempt at seduction, and subsequently, like the heroines of comedy, resolves some of her difficulties by putting on her doublet and hose and leaving the court. Like Marston's Sophonisba, she meets, face to face, the man who overtly threatens her honour. Whereas Sophonisba is able to defeat her violent and lustful attacker by means of a series of tricks, Innogen is unaware that Giacomo is conspiring against her. Although he does not, like Syphax, use violence towards his victim, he violates her by hiding himself in her bedchamber, and looking on her naked body whilst she sleeps. The slander that results from his imaginary seduction of Innogen is far more destructive to her marital relationship than Syphax's capture of Sophonisba. Sophonisba faces danger, having been delivered into the power of a ruthless and determined man, but it is a danger that she is able to acknowledge and defeat. Like Innogen who dismisses Giacomo as she would the devil himself, with the words ' [thou] solicit'st here a lady that disdains / Thee and the devil alike' (I. vi. 148-9), Sophonisba defies her captor. Her husband, Massinissa, fears for his wife's honour, but he is not tormented by fantasies of betrayal like Othello and Posthumus. He voices his fears openly when he confronts her attacker, having fought him in open combat. 'Lives Sophonisba yet unstained --- speak just --- Yet ours unforced?' (V.ii.45-6) It is a question that Othello never asks of either Cassio, or Desdemona herself. The key word in the question is 'unforced.' Massinissa, convinced of his wife's virtue, assumes that she would succumb only if she were raped. She is, after all, 'the wonder of women', the exception to the rest of her sex. In the eyes of Shakespeare's jealous husbands, their wives lose the exceptional quality that they once possessed and become the stereotypical women of the misogynist, lying, deceiving, governed by 'lust and rank thoughts.' (*Cymbeline*, II.v.24)

Desdemona never has to confront a seducer face to face. What she does confront, like Innogen, is the male fantasy of sexual betrayal, fired, though not created, by Iago. Iago's definitions of love, women, and honour come to dominate the play. Like Don John he relies on the existence of a deep-rooted fear of female sexuality in Othello; the difficulty of reconciling the 'matchless jewel' of courtship with the wife as sexual partner. His edifice of lies rests as much on Desdemona's virtues as on her imaginary vices. The mutuality of the love which she shares with Othello, the confidence with which she asserts her rights as a woman and her solicitousness on Cassio's behalf combine against her. She is a woman who has defied parental authority; portrayed as warm and loving, willing, as Brabantio incredulously puts it, to be 'half the wooer.' (I.iii.175) What may be interpreted as positive virtues can also be represented as waywardness. Desdemona's actions, like those of Juliet, uphold literary convention but defy social convention, and her eagerness to consummate her marriage makes her all the more open to attack. Othello demands of Iago, 'Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore' (III. iii.364) and Iago obligingly does as he is requested. The link between female sexuality and whoredom being so well-established, it is not difficult. He draws Othello into a conspiracy of maleness in which all women are suspect, and a man's honour is narrowly linked, not to his worldly reputation, but to the conduct of his wife.

The disillusionment which follows the revelation of unfaithfulness is proportionate to the joy and exaltation that precede it. The married state, in Perkins's words, 'ordained by God in Paradise above' does not measure up to the ideal. The suspicious husband is haunted by images of what Claudio, in *Much Ado*, termed 'savage sexuality'. Jonson creates a parody of male jealousy in the ludicrous, but unpleasant Corvino in *Volpone*. The idea of his wife parading herself at a window and offering her favours to men sends him into paroxysms of rage. No matter that the behaviour he describes is in itself grossly exaggerated, it is enough to make him address the innocent Celia as if she were a whore: 'Get you a cittern, Lady Vanity, / And be a dealer with the virtuous man.' (II.v.21-23) With

angry sarcasm he demands, like Othello, visible proof : ...'let me see,/ I think y' had rather mount / Would you not mount?' He threatens her with his sword, building up image after image of confinement, from shutting out the 'bawdy light' of the window, to forcing her to wear a chastity belt and walk only backwards. The intensity of these images reflects the imposition of male fantasies of sexuality on the ideal of the chaste and virtuous woman. The exaggeration is comic as well as grotesque, but it is built upon the same assumptions as the jealousy of Othello and Posthumus. Like Corvino, but with more 'evidence' of their wives' betrayal, they indulge in images of unbridled lust. Othello moves from the vividly particular vision of Desdemona 'with Cassio's kisses on her lips' (III. 34), vividly multiplying it into images of servicing a whole army . Posthumus imagines the moment of consummation:

This yellow Giacomo in an hour - was't not?-  
Or less - at first ? Perchance he spoke not, but  
Like a full-acorned boar, a German one,  
Cried 'O!' and mounted; found no opposition  
But what he looked for should oppose and she  
Should from encounter guard.

(II.v.14-19)

It is this vision which is juxtaposed with the vision of Innogen's 'pudency so rosy', Similarly, Othello is torn between Desdemona's apparent purity and his 'knowledge' of her betrayal. His happiness turns to revulsion as Desdemona becomes, in his eyes, not his wife, but 'that cunning whore of Venice/ That married with Othello'. (IV. ii.93-94) He makes 'real' his fantasy by making Emilia act the part of brothel-keeper and advising her:

Leave procreants alone, and shut the door,  
Cough or cry 'Hem' if anybody come.  
Your mystery, your mystery --- nay, dispatch.

(IV.ii.30-32)

One of the traditional butts of comedy in the period is the man who unwittingly marries a whore, like Tim Yellowhammer at the end of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. The situation in

Middleton's play is resolved by a play on words. When Tim says in protest at his fate 'Uxor non est meretrix', his wife replies, 'There's a thing called marriage, and that makes me honest.' (V.iv.116-118) No such glib resolutions are available to Othello, who has, in effect, made the opposite transformation of wife into whore. He has become 'the fixed figure for the time of scorn / To point his slow and moving finger at.' (IV.ii.56-7), and Desdemona is, to him, like Hero to Claudio, 'most foul, most fair.'

***'Ha, that wives were of my metal!'***

There is no doubt that, in his treatment of the theme of the slandered wife, Shakespeare appears to be emphasising the vulnerability of women as targets of masculine insecurity. In his treatment of *Pandosto*, the chief source for *The Winter's Tale*, he underlines the arbitrary and dangerous nature of Leontes' jealousy. Allowing for the difference of genre, it is still notable that he chooses to emphasise that quality, rather than offer the kind of dramatic build-up which is present in *Othello*. In *Othello*, the psychological foundation of jealousy is well established, but the apparently resourceful and confident heroine of the earlier scenes of the play is increasingly confined, until she meets death in her own bedchamber. She is subject to bewildering accusations, placed on trial by an unseen accuser, and condemned without a hearing. The chaste women who are falsely accused defy the stereotype of female frailty but conform to another long-suffering stereotype of female virtue, enduring patiently, like Griselda, the misfortunes that befall them. Even Sophonisba, who is successful in tricking her would-be seducer on three occasions, dies to uphold her husband's honour. It could be argued that Shakespeare, and to a lesser extent, Marston, whilst seeming to deny male prejudice about female sexuality are, in fact, confirming it by presenting 'good' women as exceptions to the rule.

The idealisation of female virtue as restraint might well be said to fulfil a male fantasy of women as a sexual being. As if to emphasise the point, Marston's Sophonisba dies, not at her husband's hands, like Desdemona, but at her own. This 'wonder of women', united to her husband at last, after a long absence, is finally able to look forward

to the consummation of her marriage and celebrate the wedding night interrupted at the beginning of the play. As in *Othello*, the scene is set for the tragedy to be played out on the marriage bed itself. Jealousy is not an issue here, but honour demands that Massinissa fulfil his promise to his captain, Scipio, and surrender up his wife. Rather than allow her husband to betray his honour, she takes the initiative upon herself and commits suicide, declaring: 'Faith pure, a virgin wife, tried to my glory / I die, of female faith the long-lived story.' (V.iv.104-5) The paradox of the 'virgin wife' reflects the impossible ideal of female virtue which can only be fulfilled in death. The mock deaths of Hero and Hermione, and the real death of Desdemona might be said to be a form of enactment of the punishment of death which was held by some to be the appropriate punishment for adultery. On the other hand, for an audience to be made fully aware of the destructive power of jealousy within the marital relationship, it is appropriate that it should be unfounded. The audience can thus be invited to condemn the irrationality of the husband who attempts to impose cynical judgements about society in general upon his own household.

It is clear that the playwrights deliberately exploited the excesses of misogyny in their characterisation. Posthumus, in his diatribe against women, echoes the sentiments of the notorious 'woman-hater', Joseph Swetnam, in denigrating himself because of the 'woman's part' which went towards his making.<sup>27</sup> He vows, like the satirist, 'I'll write against them.' Zuccone, in Marston's *The Fawn*, (c.1605), having abstained from sexual relations with his wife for four years on account of his jealousy, cries

O heaven, that God made for a man no other means of  
procreation and maintaining the world peopled but by women!  
O, that we could increase like roses by being slipped, one from  
another, or like flies procreate by blowing, or any other way but

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Swetnam, 'The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, froward and inconstant women' {1615}, publ. in Henderson Usher K. and Mcmanus, B.eds. *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985)

by a woman...

(IV.i.385-90)

The irrationality of male jealousy is underlined by its absurdity in the case of the comic figures of Master Ford, Corvino and Zuccone. The graceful submission of Hermione and Desdemona, although it suggests a helplessness in the face of masculine tyranny, highlights the unreasoning force of male jealousy, and the cruel, narrow interpretation of honour imposed upon women. Othello's regret for his actions is, of course, expressed, tragically, too late. It is with a bitter irony that he touches Desdemona's body and acknowledges it as 'cold, cold', like her chastity. Valerie Traub interprets the conclusions of *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* as a way of alleviating male anxieties about female sexuality, rather than a celebration of female virtue.<sup>28</sup> Desdemona's death and Hermione's apparent death and subsequent transformation into a statue represent, she argues, a way of sublimating the need to control woman's sexuality. For instance, she writes, of Othello, 'By imaginatively transforming Desdemona into a jewel --- hard, cold, static, silent yet also adored and desired', no longer a 'warm, living body', he is able to construct a 'masculine subjectivity', to exert authority over her body. Similarly, Leontes sees his wife restored to him as a statue, her sexual power muted by the passage of time. It is, she suggests, 'a wish fulfillment for Leontes', rather than a victory for Hermione.<sup>29</sup> It is true that in both plays Shakespeare brings vividly to life an unreasoning jealousy which is characterised by what prove to be fantasies of uncontrolled female sexuality. Statues, 'jewels' and corpses offer no threat to male insecurity; as Othello puts it, 'she must die/ else she'll betray more men.' (V.ii.6) There is, however, no satisfaction for Othello in Desdemona's death, nor any evidence that his 'subjectivity' has been restored by it. In Leontes' case, the movement of the play is towards renewal. After years of grieving for Hermione, he expresses his regrets in terms that acknowledge her as a sexual being:

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<sup>28</sup> Valerie Traub *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Anxiety in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge 1992) p. 40

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.45

Good Paulina,  
 Who hast the memory of Hermione ,  
 I know, in honour; O! that ever I  
 Had squar'd me to thy counsel! then, even now,  
 I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,  
 Have taken treasure from her lips-----  
 ( V. i.49-54)

Paulina's reply: 'And left them / More rich for what they yielded' (l. 54-5) emphasizes the mutuality of the experience. The imagery of richness is transformed in *Cymbeline* to one of ripeness and growth as Posthumus bids Innogen hang about his neck 'like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die.'(V.vi.262-3) More notable still is his address to the audience, before he hears that his wife is innocent of the charges made against her:

You married ones  
 If each of you should take this course, how many  
 Must murder wives much better than themselves  
 For wrying but a little .  
 (V. i. 2-5)

It is, of course, advice that he gives out of a sense of guilt; the need to expiate his own crime, but it is a reversal of that obsessive masculine honour which demands death as the price of dishonour. Appropriately the play ends, like *The Winter's Tale*, harmoniously, on a note of reconciliation. If the impossible ideal of the 'virgin-wife' persists, if only in suggestion, in the description of Innogen's restraint, Hermione's transformation into statue, and Desdemona's cold chastity, it is one which is challenged by the joyful reunion of the romances.

It is also challenged within the plays themselves. Desdemona asks incredulously of Emilia, 'Dost thou in conscience think --- tell me Emilia --- That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?' (V.1.59-61) Renaissance drama is full of such

examples, to which Desdemona is placed in emphatic contrast. If she is made a sacrifice, however, it is not because Shakespeare was unwilling to present a more assertive model for women. Emilia, for instance, seems to echo the words of Jane Anger in her pamphlet on marriage, published in 1589:

Deceitful men with guile must be repaid,  
And blows for blows who renders not again?  
The man that is of Cuckold's lot afraid  
From lechery he ought for to refrain. <sup>30</sup>

Emilia's version is an impassioned plea for mutuality, which brings to mind the reverse situation of that presented in *Othello*, where a man is false to a woman. Her words are a reminder of the more positive part played by women in their relationships with men; women like Crispinella and Beatrice, for example. She advises her mistress:

Let husbands know  
Their wives have sense like them. They see, and smell,  
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,  
As husbands have. What is it that they do  
When they change us for others? Is it sport?  
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?  
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?  
It is so, too. And have we not affections,  
Desires for sport, and frailty as men have?  
Then let them use us well, else let them know  
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

(V.i.92-102)

Emilia's words could be interpreted in the light of those of the many maidservants of Renaissance drama who provide worldly foils for their virtuous mistresses; like Zanthia, who advises Sophonisba to take advantage of Syphax's desire for her. The audience view

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<sup>30</sup> Jane Anger *Her Protection For Women* (1589) in Henderson, Usher K. and Mcmanus B. *Half Humankind* p.176

of Zanthia is, however, coloured by her betrayal of her mistress. Her worldliness here is equated, not so much with earthy common sense as with opportunism. In Emilia's case, the impact of these rebellious words must be seen in the context of her loyalty to her mistress, and her spirited confrontation of both Othello and her own husband. Like Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, who challenges Leontes for not being able to 'produce more accusation against his wife than his own 'weak hinged fancy', she does not hesitate to speak her mind. The question she asks about Othello is one which could be applied to all the jealous husbands who wrong their wives: 'What should such a fool/ Do with so good a wife?' (V.ii. 240-1)

It is in comedy rather than tragedy that the most positive models can be found of the wronged wife. The gallants of Jonson's *Epicoene*, who have lied about their conquests, which, according to them, include Morose's 'wife', are exposed when it is revealed that Epicoene is a boy. It is Truewit who, having made satirical comments about women's lack of chastity, now defends them:

Nay, Sir Daw, and Sir La Foole, you see the gentlewoman that has done you the favours! We are all thankful to you, and so should the womenkind here, specially for lying on her, though not with her! ... this Amazon, the champion of the sex, should beat you now thriftily for the common slanders which ladies receive from such cuckoos as you are. You are they, that, when no merit or fortune can make you hope to enjoy their bodies, will yet lie with their reputations, and make their fame suffer.

(V. iv. 256-265)

In *The Fawn*, far from suffering in silence, Zoya enacts a revenge on her jealous husband by pretending to be pregnant by another man. This, the outward sign of the cuckold's shame, is achieved, in Zoya's case by trickery. Zoya refuses to be her husband's victim and avenges herself by attacking his most vulnerable feelings. Instead of suffering rejection she actively seeks it, hoping that he will divorce her. Like the other guilty

husbands he learns to value his wife in the end. The couple are reunited but it is the wife who makes all the conditions, insisting on a public statement from Zuccone about his future conduct. Zoya cunningly relates these conditions to all the contemporary cliches which were suggestive of a wife's unfaithfulness: thus, her husband is made to promise that he will no longer question her servants, or search for signs such as the oiling of the hinges on the bedroom door. As Zoya herself remarks,

I ha' not the weak fence of some of your soft-eyed  
whimpering ladies, who, if they were used like me, would gall  
their fingers with ringing their hands, look like bleeding Lucreces,  
and shed salt water enough to powder all the beef in the duke's  
larder. No, I am resolute Donna Zoya. Ha, that wives were of my  
metal!

(II.ii. 341-8)

Zoya's speech makes us aware that the dramatists, just as they were aware of the misogynistic extremes of attitude towards women, were equally conscious of the saintly stereotype of long-suffering virtue. Though Marston pays tribute to a 'wonder of women' in *Sophonisba*, his Donna Zoya has to operate in a world where heroics are not enough to resolve the problems of day to day living. The plea for mutuality underlines much of the realistic interchange of comedy, which must end in resolution, rather than catastrophe. The near tragic moments in *Much Ado*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* illustrate a blindness to the need for mutual understanding in marriage; an embracing of the stereotype over the individual.

The plays discussed in this chapter represent both the idealistic view of a loving marriage and the more pessimistic portrayal of marital happiness marred by fears of infidelity. Set against du Bartas's ideal of 'two soules in one' is the deep division brought about by suspicion. The deeply rooted fear of cuckoldry is fuelled by the belief that women, having lost their virginity, find it more difficult to control their desires than men, Yet, what is emphasised in these plays is the women's innocence. The 'lust' is projected

onto them by men, and it is men who become obsessed by 'rank thoughts'. The conflict between flesh and spirit, which is never divorced from sexuality in the period, is illustrated as men displace their own 'lust and rank thoughts' onto the women's part. As the virtuous women, wrongly accused, accept their fate with restraint and resignation, the jealous husbands, paradoxically, convinced of their wives' loss of control, lose it themselves, in a riot of sexual and violent imagery. Suspicion creates monsters and men become monsters, awarding themselves the cuckold's horns, a self-fulfilled destiny, 'unshunnable, like death.'

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 'NO SIN.. BUT A PASTIME'...

#### *'The outrageous seas of adultery'..*

The discourse of adultery has its literary heritage in the legends of courtly love: the stories of Tristan and Isolde, of Lancelot and Guinevere. In conflict with these tales of doomed passion is the biblical discourse of saints, and devils, of temptation and fall, and the socio-economic discourse of property gained and lost; of public disgrace and ridicule. As a dramatic theme, adultery has connotations of courtly love, and the grand passion which Shakespeare draws on in *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is also treated with bawdy humour in many of the *fabliaux*, with their themes of petty intrigue, and their familiar comic figures of the complacent or jealous husband and his resourceful wife. The rich discourse of love in the period includes not only the spiritually uplifting but the erotic, and tales of adultery involve a breaking down of social and sexual taboos which have a widespread vicarious appeal. Gascoigne's *Master F.J.*, for instance, though it is written as a romance, exposes the reality of adultery which lies under the mask of courtly love, inviting his reader, perhaps to condemn, but also to enjoy the experience. The strenuous demands made by Protestantism on the individual's relationship with God led to a new alertness to the nature of sexuality among the god-fearing, however. The danger of eroticism was that, unlike the bawdy, it was not easily dismissed as obscenity but made sexuality attractive. As John Hale points out, increased 'flexibility in the handling of the vernacular language enabled writers to match contemporary feelings with a new directness', to make psychologically credible what, in earlier tales of courtly love, might have been suggested by veiled suggestion or allegory.<sup>1</sup> In 1599 the Episcopal

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<sup>1</sup> John Hale, *The Civilisation of Europe in the Renaissance* (London: Harper Collins, 1993) p.433

authorities of London and Canterbury, concerned for at least the last decade about the proliferation of licentious works, gathered up volumes of erotic verse, including Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, to be burned. This act of censorship was a reflection of the Church's fears regarding declining moral standards.

Whilst there continued to be areas of dispute on a number of issues concerning the doctrine and organisation of the church, there was considerable agreement on matters of sexual morality. There is evidence that the Church saw itself as arbiter of standards in an increasingly immoral world. This was not a stance taken up by a few extremists but reflected in the teachings of the established church. The *Homily on Whoredom and Adultery* describes a situation in which

above other vices the outrageous seas of adultery (or breaking of wedlock), whoredom, fornication and uncleanness have not only brast in [sic] but also overflowed almost the whole world, unto the great dishonour of God, the exceeding infamy of Christ, the notable decay of true religion, and the utter destruction of public wealth ...<sup>2</sup>

The fear of uncontrolled sexuality is given more intensity by its association with a breakdown in the family and society and even in law and order. According to the Homilist, lechery is 'accompanied by all evils'; it destroys good name, patrimony, wealth, beauty and youth and leads to misbegotten children, poverty, theft and hanging. It is a view which is echoed by seventeenth century writers, such as Robert Burton, who, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, refers to:

burning lust, a disease, phrensy, madness, hell [which subverts] kingdoms, overthrows cities, towns, families; mars, corrupts and makes a massacre of men; thunder and lightnings,

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<sup>2</sup> *Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches: Book I* (The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge: London, 1864) p.122

wars, plagues, have not done that mischief to mankind as this burning lust, this brutish passion.<sup>3</sup>

As well as acknowledging the destructive power of the 'brutish passion' of lust, the Homilist is concerned at what he perceives as a decline in moral standards. All ages and sexes are exhorted to heed the warning that hell and damnation await those who give their minds to 'fleshly delight' and 'filthy pleasures.'<sup>4</sup> It is impossible not to conclude that the ever-present threat of damnation had not yet succeeded in modifying the behaviour of the unfortunate sinners to whom the Homily was addressed. The Homilist's aim is to elevate lechery to a more prominent place amongst the seven deadly sins. The commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is extended to refer to all 'unlawful use of those parts which be ordained for generation.' The congregation was reminded of the words of St. Matthew (V.27-28) 'Whoever seeth a woman, to have his lust of her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' This almost impossible demand, to govern the inmost thoughts as well as the actions, is calculated to provoke feelings of guilt. The actions of Christ concerning the woman taken in adultery, which might be interpreted as compassionate, are given the gloss: 'Doth he not call her whoredom sin? And what is the reward of sin but everlasting death?' Further ammunition to the argument is added by reference to John the Baptist's rebuke to Herod.

If whoredom had been but a pastime, a dalliance, and a thing not to be passed of, as many count it now a days, [sic] truly John had been twice mad, if he would have had the displeasure of a king, if he would have been cast into prison and lost his head, for a trifle.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Vol. III, ii.

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies* p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* p.123

The sermon, uncompromising in its message, however makes it clear that a conflict existed between the ideal standard and the reality of human behaviour. What seems to particularly incense the writer is that:

through the customable use thereof, this vice is grown into such an height, that in a manner among so many it is counted no sin at all but rather a pastime, a dalliance, and but a touch of youth; not rebuked, but winked at; not punished, but laughed at. <sup>6</sup>

The Homilist's indignation concerns the discourse of adultery as well as adultery in itself: the prohibitive has become the playful and the sin of adultery has been redefined by the substitution of terms like 'pastime' and 'dalliance'. Sexual misdemeanour is made to sound both enjoyable and trivial; the suggestion that it is 'winked at' or 'laughed at' accuses the whole of society of complicity. To a society expected to attend church regularly, the sermon was a familiar one, often repeated, though not always attended to. Nevertheless, it was a means of reinforcing the sense of guilt which, in the Pauline tradition of Christianity, was inseparable from human sexuality. Stubbes expresses his views on 'the horrible vice of Whoredom' in the form of a debate between Spudeus and Philoponus. Spudeus puts the argument that whoredom is no sin:

I have heard them reason, that mutuall coition betwixt man and woman is not so offensive before God; for do not all creatures .. both small and great, engender together?.. otherwyse the World would become barren, and soone fall to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.126

decay, wherefore they conclude that whordome is a badge of love, a cognizance of amitie, a tutch of lustie youth, a frendlie dalliance, a redintegration of love, and an ensigne of vertue, rather meritorious than damnable.' <sup>7</sup>

Philoponus replies with a diatribe. Outside marriage, he asserts, all 'other goings together are damnable, pestiferous, and execrable.' It is this debate, and the tension between desire and guilt which the drama is so well-suited to express. The conflict between a worldly acceptance of the indulgence of the flesh and urgent moral condemnation is enacted in dialogue and in the individual conscience. For some dramatic characters, love is, as the Homilist suggests, a game of deception, a 'dalliance', 'winked at' by a corrupt society. More often it comes into conflict with competing discourses of sin, remorse and condemnation.

The Protestant discourse of marriage as true companionship was mocked by the deceit of the erring husband, and more frequently, the erring wife. Although both were perceived as morally guilty, the adulterous wife could, through her actions, as the previous chapter suggests, transform her husband into an object of scorn, a horned monster. Erring husbands, like Bracciano in *The White Devil*, exist but it is women who fulfil the kind of generalisation uttered by Bassanes in Ford's *The Broken Heart*: 'No woman but can fall, or would.' (II.i.40) If the chaste constancy of a Hermione and a Desdemona serve to highlight male insecurity in marriage, the adultery of Alice Arden, Tamyra, Anne Frankford, and Bianca might be said to justify its expression. The recurrence of cuckoldry as a sort of *leit-motiv* in Renaissance literature highlights the role of the deceived husband as well as the guilty lovers. The kind of convention which led to a polarisation of women as either chaste and constant, or cynical and worldly, also gives us husbands who are trusting, and those who are obsessively suspicious of their wives. The existence of these recognisable types

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<sup>7</sup> Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, Vol I. p.91

reveals an important underlying tension of belief. The idealistic husband believes in love and virtue but in a corrupt world he may be doomed to disillusionment. The jealous husband doubts and can only look for confirmation of his own suspicions. He suffers from what Burton calls 'love-melancholy' and defines as 'full of fear, anxiety, doubt, care, peevishness and suspicion', adding that such melancholy 'turns a man into a woman...because fear and love are still linked together,'<sup>8</sup> Ironically, according to Burton, the anxieties associated with love and with the fear of cuckoldry have the same effect: that of emasculation. The suspicious husband loses control of his thoughts, and is tortured by the loss of his manhood which is intrinsically linked with his wife's honour.

The apparently irreconcilable problem for the suspicious husband is summed up by Sir Thomas Overbury in *A Wife*.<sup>9</sup> Rather than the higher form of companionship that is envisaged by Erasmus and Tilney, marriage, to Overbury, is essentially a 'medicine for lust.' The Homily's emphasis on lust as the *radix malorum* makes it appear the greatest of all temptations for man, let alone woman, the weaker sex. Thus, Overbury, in describing the miseries of jealousy echoes Montaigne, but recommends: a degree of 'care', or prudence in a husband:

This miserie doth jealousie ensue,  
That we may prove her false, but cannot true .

Suspicious may the will of lust restraine,  
But good prevents from having such a will ;  
For chaste is but an abstinence from ill :  
And in a wife that's bad, although the best  
Of qualities, yet in a good the least .

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<sup>8</sup> Burton, p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Thomas Overbury, *Characters* (1614) publ in *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edward F. Rimbault (London: John Russell Smith, 1856)

To barre the means is care, not jealousie :  
 Some lawfull things to be avoided are,  
 When they occasion of unlawfull be:  
 Lust ere it hurts is best decryed afarre:  
 Lust is a sinne of two ; he that is sure  
 Of either part, may be of both secure.

Overbury has no difficulty in acknowledging that the truly good woman is beyond temptation but he reconciles this ideal with practical advice on the avoidance of cuckoldry. He makes an important distinction between outward conformity and inner virtue in women but he clearly accepts the husband's need to make assurance doubly sure, by protecting his wife's reputation even if it means restricting her access to 'lawfull' entertainment.

***'What labour is't for woman to keep constant?'***

It is this kind of suspicion, or 'care' that motivates the jealous husbands, Harebrain and Anselmus of Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* (1606) and his later play, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611). We are given a comic exaggeration of the theme in the former, in which a Harebrain, aptly named, contrives, against all the odds, to prevent his scheming wife from cuckolding him. In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, Middleton takes the theme to a tragic conclusion. There is a kind of humour in the seemingly desperate attempts of the husband, Anselmus, to award himself the horns which he dreads, but it is humour of a darker kind. Mistress Harebrain, for all her striving, does not fall after all, saved by the hypocritical remorse of Sir Penitent Brothel. The Wife, on the other hand is subjected to an elaborate re-enactment of the original Temptation, orchestrated by her husband, with herself in the role of Eve. The situations are different in that we are quickly made aware that Harebrain has cause to be jealous of his wife, whilst Anselmus appears to be driven by an unreasoning need to prove his wife's constancy, even though he has no cause to doubt her. He sums up

his situation with the words: 'Our own thoughts / Make the best fools of us; next to them/ Our wives.' As Overbury suggests, however, he is able to prove his wife false more easily than he can prove her true. His obsession with his wife's sexuality takes the form of persuading his friend, Votarius, to attempt to seduce her. It is not so much that, like Othello, he cannot endure to live in doubt, but that he needs to put his wife to the test to reinforce his own self-esteem. As he says:

What labour is't for woman to keep constant?  
That's never tried or tempted? Where's her fight?  
The war's within her breast, her honest anger  
Against the impudence of flesh and hell.

(I. ii.30-3)

This is not the language of love but of tortured sexuality. Anselmus can only conceive of virtue in his wife in terms of a constant struggle against vice: what he calls the 'impudence of flesh and hell.'

The theme of testing, or temptation, which is recurrent in the drama, highlights the preoccupation with moral choices and their consequences which concern both men and women. More specifically, however, Middleton focuses on the restless anxiety to prove what, as Overbury emphasises, can never be proved. As Shakespeare demonstrated with his 'silencing' of Hermione and Hero, it is impossible to 'prove true.' On the other hand, Iago, at Othello's command, proved his love a whore, just as Votarius, at the request of Anselmus, proves his wife 'a quean.' Harebrain, who, it is made clear, has genuine cause for concern over his wife's behaviour, opts for a policy of containment. The methods he uses throw an interesting light on the conflicting discourses of sexuality which were available. The celebration of sexual love in the narrative poems is, in Harebrain's view, likely to inflame his wife's desires for a lover. He informs Lady Gullman 'I have convey'd away all her wanton pamphlets, as *Hero and Leander*, *Venus and Adonis*; oh, two delicious mary-

bone pies for a young married wife.' (I.ii.47-50) Following the example of Bullinger in *The Christian State of Matrimony* <sup>10</sup> he places his faith in the therapeutic powers of goodly books to 'mortify (the) flesh', and asks Gullman to read the Resolution to his wife. <sup>11</sup> This is the occasion for a pun, as we are informed 'Sh' has set up her resolution already'. In this minor skirmish in the battle of the printed word, the wanton pamphlets have already carried the day. Harebrain's description of the contents has something of the tone of the Homily but it is already clear to the audience that it is unlikely to modify the lady's behaviour. Harebrain is as zealous as a new convert:

There's a chapter of Hell, 'tis good to read this cold weather.  
Terrify her, terrify her; go, read to her the horrible punishments  
for itching wantonness, the pains allotted for adultery; tell her  
thoughts, her very dreams are answerable, say so; rip up the life  
of a courtesan and show her how loathsome 'tis.

(I.ii.54-9)

He substitutes, for the erotic, the text of the moralist. Love is re-written as 'itching wantonness', punishable by hellfire. In his portrayal of Harebrain's concern, Middleton reflects the real indignation of moralists like Stubbes about the way in which 'bookes and pamphlets of scurrilitie and baudrie are better esteemed, and more vendible, then the godlyest and sagest bookes that be; for if it be a godly treatise, reprooving vice and teaching vertue, away with it.' <sup>12</sup> Mistress Harebrain exemplifies both popular taste and ideas about female susceptibility. Coached by Gullman on the many ways of deceiving a husband, however, Mistress Harebrain outmanoeuvres her

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<sup>10</sup> Bullinger advice on women's reading was 'Let not them read fables of fond and light love, but call upon God to give them pure hearts and chaste....Books of Robin Hood, Bevis of Hampton, Troilus and such like fables do but kindle in liars like lies and wanton love'.. *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541) in *Renaissance Women: A Source Book*

<sup>11</sup> Resolution: *The First Book of the Christian Experience Appertaining to Resolution* (1582), a popular book of devotion by the Jesuit, Robert Parsons. It is Chapter Nine to which he refers

<sup>12</sup> Stubbes, *Anat. I* p.185

husband with a pious condemnation of all the activities she considers sinful. He is soon taken in by his wife's show of morality and modesty, as shown in her retirement from company, and not least, by her newly acquired habit of reading 'divine writs', their pages folded down wherever they touch on the subject of pride or adultery. Though the picture conjured up might be interpreted as an attack on society's double standards, it is as comical in its incongruity as is Harebrain's inappropriate expression of remorse at the suspicions he had entertained:

Fool that I am, and madman, beast! What worse?  
 Suspicious o'er a creature that deserves  
 The best opinion and the purest thought;  
 Watchful oe'r her that is her watch herself..

(III.i.69-72)

In a similar way, Anselmus falsely concludes that his wife is virtuous, declaring that he has 'a jewel' in her; that he may now 'advance his forehead and boast purely.' It is not, at this point, the frailty of the wives which is being emphasized, but the foolishness of their husbands. Their 'care' over their wives' virtue is demonstrated to be comically ineffective, or positively destructive.

The idealistic husband does not necessarily fare better. Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1604) is a domestic version of the *Othello* story, without an Iago, in which the husband, Frankford, becomes bitterly disillusioned by the discovery of his wife's unfaithfulness. Middleton's Leantio, in *Women Beware Women* (1621) is similarly affected. Both plays, unlike *Othello*, are tragedies of adultery rather than misplaced jealousy, but whereas Heywood's play has a domestic setting, in *Women Beware Women* Middleton moves into a more courtly sphere to portray a society in which marital chastity appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Heywood appears to be presenting his audience with the celebration of an ideal marriage. Whilst Leantio's match with Bianca has overtones of romance, the marriage

of Anne Frankford to her husband has the parental seal of approval. Anne herself is the embodiment of perfection in a wife. Her birth is noble and her education 'such as might become the daughter of a prince.' (I.i.17-18) The mutuality of the match is emphasized by Sir Charles:

You both adorn each other, and your hands  
 Methinks are matches. There's equality  
 In this fair combination; you are both scholars,  
 Both young, both descended nobly:  
 There's music in this sympathy; it carries  
 Consort and expectation of much joy.

(I.65-70)

Despite this auspicious beginning, however, the action of the play seems to confirm a view of women as essentially weak and the foundations of marriage as insecure. As Lisa Jardine points out, the apparently positive qualities of Anne's independence are represented on stage as 'adultery and sexual rapaciousness'.<sup>13</sup> Her education is no proof against temptation when it presents itself. Bianca, less of a paragon, is also presented as susceptible, though her downfall is carefully planned and orchestrated. The bridegrooms have high hopes of their marriages. Frankford's conviction 'I have a fair, a chaste and loving wife, / Perfect all, all truth and ornament' (IV.11-12) is matched by Leantio's description of his Bianca as a 'treasure', a 'matchless jewel' (I. i. 62). There is a self-congratulatory note which might well convey a note of warning to alert members of the audience to the ever-present threat of cuckoldry. The newly married Leantio, in all his euphoric joy at having gained such a wife, retains a note of caution:

'tis great policy  
 To keep choice treasures in obscurest places

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<sup>13</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p.39

Should we show thieves our wealth, 'twould make 'em  
 Bolder. Temptation is a devil will not stick  
 To fasten upon a saint.

(I.i.165-9)

It is a note of possessiveness more befitting the young merchant than the romantic lover, who has, in a sense, committed a 'theft' (I.i.43-4) in marrying Bianca against her family's wishes.

Both Leantio and Frankford rejoice in marriage as a state bordering on paradise. It is as close to heaven as their wives are close to sainthood. The euphoric nature of this kind of discourse seems to beg the opposition of worldly realism, or its polar opposite of disillusionment. The fact that it is so often expressed, not as a dialogue between lovers but as a soliloquy, an aside to the audience, or an affirmation to other men underlines its personal, self-reflective quality. Leantio's joy is a secret he hugs to himself

How near am I now to a happiness,  
 That earth exceeds not! Not another like it!  
 The treasures of the deep are not so precious  
 As are the conceal'd comforts of a man,  
 Lock'd up in a woman's love.

(III.i.82-6)

Though his speech lacks the transcendent romanticism of Othello, or the hyperbole of Bassanes, it is a tribute to married love. Marriage, for Leantio has served the purpose described by the Homily of 'bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty.' Like Freevill in *The Dutch Courtesan*, he appears to have found 'honest wedlock' to be a remedy for what he earlier terms 'sinful desire'.<sup>14</sup> It is not, as far as we know, a desire that he indulged with the same irreverence as Freevill, but

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Three

rather one which was uncomfortably bound up with the consciousness of sin. Having married, Leantio congratulates himself that he can now go to church to pray, not look at women's faces. (I.i.33) In acknowledging desire in himself as 'that glorious dangerous strumpet', he sums up the ambivalence associated with sexuality, which offers a temporary feeling of elation, but with the threat of disillusionment to come. The use of the term 'strumpet' personifies desire as a whore, whose embraces might be associated with sexually transmitted disease, as well as sexual fulfilment.

Leantio makes a clear distinction between love and lust, which he describes as 'like an insurrection in the people / That, rais'd in self-will, wars against all reason.' (I.iii.45-6) The image of the struggle between reason and will is neatly and conventionally linked with the idea of rebellion in the state. Married love, on the contrary, symbolises order. As Leantio puts it 'But love that is respective for increase/ Is like a good king that keeps all in peace.' (47-8) Like the Homilist, he views lust as evidence of a breakdown of social values on a political as well as a personal scale. Marriage to Bianca makes him lyrical on the subject:

Honest wedlock  
 Is like a banqueting-house built in a garden  
 On which the spring's chaste flowers take delight  
 To cast their modest odours; when base lust  
 With all her powders, paintings, and best pride,  
 Is but a fair house built by a ditch side.

(III.i.89-94)

Like a banqueting house, wedlock offers satisfaction to the senses but whilst its garden setting provides appropriate images of natural growth, the emphasis is on chastity and modesty. The image of the banqueting house, ambiguous in its day because of its associations with appetite and indulgence is perhaps deliberately employed to emphasise Leantio's naivety as far as his wife is concerned. The

audience might well, like Stubbes, associate such a place with illicit assignations.<sup>15</sup> The joke, if it is one, is on the idealistic husband, who is unsuspecting of his wife. Nevertheless, in describing 'base lust' Leantio associates it with female, rather than male, transgression.. The image conjured up is that of a painted woman. Alliteration links together the customary attributes of the harlot: her powders, her paintings and her pride. Cosmetics create a false appearance, able to deceive men, and their use indicates pride, one of the seven deadly sins. The house of lust is situated by a ditch, repository for the city's refuse, and presenting a trap to the unwary.

***'Is all this seeming gold plain copper?'***

The distinction between married love and lust is perhaps not as clear-cut as Leantio would like to make it. Like Freevill, Leantio is able to 'quench' his desire by 'cool meditation' but, ironically he transfers that desire onto his wife, envisaging her, after his absence on business, eager for his embraces: 'She'll be so greedy now, and cling about me, / I take care how I shall be rid of her.' (III.i.107-8) His use of the word 'greedy' attributes a healthy sexual appetite to his wife which, unknown to him, she has already demonstrated in her seduction by the Duke. The contrast between Leantio's pride in his own restraint and his anticipation of his wife's eagerness underlines the double standard of sexuality. As in the case of Desdemona, Bianca's earlier demonstration of pleasure in her husband's affections could be interpreted as giving credence to her susceptibility. Here is none of the 'pudency' which Posthumus saw in his Innogen; rather, it is evidence of a sensual nature which is desirable in a wife but also potentially dangerous. In contrast Anne Frankford is perceived by her husband as 'modest, chaste and godly.' The outcome is the same, and it seems that neither the outward appearance of restraint nor the demonstration of affection can be

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<sup>15</sup> Stubbes, *Anat. I* p.88 'they have their Banqueting houses with Galleries, Turrettes, and what not els therein sumptuously erected: wherein they maie (and doubtlesse doe) many of them play the filthie persons. And for that their gardens are locked, some of them have three or fower keys a peece, whereof one they keep for themselves, the other their Paramours have to go in before them, least happely they should be perceived....'

regarded as indicators of female virtue. The one is a facade; the other a positive virtue which can easily be misdirected into vice. Frankford, convinced that his wife Anne is unfaithful, is unable to face the destruction of his illusions

In all her actions that concern the love  
To me, her husband, modest, chaste, and godly,  
Is all this seeming gold plain copper?

(VIII. 103-5)

Like Othello, demanding the death of Desdemona, he refers to Anne as his 'saint' turned 'devil'. It follows that, as he approaches his bedroom, he refers to it as 'my polluted bedchamber/ Once my terrestrial heaven, now my earth's hell.' (IV v.. 14-15) The contrast is underlined by the juxtaposition of extremes; there is no compromise possible. Similarly, Leantio, in his disillusionment paints a contrasting picture of marriage which mirrors his earlier description. His earthly paradise has become a melancholy garden:

O thou, the ripe time of man's misery, wedlock.  
When all his thoughts, like over-laden trees  
Crack with the fruit they bear, in cares, in jealousies!

(III.i. 271)

Whilst the deceived husbands express themselves in terms of a progress from heaven to hell, the guilty lovers' behaviour is portrayed in terms of temptation and fall. The script for the adulterous liaison is written in the Petrarchan language of love, but it is a love overshadowed by guilt. In *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, it is guilt which predominates. The attractions of adultery are played down and the emotional commitment of the lovers is overshadowed by an awareness of sin. Wendoll exhibits all the symptoms of love when he enters 'melancholy', but his language is that of self-condemnation and helpless surrender to passion:

I am a villain, if I apprehend

But such a thought : then, to attempt the deed,  
 Slave, thou art damned without redemption.  
 (VI. 1-3)

The focus here is on him as both tempter and tempted but there is little joy in the temptation. It is 'mischief', not love which beckons, and destruction which awaits. As he puts it, O God! O God! with what a violence / I am hurried to my own destruction. (VI. 17-18) The body and spirit are engaged in a conflict in which the body appears to achieve only a Pyrrhic victory. The nature of the struggle is emphasized by Wendoll's description of his soul 'drained in red tears of blood'; his very prayers interrupted by meditations on Anne's 'divine perfections.' He attempts to absolve himself of responsibility by attributing his infatuation to the fates:

What sad destiny  
 Hath such command over my yielding thoughts?  
 I will not! Ha! Some fury pricks me on;  
 The swift fates drag me at their chariot wheel  
 And hurry me to mischief.  
 (VI. 97-101)

Anne Frankford's indignation is quickly overruled by passionate declarations of love. As Wendoll declares ' For you I'll hazard all; why what care I?/ For you I'll live and in your love I'll die' (VI. 137-8) she is moved to 'passion and to pity'. Although she informs him 'The love I bear for my husband is as precious / As my soul's health' (139-141), within one short speech she admits 'My soul is wand'ring and hath lost her way.' (150) If Wendoll speaks the clichés of romantic love in his courtship, Anne shows a stereotypical female weakness, won over by Wendoll's facile declaration of regard for her husband and his promise of secrecy. In him the high-sounding rhetoric associating love with death is tempered by a healthy regard for the practicalities of the adulterous liaison. Anne is made to appear inconsistent, easily

persuaded, moved less by moral considerations than those of expediency. Though she confesses to feelings of shame, she admits to being 'enchanted'. Enchantment soon gives way to remorse, as the claims of the soul begin to outweigh the body's weakness, but Anne's guilty exclamation: 'O what a clog unto the soul is sin!' (XI. 103) is mocked by Wendoll. Having conquered his own scruples, he dismisses her words with the comment 'Fie, Fie, you talk too like a puritan.' (XI.109)

*'Such an appetite as I know damns me'..*

It is this kind of 'puritanical' talk that Middleton parodies in *A Mad World My Masters*. There is even less of the romantic lover in Sir Penitent Brothel than there is in Wendoll, but like Wendoll, he employs a discourse of self-condemnation. What, in others, he defines as 'wild passions', become, in him, 'deadly follies.'

But why in others do I check wild passions,  
 And retain deadly follies in myself?  
 I tax his youth of common receiv'd riot,  
 Time's cosmic flashes, and the fruits of blood;  
 And in myself soothe up adulterous motions?  
 And such an appetite that I know damns me,  
 Yet willingly embrace it

(I.i.101-5)

The character is exposed to the ridicule, as much as to the disapproval of the audience, but he nevertheless expresses the tension which existed for many between the 'fruits of blood', or passion, and the conviction that indulgence would lead inevitably to damnation. In contrast to her lover, and the guilt-ridden Anne Frankford, Mistress Harebrain exhibits a cheerful indifference to the sin of adultery for most of the play, which is surpassed only by that of the disguised courtesan, Lady Gullman, who acts as Penitent's accomplice. In the 'mad world' of Middleton's creation, self-indulgence is set against self-criticism and soul-searching. Much of the

action of the sub-plot is orchestrated by the women. However much they conform to the cynical view of women as deceivers, there is an element of play, of role reversal and defiance of ineffectual male authority which might well have amused as many in the audience as it offended. The outrageousness of their deception is amusing in itself, whilst Harebrain's credulity and his frantic efforts to control his wife's thoughts and actions are subject to the same ridicule as the hypocritical Sir Penitent.

Middleton underlines the hypocrisy of his would-be adulterer, Penitent, by having him appear, after arranging a meeting with his mistress, reading a religious text. The moralistic works provided by Harebrain for his wife, and used by her as properties in deceiving him, are given what might seem a more appropriate context:

Ha! Read that place again. 'Adultery  
 Draws the divorce 'twixt heaven and the soul.'  
 Accursed man, that stand'st divorced from heaven,  
 Thou wretched unthrift, that hast play'd away  
 Thy eternal portion at a minute's game.  
 To please the flesh, has blotted out thy name;  
 Where were thy nobler meditations busied  
 That they durst trust this body with itself,  
 This natural drunkard that undoes us all  
 And makes our shame apparent in our fall?  
 Then let my blood pay for't and vex and boil.  
 My soul, I know, would never grieve to th' death  
 The Eternal Spirit that feeds her with his breath.  
 Nay, I that knew the price of life and sin,  
 What crown is kept for continencie, what for lust,  
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 To dote on weakness, slime, corruption, woman!  
 What is she, took asunder from her clothes?  
 Being ready, she consists of a hundred pieces  
 Much like your German clock and near allied:  
 Both are so nice, they cannot go for pride,  
 Beside, a greater fault, but too well known.

They'll strike ten when they should stop at one.

(IV.i.1-15,18-24 )

The words have a resonance of their own, echoing the concern of the Homilist and the preacher, and expressing some of the deep ambivalence that lies at the heart of so much of the writing about love in the period. The ironic and effective use of the word 'divorce' in this context, and the image of the 'eternal portion' being played away in a minute's game highlights the tension between spiritual and physical, and gives a sense of urgency to the moral dilemma. 'Continencie' and 'Lust' are opposed as irreconcilably as they might have been by any mediaeval moralist, and the words 'shame' and 'fall' underline the association of sexuality with guilt. The conclusion of Penitent's speech is a piece of virulent, if conventional misogyny, associating women with weakness and corruption; faulty, like the notorious German clock, and essentially promiscuous.

The tensions in the play are comically resolved. Sir Penitent is saved from committing a sin by the agency of the supernatural. As if to provide visual confirmation of her association with the originator of all evil, a woman enters, as succubus, in the shape of Mistress Harebrain. If Penitent is to be perceived primarily as a comic character, this parody which may be based on Faustus, or on the special effects of the morality play, is an effective means of simultaneously testing him out and punishing him. The sight of this unromantic and reluctant lover in the embraces of a she-devil has all the elements of incongruity and loss of dignity that humour demands. There is also the satisfaction of seeing Penitent frightened out of his moralising into frantic enquiries about the identity of the visitor. Comic as it is, however, the appearance of the supernatural is a reminder of a different world from the 'mad world' of material and sexual pursuits. It has the effect of startling both Penitent and his mistress into repentance. Penitent himself moves into the mode of

commentator. He admits responsibility for his actions and those of Mistress Harebrain but turns to a general condemnation of society:

None for religion, all for pleasure burn.  
 Hot zeal into hot lust is now transform'd,  
 Grace into painting, charity into clothes,  
 Faith into false hair and put off as often.

(IV.v. 64-7)

He concludes by advising Mistress Harebrain to 'live happy' and keep her vows, whilst she kneels and declares her intention of becoming a good wife, to the delight of her husband who overhears her words. This neat resolution is not without its ironies as Middleton suggests that those who speak loudest about public morality might well have first-hand experience of the subject, but the startling conversion of Sir Penitent is not in doubt. If we are left with a sense of incongruity by his pious blessings on the married pair, in the light of his former conduct, it is an incongruity deliberately contrived.

In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, where no *deus ex machina* appears to divert the course of events, the results of the adulterous liaison are tragic. Here, The Wife, in contrast to the chaste 'Lady' of the main plot, is portrayed as seemingly virtuous, though she becomes, like her lover, Votarius, 'beguiled' by love. The argument of Votarius, in trying to dissuade Anselmus from putting his wife to the test, is a cynical observation about the weakness of the female sex:

Nor does it taste of wit to try their strength  
 That are created sickly, nor of manhood.  
 We ought not to put blocks in women's ways  
 For some too often fall upon plain ground.

(I.ii.58-60)

Votarius as the tempter, finds himself tempted, though he displaces the temptation onto the Wife. 'I praised the garden/ But little thought a bed of snakes lay in't.' (II.i.231-2) The biblical imagery is obvious enough, paving the way for an enactment of the stages of the original fall which a contemporary audience would have no difficulty in recognising. Middleton writes the script of passion and seduction in a context which has unmistakable religious associations. Like the serpent, Votarius attempts to awaken a sense of dissatisfaction in the woman whom he is deceiving. His courtship has strong sexual overtones, full of innuendo and centring on the fact that the Wife has admitted that her husband has 'become a stranger to the joys and rites of love.' (II.i.109) The scene is elaborately prepared for the Wife's downfall by our knowledge of her husband's neglect, and by Votarius's warnings about the nature of women, though it appears that she recognises her own vulnerability, as she protests:

It is not honest in you to tempt woman,  
 When her distresses take away her strength  
 How is she able to withstand her enemy?  
(I.ii.242-4)

The temptation is not hers alone. Although Votarius has accepted a role that he regards as iniquitous, he is himself overcome by desire. The complex relationships involved in this encounter, though they might be interpreted on one level as demonstrating that misogynistic mistrust of women is justifiable, reflect the deep, underlying conflict between the flesh and the spirit. It is a conflict which is fought by both sexes, with the odds of tradition and expectation being stacked against the woman, as the drama so frequently reminds us. For Votarius as one of the stronger sex it appears to be more deeply felt and long drawn-out than for the Wife. He admits

Heart, I grow fond myself! 'T'was well she waked me

Before the dead sleep of adultery took me;  
 'T'was stealing on me.

(I.ii.225--7)

The struggle against temptation is doomed to failure. The Wife challenges her seducer with the words;

What is't to you, good sir, if I be pleased  
 To weep myself away, and run thus violently  
 Into the arms of death, and kiss destruction?  
 Does this concern you now?

(I.ii.246-9)

The association of love and death belongs to tragedy, and it is passion that dominates here, rather than the awareness of sin. The Wife's emotion, and the personification of death as a lover is more dramatically compelling than the suggestion that destruction might be the wages of the sin of adultery. Her appeal to Votarius is immediate and affecting, and Votarius is forced to insist that The Wife's talk of death does, indeed, concern him, and to offer her his arms and his lips as consolation. At the same time, he pleads for forgiveness:

Heart, I'm beguiled again! Forgive me, heav'n  
 My lips have been at naught with her. Sin's mere witchcraft  
 Break all the engines of life's frame in pieces,  
 I will be master once and whip the boy  
 Home to his mother's lap.

(I.ii.253-7)

His references to Cupid highlight the struggle between the essentially pagan nature of desire and the Christian need for control and restraint. 'Thou art too young, fond boy, to master me.' The suggestion of beguilement and witchcraft conjures up the idea of woman as temptress but the mutual physical attraction between the reluctant lovers places them on the same level.

In this morally charged depiction of adultery and passion, the lovers themselves become representative of destruction. Like Sir Penitent, in *A Mad World* Votarius indulges in a long, remorseful speech, in which many phrases echo those of the earlier play. The Wife is no Mistress Harebrain, however, viewing adultery as mere 'dalliance', but an unhappy woman, susceptible, as much because of her husband's neglect as by her own weakness. Her lover, Votarius, is not indulging in himself what he condemns in others, unlike Penitent, whose soul-searching, such as it is, is offered as evidence of his hypocrisy. Votarius, concluding in a similar vein adds a different dimension by focusing less on the unworthiness and rapacious appetite of women than on the destructive force of jealousy. He too, uses the image of gaming:

All's gone; there's nothing but the prodigal left.  
I have played away my soul at one short game  
Where e'en the winner loses.

(II.ii.1-3)

He uses the same, familiar comparison of a woman to a watch, but with a different emphasis:

Man in these days  
Is not content to have his lady honest,  
And so rest pleased with her without more toil,  
But he must have her tried, forsooth, and tempted,  
And when she proves a quean then he lies quiet,  
Like one that has a watch of curious making,  
Thinking to be more cunning than the workman,  
Never gives over tamp'ring with the wheels  
Till either spring be weakened, balance bowed,  
Or some wrong pin be put in, and so spoils all.

(II.ii.7-16)

Here Middleton stresses the restless need to make trial of virtue in terms of a 'tamp'ring' which weakens and destroys; which, perversely, has the opposite effect of

what is intended. The precious object is spoiled: just as the 'wrong pin' is inserted into the watch, the wrong man takes possession of the wife. Votarius adds to his contradictory role as both tempter and tempted, that of moral commentator. Despite his apparent detachment, however, he is shown to be as helpless in the grip of passion as his mistress. The conflict between body and soul is given dramatic immediacy when, just as Votarius is regretting his 'blind, repented lust' the Wife's physical presence intrudes on his thoughts. He interrupts himself mid-sentence, declaring 'Her very sight strikes my repentance backward;/ It cannot stand against her.' (II.ii. 19,22-4)

Although she does not appear as the demon-like figure of *A Mad World*, she represents sin to Votarius as clearly as the succubus represented damnation to Sir Penitent. At the same time the special effects which lend an almost farcical quality to the scene of Penitent's contrition are missing. Sin is not a matter of stage devils and fireworks but of the powerful attraction between a man and a woman, The victory in this case is to the flesh: there is no timely repentance to prevent the final tragedy.

The intrusion of moral commentary does not diminish the complexity of the play as a whole, but here, as in *Women Beware Women*, Middleton underlines the destructive effects of lust. Although the passion of the lovers is portrayed with a degree of sympathy, adultery is not a 'dalliance' here but a sin. The husband's mistrust, though it may make him appear ridiculous, proves well-founded. Like Heywood, Middleton paints a picture of high expectations being disappointed, of men being tempted, and of wives being susceptible to temptation. He places his characters in a rich social context, highlighting the material world and its moral ambiguities. In city and in court, adultery becomes a game of deception, a courtly way of life; a necessary submission to powerful forces, political or otherwise. It is always, we are reminded, a matter of 'flesh and hell'; of corruption and damnation.

*'O the unsounded sea of women's bloods'..*

The relatively short period allotted to Anne Frankford's seduction; the predictable fall of Bianca, and of The Wife, and the artful intriguing of Mistress Harebrain are all testament to the concept of woman as, in the words of the *Homily*, 'a frail vessel', whose sexual feelings are easily aroused. The absence of her husband is shown to leave a woman vulnerable to temptation. Whatever her protests, she is easily persuaded by the script of the seducer with his flattery, his protestations of love and his assurance of discretion. The lover may exhibit weakness and lack of control but the faithless wife fulfils a stereotype which is all too familiar. The misogynistic comment which defines her as such within the drama, is of course, not always to be taken as the verdict of the whole of society, The not infrequent association of misogyny with hypocrisy is, in itself, an illustration of the duality of attitudes towards sexuality and sexual misdemeanour. Anselmus bears the responsibility for his wife's downfall and Guardiano, Livia and the Duke join in an unholy trinity to woo Bianca away from her husband. If women are portrayed as susceptible to temptation, men are engaged, as husbands and lovers, in elaborate schemes for testing and corrupting them. The difference is, that if the women fail the test, or succumb to the corruption, they are subject, not only to moral condemnation, like their male counterparts, but to a sexually charged diatribe which mingles desire with repulsion, transposing the blame for the sin onto 'the woman's part.' Misogyny is a means of expressing the revulsion against sexuality which is the other side of worship; the legacy of the medieval guilt in the pleasures of the flesh.

Thus, it is Monsieur, Tamyra's would-be seducer in Chapman's *The Tragedy of Bussy D' Ambois* (1604) whose desire is turned, by rejection, into bitter moralising.

O the unsounded Sea of women's bloods  
That when 'tis calmest, is most dangerous:

Not any wrinkle creaming in their faces,  
 Who in their hearts are Scylla and Charybdis,  
 Which still are hid in monster-formed clouds,  
 Where never day shines, nothing ever grows,  
 But weeds and poisons that no statesman knows;  
 Not Cerberus ever saw the damned nooks  
 Hid with the veils of women's virtuous looks.

(III. ii.286 -294)

The murky imagery of darkness and damnation is in contrast to the urbane and worldly language of seduction that he employs earlier. As spokesman for the world of fashionable intrigue he assures Tamyra 'Dames maritorious, ne'er were meritorious' (II. ii. 84) He argues away honour as a word, employing the imagery of love to prove that Cupid, like any other archer, must have two strings to his bow: 'A husband and a friend all wise wives have.' (II. ii. 69) This is the familiar script of the seducer: that to be a man or woman 'o' the time' is to indulge in extra-marital affairs; that marital chastity, like any other kind, is outmoded. In her encounter with Monsieur, Tamyra stands firm in her refusal to be persuaded by his dubious logic. She responds to his mockery of 'Honour and husband' by a counter-attack. threatening to tell the king of his 'occupation of dishonouring ladies.' Ironically, the values which she defends are already being eroded by her love for Bussy. The result is that she becomes the kind of courtly hypocrite he describes. There is more to her relationship with her lover than the married woman's desire to keep, as Monsieur suggests, a husband and a friend, though she eventually describes them in those terms. Tamyra herself recognises the fact that she has committed a worldly sin but she does not possess the worldly amorality which would preclude a sense of guilt.

O had I never married but for form,  
 Never vow'd faith but purpos'd to deceive:  
 Never made conscience of any sin,

But cloak'd it privately and made it common.  
 Nor never honour'd been, in blood, or mind;  
 Happy had I been then, as others are  
 Of the like licence; I had then been honour'd.

(V. iii. 219-225)

The use of the word 'honour'd' in two contexts, as both honourable in conduct, 'in blood and mind' and as 'honour'd', meaning highly regarded, underlines the duality of the concept as far as contemporary values are concerned. In the fashionable world, honour, paradoxically comes through dishonour, as the various seducers and go-betweens of the drama so frequently remind their victims.<sup>16</sup> The adulterous passion of the lovers comes into conflict, not only with Christian morality but with courtly convention.

In *Bussy D'Ambois*, Chapman gives full recognition to Tamyra's struggle to suppress her feelings. She acknowledges her desire for Bussy to be a sin, admitting to the 'licentious fancy' that 'riots' within her, but the description of that desire as a natural force that cannot be opposed, dignifies rather than degrades it. It is:

as when a fume,  
 Hot, dry and gross, (within the womb of earth,  
 Or in her superficies begot),

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 The more it is compress'd, the more it rageth'...

(II.ii.34-6, 38)

The demands of the body, which Chapman elsewhere terms 'the shirt of Nessus,' override the demands of name, house and religion. The victory of will over scruple is underlined by Tamyra's decision to make use of the friar as go-between: 'that holy man/ That, from my cradle, counsell'd for my soul, I now must make an agent for my

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<sup>16</sup> See the discussion in Chapters Five and Six

blood.' (II. ii. 47-9) The juxtaposition of 'soul' and 'blood' makes explicit the conflicting demands of the spiritual and the physical. An association with *Romeo and Juliet* is almost inevitable. The sense of secrecy, of urgency and of alienation from the rest of society is present here as in Shakespeare's Verona, but the lovers are breaking a different set of rules. Like Juliet, Tamyra makes an impassioned speech in the style of an epithalamion. In this case she prays for time to stand still for her and her lover, calling upon the 'regents of the night' ; the 'Enchantments, dead sleeps, all the friends of rest' to make the violent wheels of Time and Fortune stand' (II.ii.157-165) As Gunilla Florby points out, there are also similarities between this speech and that of Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which links her with the idea of woman as seducer and enchantress.<sup>17</sup> Tamyra's deep sense of guilt makes her an inadequate Medea, however. Like Anne Frankford, she expresses loathing of the sin she is about to commit: 'I love what most I loathe, and cannot live / Unless I compass that which holds my death. (II.ii.170-71) Her words, like those of the heroes and heroines of love tragedy link love and death but here love is inseparable from loathing and death means spiritual death or damnation.

In admitting to her guilt Tamyra conforms to the traditional view of female frailty: 'What shall weak Dames do, when th' whole work of Nature / Hath a strong finger in each one of us.' (III.i.47-8) It is as conventional for women to admit to their weakness as it is for men to assume it. Tamyra is not, however, portrayed as a victim of seduction, like Anne Frankford, but as a woman determined to find expression for her love. The imagery which she uses to describe her battle with her conscience does not relate specifically to her sex but to the conflict between body and soul.

Our bodies are but thick clouds to our souls,  
Through which they cannot shine when they desire;

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<sup>17</sup> Gunilla Florby quote passages from *Metamorphoses V. II. ff.*, including the lines: 'Nox, ait, arcanes fidissima, quaeque divines / Aurea cum Luna suocedit ignibus astra,' in *The Painful Passage to Virtue: A Study of Chapman's 'The Tragedy of Bussy D' Ambois', and 'The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (Kavlinge: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1982) p.114

When all the stars, and even the sun himself,  
 Must stay the vapours' times that he exhales-  
 Before he can make good his beams to us -  
 O how can we, that are but motes to him,  
 Wand'ring at random in his ord'ed rays,  
 Disperse our passions' fumes with our weak labours,  
 That are more thick and black than all earth's vapours?

(III i 59-67)

The concept owes as much to Neo-Platonist philosophy as it does to Christianity, with its emphasis on the hierarchy of the mind, soul and body. In this case, the imagery of light and darkness emphasizes the limitations placed by the body on the soul. It is not so much a simple opposition of good and evil forces that Tamyra describes, but a sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming forces.

Both Tamyra and Bussy defy conventional morality, though they do not conform to the morality of the court. Their adultery brings into focus the familiar conflicting discourses of passion and guilt. The emphasis on passion is greater because Chapman makes Tamyra the instigator of the love affair. She is not persuaded, trapped, or tricked into it. Aware of the consequences, she declares,

See, see, the gulf is opening, that will swallow  
 Me and my fame for ever; I will in,  
 And cast myself off, as I ne'er had been.

(II.ii.176-8 )

If this surrender can be interpreted as a form of weakness, it also demonstrates a degree of courage and commitment. Like Antony and Cleopatra, she and Bussy create a world of their own, temporarily divorced from the intrigue around them. On the other hand, we are reminded of the price which must be paid. Whereas Antony is able to leave his Octavia in Rome, Tamyra must keep up the deception of her husband. Her manner of doing so, whilst demonstrating her commitment to her lover,

underlines her deceit. Her assumption of the virtue of restraint is blatant hypocrisy; she is prepared to commit adultery at night, but not to make love to her husband in the daytime

Your holy friar says  
 All couplings in the day that touch the bed  
 Adulterous are, even in the married. (III.i.91-3)

It is an attitude that seems to justify Monsieur's later comment 'O, the infinite regions between a woman's tongue and her heart. / Is this our Goddess of chastity?' (III.ii.201-2) This is more than just a cynical observation, however; it carries with it the resentment of the rejected lover. A commonplace of Renaissance misogyny, it is given substance by Tamyra's conduct but coloured by our knowledge of the speaker, himself an exploiter of the very faults he condemns. The irony that it is as much Tamyra's rejection of Monsieur as her involvement with Bussy which leads to her downfall, cannot escape the audience.

*'O thou beguiler of man's easy trust'..*

If the drama, as we have seen, reflects different discourses of adultery through the interaction of a range of characters and commentators, we might expect to find some sort of synthesis in the outcome. The comic resolution of *A Mad World* is reassuring, up to a point, confirming the values of marriage, though the triumph of the courtesan, Mistress Gullman in achieving that state through deception has its own particular ironies. The supernatural experience that leads to the hurried conversion of Mistress Harebrain and Sir Penitent Brothel might be compared, in its effect, to the voice of the Homilist reminding the congregation of the wages of sin; an experience more intense perhaps than that conveyed by the written or spoken word but not necessarily more lasting in its effects. The ending is good-humoured, however, with harmony restored and blame apparently evenly distributed. The outcomes of

adultery in tragedy are less concerned with final reconciliation than with destruction, guilt and blame. The Wife is killed as she runs between two swords; Bianca is poisoned; Anne Frankford starves to death and Tamyra is repeatedly stabbed and placed upon the rack by her jealous husband.

The incidence of violent death in Renaissance tragedy is such that these deaths are in themselves unremarkable. What does accompany them, however is the kind of moralising commentary which might be summed up in the words of Belarius in *The Second Maid's Tragedy* 'O thou beguiler of man's easy trust! / The serpent's wisdom is in woman's lust.' (V.i.179-80) Although the guilty lovers (Wendoll is an exception) usually share the same fate, much of the pious condemnation which attends it is directed specifically at the woman, and a lengthy expiation is demanded of them. Anne Frankford abuses herself as a shame to womanhood, and turns herself into an exemplar of infidelity for the women in the audience, whom she addresses directly. She demands of her husband: 'When do you spurn me like a dog? When tread me / Under your feet? When drag me by the hair?' (VIII. 93-4) She conjures up images of physical pain, declaring that to 'redeem' her honour 'I would have this hand cut off, these my breasts seared,/Be racked, strappadoed, put to any torment'. (V. 136-70) Tamyra similarly invites punishment upon herself:

Hang me in chains, and let me eat these arms  
That have offended: bind me face to face  
To some dead woman, taken from the cart  
Of execution, till death and time  
In grains of dust dissolve me; I'll endure  
Or any torture that your wrath's invention  
Can fright all pity from the world withal;

(V.i.107-113)

Her motive, at this point is different from Anne's, in that she is trying to sacrifice herself in order to save her lover. Like Anne, however, she acknowledges her husband's right to punish her physically. Unlike Frankford, who refrains from

physical violence, Tamyra's husband, Montsurry, drags his wife on stage by the hair as a preliminary to subsequent punishments. Her body is made to bear the full burden of what appears to be a revulsion against sexuality itself.

The behaviour of Frankford and Montsurry polarises the distinction between Christian forbearance and revenge. Frankford inflicts no physical pain upon his wife though he forbids her any future contact with her children. His version of Christianity allows no forgiveness, at this stage, for a sin which he speaks of in terms of disease and infection, of shame and irremovable stain. In Montsurry, the condemnation becomes a stream of sexually charged abuse.

Come, Siren, sing, and clash against my rocks  
 Thy ruffi'n Galley, laden for thy lust:  
 Sing, and put all the nets into thy voice  
 With which thou drew'st into thy strumpet's lap  
 The spawn of Venus

(V.i.60-64)

Montsurry emphasises here, not Tamyra's frailty or her degradation but the vision of woman as an enchantress capable of drawing men to their destruction, which is hinted at earlier. It is Bussy's destruction he envisages, but his own betrayal that embitters him. Whilst Othello questioned 'Was this most goodly book / Made to write 'whore' on?' Montsurry declares 'I'll write in wounds (my wrongs fit characters,) / Thy right of sufferance.' (V.i.125) Montsurry writes and rights, as he sees it, the wrong done to him, in blows upon his wife's body; his repeated stabbing of her a grotesque act of penetration. Equally symbolic is the message that Tamyra finally writes, in her own blood, to her lover; her sin, one of 'blood' is written in blood and instrumental in bringing her lover to his death.

The threat to marriage, presented by adultery is countered in the punishment meted out to the lovers who become sinners in the play's denouement. The guilty

wife submits to her husband's authority, acknowledging his rights to punish, rather than possess her body. It has to be born in mind that whoredom and adultery were liable, in real life, to incur public and physical chastisement, and that public recantations were made. In this respect, as in others, drama imitated life as well as adding a dimension of its own. The flesh, having triumphed against the spirit, is made to suffer chastisement. The conclusion of *Bussy D'Ambois*, like that of *A Woman Killed With Kindness* reinforces the dominant religious verdict on adultery, though not without a note of irony. In Heywood's play, it is clearly Anne who pays the price and even acquires a certain dramatic, if not moral ascendancy over the nature of her death, which has a quality of martyrdom about it. Wendoll, escaping to the continent makes it abundantly clear that there is double standard of which he will be able to take advantage. Bussy and Tamyra are both destroyed by their passion, but their deaths have a dignity that throws into perspective the obscene ravings of Montsurry and the amoral politics of Monsieur. Chapman whilst recognising the discourse of sin and shame which attaches to adultery, presents it also as a loving association, in a play which is as much a love tragedy as a tragedy of state. In *Women Beware Women*, passion and policy are more closely linked. The outcome is the same as that in *Bussy*, in that the guilty lovers die, but their deaths are only part of a bloody denouement in which wedding masque is transformed to masque of retribution. Leantio himself is caught up in the courtly corruption by the promises of wealthy living which Livia offers him. In the encounter between husband and erring wife, the two compete in the exchange of sexual innuendo based on the new costumes which they each wear as a sign of their advancement in the world. Adultery is shown to have its rewards and its compensations though it is Leantio who moralises:

Why, here's sin made, and nev'r a conscience put to't,  
 A monster with all forehead and no eyes!  
 Why do I talk to thee of sense or virtue,  
 That art as dark as death?

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 And so, to an ignorance darker than thy womb  
 I leave thy perjured soul. A plague will come!

( IV.i.91-4;102-4)

Although Leantio has , in a sense, paid back Bianca in kind for her defection, his judgement carries weight. His words move from the barbed repartee of the initial confrontation into moralising mode. Like the other cuckolded husbands, Leantio pronounces judgement on his wife. In his comparison of the 'lack of sense and virtue' that renders her 'dark as death' to 'an ignorance darker than the womb', he underlines, not for the first time in Renaissance drama, the connection between guilt and femininity. The question he asks: 'What is there good in woman to be loved / When only that which makes her so has left her' (III.ii.351-6) is central to a misogynistic discourse in which chastity, or faithfulness in a wife, is the only female virtue of any real account. The need to portray the testing of it in all kinds of contexts is a measure of its importance to men. The anxiety and the conflicting emotions which accompany the portrayal of adultery in the drama, and the breakdown of trust which forms the conclusion of this chapter underlie the discussion in Chapter Five, in which idealised views of courtship and marriage increasingly come into conflict with the view that 'it is our blood to err'.

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### 'THE IMPUDENCE OF FLESH AND HELL'

*I did not bid thee talk of chastity'..*

The courtship of the early romantic comedies, with its happy resolution, and the unequivocal commitment of the tragic lovers discussed in the earlier chapters form a dramatic yardstick against which other sexual relationships can be measured. The ideal of mutual affection achievable in marriage is an important factor in the relationships between men and women, but it is shown to be in conflict with a flawed reality. In this, and the following chapters, the mutuality which characterised some of the earlier portrayals of love breaks down, particularly when seduction, rather than marriage is the aim of courtship. The emphasis is less on the competing discourses of sublimation and fulfilment than on those of love and lust. The various encounters between men and women take place in a context in which values are being questioned; and, as the Homilist in the previous chapter points out, sexual indulgence outside marriage is increasingly regarded as a pleasurable 'pastime', not a sin. The dramatic interest of these portrayals centres on the clash between what might be perceived as a more flexible approach to human behaviour and the strict code of conduct advocated by the moralist.

I have made the figure of the go-between central to the discussion in this chapter. Much of the dramatic interest of the role lies the fact that here is a third person whose repetition of the courtship script may highlight its sincerity, but can also expose the cynical intention that underlies it. Characters like Pandarus in *Troilus and Cressida*, (1602), Flamineo in *The White Devil* (1612) and Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), are not only actors but commentators. In those tragedies

in which love is a central theme, the go-between provides an alternative viewpoint to that of the lover, enabling the dramatist to exploit the ironic contrast which arises through the expression of conflicting values. Tension is heightened when the go-between is not an enthusiastic supporter of the cause of love, like the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, but an unwilling recruit in the seduction of virtue. A situation which, in comedy, might be a source of humorous misunderstanding, may be presented more seriously as the focus of a moral dilemma. The Earl of Warwick, in the anonymous play *Edward III (1590)* is required to seduce his own daughter; Vindice, his own sister. The relatively straightforward role of Juliet's Nurse, as purveyor of messages, is in marked contrast to that of these unwilling seducers forced by circumstances to employ a powerful arsenal of persuasion against a member of their own family. As the role of the agent becomes more complex so does the language employed in enacting it. Conveying words of love and arranging meetings are one thing; constructing elaborate schemes of temptation, another. The go-between, willing, or unwilling, reflects an uneasy compromise between the language of love, derived from literary convention and the language of acquisition, wealth and commerce.

King Edward is presented with a degree of sympathy as a lover, particularly when he shows what appears to be a genuine response to the Countess of Salisbury as an individual. His delight in the way in which she tells the story of David and the Scots, bringing events alive to him by adapting her accent to suit the various characters, 'somewhat better than the Scots to speak,' forms a contrast with his use of the conventional flattery of courtship. At the same time attention is drawn from the outset by the King's servant, Lodowick, to the fact that this is a passion mingled with guilt. (II.i.1-21) As King, Edward is able to command Lodowick's assistance to write messages of love to further his seduction. In a scene which parodies the Petrarchan convention, he struggles in the throes of poetic composition. Unlike the noblemen of *Love's Labour's Lost*, he is unable to marshal his thoughts: the conventional comparisons which come to mind, like that of his mistress's voice to a nightingale's,

only serve to associate him with King Tereus in his pursuit of Philomel and underline the fact that his is an adulterous passion. Edward expresses himself in terms which derive from the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, praising his mistress's voice, eyes, hair, endowing even her name with the power to 'gild' the paper it is written on, yet he makes it clear that he envisages a relationship which goes beyond that of adored mistress and humble slave.

The playwright neatly underlines the sexual reality that informs Edward's discourse in his dialogue with Lodowick. The King rejects Lodowick's poetic offering: 'More fair and chaste than is the Queen of Shades' on two counts, one concerning its expression, the other its meaning. In the rarified context of courtly love, an objection to an inappropriate simile is to be expected; less so the second objection, to which the playwright draws our attention by having Edward require Lodowick to repeat himself;

K. EDWARD: 'Read o'er the line again.

LODOWICK: 'More fair and chaste'...

K. EDWARD: I did not bid thee talk of chastity.

To ransack so the treasure of her mind:

For I would rather have her chased than chaste,

Out with the moon line, I will none of it....

( II.ii.149-154)

The focus of the humour here is not, as is so often the case, the contrast between the extravagances of the love but the gap between the traditional, idealistic admiration of beauty and virtue and the earthy nature of the king's desires. Although he borrows the Petrarchan idiom, Edward's desire for the Countess cannot be termed, to borrow Longueville's phrase, a 'heavenly passion.'<sup>1</sup>

The situation becomes more complex when, having rejected Lodowick's services and unsuccessfully attempted to woo the Countess for himself, he turns to

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<sup>1</sup> *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV.iii.63). See the discussion in Chapter One

her father, the Earl of Warwick, insisting that he bring pressure to bear on his daughter. The change in tactics underlines a shift in the balance of Edward's feelings: desire which was expressed in the language of love and idealisation is become, as Warwick terms it, 'graceless lust' (II.i.429), with power, rather than persuasion as the weapon in the courtship game. Edward no longer requires a go-between to write and deliver his verses for him but a procurer. He admits that it is the 'devil's office' that he requires of Warwick:

Go to thy daughter; and in my behalf  
 Command her, woo her, win her any ways  
 To be my mistress and my secret love. (II.i.342-4)

Warwick is placed in a seemingly impossible position which the dramatist exploits to the full. Interest focuses on the way in which he will resolve his dilemma: break his oath of obedience to the king or betray his daughter. The drama of Warwick's struggle with his conscience underlines, by contrast, the king's willing surrender to passion, in which moral scruples play no part: 'I cannot beat/ With reason and reproof, fond love away.' (II.i.291-2) Warwick expresses his revulsion for the situation in which he finds himself by denying his natural role: 'I must not call her 'child'; for where's the father/ That will, in such a suit, seduce his child?' (II.i.374-5 ) Though there is a degree of suspense as to the outcome of the encounter between Warwick and his daughter the audience is left in no doubt about the moral issues. The rhetorical structure of the Duke of Warwick's soliloquy as he rehearses the speech of persuasion leaves no room for moral ambivalence. It takes the audience through the process of soul-searching and invites its members to share his anticipation and identify with his values. The issues are clearly presented in the form of assertion, followed by qualification:

I'll say, she must forget her husband Salisbury,

If she remember to embrace the King.  
 I'll say, an oath may easily be broken,  
 But not so easily pardoned, being broken;  
 I'll say, it is true charity to love  
 But not true love to be so charitable;  
 I'll say, his greatness may bear out the shame,  
 But not his kingdom can buy out the sin;  
 I'll say it is my duty to persuade  
 But not her honesty to give consent.

( II. i.357-366)

The qualifications are more cumbersome in expression, making more extensive use of multisyllabic words. Sin is easier than its consequences. The repetition of 'I'll say' builds on our expectations but the simple juxtaposition of alternatives makes the choice seem clear-cut. What is dramatically interesting is the guilt which he acknowledges, underlined by repeated negatives :

Neither my daughter nor my dear friend's wife  
 I am not Warwick, as thou thinkst I am  
 But an attorney from the court of hell.

(II.i.379-81)

Warwick approaches his task by reminding his daughter in one sentence of the both the King's power and his love for her: 'The mighty King of England dotes on thee/ He that hath power to take away thy life.' He argues:

...consent

To pawn thine honour rather than thy life  
 Honour is often lost and got again;  
 But life, once gone, hath no recovery.

(II.i.386-9)

On one level, it is a convincing argument; the reverse of what he might be expected to say. Such a reversal imparts a bitter irony to the line 'Honour is often lost and got again' and links, by implication, women's honour with family disgrace. He continues

his argument with the assurance that 'mighty men' can put right what wrong they do, and that the King 'will in his glory hide thy shame.' (398) The overall tone is negative, however, concentrating on avoidance of the appearance of dishonour, rather than the advantages to be gained by the King's favour. Thus, Warwick's moral standpoint is never in doubt, nor are the consequences of female dishonour in bringing disgrace to the male members of her family. Only at one point does Warwick hint at the glory that might be gained by submitting to the King's demands, when he says 'those that gaze on him, to find out thee/ Will lose their eyesight, looking in the sun' (399-400) The image is an uncomfortable one and, even here, describes the King's power as a force to mitigate the shame of dishonour, rather than one which could bring worldly benefits. In a similar way, when he suggests that acknowledgement of the king's greatness will 'temper' the awareness of wrongdoing and impart a 'sugar-sweet and most delicious taste', (l. 406) the image is cloying, rather than tempting. Though Warwick has, as he claims, 'apparell'd sin in virtuous sentences', the apparel has a transparency which reveals, rather than conceals.

The Countess, in the honourable tradition of chaste maid, or, in her case, matron, is indignant in her response as she expresses a willingness to die rather than submit. Warwick's relief is shown in the way he proceeds to 'unsay' all that he has said before, in a series of images that emphasise the inappropriateness of sinful behaviour in men of greatness. In terms of formal rhetoric he presents a reasoned but emotive argument, implying, at times, the intense revulsion at sexuality which is characteristic of contemporary moralising: 'The freshest summer's day doth soonest taint / The loathed carrion that it seems to kiss.'<sup>2</sup> He juxtaposes images of sin and holiness, darkness and light, and corruption: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.' Though he expresses forcefully his personal anger at the King's conduct, they

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<sup>2</sup> An interesting echo of this speech is to be found in *Measure For Measure* (II.ii.170-3). There the words are put into the mouth of the seducer himself, so that it is self-disgust that is expressed.

also make a judgement about the duties of the great. The outcome of the play is positive in that traditional morality is upheld. The Countess's virtue is emphasised by her constancy in refusing all attempts at persuasion. her own wit and resourcefulness enable her to convince the king of his wrongdoing. He receives an education in the course of the action and the example that inspires him is that of a virtuous woman. Not only is the moral order restored but the King's dignity and his reputation.

*'Love's subject grows too threadbare nowadays'..*

The relative clarity of the moral issues in *Edward III* derives, in part, from its didactic style. The King and the Countess take up positions which belong to a well-established tradition which is much exploited in the drama. They are, as it is expressed in *Soliman and Perseda*, 'lines parallel which never meet'; chastity and lust in opposition, with Warwick providing the only note of ambivalence in that he is forced to speak on behalf of worldly values which he views in terms of sin. In contrast, in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, the questioning of values pervades the whole play and there is no clear resolution. The literary world of the sonneteers had by 1602 given way to a more satirical vision. Although love remains an important theme it is accompanied by a fascination with the effects of frustrated or unlawful desire. The words of Samuel Rowlands sum up a change in tone which is reflected in some of the drama of the period. 'Leave Cupid's cut, women's flattering praise / Love's subject grows too threadbare nowadays.'<sup>3</sup> Threadbare it is in *Troilus and Cressida*, symbolised by the fragile impermanence of the sleeve which serves as love-token and the shallowness of Helen's court, where it seems to some that she 'is not worth what she does cost, the holding'. (II.ii.50-1) Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* tells the story of two legendary lovers but it has neither a comic nor a tragic

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Rowlands, *The Letting of Humours Blood in the Heade-Vaine 1600*, (London:Hunterian Club reprint,1880) I.5

resolution. Its movement is not towards mutuality but towards despair and disillusionment. Heroism and love are not glorified in this satirical play but subject to a relentless deflation. The questioning of values is central to the play's theme and ambivalence is characteristic of its tone. Though, in *Romeo and Juliet*, love is often mocked, and the trivial and the bawdy form a counterpoint to the idealism of the young lovers, their tragedy dominates the dramatic action. Whilst the language of love is subject to parody, the actions of the lovers make real the literary conventions: they die for love. *Troilus and Cressida* is a love tragedy written in a different mode, in which love is challenged, not by death but by change and betrayal.

Troilus himself appears to be the epitome of the romantic lover, idealising his mistress's beauty:

Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl,  
Between our Ilium and where she resides  
Let it be called the wide and wand'ring flood,  
Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar  
Our doubtful hope, our convoy, and our barque.

(I.i.100-104)

The image of precious beauty and the concept of a danger, in the form of 'a wide and wandering flood' to be hazarded derive from the language of Petrarchan courtship, and suggest the tragic lover, determined to face death and danger, like Guisnard, in order to achieve his desire. At the same time, the idea of a pearl acquired by a merchant links courtship with commodity rather than spiritual growth. The image links the riches of India with Cressida's bed, in a way which focuses on sexual fulfilment, and it is sexual fulfilment which is at the forefront of Pandarus's mind when he stage-manages the lovers' meetings.

At his most benign, Pandarus has qualities in common with the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Like her, he is an eager matchmaker who enjoys his role but

whereas the Nurse's enthusiasm is tempered by her concern as to whether Romeo's intentions are honourable, Pandarus has no such scruples on his niece's behalf. Marriage forms no part of his negotiations, nor is there any place for sublimation or the postponement of sexual fulfilment. In his conversation with Cressida, Pandarus echoes and parodies the admiring words of Troilus earlier in the play, and the language of courtly love. He extols Troilus' s virtues to his niece, playing on her jealousy, and using Helen's behaviour to support his case: 'I cannot choose but laugh to think how she tickled his chin. Indeed, she has a marvellous white hand, I must needs confess.'(I.ii.130-132) In an ecstasy of enthusiasm he uses the Petrarchan imagery of the power of the lover's glance, projecting himself, ludicrously, into the role of mistress with: 'I could live and die i' th' eyes of Troilus.' (I.ii.238-9) His eager activity in the cause of love is, at this point, comic and reductive in its effect as he upholds Troilus' claims over Paris with the confident assertion: 'Paris is dirt to him.' (I.235) To Pandarus, love is not a matter of idealism: it concerns bodies, not souls. The song he sings for Helen makes use of the conventional association of love and death, but not in sentimental terms, like the song which is sung for Orsino in *Twelfth Night*. The words could be regarded as a parody of those of the song 'Gather the Rose of love' in the Bower of Bliss, but Priam's place, though it is a place of cloying affection, has none of the enchantment of the former.<sup>4</sup> Pandarus sings of fulfilment, but conveys none of its ecstasy. Death is related to orgasm in a bawdy refrain which trivialises the experience as a series of groans, turning into laughter:

These lovers cry 'O! O!', they die.  
 Yet that which seems the wound to kill  
 Doth turn 'O! O!' to 'ha ha he!'  
 So dying love lives still.

(III.i.117-20)

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<sup>4</sup> *The Faerie Queen*.e, XII, 74-5)

The paradox of pain and sweetness which is at the heart of Petrarchan love is reduced to meaningless repetition. Yet it is Pandarus who is the subject of Troilus' plea: 'O gentle Pandar / From Cupid's shoulder pluck his painted wings/And fly with me to Cressid.' (III.ii.12-14) The cloying endearments of Helen's court and the crude double entendre of Pandarus' song of 'dying love' are contrasted with the idealistic expectancy of the lover in the following scene. Pandarus is an unlikely Cupid, just as, to Juliet, the nurse is an inadequate harbinger of love. There is, as with the Nurse, a comic dimension to his role arising out of this incongruity. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the lyricism of Juliet's imagination, with its 'wind swift cupids' is set against the real presence of the nurse, as she arrives, footsore, weary and out of breath. The comic effect is heightened as Juliet's anxiety for news of Romeo is set against her servant's inability to communicate. The nurse provides an effective foil for her mistress, a visual and verbal reminder that the passions of youth may fade and be as short-lived as youth itself, but the ironic contrast is based upon human interaction, not deflation.

Deflation is the inevitable effect of Pandarus's intrusive commentary. It is not that he mocks or disparages love, like Mercutio: on the contrary, he delights in it. He is not like the misogynistic commentator who portrays women as creatures of appetite and regards sexual love as degrading, or even absurd. His view of love is reductive, but it is based on a vicarious enjoyment of human sexuality. From the opening scene onwards he invites us to see the world through his eyes. Like the Nurse, he appears to recognise the lovers' idealistic view of love, whilst providing an earthy counterpoint to it. He is an eager spectator of the meeting he has himself arranged and invites us to share his enjoyment. It is as if he cannot bear to leave the lovers alone. We are given only a limited opportunity to respond to what they have to say and our reaction is coloured by his relentless urgings towards consummation. When Romeo and Juliet first meet, the sonnet form which shapes their communication isolates them from the rest of the company, and later, as they meet in

Juliet's chamber, the only evidence of the part played by the Nurse is a practical one: the ladder of cords. Pandarus plays a more dominant role, introducing Cressida to Troilus and drawing back the veil from her face in a gesture which suggests the displaying of goods for market and parodies the removal of the bride's veil in the marriage service. Here is no marriage and the staging of the scene is suggestive of brothel, rather than bower. The presence of Pandarus gives a comic edge to a scene which we might expect to take seriously. Pandarus's anticipation seems to match Cressida's, as he draws attention to her blushing and almost breathless excitement: 'She fetches her breath as short as a new ta'en sparrow.' (III.ii.31-32) As Jane Adamson comments, 'his chuckling prose is like a burlesque version of the lovers' high-strung expectancy.'<sup>5</sup>

Troilus's anticipation, in contrast, suggests a more ambivalent approach towards sexuality:

I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.  
 Th'imaginary relish is so sweet  
 That it enchants my sense. What will it be  
 When that the wat'ry palate taste indeed  
 Love's thrice repured nectar? Death, I fear me,  
 Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness  
 For the capacity of my ruder powers...

(III.ii.16-23)

His words, like those of Lyly's Eumenides suggest a fear of fulfilment; an intensity of sexual feeling, leading, not to heightened awareness but to a sensation too intense to bear. The intrusion of Pandarus provides a mixture of comic relief and bathos. His cheerful bawdiness is reminiscent of the raillery that surrounds the Nurse on her meeting with Romeo, except that here it is directed at the lovers themselves, not deflected by their agent. To Jan Kott, the night is spoilt by his presence, 'deprived of

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Adamson, *The Harvester New Critical Approaches to Shakespeare : Troilus and Cressida* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987) p. 65

its poetry', even 'defiled.'<sup>6</sup> His introductory speech is verbally overwhelming and in marked contrast to the lovers' silence. It is he who takes the initiative from the lovers, prompting Troilus to swear oaths of love, to speak, even to kiss. The urgency is his, underlining the significance of the rite of passage from virginity: 'Words pay no debts; give her deeds' ( III.ii.154). Briefly he leaves them together but returns to comment once more on Cressida's blushing. It is not clear whether she is meant to be blushing or whether Pandarus is trying to draw attention to her modesty and tease her into a reaction? Again it is he who sets the pace with his 'Have you not done talking yet?' (97-8) As he comments 'Pretty i'faith', (132) he is inviting us to share his viewpoint. Like him, we become conscious of watching the lovers rather than entering, for a time, into their world.

When does a go-between become a procurer? It is Pandarus himself who draws attention to his role by announcing: 'And Cupid grant all tongue-tied maidens here/ Bed, chamber, pander to provide this gear.' (III.ii.206-7) His benign and avuncular welcoming of the lovers' pledge becomes a salacious invitation to a wider audience, as he juxtaposes mention of the messenger of love with the practical arrangements of the 'hold-door trade'; in Douglas Bruster's words, he talks like a seedy businessman.'<sup>7</sup> To Troilus, Cressida's bed is 'India' and she herself a 'pearl. It is Pandarus who strips away the mystery and insists on the act itself. At the same time, the occasion has a kind of solemnity as the lovers exchange vows and Pandarus performs the priest's function with his repeated 'amens.' The heightened language of the lovers' vows can be seen as metadramatic and Pandarus' comments further underline our awareness of the historical events that render them meaningless except in the negative sense. 'let all pitiful goers-between be called to the world's end after

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Routledge, rep.1988) p.66.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 104

my name: call them panders. Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers-between panders.' (II.ii.196-200) Pandarus subtly invites us his audience to dismiss Cressida as a whore and Troilus as a credulous fool, to detach itself from the dramatic experience of the moment and anticipate later events.

The scene does not entirely belong to Pandarus, however, though he opens and closes it. Even as we recognise the irony in the lovers' declaration of faith, it is possible to respond to it as sincere. Their words insist on what Derek Traversi calls 'the unavoidable flaw at the heart of passion', time.<sup>8</sup> The extravagant declarations that they make are a challenge to time which the audience knows is doomed to defeat: their love will not last, any more than the walls of Troy itself. The audience is made conscious of time in a different way in *Romeo and Juliet*, from the Prologue that introduces them as 'star-crost lovers' to the hasty meetings and the fateful misunderstandings. It is danger and death that threaten them however, whereas in *Troilus and Cressida*, it is the betrayal of love itself. Juliet resists the social pressures upon her; Cressida, perhaps more realistically, adjusts to changing circumstances. It could be argued that the greater betrayal is not that of Cressida but of Pandarus, in his failure to guard his niece's interest in the beginning. He plays his part to the end, delivering a letter from his niece to Troilus. A certain ambivalence clings to him here. There is no trace of his customary ebullience; rather, he appears as a pathetic figure. At the same time his reference to the ache in his bones relentlessly draws attention to the venereal disease associated with the profession of bawd with which he fully identifies himself at the end of the play. The contents of the letter are not revealed but its bearer is unceremoniously dismissed with the words: 'Hence, broker lackey! Infamy and shame / Pursue thy life and live aye with thy name.' (V.iii. 117-118)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare II : Troilus and Cressida to The Tempest* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1969) p.27.

<sup>9</sup> These lines are omitted in Q but printed at V10 both in Q and (with variants) in F, belonging to a

Although they take on similar roles, Pandarus and the Duke of Warwick represent diametrically opposed viewpoints with regard to sexual relationships. Pandarus's view of love is reductive, but it is based on a vicarious enjoyment of human sexuality. Warwick takes a strict, moral view. He condemns the king's passion as sin, valuing his daughter's honour more than the advancement that it can bring him. This moral dimension, heightened when the aim is seduction and the object unwilling, is exploited to maximum effect in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*.<sup>10</sup> The hero, Vindice, like Warwick is employed to seduce a member of his immediate family, in this case, his sister, Castiza. The situation is complicated by the fact that he is the play's central character and that his unwilling attempt at seduction is successful in persuading not his sister, but his mother, of the advantages of the liaison. The world of the ducal court is very different from that of *Edward III*. The latter is essentially a history play, dealing with the exploits of a well-respected King of England, and drawing in its terms of reference upon concepts of chivalry and virtue which all the characters recognise. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, like *The White Devil*, is set in the kind of 'Italian lascivious palace' described by Marston in *The Malcontent*. Their world is narrower than that of *Edward III* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and the tone of both plays, in common with *Troilus and Cressida*, exhibits the qualities of fascination and disgust that we associate with satire. Virtue is acknowledged in *The Revenger's Tragedy* but it is rare and associated with chaste self-denial. The wife of Lord Antonio, who like Lucrece, kills herself after being raped, is described as 'that dear form, who ever lived / As cold in lust as she is now in death.' (I.iv.I34-6). The play offers an alternative vocabulary to the Petrarchan idealising of love and of women, with love more often represented as what Iago calls a 'lust of the blood and a permission of the will' (I.iii.335) than a transcendent experience.

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version of the play in which Pandarus does not reappear. The Oxford edition prints them in V 10 immediately before Pandarus' epilogue.

<sup>10</sup> *The Revenger's Tragedy* has been traditionally attributed to Tourneur. See note in Bibliography.

*'It is our blood to err, though hell gap'd loud'..*

Vindice resembles the archetypal malcontent, manipulating audience response to a world in which values are shifting, a world which despite its 'Italian' artificiality, reflects real anxieties of contemporary society. He takes on a number of roles in the play: lover, revenger, pimp, seducer and moral commentator. Many of Vindice's speeches echo the words of *The Homily on Whoredom and Adultery* in which the fear of sexuality is associated with a breakdown in the family and society and even in law and order.<sup>11</sup> Vindice recreates the Homilist's vision with dramatic intensity when he describes the corruption which he sees around him. Like the preacher who imagines fornication to be like a great tidal river overflowing the world he describes the tide of depravity which engulfs society each night:

Now 'tis full sea abed over the world,  
There's juggling of all sides; some that were maids  
E'en at sunset are now perhaps i' the toll-book.

(II.ii.134-6)

The levels of response which are brought out in the audience by this multi-layered figure are indicative of the clash of values which he himself embodies. He personifies the extremes of male attitudes to women, praising the beauty and virtue of his 'betrothed lady,' yet he keeps up a stream of misogynistic comment about women in general. He condemns the licentious conduct of others but his plan for revenge demands that he establish himself as 'a man o' the time' (I.ii.14), in other words, a man who has adapted himself to changing values and whose loyalty can be bought. Vindice, in his disguise as Piato, is employed by Lussurioso as, what his brother Hippolito calls, 'a base-coined pander', one of Pandarus' s heirs of the 'hold-door trade.' The scale of his supposed activities is impressive as he claims: 'I have been

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Four

witness / To the surrender of a thousand virgins.' (I.iii.49-50). The image of society which he creates is one in which spiritual values have been abandoned in favour of the pleasures of the flesh.

Working himself up into his role, Vindice responds to Lussurioso's tentative enquiries with a description of the 'strange lust' he has encountered. His emphasis on incest suggests a breaking down of traditional taboos in favour of sexual experiment: 'Any kin next to the rim o' the sister /Is man's meat these days.' (I.iii.65-6) The description serves its purpose of convincing Lussurioso that here, indeed, is a 'fine villain' but the choice of words is revealing. The struggle between body and spirit which plays such an important part in the discourse of love and sexuality is no longer an issue in this world, where the body is so much 'meat.' 'Meat' is appropriate in the picture of indiscriminate lust that Vindice paints, where 'Some father dreads not, gone to bed in wine, / To slide from the mother and cling the daughter in law.' ( I. iii. 61-62) The verbs 'slide' and 'cling' suggest a dissolving of any sense of commitment to an individual as well as that of the ability to make moral choices. At the same time, Vindice reminds us of his own, rather than Plato's viewpoint when he comments: 'Who can perceive this, save that eternal eye / That sees through flesh and all' (I.iii.68-9). His master responds with the admission that 'It is our blood to err, though hell gap'd loud.' (I.iii.75) Love to Lussurioso is lust, and therefore, sin. The two are in apparent agreement on the subject of human frailty and Lussurioso dismisses the topic with 'let this talk glide' in an uncomfortable echo of Vindice's earlier use of the word 'slide'.

The object of Lussurioso's desire, Castiza, is not an individual to him; she is simply, anonymously, 'a virgin far from court'. There is no trace in him of the Petrarchan lover. Instead he admits 'I am past my depth in lust.' (I.iii.91) His courtship has followed conventional lines in that he has sent verses and gifts of jewellery to his mistress, but his faith in the power of wealth to 'ravish her / Without the help of man ' (I.iii. 96-7) has proved so far, to be unjustified. Lussurioso's cynical

lack of values is revealed in his dismissal of Castiza's 'foolish-chaste' rejection of his advances. The two adjectives are incongruously opposed according to traditional expectations of female virtue but appropriately linked in the context of this corrupt court. The nature of the agreement between Lussurioso and Vindice is underlined by the fact that money changes hands. To the Duke's son, beauty is a commodity to be bought. He makes it clear that the young virgin he desires is 'too mean' in 'blood and fortune' for him to consider marrying her; he would rather 'keep a friend' (I.iii.106). Though he refers, like a lover, to 'the business of my heart', monetary imagery pervades his speech in his likening of honour to 'a stock of money laid to sleep/ Which, ne'er so little broke, does never keep.' (I.iii.118-19) Here is no conventional admiration of a mistress's virtue and chastity: it is merely an obstruction to the satisfaction of his lust. His pun on the word 'broke' suggests the breaking of the hymen as well as breaking into a store of money, placing virginity on the level of a commodity. Middleton makes much of the irony of the situation in which Vindice realises, with a shock, that his own sister is the subject of the discussion. Whilst he is momentarily reduced to silence, Lussurioso finds amusement in the knowledge that Vindice's brother, Hippolito, has, it appears, unwittingly supplied a pander to his own sister. The audience perceives a further irony of anticipation of the way in which Vindice will play his part. His instructions are, if his persuasions fail, to 'venture upon the mother,' a task which might be regarded as even more unnatural to any but a 'man o' the time.' In his role as Piato, he has been forced to do more than suppress his natural feelings; he has denied them.

This sense of loss of identity experienced by Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* echoes that of Warwick in *Edward III* when he tries to deny his fatherhood, but here the sense of dislocation is much greater. The character of Warwick in the earlier play is conceived naturalistically, if stereotypically, as a loving father. His speeches, being essentially didactic in tone represent his dilemma clearly. The portrayal of Vindice is different in that he moves from observation to involvement;

from apparent detachment to emotion. Jonas Barish argues that he functions as a means of dramatising virtue as effectively as vice was dramatised in the trial scenes earlier in the play: 'The whole sequence serves as a necessary if programmatic counterweight to the antic dance of vices at the ducal court.'<sup>12</sup> This may well have been Middleton's intention but it is only one aspect of the scene. The donning of the Piato disguise, a recognisable dramatic device more familiar to comedy than to tragedy, has a complex effect on the audience. Vindice's role as go-between is painful to him yet he seems, at times, almost to relish it. When he consoles himself with the thought that he will fail in his task, it is a consolation flavoured by the doubtful consideration that it would be best to undertake it himself rather than allow Lussurioso to employ another go-between, who might prove more successful. It is not clear here whether Vindice's cynical views on female behaviour are outweighing his faith in his sister's chastity, though he proclaims: 'I durst almost for good/ Venture my lands in heaven on their blood.' (I. iii.184-5) Increasingly this suggests, not so much a dislocation of personality, nor an inadequacy of characterisation, but an articulation of the tensions and contradictions that he is experiencing. The forces acting upon Vindice are the conflicting forces represented by the fashionable world and that of traditional morality. Such tensions exist in the words Warwick addresses to his daughter but we never have any doubt as to his underlying feelings, even if his words belie them. For Vindice, words operate in a different way. The increased fluidity of the language of the drama, developed since the composition of *Edward III*, itself facilitates his task. He is not a judge, summing up the factors on which a decision should be based but a persuasive counsel, defending the indefensible, in the persuasive terms of the vernacular. He, more than Warwick, is 'the attorney from the court of hell', the 'bad angel' of the Morality play.

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<sup>12</sup> Jonas A. Barish, 'The True and False Families of "The Revenger's Tragedy"' in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeline Doran and Mark Eccles* ed. by Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough and Richard Knowles (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976) p. 142-154, p.147

Vindice apparels sin, not in 'virtuous sentences' like Warwick, but in gorgeous garments, designed to tempt. Castiza's vulnerability is evident from the opening scene as she makes clear to us both her chastity and her lack of inheritance, in the words, 'Why had not virtue a revenue?' (III.i.7) As we already know, in this corrupt court, chastity has a market value but Castiza like many of the heroines of Renaissance drama, as her name suggests, proves unequivocal in her determination to preserve her virginity. Her response to Vindice, in his guise as Lussurioso's messenger, is comically effective, as she boxes his ears. She is forthright in her condemnation of him as the 'attorney' of his master's sin. To the audience and to Vindice she demonstrates that she is one of that band of chaste women represented in the play by Vindice's betrothed and the wife of Lord Antonio. The fact that there is some precedent for female virtue does not, however prevent her from being described by her brother as a 'rare phoenix.' That female virtue is indeed rare is demonstrated by the more worldly response of Castiza's (and Vindice's) mother, Gratiana.

Vindice presents the idea of power itself less as a threat, but as a source of temptation. The opportunity to 'pleasure' a man of high rank is represented as an honour, as it was by the Duke of Warwick, and more cynically by Chapman's Monsieur, in *Bussy D'Ambois*.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the loss of honour is represented as its gain. Like Warwick, Vindice suggests that honour can be lost without anyone's being aware of the fact, but whereas Warwick's image of all eyes being directed to the King and his mistress and dazzled by the sun subtly conveys a sense of public shame, Vindice's colloquial: 'Tut, one would let a little of that go too/ And ne'er be seen in it, ne'er be seen in it, mark you' (II.i.64-65) reduces the whole process to one of commonplace practicality. Vindice plays on what he knows of his mother's circumstances, personifying chastity, with a patronising air, as a 'foolish country girl'. (II.i.81) Gratiana is in no doubt of the 'unnatural nature' of the task that Vindice is so eager to impose upon her: the procuring of her own daughter, but he persuasively

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<sup>13</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Four

presents his argument from her viewpoint, appealing at the same time, to her greed and, more subtly, to her own sexuality. His comment 'Forty angels can make four score devils' is a pun on the word angel, meaning a gold coin, which once more highlights the kind of financial transaction which has replaced the traditional morality. (II.i.88) The morality play opposition of angels and devils has no place in these times when distinctions are blurred, and both mother and son can be persuaded out of traditional family roles if the financial reward is high enough. Vindice teases his mother with a picture of 'other daughters' favoured by the Duke's heir and advises her :

No, I would raise my state upon her breast  
 And call her eyes my tenants: I would count  
 My yearly maintenance upon her cheeks,  
 Take coach upon her lip, and all her parts  
 Should keep man after man and I would ride  
 In pleasure upon pleasure.

(II.i.94-9)

Vindice argues with enthusiasm and fluency, using the blazon of the Petrarchan sonnet to link images of the body, with images, not of beauty but of wealth and ambition. The body is reduced to its component parts and effectively dehumanised. The eyes, cheeks and breasts, which are traditionally the object of admiration are seen in material terms. The images clash and become grotesque yet the delivery has an urgency, arising out of the continuous flow of the lines, that culminates in a blatant appeal to vicarious sensuality. It is hardly the argument which might be expected to persuade a mother. Vindice deliberately protests too much, creating a picture which is intended to outrage, rather than convince. With his cynical assurance: 'You brought her forth, she may well bring you home' he reminds Gratiana of her role as child bearer, dwelling, not on her maternal feelings, but on the possibility of her exploiting her daughter for selfish gain.

The response is not what Vindice, or the audience, expects. As Gratiana cries 'O heavens! This overcomes me' he says, aside, 'Not, I hope, already?' (II.i.103-4) Momentarily Vindice steps out of role, with a humorous effect that is unsettling in that 'already' suggests that he is surprised by the speed of his success if not by the success itself. This is a contradiction of his earlier assertion that he dare 'venture his lands in heaven' on his mother's and sister's integrity. It is the kind of ambivalence that is present in Pandarus. Vindice is portrayed as believing in his mother and sister, yet profoundly cynical about women in general. His cynicism is made clear to us from the opening scenes of the play, where he functions as a commentator on the court. It is not simply an attitude he takes on with the role of Piato. Whilst Pandarus joins in the celebration of love but deals in sexuality, Vindice pays lip-service to the ideal of chastity whilst doubting its ability to withstand corruption. Unlike Warwick, he continues in his attempts at persuasion, despite the fact that he knows his mother has been won over. He offers Gratiana a rationale: 'Tis no shame to be bad, because 'tis common', (II.i.116) effectively summarising the position in a manner that begs disagreement. His offer of money is a visual reminder of the kind of transaction that is taking place here, and with an additional subtle touch, we see Gratiana offer to Vindice, in turn, a small reward for his services. For a brief interlude, Vindice becomes observer, rather than participant, having successfully transferred his role as pander to his mother.

Castiza's indignation is as strongly portrayed as that of the virtuous Countess of Salisbury, though expressed in ways that reflect a different dramatic approach to speech, presenting it as less formal and more naturalistic. She does not adopt the heroic stance of declaring that she will die rather than succumb. After all, it is not Lussurioso's power which threatens her but what is assumed to be her own weakness. She can afford to despise what does not tempt her and turns on her mother with bitter sarcasm:

I cry you mercy, lady, I mistook you.  
 Pray, did you see my mother? Which way went she ?  
 Pray God I have not lost her.

(II.i.157-9)

The tone is conversational but the impact is still powerful. It does not prevent Vindice from continuing his assault on her virtue. He is not, unlike Warwick, content to rejoice in the angry response. Echoing Castiza's words, with a touch of irony, he equates honesty with poverty, asserting again, in a way which is more likely to repel than persuade, that she is lucky in that she needs only to please one man to make her fortune. He quibbles on the words 'honour' and 'grace':

'S'lid, how can you lose your honour  
 To deal with my lord's Grace?  
 He'll add more honour to it by his title.

(II.i.190-3)

Honour, as chastity, is set against honour as worldly recognition and Lussurioso's title is in itself ironic. His description of the pleasures of the palace is of a world of frenetic activity, rather than what he terms 'ease', with its banquets, music and sports. It is vividly created, yet grotesque, drawing on bizarre visual images like that of 'the stirring meats /Ready to move out of the dishes.'(II.i.196-7) The emphasis is on stimulation yet, as Coburn Freer points out, 'The zestful bad taste of this, especially that pornographic cartoon shot of the meat, could hardly persuade Castiza to accept Lussurioso when she has already rejected him and her mother's solicitations as well.'

<sup>14</sup> Nor can the description of cuckoldry have much appeal for the chaste and unmarried Castiza. Vindice urges, like the Ovidian lover, 'the virgin to make much of

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<sup>14</sup> Coburn Freer, *The Poetics of Jacobean Drama* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1981) p.73

time'; the 'nine coaches waiting' create a powerful sense of expectancy but the world he describes is disturbing rather than appealing, as in the surreal paintings of Hieronymous Bosch. In his own way, he is playing Devil's advocate, like Warwick but his approach implies the susceptibility of woman to temptation, rather than reasoned argument. His moral stance is not clearly outlined though his ironic tone is unmistakable as he puts forward a 'modest proposal' for the continuance of a fashionable society, in which 'All thrives but Chastity, she lies a-cold' (II.i. 223) His language is fluent and colloquial lending itself to a blurring of moral distinctions. Appropriately, perhaps, as a result, he both succeeds and fails. Castiza, like Vindice himself, responds with disgust to the 'pleasures of the palace', whereas his mother succumbs to the temptation that he effectively urges, failing to perceive the sub-text of revulsion. The scene ends on an ambivalent note, with Castiza's indignant refusal and Gratiana's agreement that she will continue the work of persuasion.

The doubleness of Vindice's role is made evident when he reports back to his master. He moves from a satirical reflection on declining values to the deeply personal. To Lussurioso, he comments on the ease with which chastity can be bought:

A right good woman in these days is chang'd  
 Into white money with less labour far;  
 Many a maid has turned to Mahomet  
 With easier working.

(II.ii.25-28)

The pun on 'chang'd' is an appropriate one, evidence again of the all-pervasive influence of money in this microcosm of society. On the other hand, the audience is allowed to glimpse his fears that his mother's persuasions might have prevailed, as he exclaims: 'O, the mother, the mother' (134). From this impassioned aside his tone changes to one of satiric mockery: 'But set spurs to the mother; golden spurs / Will put her to false gallop in a trice.' (II. ii. 44-5) The bitterness with which he pictures

his mother's all too easy capitulation gives way to a characteristic sententiousness about the nature of women : 'Women with women can work best alone.' (II. ii. 64). It is consistent with his misogyny that, offered further reward for his services, Vindice chooses what might seem an appropriate one: 'to have all the fees behind the arras and all the farthingales that fall plump about twelve o' clock on the rushes.' ( II.ii. )<sup>15</sup> The idea is grotesquely vivid, with its immediacy of time and location and the solid, tactile image of falling 'plump' on the floor, transferred from the women themselves to their clothing. Fashion and morality are inextricably linked in a court where, to Vindice, the only grace that exists is 'Grace, the bawd.' Vindice himself has the best of both worlds here, able to speak as Piato, whilst giving his words the edge of condemnation that reflects his customary, moralising tone.

The culmination of Vindice's activities is in Act III, scene v where he once again acts as go-between, in order to achieve his revenge on the man who dishonoured his betrothed. He sets up a meeting between Lussurioso's father, the Duke, and a 'lady' The 'lady' is the skull of Gloriana, attired in a headdress and mask and smeared with poison. As the 'slave pander' of Lussurioso's description, Vindice exposes, literally, the 'skull beneath the skin' in a scene which brings together, verbally and visually, the underlying tensions of Renaissance attitudes to love, sexuality and death. Vindice speaks as both lover and moral commentator. The equivocal nature of his attitude towards women which was enacted in his temptation of Castiza, is given expression again as he, in Muriel Bradbrook's words, 'addresses the skull of his mistress, who died for her chastity, as though it were that of a courtesan.<sup>16</sup> 'Who now bids twenty pounds a night, prepares music and sweetmeats?' (III. v. 88-9) This is the woman whom Vindice claims to have loved

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<sup>15</sup> This image can also be found in *The Mayor of Queenborough, or Hengist, King of Kent*, Act I

<sup>16</sup> Muriel Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) p. 163

and for whom he now acts as pander. For the third time his words echo the blazon of the sonnet. In Act I scene one he refers, without ambiguity, but fleetingly and retrospectively to his mistress's 'bright face' and the 'two heaven-pointed diamonds' that were her eyes.' (I.i.16, 19) Later, as we have seen, he turns the Petrarchan discourse of admiration into an instrument of temptation for his mother, associating his sister's body with an elaborate series of financial transactions. Here, he makes his mistress's skull once again into a *memento mori*, with a moral dimension that encompasses his audience, describing her features in grotesque terms as possessing the power, not to inspire a lover but to shock the sinner into repentance:

Here's an eye

Able to tempt a great man - to serve God;

A pretty hanging lip, that has forgot now to dissemble,

Methinks this mouth should make a swearer tremble,

A drunkard clasp his teeth and not undo 'em

To suffer wet damnation to run through 'em.

Here's a cheek keeps her colour, let the wind go whistle;

(III.v.54 -60)

With a modulation of tone which seems to go deeper than a mere shift into another satiric mode might suggest, Vindice then adds; 'And now methinks I could e'en chide myself / For doting on her beauty, though her death / Shall be revenged after no common action.' (III.v.68-70)

The establishment of love as a motive for revenge, made in the first scene of the play, is difficult to sustain in view of Vindice's profoundly cynical commentary. Here he explicitly denies love as a value. The courtly tradition of sacrifice and service is reinterpreted in terms of commercial transaction: 'lordships sold to maintain ladyships' (l. 73) and financial ruin, and all for the sake of 'a bewitching minute.' (74) The essential aspects of the role of trader in the flesh are given expression in Vindice's introduction of the 'lady' to his brother: the secrecy : 'Secret/ Ne'er doubt us,

madam' (III.v.44); the velvet gowns that are the compensation for dishonour and the reassurance that disgrace is merely a 'poor thin shell.'(46) The scene culminates in the torture and death of the duke, betrayed by his own lechery. Love and death are brought together in a familiar combination but the love is unquestionably lust. The dying duke is forced to watch yet another lover's assignation; that of his bastard son, Spurio and his Duchess. Their words sum up, appropriately, the tension between sexuality and sin which pervades the play:

SPURIO: Had not that kiss a taste of sin, 'twere sweet.

DUCHESS: Why, there's no pleasure sweet but it is sinful.

SPURIO: True, such a bitter sweetness fate hath given,

Best side to us is the worst side to heaven.

(III.v.201-4)

### ***'Am I the author of your sin?'***

Like Vindice, Flamineo in *The White Devil* has the task of procuring his own sister. He has not, as Vindice has, the security of a disguise behind which to hide, nor does the play allow him quite the same degree of commanding perspective. To Bracciano, whom he addresses as 'honoured lord', Flamineo emphasizes his sister's willingness, assuring his master that he has all the arrangements in hand. There is no evidence of anything but an eagerness to undertake his role as procurer. Unlike Vindice, he expresses no scruples regarding the arrangements. Able to talk freely to the Duke once they are alone together, he expounds on the subject of sexuality. Like Lussurioso and Vindice in the guise of Piato, he denies the occasion its particularity: Vittoria becomes 'most women' and Bracciano is offered advice which might be thought to apply to all men: 'What is't you doubt? Her coyness? That's but the superficialities of lust most women have.' (I.ii.17-19) Effectively, as Charles Forker points out, he 'sullies our image of Vittoria before her appearance on stage can correct

the degrading cartoon which he creates of women.' <sup>17</sup> Like Iago, he suggests that women pretend to a modesty they do not possess: 'Why should ladies blush to hear that nam'd / Which they do not fear to handle.?' ( I.ii.21-25) Chastity is hypocrisy; virtue, a fig. He uses images of appetite to describe sexuality:

They know our desire is increased by the difficulty of enjoying; whereas satiety is a blunt, weary and drowsy passion; if the buttery hatch stood continually open there would be nothing so passionate crowding, nor hot suit after the beverage.'

(I.ii.21-25)

'They know' emphasizes the complicity of women as deceivers of men. Sex is a kind of game in which the stakes must be upped to provide any promise of satisfaction. Flamineo's words closely resemble those of Montaigne in his more disillusioned moments: 'forasmuch as discontent and vexation proceed of the estimation we have of the thing desired, which sharpen love, and set it afire. Whereas satiety begets distaste: It is a dull, blunt, weary and drowsy passion.' <sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is not satiety that is sought; the sexual act is here merely what Shakespeare calls, in Sonnet 129 , 'an expense of spirit.' To Flamineo, it is an enervating experience, dulling, rather than heightening the perceptions. The tone is jaded and comically reductive; the language of the worldly-wise courtier, rather than the language of courtly love. Flamineo draws attention to the conventional discourse of love in order to deflate it, dismissing the kind of 'ignorant ass or flattering knave' who might 'write sonnets to her eyes, or call her brow the snow of Ida, or ivory of Corinth, or compare

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Forker, *The Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) p.262

<sup>18</sup> Montaigne, *Essays II*. XV ed. Florio, p.336

her hair to the blackbird's bill, when 'tis liker the blackbird's feather.'(I.ii.115-9)His satire is as sharp as that of Mercutio but Bracciano lacks the youthful simplicity and idealism of Romeo. Flamineo's deflation does not enhance, by contrast, Bracciano's sincerity of feeling but cast doubts upon it. The focus of the cynicism is rather different from that of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* where the emphasis is on the susceptibility of women to rich gifts, high social status, and courtly reward. Here Flamineo's argument is, like that of Iago, based on a view of women as essentially lustful. He diminishes Bracciano's fears of rejection by devaluing what he hopes to gain, just as Iago devalues Desdemona in Roderigo's eyes.

Flamineo, like Vindice, has been compared to the traditional Vice figure. Juliet Dusinberre sees him as semi-allegorical, an archetype of theatrical villainy, rather than a credible, fully motivated character, a mouthpiece for the satirical deflation of love. She comments: 'No poetic passions can survive his nudging, Pandarus-like commentary.'<sup>19</sup> It is true that he appears, at times, to distance himself from events and from family bonds with a tone that is playful as well as cynical and detached. It is the tone he adopts when he dismisses, like Pandarus, the need for unnecessary preliminaries, and says to the lovers, 'This is all: be wise, I will make you friends and you shall go to bed together.' (I.ii. 119-20) His dismissal of Camillo is equally cynical and impersonal. He disparages the husband to the would-be lover, as Iago disparages Othello to Roderigo, though the effect is different in that we recognise that to call Othello 'an erring barbarian' and Desdemona a 'super-subtle Venetian' is a distortion of the truth. Flamineo's description of Camillo contains more ridicule. He makes him into a burlesque figure, the archetypal cuckold of comedy: 'So unable to please a woman that, like a Dutch Doublet all his back is shrunk into his breeches.' (I.ii-32-34). His language transforms the wronged husband into an object which is grotesque and ridiculous, whilst his blatant trickery of his credulous victim

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<sup>19</sup> Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (Houndmill: Macmillan, 1975) p.242

invites us to share in his contempt. The moral standpoint adopted by both Warwick and Vindice is lacking. Flamineo undergoes none of the soul-searching which accompanies their actions. 'Courtly reward' is established as a universal god in the opening lines of the play and the prosperity and preferment with which Vindice tries to tempt his sister are Flamineo's self-confessed goal. To some extent he seems to share the bawdy enjoyment of Pandarus, happy to act as voyeur as well as assisting the courtship process. Vittoria is introduced, like Cressida, with a reference that seems clearly ironic in view of Vittoria's willingness to deceive her husband, 'Come sister, darkness hides your blush'. (I.i.195) Flamineo follows this by a further generalisation about women: 'women are like curst dogs, civility keeps them tied all daytime but they are let loose at midnight, then they do good or most mischief.' (I.ii.201) Such a commentary does not necessarily reduce Flamineo to a one-dimensional figure. It may be that insistent generalisation of this kind is a means of avoiding the particular; just as the reduction of Camillo to a complaisant fool makes Vittoria's liaison with the Duke, and therefore, Flamineo's role as go-between, less humiliating. Our insight into Flamineo's feelings and motivation is developed in the course of the action in a way that suggests he is to be regarded as more than a theatrical type. The lovers' meeting which he stage-manages is given a further dimension by the presence of his mother, who watches unseen by any of the protagonists until she is unable to resist intervention. She witnesses Bracciano's gift of a precious jewel and the bawdy comment of Flamineo that accompanies it emphasising the physicality of the union and transforming the passionate into the salacious: 'That's better - she must wear his jewel lower.' (I.ii.227)

Flamineo is well aware of his role but the veneer of self-possession cracks when, having witnessed the attempts of those in authority to humiliate his sister in public trial, he hears Bracciano demand 'Where's that whore?' His broken speech testifies to the strength of his emotional reaction: 'That .. what do you call her?' (144) The accusation of his sister, not by moralising hypocrites whom he despises but by

her lover and his master, means humiliation for him. Bracciano defines his sister as a whore and him as a pimp: 'In, you pander.' Momentarily Flamineo is forced to question the nature of the 'honour' which Vittoria has acquired by her association with the Duke. The conflict which now flares up between master and servant, is a dramatic reversal of attitudes in which Flamineo is shaken out of his role and his feelings of anger and resentment emerge in his bitter questioning of his subservience: 'What me, my lord, am I your dog?' (IV.ii.49) He recollects his position with 'Come, I'll lead you to her' (IV.ii.47) and the two lovers meet once again, with Flamineo present throughout as commentator. He is of the scene and yet apart from it, though his comments, at first minimal, are increasingly intrusive. When Bracciano turns to Vittoria to say 'My dearest happiness? Vittoria? / What do you ail my love?' (IV. ii.130-1) his tone modulates into tenderness and Flamineo's interruption, like those of Pandarus, is an attempt to force the pace. His sister's response is a spirited 'Hence, you pander' and he in turn challenges her with 'Pander! Am I the author of your sin?' (IV.ii.136-7)

Flamineo's tone is relentlessly deflationary. His 'No oaths, for God's sake' (IV ii.147) interrupts the lovers' conversation, and his advice as to how to end the deadlock which hinders their reconciliation is a return to the satirical commentary on women which is characteristic of him throughout: 'Women are caught as you take tortoises, / She must be turn'd on her back.'(IV.ii.151-2) In Ralph Berry's words, 'his choric voice seems to fix the idea of sex as copulation.'<sup>20</sup> In this image, Vittoria is to be 'caught' and rendered helpless in a sexual reconciliation that centres on the exercise of male power. He draws Bracciano into a conspiracy of maleness: winning Vittoria is winning all women in a sexual game in which love and particularity are denied. The image is, at the same time reductive and ridiculous. Whereas Pandarus, though he translates the love of Troilus and Cressida into physical terms, takes pleasure in it, Flamineo's references to his sister frequently carry overtones of disgust. It is a

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<sup>20</sup> Ralph Berry, *The Art of John Webster* (Oxford:Clarendon,1972)p.84.

disgust which is inextricably linked with his resentment and awareness of his own degradation. The audience is asked to respond on more than one level as he moves from his position as shaper of the lovers' reconciliation to the savage satire of: 'Will any mercer take another's ware / When once 'tis tous'd and sullied?' (IV.ii. 156-7)

From a moral standpoint Flamineo's mockery underlines the fact that this began as an adulterous liaison and that a wife and a husband have been murdered. Flamineo could be seen as a relentless reminder that these lovers have no claims on our sympathy. It is not so simple. Bracciano's passion is as genuinely moving as Vittoria's, and Flamineo's reductive comment, though often amusing, is a denial of love in them, as in himself. Like Vindice, he is part of the corrupt world in which he moves. As the scene draws to a close, there are echoes of the world of comedy in Flamineo's plan that the lovers should escape to Padua, with Vittoria attired 'in a page's suit'. (IV ii.213) The romantic and satiric elements momentarily clash but we are brought back to the realities of courtly transaction as Bracciano promises advancement to Flamineo and a duchess's title to Vittoria. The last words go to Flamineo, with his fable of the crocodile. His interpretation of it: 'You are blemish'd in your fame, my lord cures it', (IV.ii.238-9) echoes the argument that Warwick planned to put to his daughter: 'His greatness may bear out the shame'. Unlike Warwick, he offers no answering qualification.

***'A good whore had saved all this..'***

In Fletcher's *Valentinian*, the 'brothers and sisters of the hold-door trade' come into their own. The heroine, Lucina, is presented to us through the eyes of no less than four of the Emperor's agents. In the opening scene, they discuss the ways in which her chastity has already been assailed by 'pretty baits.' Balbus describes a conversation in which he asked Lucina what she would do if the Emperor, 'grown mad with love should force her' (I.i.90) and she answered by pointing to a picture of Lucrece. This classical illusion makes it clear that Lucina is to be aligned with the

chaste heroines of the drama, as her name, like that of Castiza, indicates. It is the go-betweens who dominate the scene. They are self-confessed bawds, professionals, comparing the techniques of persuasion they have employed. Like Vindice with his 'thousand virgins', Proculus claims to have 'brought young loving things together / This two and thirty year.' Lucina's chastity is a subject for jesting incredulity; like Castiza, she is referred to as a ' phoenix'(I.i.81). In terms of the Emperor's court, she is 'chaster than cold camphire' (I. i.85); her eyes, instead of sending the conventional darts of love, are said to have 'shot vestal fire.'(92)

In the following scene, Fletcher introduces more of the Emperor's bawds. In this case it is women, rather than men, who are shown in the act of persuasion. Ardelia's argument takes the form of a series of rhetorical questions, relating to the nature of 'that idol', honour,

Can it renew your youth ? can it add wealth?  
That takes off wrinkles? can it draw men's eyes  
To gaze upon you in your age?

(I.ii.2-3 )

Clearly the answer is no, though it is not clear whether adultery is any more effective as a means of achieving the impossible. The main point of the argument is that beauty must be seen and that, for a woman, honour consists in admiration: 'The honour of a woman is in her praises ' (I.ii.11). To Lucina, Ardelia and Phorba are 'devils', ambassadors from hell, to use Warwick's words. She attacks them for disloyalty to their own sex, for betraying another woman for 'base rewards.' Like Castiza, she turns the weapon of irony against them: 'If ever in your life ye heard of goodness / Though many regions off, as men hear thunder...'. (I.ii.50-1). She builds up to a climax of condemnation of them as 'beasts.' Fletcher draws a contrast between Lucina's impassioned speech and the bawds' detachment, as Phorba replies with a touch of irony of her own:

Ye speak well, Lady,  
 A sign of fruitful education  
 If your religious zeal had wisdom with it.  
 (I.ii.61-3)

There is humour in the way that they discuss Lucina in her presence as though she were a marketable piece of goods. Here is a clash between two opposed value systems, like that in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Lucina represents an old-fashioned morality, an ideal of chastity, which contrasts with that of the court where, in Chilax's words, 'she is no woman / As women go now.' The sentiment is that expressed by Vindice in more overtly sexual terms: 'That woman is all male whom none may enter.' (I.i.43-44). Her modesty is remarkable, a source of comment for both male and female bawds. Phorba, like Pandarus, remarks on Lucina's blushes:

Do you mark, too,  
 (Which is a noble virtue) how she blushes  
 And what a flowing modesty runs through her  
 When we but name the Emperor?  
 (I.ii. 84-7)

Like the men in the opening scene, she and Ardelia seem to savour the idea of a modesty which is not 'cold', like chastity, but suggestive of human warmth and response. There is also the suggestion, echoed in Chiron's description of Lucina's blushing as 'the holiest thing to look upon', that reluctance can be all the more attractive to the seducer.

The arguments by which Phorba and Ardelia attempt to persuade Lucina are not without substance. They shift their ground from an appeal to her vanity and attempt to flatter her as the potential saviour of the state, able to dissuade Valentinian from his 'wild flying courses.' (I.iii.67) All this is done, not directly but through a

conversation that Lucina is intended to hear. Their persistence is almost comic, as they try to turn even her anger into a focus for compliment. Their simpering flattery contrasts sharply with her bitter and insulting attack on them. She recognises them for what they are: 'Ye are your purses' agents' (I.106) and declares: 'that price / You sell the chastity of modest wives at / Run to diseases with your bones.' (I.ii.139-141) Her words sharply define the corruption which overshadows the opening scenes of the play and remind us of the legacy which Pandarus bequeaths to his 'brethren' in the Epilogue to *Troilus and Cressida*. She is spirited in her response, reminding her tormentors:

I have a noble husband,  
 (Pray tell him that too), yet a noble name  
 A noble family, and, at last, a conscience.'  
 (I. ii.161-2)

The parenthesis underlines her ironic politeness of address; the word 'noble' is reiterated to underline the extent of the Emperor's ignobility and the nature of the obstacles which stand in his way. The deliberate placing of 'a conscience' as the 'last' of reasons, underlines, rather than minimises its importance and its implied absence in Valentinian himself. The scene does not close on this high note of moral indignation, however, since the bawds are allowed to have the last word. Their response adds a note of bathos as they commiserate on their lack of success and Phorba complains 'She has almost spoil'd our trade.' (I.ii. 169) The juxtaposition of seemingly rigid and outdated notions of chastity and honour with their more accommodating view of the world is effectively made when Lucina advises them: 'Ye have liv'd the shame of women, die the better. (I.ii.164) Left alone with her partner, Phorba asks: 'What's to do now?' and Ardelia replies: 'Ev'n as she said, to die; For there's no living here, and women thus,/ I am sure, for us two.' (I.ii.165-7) Dying is the time-honoured response of the chaste woman whose virtue is under siege: the Countess of Salisbury is willing to die rather than submit to the king; Antonio's wife, in *The Revenger's Tragedy* kills herself after she has been dishonoured by the duke's

son; Lucina commits suicide, having been raped by the emperor. When Ardelia talks of dying because 'there's no living here' the word 'living' carries a double meaning and it is living as livelihood which has priority here. It is concern for their livelihood which strengthens the bawds in their determination not to be thwarted by the 'monster' that is Lucina, as they reassure themselves: 'There is a certain season, if we hit, / That women may be rid without a bit.' (I. ii.176-7)

The cosy, almost conversational style of the bawds of both sexes has the effect of minimising the unpleasantness of their task. It is a task taken for granted rather than questioned; they exhibit no moral indignation, like that of Warwick or Vindice. If anyone seems to protest too much, it is Lucina herself. Her virtue is uncompromising and seemingly unassailable. Whereas the Countess of Salisbury and Castiza successfully resist seduction, Lucina is raped, like her Roman ancestor, Lucretia, in an act of violence which seems out of place in this world in which chastity, according to the bawds, is outmoded. As Licinius comments afterwards: 'A good whore/ had sav'd all this, and happily as wholesome.' (III. i. 20-1) The build-up to the event is long-drawn out and carefully orchestrated. Whilst Middleton portrays Vindice as trying to tempt his sister with evocative descriptions of 'the pleasures of the palace', Fletcher lays them out before Lucina, and the audience, at first hand, in a way that invites audience complicity as well as indignation.

Lucina's journey of temptation is actual, not spiritual. It is planned with almost military precision by Valentinian's agents, timing being of the essence. Valentinian himself is advised to 'retire' strategically, to avoid a 'disputation /'Tween frozen conscience and hot burning will.' (*The Rape of Lucrece* 1. 247) The emphasis is on suspense, as Licinius announces 'She enters' (II. iv. 19) and, later, 'She is coming up the stairs. Now the music; / And as that stirs her, let's set on. Perfumes there!' (II.v. 1-2) The aim is to assault Lucina's senses, whilst at the same time, having an assortment of jewels available to offer further inducement. The persuasion of Lucina works on two levels: eroticism and self-interest. The eroticism is divorced

from love and courtship, on a personal level, but employed as a cynical manoeuvre to assault the senses of what was regarded as the weaker sex. The first song which is performed for her emphasizes the plucking of flowers and the tasting of fruit. The chorus, 'Ladies, if not pluck'd we die' is the typical Ovidian refrain, based on the idea of *carpe diem*. The second contains a series of classical references to the activities of Jupiter: the rape of Danae, of Europa and Leda.. The overall theme is sexual experience, and the determination of men to enjoy it. The Emperor is sensed as a threatening presence; although unable to convert himself, like Jupiter, into a bull or a shower of gold, his power disturbingly underlies the whole elaborate scheme of seduction.

The contrast between the insistent civility and servility of the bawds and the uncompromising tone of Lucina gives an added intensity to the scene. The heroic is set against the base and the corrupt. Lucina holds her own verbally in response to Proculus' whispered comments, but she is forced to adopt the rhetoric of the chaste matron: 'I'll rather find my grave.' (II.v.71) Dramatically she has the ascendancy but the audience is, all the time, conscious, as she moves from one apartment to another in this Chinese box of a palace, that the Emperor is at the centre. Her movement is, in itself, unsettling and perhaps symbolic; she is not allowed to stand her ground and debate here. though her integrity is repeatedly affirmed in her response to the songs, the perfumed atmosphere and the insistent whispering voices of temptation. For instance, when a curtain is drawn on a casket of jewels, spread before her for the taking, the other women show immediate interest but Lucina's response is to reject them. 'Nay, you may draw the curtain; I have seen 'em / But none worth half my honesty.' (II.v.83-4) Her refusal to submit, expressed again in terms of her death 'The gods shall kill me first!' is countered by Licinius' s 'There's better dying / I th'emperor's arms, go to!' ( II. v. 89-90). The innuendo is obvious but it has the effect of diminishing the heroic and making it seem almost humorous. The comic

effect is heightened by the gestures of Phorba and Ardelia as they appear, strewing rushes on the floor.

Fletcher, like Middleton, brings together a world of traditional values and a world in which chastity is not only outmoded but ridiculous; where everything has a price. He does not state a moral, but the enactment of this scene of seduction gives rise to a complex response. Ardelia's question 'How did you find your way to court?' reflects, not on the practicalities of Lucina's journey, but on the court itself and the incongruity of Lucina's presence there. To Ardelia, it is 'a paradise to live in' but, as Lucina points out, it is only a paradise to those who think solely in terms of pleasure. (II.v.109-110) The climax of Lucina's progress through the palace is her encounter with Valentinian. Appropriately, it is Chilax and Balbus who introduce the scene, with an incongruous juxtaposition of 'soft music' and crude summing-up of the situation: 'The women by this time are worming of her; / If she can hold out them, the emperor / Takes her to task. He has her. Hark, the music.' (II. vi. 2-4) Lucina maintains her resistance with 'Believe me, I shall never make a whore.' (II.vi. 11) Fletcher takes us to the edge of suspense, allowing Lucina two speeches in which she tries to defend her honour. The outcome is not in doubt when we hear Valentinian's aside, 'I dare not do it here.' (II. vi. 34).

It is interesting that it is the four male agents who report back the rape to us. Chilax's words express an awareness of moral responsibility as he admits 'If there be any justice, we are villains, / And must be so rewarded' (III.i.2-3) Balbus's viewpoint is more pragmatic; for him, ' 'tis no time now to repent it.' (4) There is general agreement that Valentinian might have been better advised to chose one of 'those / That know the mystery, and are best able / To play a game with judgement.' (III.i.11-13). This is, of course, after the event; one in which they played their part with enthusiasm. Any ambivalence that might exist about the nature of women is resolved in their banter: women either know 'the game', or they are 'cold virtue.' Proculus's 'Why should not women be as free as we are?' (III.i.24) is an interesting

question but it is essentially rhetorical. Free to be what, exactly, is not defined. To play the game without being caught? Or to be chaste without being ridiculed? His own answer is that women are free, but 'not in open.' Unfortunately it is not his flexible interpretations of human behaviour but the absolute standards of Maximus and Lucina herself, that result in the tragic climax of Act III. Like Vindice's Gloriana, she is a victim of lust. Her self-imposed punishment is to enact the role of Lucretia and kill herself.

The agents of *Valentinian* are not central characters in the play but their contribution to its tragic events is made clear. In a sense, like the Nurse, they represent the anti-heroic, everyday world, a world which is, by no means, 'well lost for love.' Instead of ideals, for them there is only service and reward. Their service does not always bring respect. Pandarus, in the Epilogue to *Troilus and Cressida*, sums up the plight of the 'poor agent despised.' In a direct address to the audience, he continues 'O traitors and bawds, how earnestly you are set a work and how ill-requited. Why should our endeavour be so desired and the performance so loathed?' (Epi.1.7-8) The question goes to the heart of the confusion of values which surrounds the area of love and sexuality. Troilus projects his loathing of Cressida's betrayal onto Pandarus just as Bracciano, in the House of Convertites, projects his anger onto Flamineo. Flamineo's role in the drama, of course, goes beyond that of go-between; he is far more than the 'pander' contemptuously described by the Duke. Like Vindice, he is central to the tragic events of the play. Like Vindice he plays a part but without adopting a named persona. Vindice is able to use the persona of Piato to deflect some of the contempt associated with his role. In a dramatic tour de force, he turns the role on its head: corrupter of virtue becomes agent of retribution. He exploits his position as confidant and procurer of women in order to achieve his vengeance.

The examples discussed, taken chronologically, could be seen to suggest a growing cynicism in the drama and in the society of which it forms a part.

Compared with the figure of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and the Earl of Warwick in *Edward III*, though at opposite ends of the aristocratic scale, are uncomplicated in their attitudes: the Nurse representing the conventional, down-to-earth philosophy which denies the heroic; Warwick using for his point of reference, a heroic ideal of chastity, and death before dishonour. Romeo and Juliet transcend the society in which they live by dying for their love and King Edward, turning his back on temptation, reverts to a more chivalric model of kingship. Vindice and Flamineo are products of a world in which values are being questioned, challenged or despised: although love is still, at times, portrayed in positive terms, these cynical interpreters of human behaviour draw attention to the idea of sexuality as appetite, and woman as commodity. Their dramatic interest, like that of the bawds in *Valentinian*, lies precisely in the essential 'doubleness' of their role, as observers and as participants.

The question of values arises for all go-betweens, in that they are conducting a transaction of sorts. What price virginity, or chaste virtue? To Juliet's Nurse, it is what makes her young mistress a desirable party in marriage, a state to be safeguarded and protected against exploitation. Assured of the mutuality of Romeo's and Juliet's love, and of Romeo's honourable intentions, she is able, initially, to accept and encourage their alliance. For Troilus and Cressida, there is no marriage. Cressida herself offers a cynical commentary which may reflect her true feelings, or simply echo the 'wisdom' of her world: 'Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.' (I. ii. 290) Pandarus refers to Troilus as a 'thing' and debases the lovers' meeting into a purely sexual encounter. Love is, as it is for Iago, 'merely a lust of the blood.' (I.iii.333) Implicit in the negotiations of Pandarus and more explicit in those of Vindice, Flamineo and Valentinian's agents, is a dual concept of women: as virtuous maidens or wives, and as whores. Cressida exemplifies both sets of expectations. Idealised by Troilus and vilified by Ulysses, she is 'changed' through her relationship with Troilus and literally 'changed' for Antenor. We see her transformed, through

her own actions and through the language of those who comment on her, from a 'pearl' beyond price to one of the 'daughters of the game.' (IV.v.63) In the court worlds created by Middleton, Webster and Fletcher, virtue is something to be desired, tested and challenged. The more modest the appearance of a woman, the more she is to be prized as an object for seduction. The go-between is the tester, the purveyor of rich gifts, the speaker of fine words on the seducer's behalf. Virtue is admirable, yet inconvenient; a stumbling block to the agent's preferment. For the agent can also be regarded as victim to a society where power is, paradoxically, able to confer honour in exchange for abusing it.

## CHAPTER SIX

## 'LINES PARALLEL THAT NEVER MEET'..

*'Men having autorite' and 'mirrors of rare chastitie'..*

The testing of virtue is given a more emblematic quality in the dramatisation of the encounter between the chaste maid or matron, and the tyrannical ruler. If the conventions of Petrarchanism make a man into a woman's slave, the unequal relationship between male ruler and female subject represents a reversal of those positions. The confrontation allows the dramatist to polarise two extremes of human sexuality: chastity and lust. In the conventional treatment of such an encounter it is the tyrant who embodies lust and the virtuous heroine who represents chastity. The juxtaposition of a woman determined to protect her honour, and a man driven by lust to possess her, is given additional impact by the power relationship that exists between them: he is able to command if persuasion fails, and to enforce his commands, and she, as his subject, owes him obedience. The script for seduction is written in terms of Petrarchan admiration but it is overshadowed by the competing emotions of desire and guilt. The testing of virtue and its triumph over vice is played out in this battle of the sexes in which the odds are stacked against the woman, who, nevertheless, rather than demonstrating her frailty, upholds an ideal standard of conduct against which unruly vice can be measured.

It could be concluded, by the amount of cynical commentary on the subject, that by 1614, the mystique of chastity, like the mystique of honour, was fading. Given the irreverent remarks of characters from Lucio, in *Measure For Measure* to the bawds in *Valentinian*, we might ask why this particular theme retained its appeal. Barnaby Rich comments satirically in *The Honestie of This Age* (1612):

Is this not a happy age for women. Menne have manie  
 faults whereby to taynt their credites; there is no  
 imprefection in a woman but that of her bodie, and who  
 is able to prove that? <sup>1</sup>

Satirical or not, the question of proving the 'imprefection' of a woman's body remained a recurring theme in the drama of the period. The competing discourses of Petrarchan love and desire; of sexuality and sin are centred on the ruler, or governor who struggles with feelings he may despise in himself. The woman who is the object of his desires is the epitome of a chaste virtue which is increasingly referred to as rare.

It may be concluded that an awareness of changing values in society, if anything, intensifies interest in the conflict between the ideal and the actual. The confrontation between tyrant and lady focuses on the temptation of both man and woman. The tyrant, with varying degrees of success, struggles with his lust; the lady resists him. The encounter is, amongst other things, an acting out of the deep-rooted ambivalence which attaches to sexuality in the period and expresses itself in the conflict between reason and will. In this variation on the theme, male desire, expressed as love, overcomes reason and restraint. It is aroused, not by deliberate temptation on the part of a woman but by her unassailable virtue. Instead of inspiring him to good, in the tradition of Petrarchanism, it awakens feelings of lust; in other words, according to contemporary belief, virtue does not lead him up the ladder to transcendence but leaves him on a base and earthly level. The woman who is the object of his desire, like the chaste mistress of the sonnets, repulses him. Although images of sexually rapacious women abound in Renaissance drama, the issue here centres on woman's resistance.

The extreme opposition of chastity and lust was, in part, attributable to the idealisation of marriage. Lust had always been one of the seven deadly sins but the

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<sup>1</sup> Barnaby Rich *The Honestie of This Age* ed. Peter Cunningham, Percy Society Reprints II (London, 1844) p.16

*Sermon Against Whoredom and Adultery* gave it prominence as the root of all evil in society<sup>2</sup>. At the same time an increased divergence was perceived between real life and the rules laid down by moralists. The growth of wealth at the upper levels of society in particular enabled men and women to enjoy themselves in ways which the ascetics would have condemned as an indulgence of the flesh. The dramatic tension created by these oppositions is intensified by the clash of value systems, as the discussion of *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the previous chapter demonstrates. Even plays as disparate as Lyly's courtly comedies and Middleton's satiric versions of city life acknowledge the gap between ideals of conduct and human fallibility. The later playwrights draw attention to the discrepancy between a golden age of virtue and a corrupt present. The concept of the ideal ruler is, arguably, as far removed from reality as that of the ideal woman. In each, however, supreme goodness, by tradition, involved restraint and denial of the flesh. To rule a country justly and effectively, a man must also have control of his 'little state of man.' Elyot's influential work *The Governour* emphasises the need for the virtues of abstinence and continence 'specially in men hauing autoritie.'<sup>3</sup> He defines continence as 'refrayning or forbering the act of carnall pleasure, where unto a man is feruently meued, or is at libertie to have it' ... a mark of great virtue and wisdom, since nothing 'so sharpely assaileth a mannes mynde as do the carnall affection (called by the folowers thereof) love.'<sup>4</sup> Continence is 'a uertue whiche kepeth the pleasaunt appetite of man under the yoke of reason.'<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Breton's description of the bad ruler is, similarly, characterised by his self-indulgence. Such a man 'triumpheth' in the shame of chaste women, 'Knowes no God but makes an Idoll of Nature, and useth reason but to the ruine of sense: his

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Four

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot *The Governour*, first publ. 1531; this edition, London (Dent & Sons, 1937) p.250

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.10

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.246

care is but his will, his pleasure but his ease, his exercise but sinne.' <sup>6</sup> The emphasis on restraint is more often directed at women: continence is not usually listed as one of man's attributes. In the case of the tyrant, there is direct political correlation, however, as Shakespeare reminds us in *Macbeth* when Malcolm, trying to give the impression to Macduff that he is unfit to rule, talks of his 'voluptuousness' and his incontinent desire. (IV.iii.64-5)

The chaste maid, or matron who is forced to confront appetite personified, represents a tradition which derives from classical and traditional sources, and their literary derivations. The figure of Lucretia was especially popular. Versions of her story were available in Livy, Ovid and Plutarch, as well as Boccaccio, Chaucer, Bandello and Painter. Ballads on the subject were entered in *The Stationers Register* in 1568 and 1569 and both Shakespeare and Middleton wrote poems based on Lucrece's story. Also popular was Virginia, who died a virgin martyr at her father's hands. Like the virtuous, slandered figure of Susannah, these women provided models to which women were encouraged, in conduct books of the period, to aspire. Although the circumstances of the biblical and ancient Roman heroines might be distanced from those of the young lady of the Renaissance, the message that death was preferable to dishonour was a means of underlining the importance of chastity in a woman. There were historical examples closer to home, like Matilda and the Countess of Salisbury. Their importance lies in their exemplary conduct, summed up by Michael Drayton in the dedication to his poem, *Matilda*, published in 1594.

A mirror of so rare chastitie, as neither the fayre speeches,  
nor rich rewards of a King, nor death it selfe, could ever remove  
from her owne chast thoughts: or from that due regard which  
she had of her never-stained honour.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Breton, 'The Good and the Badde', or 'Descriptions of the Worthies and Unworthies of this Age' first pub. 1616, in *The Workes in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton* ed. the Rev. Alexander B. Grossart (New York: AMS Press, 1967) p.5

<sup>7</sup> Michael Drayton, *Works: Tercentenary Edition* ed. J. William Hebel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1931)

Like the biblical and Roman heroines, Matilda was a member of the illustrious company of what Thomas Salter, in his *Mirrhoe of Modestie* called 'godly and virtuous ladies.'<sup>8</sup>

The gap between the ideal and the reality is indicated in his advice to wise matrons that they should 'reade, or cause [their] maidens to reade' the lives of these worthy ladies instead of 'bookes, ballades, songes, sonnettes, and ditties of dalliance.' These were not only readily available, as Middleton makes clear in *A Mad World My Masters* but popular. Interest in these mirrors of 'rare chastitie' is testament to a concern with female virtue which did not diminish in proportion to its perceived rarity<sup>9</sup>. Although celibacy in itself was no longer an ideal mode of existence, the purity of wives and daughters reflected on their male relatives. If a woman erred, she brought shame on her husband: in the area of sexual behaviour, male and female honour were inextricably linked, as the examples in Chapters Three and Four make clear. The depiction of women as chaste and constant, resistant to all manner of persuasion, threat and even trickery was complimentary to the female members of the audience and reassuring to the male.

The period from 1564 to 1614 (the dates of *Apus and Virginia* and *Valentinian*) saw wide-ranging political and social changes, as well as changes in literary convention, but although there are differences in style and presentation, early and late versions of the same story have much in common. Some of those similarities and differences have been demonstrated in the discussion of *Edward III* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the preceding chapter. Such encounters are popular in plays

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Salter *A Mirrhoe mete for all Mothers, Matrons and Maidens entitled the Mirrhoe of Modestie*: (1579) reprinted in *Old English Literature: vol I*, ed. J.P. Collier (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1996) p. 35

<sup>9</sup> Note the references to these exemplary women by the Chorus in *Tancred and Gismund*: see Chapter Two

throughout the period. Richard Bower's *Apus and Virginia* (1562) has a counterpart in Webster's version of the story (1625); George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (unacted, published in 1578), is a source for Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604). The tragic theme of love obstructed by desire is explored in Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda* (c.1588) and Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611).

Heywood produced his *Rape of Lucrece* in 1607 and Fletcher presented a variation on this theme in *Valentinian* (1614). The *Apus* of 1564 and the *Appius* of 1625 both dress up their lust in images of love and, inspired by Virginia's beauty, seek to make her their slave. Whetstone's *Promos* and Shakespeare's *Angelo* are each driven by their desire for a virtuous woman to make an unholy bargain; Sextus Tarquin and *Valentinian* resort to rape. The men are, alike, governed by a lust which is, paradoxically, inspired by goodness, into actions which conflict with the dignity of their public roles. The women are united in their determination to resist, conforming to an ideal of womanhood which equates chastity and goodness. As John Luis Vives, in his *Instruction of a Christian Woman* puts it, unchastity in a woman is 'like as in a man, if he lack all that he should have. For in a woman the honesty is in stead of all.'<sup>10</sup> Once overcome, by trickery, in the case of *Cassandra*, or by force, in the case of *Lucina*, these icons of womanhood choose death rather than dishonour. In comparison with the men, they are inflexible, models of virtue. The portrayal of the traditional debate between the soul and the body centres primarily on the male desire and the struggle to control the appetite. In the words of Pico della Mirandola, if a man cultivates 'the seeds of sensation, he will grow into a brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* in Joan Larsen Klein, ed. *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1992), p.107

<sup>11</sup> Pico Della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. by Charles Glenn Wallis (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, repr. 1965) p.5

This debate is enacted within the conscience of rulers like Apius, Promos, Soliman, Angelo and the Tyrant in Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. For the women, the focus is different. Although women were widely held to be inferior to men in their powers of reasoning, and to possess a strong sexual appetite, in this type of encounter, they hold the moral, and sometimes the intellectual high ground. It is significant that we are often reminded that these are the exceptions to their sex: to borrow Marston's phrase, 'wonders of women'. As a result, the dilemma that they face does not take the form of a struggle against the temptation to sin but rather, against the consequences of that sin. Faced with the threat of dishonour, the exemplary woman has to take into account the effect of what she, and her would-be seducer, perceive as a pollution of the body, on her immortal soul and to weigh up, against that, the alternative offered by death. As Geoffrey Fenton writes of the 'patternes of chastetye' in his *Tragicall Discourses*, dedicated to Lady Mary Sidney, they 'have not doubted rather to reappose a felicitye in the extreme panges of death then to fall by anye violent force into the daunger of the fleshlye ennemye to theyr honour.'<sup>12</sup> The icon of the beautiful woman embracing death to avoid, or to atone for, dishonour persists throughout the period.

***'Do what I can, no reason cooles desire'.***

The language of Petrarchan imagery, with its use of paradox, is the ideal vehicle for the expression of the conflict between reason and will. This is demonstrated most clearly in earlier plays like *Apilus and Virginia* and *Promos and Cassandra*. Promos informs us of his desire in the following terms:

Do what I can, no reason cooles desire,  
The more I strive my fond affectes to tame:  
The hotter (oh) I feele a burning fire.

(III. i. 1-3)

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<sup>12</sup> I.8. 1567 repr. in *Tudor Translations*, gen ed. W.E. Henley (London, 1898; rpr New York, 1967).

Reason and desire are placed in opposition, desire being represented as an unruly force that 'doth affraye ' the wits. There is a tension between desire and the need to control it; and between pleasure and pain, which are essential aspects of the dualism which pervades the language of love. The opposite states of passion and reason are expressed here in concrete images of heat and cold. The imagery is conventional but its familiarity to the contemporary audience must, rather than robbing it of meaning, have emphasized the widely acknowledged concept of love as a contrary state of emotions. Love is like a fever:

Even so in Love, we freese through chilling feare,  
When as our hartes doth frye with hote desire;  
(III.i.10-11 ).

It is an analysis concerned less with the object of love than with its effects on the lover. In a similar way, Apius, though he pays tribute to Virginia's beauty, is preoccupied with the effects of his own obsession. Desire overcomes his reason and overthrows the natural hierarchy of the body. The inability to govern the emotions is directly related to the wider issues of government. In Apius's eyes, his status as ' the princelest Judge, that raigneth under sonne' is undermined and he admits:

now my force is done;  
I rule no more, but ruled am I, I do not Judge but am Judged  
By beuty of Virginia, my wisdome all is trudged.  
(III.413-416)

A similar feeling is expressed more succinctly by Soliman, in Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*. Confronted by his ungovernable feelings for his beautiful captive, Perseda, he demands:

What should he doe with crowne and Emperie  
That cannot governe private fond affections?

(IV.1.145-6)

Shakespeare's Angelo is faced with the same situation, though he expresses himself, not so much in terms of a moral judgement, but of a complex sense of loss, in which substance is exchanged for insubstantiality.' The state whereon I studied / Is like a good thing, being oft read, Grown sere and tedious.' (II.iv.7-9) The gravity on which he prided himself might be exchanged for a feather, 'an idle plume / which the air beats in vain.'

The struggle with what Garnier calls 'sencelesse love' (Antonie, III.1149), in the form of a desire which undermines the functioning of the individual in the public, as well as the private sphere, is expressed in a dualistic attitude towards that desire. Love, to Soliman, is joy; a matter of 'sweete lippes', 'Phoebus's radiant beams', even 'Heaven'; yet, as sexual desire, it is also a taint, an 'uncleanness', a 'sin.' He moves uneasily from Petrarchan idealisation to passion, followed by self-disgust. His addresses to Perseda resemble the sonnet's blazon:

Faire lockes, resembling Phoebus radiant beames;  
Smooth forehead, like the table of high Iove;  
Small, pensild eye browes, like two glorious rainbowes,  
Quick lampelike eyes, like heavens two brightest orbes;  
Lips of pure Corall, breathing Ambrosie ...

(IV.1. 77-81)

The praise is conventional but the voyeuristic quality of this catalogue of delights is emphasized by Perseda's presence on stage as an object of desire. The language of admiration is given an erotic quality, as the static is brought to life by the words 'quick' and 'breathing', suggesting movement. Soliman himself moves from celestial to more earthly preoccupations; from 'heaven's brightest orbes,' to 'the Elysian shades, / Wher under couert lyes the fount of pleasure / Which thoughts may guess but tongue

must not profane.' (85-7) . The imagery follows the path from adulation to lust. It is only when he has finished paying tribute to Perseda that he invites her to respond, addressing her as 'faire Virgin,' and declaring his love for her. It is a moment which illustrates a complex range of responses to sexuality. Beauty and virginity are, it seems, inseparable; and Soliman addresses Perseda's virginity with as much reverence as her beauty. He describes his feelings for her in seemingly contradictory terms: 'Love never tainted Soliman till now.' (IV.i.89) The use of the word 'tainted' underlines the association of love with sexuality and sexuality with sin. Although Soliman paints an attractive picture of desire, compared with Apius, in terms which resemble the erotic poetry of the period, it is a desire which is shadowed by guilt and self-disgust.

In *Measure For Measure* the ambivalence that attaches to love and sexuality pervades the whole play. Angelo is appointed to his role as Deputy because of his adherence to those principles of 'continencie' and 'abstinence' advocated by Elyot. The application of these idealistic principles to the process of government is shown to be as problematic as their application to the individual. The attempt to enforce a law prohibiting sexual intercourse outside marriage underlines the whole complex area of human sexuality. The clumsy machinery of the judicial process is, it appears, incapable of differentiating between the anticipation by Claudio and Juliet of their marriage vows, and the flourishing trade of the Venetian brothels. It is a distinction which, as we have seen, some moralists also failed to make. In *Measure For Measure*, Shakespeare insists on that difference. To add to the play's many ironies, both Lucio and Angelo, who represent opposite ends of the moral spectrum, fail to appreciate it. It is Lucio who speaks in positive terms of Juliet's pregnancy, using the natural imagery of 'blossoming time/ That from the seedness the bare fallow brings / To teeming foison' (I.iv.40-42) This acceptance of human sexuality also extends to promiscuity: Lucio does not distinguish between the close relationship of two lovers and the trade in sex operated by Mistress Overdone when he pleads for 'a little more

lenity to lechery'(II.i.363) Similarly, Angelo appears not to distinguish in kind between the personal and private 'sin' committed by Claudio and the unashamedly public and commercial operation of the brothels.

*'Dost thou desire her foully for those things that make her good?'*

Angelo's values combine those of the Renaissance good governor with those of the Puritan reformist. Unlike some of the rulers discussed in this chapter, he is also, at the outset of the play, regarded as a good man. Elevated to a position of power, he is given the opportunity of making public application of his principles by his stringent application of the law to areas of public morality. According to Lucio, he has followed time-honoured methods of subduing will to reason, by developing his mind through study, and mortifying the flesh through fasting. He is:

One who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense,  
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind, study and fast.

(I.iv. 55)

Angelo's repression of 'the motions of the sense' is contrasted with Claudio's susceptibility: what Lucio calls his 'natural edge', but he has qualities in common with Claudio's sister. Like Angelo, Isabella herself is characterised by a quality of asceticism which sets her apart from other characters in the play. To Lucio, she is

... a thing enskied and sainted  
By your renouncement an immortal spirit  
And to be talked with in sincerity,  
As with a saint.

(I.iv.33-36)

Both Angelo and Isabella exalt the traditional virtues of abstinence which are continually mocked by the commentary of Lucio, to whom a sexual encounter is, on

the one hand, a natural act like eating or drinking, but on the other, merely 'a game of tick-tack.'

The meeting of Angelo and Isabella closely resembles that of Promos and Cassandra. In each case the women plead for their brothers' lives and it is their virtuous appearance which inspires lust in the men to whom they kneel. Promos expresses his response to Cassandra in conventional words: her modesty attracts him but her looks 'cut off fond suites with chast disdain.' This Petrarchan paradox is given greater resonance in *Measure for Measure* by the emphasis Shakespeare places on Angelo's purity and Isabella's status as a novice. The particular irony of the play lies in the fact that Isabella, a novice who has committed herself to a life of chastity is placed in a position where she must defend a sexual act committed out of wedlock. Throughout the scene, as Isabella woos Angelo in the name of mercy, Lucio urges her to greater warmth: 'touch him, that's the vein.' Her plea takes on an intimate quality:

Go to your bosom,  
 Knock there and ask your heart what it doth know  
 That's like my brother's fault. If it confess  
 A natural guiltiness, such as is his,  
 Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue  
 Against my brother's life.

(II.ii.140-145)

Isabella's words, which recall the words of Christ spoken to those about to punish the woman taken in adultery, ironically have the effect of arousing 'a natural guiltiness' in Angelo. It is only at the end of the scene that the effect is made clear. Isabella's argument has appealed, not to his sense but to his senses. 'She speaks, and 'tis / Such sense that my sense breeds with it'. (II.ii.143-4)

The battle between the demands of 'sense' and reason is given clear expression in *Aprius and Virginia*, where Aprius' soul-searching is expressed in terms of a division in his mind.

how am I devided ?

Two states of my life, from me are now glided,  
 For Conscience he pricketh me contempned  
 And Justice saith, Judgement wold have me condemned.

(III. 501-4)

The debate is externalised, in a tradition that derives from the morality plays, by the appearance of Conscience bearing a lamp and Justice, a sword. The issues for Appius are clear-cut. Conscience threatens him with 'fier eternal' that will destroy his soul. It is Haphazard, the Vice, who persuades him to ignore these warnings, though Conscience is not easily quelled and remains active throughout. The conflict is expressed in more complex terms in *Soliman and Perseda*. In Soliman the moral struggle is expressed in alternate modes of behaviour, and corresponding decisions. Soliman is torn between what he calls love, and revulsion at his own sexuality. Overcome by desire, he exerts his power over his captive: 'She is my vassail and I will commaund.' (IV.i.102) He even takes on the role of executioner himself, ordering Perseda to kneel down and 'receive the stroke of death.' Yet for Soliman, death is more like the stroke of a lover. The ritualistic covering of Perseda's face has, perversely, the opposite effect of making him more aware of her body as a focus of desire. Her lips are left uncovered; in adjusting the covering, Brusus reveals her neck. In each case, Soliman is moved by the sight to poetry. It is poetry which enhances the erotic quality of the scene. When Brusus tells his master, 'Now she is all covered, my lord,' Soliman replies 'Why now at last she dyes.'(IV.i.125-6) The familiar Renaissance pun might well have sexual resonance for the audience but Soliman, no longer able to be moved by the sight of Perseda responds to the 'musick' of her voice as she cries out 'O Christ, receive my soul.' (127) The very 'musick' which is part of the appeal to his senses becomes a reminder of the spiritual; it is Soliman's soul which is in danger. Soliman moves from one impulse to another,

driven by passion, then consumed by remorse. Having relented in his pursuit of Perseda and given his blessing to her and her lover, Erastus, he tortures himself with jealousy. Yet, resolved, once again, to possess Perseda, he turns upon himself in bitter accusation: 'O uniuſt Soliman: O wicked time, /Where filthie luſt muſt murder honeſt love.' (V.ii.90-91) The 'honeſt love' is that of Erastus, the 'filthie luſt', his own.

What Soliman calls 'filthie luſt' is, to Angelo, 'foul deſire.' Whiſt Promos, conſcious, like Soliman, of his own wrongdoing juſtifies it by means of the cliches of Petrarchan courtſhip, Angelo talks of his 'ſenſual race' and the 'evil' of his 'conception.' Promos approaches Cassandra like a lover, pleading:

That maugre wit, I turne my thoughts as blynd affections move,  
And quite ſubdude by Cupids might, neede makes me ſue for grace,  
To thee, Cassandra, which doeſt holde my freedome in a lace,  
Yeelde to my will, and then commaunde, even what thou wilt of mee,  
Thy brothers life and all that elſe may with thy liking gree.

(III.ii)

He admits to being overcome by love, subdued by the power of Cupid and in ſervitude to his fair miſtreſs. Love is perceived as a ſurrender to a greater power, a power which places him in the poſition of the courtly lover who muſt 'ſue for grace' to his miſtreſs. He bids her yield to him that ſhe may command. There are no Cupids in Angelo's univerſe. His concept of love is expreſſed more in terms of ſin than ſenſuality. Diſguſt at his own body's betrayal pervades his ſpeech. His revulſion from the 'filthy vices' which he aſſociates with Claudio (II.iv.42) is an indication of his reſſeſſion of his own ſexual feelings: as the Duke puts it, he 'ſcarce confeſſes that his blood flows.' (I.iii.51-3)

The conflict between fleſh and ſpirit is given detailed expoſition in the ſcenes of Angelo's temptation. The play on the word 'ſenſe' underlines the conflict between reaſon and emotion in Angelo's mind. Alone, he ſpeaks in broken ſentences that

betray his confusion. Like Promos, he is moved by the quality of goodness in Isabella but questions the effect of goodness in its ability to inspire lust. The questions he asks about desire and temptation go to the heart of the conflicting discourses on the nature of love.

Is it her fault or mine?  
 The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?  
 Not she, nor doth she tempt: but 'tis I  
 That, lying by the violet in the sun,  
 Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,  
 Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be  
 That modesty may more betray our sense  
 Than woman's lightness? having waste ground enough,  
 Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary,  
 And pitch our evils there? O fie, fie, fie!  
 What dost thou or what art thou, Angelo?  
 Dost thou desire her foully for those things  
 That make her good?

(II. ii. 167-171)

Angelo refuses to displace, like the misogynist, his own guilt onto Isabella. She has not sinned, nor has she tempted him. The compressed syntax and the ambiguous placing of the word corrupt, suggest that he is both corrupted and corrupter. The images are not developed but set side by side. Angelo's language of desire is closely identified with sin and self-loathing; the legacy of the mediaeval contempt of the flesh is brought out vividly by the use of the word 'carrion.' Virtue, instead of inspiring to goodness, is able to pervert it. The contrast between the feelings Angelo perceives as base and their object is brought out by his description of Isabella as 'the sanctuary.' Yet in his bitter protest: ' Oh cunning enemy that, to catch a saint,/ With saints dost bait thy hook.' (II.ii.184-5) he identifies with her. He is a saint, as she is: it is desire that is 'the cunning enemy', the devil.

Like Promos who finds that 'no prayer serv'd to make restraint' in him, Angelo is unable to pray. The breakdown of his 'single state of man', tenuously established by restraining those aspects of his nature which might bring about such a conflict is expressed in his frustration:

Heaven hath my empty words  
 Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,  
 Anchors on Isabel; God in my mouth,  
 As if I did but only chew his name  
 And in my heart the strong and swelling evil  
 Of my conception.

(II. iii. 2-7)

Angelo's thoughts of Isabella are, to him, irreconcilable with thoughts of Heaven. The traditional association of spiritual and physical perfection associated with the loved one cannot operate here; Isabella's spirituality is not an inspiration to an earthly lover but an indication of her readiness to become a 'bride of Christ.' It is not so much Isabella's religious status that causes this bitter self-condemnation but a deeper revulsion. Angelo's reference to the 'evils of my conception' describes not only his imagination fired by desire, but suggests the Old Testament link between 'evil' and original sin. It swells like a monstrous pregnancy; the consequences of Angelo's passion for Isabella are expressed, in figurative terms, as if they had same kind of physical consequences as Claudio's love for Juliet. Like Judge Apius, Angelo experiences a crisis of identity, but it is developed in greater depth and detail. The opening and the conclusion of his speech give some indication of the distance he has travelled. Unable to make his thoughts rise to Heaven, he acknowledges an earthly sexuality:

Blood, thou art blood:  
 Let's write 'good Angel' on the devil's horn,  
 'Tis not the devil's crest.

(II.iv.15-17)

The figure of authority who fails to govern his 'private fond affections' is, paradoxically, in a position to exercise his power over others but the script of courtship however demands that the male pay lip-service at least to female supremacy; that he talk in terms of servitude rather than domination. The traditional language of love encompasses that of worship and adulation; of pain and rejection. Power compels the would-be seducer to change that script and substitute one in which words of love and admiration clash uncomfortably with veiled threats. It is power which raises the stakes in this kind of encounter. The ruler is tested by the frustration of his desires; the woman who is the object is given an ultimatum which tests her constancy. Threats take the place of courtship and persuasion. Apius declares with confidence, 'I do what it please me, within this my realme'. Angelo's second confrontation with Isabella echoes that in *Promos and Cassandra*. The bargain that is offered by Promos, and by his dramatic successor, Angelo, makes the woman's decision a complex one. Should she submit, in order to save her brother's life, on the assumption that it is possible for the spirit to remain pure, even if the body is defiled? If she accepts the bargain, and loses her virginity, what is to be her fate? St. Augustine argues that 'when a body is forced to yield though the pledge of chastity remains no whit violated by any consent to evil, the crime belongs only to the man who lay with her perforce and not to the woman who, though forced, consented by no act of will to his lying with her.'<sup>13</sup> Though this is not rape in the conventional sense, the coercion to which Cassandra and Isabella are subjected, would, according to these standards, preclude their being judged as unchaste. The ultimatum that Isabella receives is similar to that which Promos offers Cassandra but whereas Cassandra is allowed two days to arrive at her answer; Isabella is instructed: 'Answer me tomorrow.' (II. iv. 167)

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<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*. Vol I,xix, trans. Mc Cracken (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press) p.83

What Angelo demands of Isabella is expressed, not in terms of love but of 'sweet uncleanness'; a 'charity in sin.' His use of paradox emphasises the tensions between sexual enjoyment and moral transgression. As Deputy he condemns the 'saucy sweetness' of 'those that do coin heaven's image / In stamps that are forbid'. The act is morally and legally wrong in his eyes and he dehumanises it by his imagery of coining. Yet it is this same 'sweetness' which Angelo desires of Isabella. There is none of the eroticism in his speech which colours Soliman's attempt to seduce Perseda, nor is there any attempt to minimise the moral consequences of the sexual act. It is a 'filthie vice'; 'uncleanness'; a 'stain'; a 'sin.' It is as though, unable to separate the idea of sin from sexuality himself, he must insist on it to Isabella, and demand that she share in his guilt.

Isabella's response to Angelo's threats is expressed in language as emotionally charged as that of her persecutor. She uses terms which many critics have found to be sexually ambivalent: 'keen whips', 'rubies', 'strip', 'bed', 'longing' (100-104).<sup>14</sup> Her decision to welcome 'death as a bed' is, however, proverbial (Tilley, Dent, B 192. 1.) and her eager embracing of punishment can be interpreted as a readiness to join the band of virgin martyrs as much as it reflects suppressed sexuality. Her 'Better it were a brother died at once,/ Than that a sister by redeeming him / Should die forever' (107 -10) reflects the long literary tradition relating to chastity, as well as religious belief. In a sense, Isabella ups the stakes by reminding Angelo of a higher judgement. In turn Angelo accuses her of earlier portraying her brother's misconduct as, in words that recall those of the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Adultery*, 'a merriment' rather than a 'vice.' By the end of the scene he is using his 'honour' to give credence to his argument, and his reputation as a weapon to force

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Rosalind Miles comments: 'There is ... a marked strain of suggestiveness in what Isabella says to Angelo' *The Problem of Measure for Measure* (London: Vision, 1976) Harriet Hawkins remarks that 'Isabella's references to whips...etc...are charged with an erotic power that might evoke a gleam in the eye of the most depraved marquis in the audience, to say nothing of a saint-turned sensualist like Angelo.' *The Devil's Party: Critical Counter-Interpretations of Shakespearean Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) p.225

Isabella to submit. The roles are reversed. It is he, not Isabella, who is the suitor, and he, and not Isabella, who centres his argument around the weaknesses of human nature. Whereas, earlier, he linked himself with her as a saint, now he admits to Isabella 'We are all frail,' adding 'women are frail, too.' He seizes on Isabella's admission of women's frailty:

I do arrest your words. Be that you are,  
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.  
If you be one as you are well expressed  
By all external warrant - show it now,  
By putting on the destin'd livery.

(II.iv.142-4)

Angelo's attempt to move from a script which savours more of the moralist than the lover is defeated. Isabella resists his demands, countering his 'Plainly conceive I love you' with the reply: "My brother did love Juliet, /And now you tell me that he shall die for it.' (II.iv.142-4) She reminds him of the legal consequences of illicit love and, by implication, of his public status as enforcer of the law and threatens to expose him. It is at this point that he gathers together all the ammunition that his reputation and his status afford him, warning Isabella: 'You shall stifle in your own report,/ And smell of calumny.' (II.iv.158-9) It is, ironically in this moment when he draws upon the image of his 'unsoiled name' that he allows himself to admit to the overwhelming demands of his senses: 'I have begun/ And now I give my sensual race the rein.' (159-60) The dramatic impact of this uncompromising declaration is made the more forceful by the degree of his surrender to sensuality. Appetite is not only acknowledged, but allowed to be in control of reason: modesty is portrayed not as goodness but as deceptive coyness. From his earlier absolution of Isabella from any desire or intention to tempt him, he has moved to a position in which he is able to justify himself by projecting his own desires onto her. He reduces her from a 'saint' to a coy maiden, whose

blushes 'banish what they sue for.' (162-3) Isabella's chastity which is the barrier to the fulfilment of his desires, is argued away, in the manner of the worldly-wise cynic, as false modesty.

*'If thou dost live I must my honour lose'..*

The subsequent debate between brother and sister give a dramatic urgency to Isabella's dilemma. It focuses on which is the greater evil: death or dishonour, echoing a similar scene in *Promos and Cassandra*. Cassandra upholds the tradition of chaste virtue, following the example of what Salter calls 'godly and vertuous ladies' by placing her honour above life itself:

If thou dost live I must my honour lose,  
Thy raunsome is, to Promos fleshly wyll  
That I do yelde: then which I rather chose.  
With torments sharpe my selfe he first should kyll.

(III.iv)

Cassandra is resolute in preferring death to dishonour, though Andrugio argues, in the Augustinian tradition, that 'in forst faultes is no intent of yll.' It is not her own life, but her brother's which is at stake, however, and although for her, death is a greater evil than the loss of reputation, she determines to save her brother's life by yielding.

The confrontation between Angelo and Isabella follows a similar pattern to that of Cassandra and Andrugio but Claudio, unlike Andrugio, is unable to sustain his part in the debate. He moves from a passionate embracing of 'darkness as a bride', like his sister earlier, to a shocked awareness of what death means. His passionate evocation of death is powerful enough to undermine all his concern for his sister's honour. The well-established convention of death before dishonour, which is traditionally applied to women, is obviously not an easy option for Claudio, though it is not so much cowardice that is being exposed here, but the gap between the rhetoric of martyrdom and the imaginative experience of what it entails. In the end,

martyrdom is not demanded of him. The tragic dilemma, like that in *Promos and Cassandra* is resolved by trickery. Isabella is saved from the guilt of her brother's death by the intervention of the Duke and his bedtrick. It is Cassandra who experiences the shame of the dishonoured maid

Fayne would I wretch conceal the spoyle of my virginity,  
 But O my guilt doth make mee blush, chast virgins here to see:  
 I monster now, no mayde nor wife, have stoopte to Promos' lust,  
 The cause was, nether sute nor teares could quench his wanton thirst  
 What cloke wyl scuse my crime? my selfe, my conscience doth accuse  
 And shall Cassandra now be termed, in common speche, a stewes?  
 Shall she, whose vertues bare the bell, be calld a vicious dame?  
 O cruell death, nay hell to her, that was constrayned to shame.

(IV.iii)

Cassandra's description of her plight is closer, at this point, to that of the tragic heroine than that of Isabella. It also provides a contrast with that of her seducer. Promos is able, like Angelo, to displace some of his guilt on to the woman he desires. It is Cassandra's tears which 'inflam'd' his lust and awakened in him 'filthy love.' The difference between the way in which he and Cassandra express their guilt highlights the double standard of male and female sexuality. Although Cassandra herself is guiltless, she sees herself as a monster of viciousness. Central to her feeling is the sense of shame which afflicts her when she compares herself to virtuous women, culminating in an admission that she should die and be sent to Hell. This is no tragedy: the audience is already aware that her brother has not, as she thinks, been killed, and the terrible dilemma which is the crux of both plays is resolved by the traditional comic resolution of marriage. Cassandra is married to Promos, and his sins are forgiven. But Shakespeare's world of Vienna poses more questions about sexuality than it answers. Isabella is not required to make the conventional sacrifice of her body but of her spiritual ideals, if we assume that she marries the Duke.

Angelo expresses penitence and the Duke presides over all as master of ceremonies. The extremes of human sexuality are modified by a series of measures that suggest a compromise that may be uneasy but avoids tragedy.

*'Thou mayst enforce my body but not me'..*

The tragic working-out of the opposition between chastity and lust is summed up by Perseda:

Solimans thoughts and mine resemble  
 Lines parallel that never can be joined.  
 ( IV.i.108-110)

Lines parallel never meet and the extremes of indulgence and abstinence are incompatible. The question at the heart of the matter is summed up in the words of Shakespeare's *Lucrece*: 'My body or my soul - which was the dearer?' (1163) Kyd's Perseda conforms to the pattern of the virtuous heroine, declaring that death is 'the period (her) heart desires' as the only acceptable resolution of events. On the other hand, she combines her decision to put death before dishonour with a pro-active role, challenging her would-be seducer to armed combat, and poisoning her lips so that the farewell kiss which Soliman demands of her results in his death. This pattern of resolute and active resistance is also demonstrated in the conduct of Sophonisba, and the Lady in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611). It is as though chastity must be seen to be militant. The affirmation of traditional ideals of behaviour implied by these noble deaths after the Roman fashion takes place in a context of increasing cynicism about the values of society in general. Virtue is increasingly remarked on as a rarity by commentators within the drama such as Vindice, as we have seen, and the various bawds who inhabit so many of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. As Clodio in Webster's *Appius and Virginia* explains to his master:

What's she in Rome your greatness cannot cure

Or your rich purse purchase? Promises and threats  
 Are statesmen Lictors to arrest such pleasures ....  
 Can you command Rome and not countermand  
 A woman's weakness?

(I.iii.34-6,38-40)

Clodius neatly sums up the various temptations to female honour which form the arsenal of the seducer: status and wealth. He gives the impression that honour can be purchased but, at the same time, reminds Appius of his power as emperor. His cynicism about female virtue is equalled by a cynical view of authority. In contrast with Soliman who admits to the incompatibility of being in control of an empire, yet unable to govern his 'private fond affection', Clodius effectively asks what is the use of power if it cannot be employed in the pursuit of pleasure. The chaste heroines challenge the view that women can be bought, and by resisting to the point of death challenge the power of the tyrant, though their actions take place in the context of a commentary which reminds the audience that virtue is rare.

Marston's Sophonisba epitomises this rare quality: she is a 'wondrous creature,/even fit for gods, not men' (I.2. 227) and the Lady is 'the first / of all her kind that ever refused greatness,' (I.i.182-3). The attack on the virtue of the lady and the wife forms the central theme of each plot: set against the archetypal conflict of the governor who cannot govern his affections and the woman who inspires them, is the story of the husband who cannot control his jealousy and must test out his wife's loyalty. The Tyrant, like Marston's Syphax, becomes obsessed by the woman who rejects him. Syphax is embittered by his rejection for another man, or, as he puts it, 'disgraced in and by that which hath / No reason: love and woman.' (I.ii.73-4) When Sophonisba is surrendered to him by the treacherous Carthaginians, he makes no attempt to use reason to persuade her to submit to him, but enters, dragging her on stage, with his dagger twisted around her hair. He epitomises the 'lower natures which are brutes' described by Pico Della Mirandola, governed solely by his lust and

prepared to use any means to satisfy it.<sup>15</sup> In the confrontation between the two Marston opposes the extremes of restraint and sheer brutality. Whereas Sophonisba is able to govern her feelings, to the extent of putting patriotic duty before love by forgoing her wedding night, Syphax is incapable of controlling his bodily urges. Syphax's uncompromising attitude to the exercise of power is expressed in his words: 'Thou shalt, thou must: kings' glory is their force.' (II.ii.25-6) This perversion of the traditional values associated with kingship is further illustrated by his threat:

I'll tack thy head  
To the low earth, whilst strength of two black knaves  
Thy limbs all wide shall strain.

(III i.9-11)

There is no attempt by Syphax to disguise his intentions in terms of love or eroticism: he is, as his own words imply, appetite personified: 'All appetite is deaf: I will, I must, / Achilles' armour could not bear out lust.' (II.i.25-6) Compared with Promos, Soliman and especially Angelo, Syphax is a caricature, drawn in strong but simple lines operating without compunction or remorse. Sophonisba's repeated 'Be but a beast' (II.i.19) expresses her contempt for a man whose behaviour is less than that of an animal. In this encounter the rhetoric of persuasion has no place; Syphax has surrendered himself to his 'appetite.' The interest of the scene lies not so much in this uncomplicated personification of lust as in the witty response of the heroine, and the diversionary tactics which she employs in escaping her persecutor. When contempt fails, she is more flexible in her approach than the traditional mirrors of modesty. She appeals to Syphax's preconceived philosophy of woman's coyness.

Hold thy strong arm, and hear, my Syphax, know  
I am thy servant now: I needs must love thee,  
For (O my sex, forgive!) I must confess

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<sup>15</sup> Della Mirandola, p.5

We not affect protesting feebleness,  
 Entreats, faint blushings, timorous modesty;  
 We think our lover is but little man  
 Who is so full of woman

.....  
 Our noble sex was only born t'obey  
 To him that dares command.

(III. i .27-33; 37-8)

Her words are calculated to seduce and to flatter; to convey submission, confirming Syphax in his position of male superiority. The feminine pose of false modesty to which Sophonisba earlier objected, is here transformed into a weapon against her seducer. The success of her tactics on this occasion, however, does not prevent Sophonisba from making the time-honoured plea to the gods 'for chaste life or an untainted grave' but it is a plea accompanied by an active sense of self-preservation. This is demonstrated when she succeeds in escaping Syphax by means of a variation on the bedtrick. It is not, as in the case of *Measure For Measure*, an ex-lover who is substituted but Syphax's own black slave; nor does it provide anything but a temporary respite.

In the last resort, Sophonisba is forced to resort to the ultimate gesture of the chaste woman under threat: suicide. Again, Syphax is remarkable for his lack of compunction or remorse. The exchange is uncomplicated by any psychological complexity. Lust is brutal appetite, to be indulged without self-condemnation; chastity is unassailable. As she draws a knife to kill herself, Syphax responds with the challenge:

Do, strike thy breast; know, being dead, I'll use  
 With highest lust of sense thy senseless flesh,  
 And even then thy vexed soul shall see,  
 Without resistance, thy trunk prostitute  
 Unto our appetite.

(IV. i. 57-61)

Syphax is beyond reason. On their first encounter Sophonisba attempted to claim the Pyrrhic victory of all violated women by reminding him, forcefully, of the distinction between body and spirit: 'Thou may'st enforce my body but not me.'(III.i.15) Here Syphax seems more than content to possess Sophonisba's body. He appears to relish the satisfaction that her body can provide for him, envisaging her soul in torment as a spectator of her physical humiliation. Yet when Sophonisba remains undaunted by his threat and declares her love for her husband, he appears to relent, 'Women's forced use,/ Like unripe fruit'st no sooner got but waste; / They have proportion, colour but no taste.' (IV.i.69-71)

In deciding not to attack Sophonisba, Syphax is moved, not by compassion nor by reason, but by the consideration that rape will not give him any real satisfaction. The indulgence of his appetite means so much to him that he is prepared to postpone immediate gratification in order to achieve greater pleasure. In an attempt to win her compliance he adopts once again, the discourse of the lover, claiming, 'We dote not on thy body but love thee.' (IV.i.78) The self-control that Syphax appears to have achieved here is shortlived, however. Sophonisba's lack of response leads him to try another tactic: he appeals to the supernatural in the form of the Enchantress, Erictho. Like Macbeth when he seeks out the witches in Act IV, Syphax is aware that he is turning to the powers of evil, from heaven which, as he puts it, 'helps not' to 'deepest hell' (IV.i.96). The pursuit of sensation, summed up in Syphax's words: 'Blood's appetite is Syphax' god; my wisdom is my sense' is shown to be a path to damnation. The tables are turned on him when he becomes the victim of the enchantress as the result of another bedtrick. For beauty and virtue in the person of Sophonisba are substituted ugliness and rapaciousness in the form of Erictho.

Middleton's Tyrant is not, like Syphax, a self-professed villain but he becomes similarly single-minded in his pursuit of the Lady who is the object of his affection. From the outset, he is defined as 'tyrant' and usurper. He is not the model of a good

governor, which Angelo appears to be in the opening scenes of *Measure for Measure* though his initial approach to the Lady is almost courtly. His confidence that she will desert the deposed king, whom she loves, and marry him conforms to a view of women as essentially worldly creatures. 'Now we are king she'll leave the lower path / And find the way to us ' (I.1. 1iv-15) Instead, the Lady's first words, reminiscent of those of Perseda, are: 'I am not to be altered'. This firmness is the hallmark of the exceptional woman, to be contrasted with the changeability of the Wife in the subplot, which is demonstrated in Chapter Four. The very title 'Lady' has almost emblematic connotations of nobility, chaste virtue, and restraint whereas 'Wife' denotes a married woman, sexually experienced and, therefore, liable to temptation.<sup>16</sup> The difference between the two women is that, though both are tried, only the Wife is tempted. The Lady is, in life, able to distance herself from her would-be seducer. She is not awed by his power but disturbingly articulate, inflicting what amounts to a public humiliation on her suitor by dismissing his offer of marriage:

I came not hither  
 To please the eye of glory but of goodness  
 And that concerns not you, sir; you're for greatness.  
 (I.i.127-9)

The Lady's words have a formal, rhetorical, quality, which gives the effect of a symbolic encounter rather than one which might involve what Anselmus calls 'honest anger /Against the impudence of flesh and hell.' (I.ii.33) Her rejection diminishes the Tyrant in his own eyes, and devalues his status, since she refuses to conform to the worldly values of the courtier. Instead she openly expresses her love for the deposed Govianus, kissing him and informing her father 'Why, that's the usurper, sir, this is the King,' and adding, 'It is the man I seek, the rest I lose / As things unworthy to be kept or noted' (175-6) .

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<sup>16</sup> See Chaucer's comparison of wives and virgins in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*.

Unable to accept her refusal the Tyrant resorts to the use of power and persuasion. Having ordered the imprisonment of the two lovers he prevails upon the Lady's father to act as go-between on his behalf. For Helvetius, the concept of honour is tied up with courtly reward, rather than chastity. When his master promises him:

Thy honours with thy daughter's love shall rise;  
I shall read thy deservings in her eyes.

he replies: O may they be eternal books of pleasure,  
To show you all delight!

(I.i.54-580)

Unlike the Earl of Warwick in *Edward III*, he appears to have no difficulty in accommodating himself to the values of the court. Like Gratiana, in *The Revenger's Tragedy* he is prepared to 'raise' his 'state' upon his daughter's breast; his 'yearly maintenance upon her cheeks.' (*R.T.* II.i.94,96) The Lady is given an opportunity of worldly compromise; she may marry Govianus if she accepts the Tyrant as lover, in the tradition, as Monsieur reminds us in *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*, of all 'wise wives.' Helvetius attempts to undermine his daughter's resolve by persuading her to acknowledge that she shares the weakness of all women:

... since thou wilt not yield to be his queen,  
Be yet his mistress; he shall be content  
With that or nothing; he shall ask no more.  
And with what easiness that is performed,  
Most of your women know.

(II.i.90-94)

The assumption that, having refused to become his wife, she will agree to become his mistress, illustrates the gap of understanding between Tyrant and Lady as well as between father and daughter. Unlike those women who are prepared to perform the role of mistress with 'easiness' the Lady is uncompromising in her refusal. Her father's belated realisation that he been made to act as a pander and 'flesh-broker'

forces the Tyrant to turn to yet another of his courtiers for help but when it becomes obvious that he is prepared to resort to force rather bribery, the Lady determines to die rather than give in to him. There has been no direct confrontation between the two protagonists since the opening scene. The emphasis is on the battle of wills rather than the process of seduction itself; for the time being, the sexual elements in the encounter are in abeyance. It is as though the Lady, unlike the Wife, is too pure to be sullied by temptations of the flesh. She demands that her lover, Govianus, kill her 'for honour's sake' (III.99) and prepares to die with detached resignation and an almost religious putting aside of worldly things:

like one  
 Removing from her house, that locks up all  
 And rather than she would replace her goods,  
 Make shift with anything for the time she stays.  
 (II.iii.134 -7)

These are hardly the words of a woman to a lover. The image is one of transience, reinforcing the ascetic idea of life as but a preparation for death. She assures Govianus 'I have prepared myself for rest and silence.' (III. iii. 133) On the one hand she appears almost to welcome death, in a manner which could be described as stoical, yet, like the heroines of love tragedy she assures Govianus that death cannot part her from him:

His lust may part me from thee, but death, never;  
 Thou canst not lose me there, for, dying thine,  
 Thou dost enjoy me still. Kings cannot rob thee.  
 (III.144-6)

The fact that the Lady, who seems to exemplify Christian virtues, dies by her own hand, is not made an issue here. Although her lover pays lip-service to the Christian condemnation of suicide he describes her act as 'virgin victory' (177) with all the conviction that alliteration can command. The neatness of the term perhaps

reflects a certain neatness of solution. It is a gesture of dignity and courage but it is one that is forced upon the Lady by the convention that places a woman's honour above her life. It is Govianus who reminds the audience of the alternative value system, suggesting that incorruptibility is rare in women:

She was troubled with a foolish pride  
To stand upon her honour, and so died.  
'Twas a strange trick of her. Few of you ladies  
In ordinary will believe it. They abhor it.  
They'll sooner kill themselves with lust than for it.

(III..217-21)

Like Vindice in *The Revengers' Tragedy*, his admiration of female virtue sits uncomfortably with his ready cynicism. With this misogynistic comment, he reminds us of the distance between 'real' women and the ideal of womanhood that the Lady represents, the Wife being an immediate example to the audience of a woman who does kill herself 'for lust'. In contrast to such women, the Lady is a 'treasure of mankind', a 'spring / of honest and religious desires' . (III. 249) The language has the studied, artificial quality of a set-piece; the opposite in kind to the misogynist's diatribe. In the coldness of death the Lady becomes emblematic of the chastity which she represents in the play; less an individual than a symbol; a 'fountain of weeping honour.' (III. 247-50)

The Tyrant, in contrast to Govianus, speaks to the Lady directly and personally. Having had her removed from the tomb where she lies buried he addresses her dead body like a lover. 'Madam! 'Tis I, sweet lady. Prithee speak.' (Iv.ii.86) No disdainful mistress could be so unattainable, but to him, in the delusion of the moment, she is only 'hard-hearted.' The range of tone and feeling in his speech reflects an irreconcilable view of woman and sexuality. She is the 'sweet lady' to be desired for her virtue, yet rebuked for her lack of worldliness. Like Govianus, the Tyrant makes a derisive comment about female behaviour that sits uncomfortably

with the emotion of his earlier speech, and brings forcibly to mind the alternative value system against which the Lady's conduct is set in relief:

Nothing hurt thee but want of woman's counsel.  
 Hadst thou but asked th'opinion of most ladies  
 Thou'dst never come to this! They would have told thee  
 How dear a treasure life and youth had been.

(IV. iii .99-102)

To this is added a dubious moralising:

'tis that they fear to lose; the very name  
 Can make more gaudy tremblers in a minute  
 Than heaven or sin or hell: those are last thought on.

(IV.iii.103-5)

The Tyrant's remarks on the essentially carnal nature of women, illustrated in the Wife's behaviour, must have struck a familiar satirical note to the contemporary audience but it is impossible to escape the irony of the fact that the speaker is, himself temporarily oblivious of the judgement of heaven and hell on the somewhat less venial sin of violating the grave with the intention of committing necrophilia.

The desire for union beyond death is, as we have seen, often expressed by tragic lovers . Kyd's Soliman, thwarted in his desires, speaks of pursuing his Perseda:

And sweet Perseda, flie not Soliman,  
 When as my gliding ghost shall follow thee  
 With eager moode, thorow eternal night. (V. v. 149-151)

The lines are ominous but it is a ghostly encounter that he envisages. The Tyrant, on the other hand, can only be satisfied by physical possession. The interdependence of the soul and body, to which the Lady, like Lucrece, sacrificed herself , is given a

further dimension in this parody of love. Without any sense of irony, the Tyrant says to the Lady:

Since thy life has left me,  
I'll clasp the body for the spirit that dwelt in't  
And love the house still for the mistress' sake.  
Thou art mine now, spite of destruction  
And Govianus, and I will possess thee.

(IV.iii.111-114)

Although he implies that the spirit has left the body, the body allows him to 'clasp', 'love' and 'possess' his mistress. It is only after this point that he begins to struggle with his conscience, articulating his doubts in terms of the traditional battle between the body and the soul:

In vain my spirit wrestles with my blood;  
Affection must be mistress here on earth.  
The house is hers; the soul is but a tenant.  
I ha' tasked myself but with the abstinence  
Of one poor hour, yet cannot conquer that;  
I cannot keep from sight of her so long.  
I starve mine eye too much

(V.ii.1-6)

It is clear, from the opening words 'in vain' that the battle is over before it is begun. The Tyrant submits to his 'lower nature', implying that, whilst the spiritual might rule in heaven, it is 'blood', or passion which must be allowed to rule on earth. It is passion that rules him; he is incapable of restraint, or 'abstinence'; determined to feed his senses on a body which he has ordered to be clad in rich garments: 'I cannot keep from sight of her so long/ I starve my eye too much.' (V.iii. 6-7)

The entrance of the Lady's body, on a chair, and the reverence which he pays to it, could be suggestive to a contemporary audience of the idolatry associated with the old religion; a point which is made by one of the soldiers who has born the body.

The Petrarchan lover's worship of his mistress as a saint, acceptable in the literary convention, is here become distorted into a heresy. The cosmetics that the Tyrant demands to colour the lady's face into a semblance of life are suggestive of the paints used to decorate the statues in pre-Reformation churches. Again, the effect is to emphasise the sacrilegious nature of the Tyrant's demands. Cosmetics, so often used as a means of commenting on a woman's vanity, are used here in a desperate attempt to give the body the semblance of life, becoming also, like Vindice's skull, and Perseda's poisoned lips, the instruments of revenge. As the Tyrant kisses the Lady and tries to call her back to life, he embraces his own death. At the climax of the scene, the ghost of the Lady appears, so that body and soul are again juxtaposed. They now wear the same garments, as if to symbolise their unity. As he dies, the Tyrant cries out

O if there be a hell for flesh and spirit  
'Tis built within this bosom. (V. ii. 165-6)

The polarisation of lust and chastity is taken to extremes in the encounter of the Tyrant and the Lady. The fact that she dies rather than surrender to him allows her to retain her 'virgin victory.' When she appears as a spirit, she is a symbol of non-material values, to be finally crowned by her lover and revenger, Govianus, in the tradition of the virgin martyrs. Like Marston's Massinissa, this less than heroic figure accepts the honours granted to him. The death of his 'virtuous lady' does not inspire him to follow her example. His final words are a reminder of her exceptional qualities:

I would these ladies that fill honour's rooms  
Might all be borne so honest to their tombs.  
(V.ii. 211-2)

The informal epitaphs awarded to the Tyrant and the Lady sum up the difference in their roles. Like Angelo, Soliman and the other rulers who are tempted to abuse their power, the Tyrant's inability to subdue his will to his reason is demonstrative of his unsuitability to govern others. His death is greeted by the comment: 'He's gone, / And all the kingdom's evils perish with him.' (V.ii.193-iv) In contrast, the Lady's death is summed up entirely in terms of her honour, or chastity, providing an opportunity to point a moral to those, like the Wife, who lack her stoical qualities. The issue is one concerning gender as well as power. The debate between the soul and the body, or the flesh and the spirit, as the Tyrant terms it, is for some of the would-be seducers, a long-drawn out, or painful process. For the virtuous woman there is no hesitation. It is significant that for her, the trial of virtue may involve various means of coercion, but it does not involve temptation: it is her role as unwitting temptress to the man which is at issue.

The Lady's suicide is described by Linda Leet Brodwin as but one in 'the increasing suicide rate of chaste Jacobean heroines.'<sup>17</sup> She attributes this, in part, to a desire on the part of the playwright to affirm the values of purity and to draw attention to the evils of society: what she terms a 'wicked time.' It is also yet another indication of the duality of men's response to women. The chaste heroine, as we have seen, is used as a means of satirically pointing up the shortcomings of her more worldly counterparts. Perseda, Isabella, Sophonisba and the Lady are emblems of virtue, remarked upon as rare. They have in common their virginity, preserved against the odds in ingenious fashion by methods varying from the substitution of another woman, by armed combat, and even by visitation from beyond the grave. For all except Isabella, the price is high. The conflict between chastity and lust is resolved

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Leet Brodwin, *Elizabethan Love Tragedy 1598-1625* (London: University of London Press, 1972) p.95

when the heroine defeats her persecutor by escaping him: in tragedy she escapes only through her death.

As Robert Ornstein points out, 'every age has its official and semi-official pieties.'<sup>18</sup> One of these was the belief in an ideal of womanhood; another, in an ideal of government. The tension between these ideals and the actuality is increasingly reflected in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, with women as the focus of that concern. The testing of the man's ability to govern, in the widest sense and the women's virtue is reflected in the conflict between the Tyrant and the woman he desires. The essence of that conflict is in the polarised representation of sexuality, which personifies man as lust and woman as chastity: they are, in Perseda's words, 'lines parallel that never meet.' The dramatists, in their different ways, make use of that polarization to explore a more complex ambivalence: that the source of pleasure should bring pain, the source of joy, sorrow, and the price of indulgence, shame. For the Tyrant, the longed-for consummation so easily turns to 'loathed delight'; he has 'sold eternity to get a toy.' (Lucrece, 214) For the woman he abuses, there is the prospect of 'a dying life to living infamy.' (Lucrece: 1055) Drama brings to life a situation which has, for the Renaissance not only a rich literary context, but also a personal and a social one. It rehearses the questions which continue to be asked throughout the period: 'The tempter or the tempted: Who sins most?'; 'My body and my soul, which is the dearer?' or, more cynically, 'What labour is't for women to keep constant/ That's never tried or tempted?' There are no simple answers. The characters who ask the questions attempt to answer them but it is left to the audience, then as now, to make the final judgement. We may well, when comparing the lustful tyrant with his chaste victim, be able to say who sins most, but the nature of that sin and its consequences requires a more complex response.

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<sup>18</sup> Ornstein, p.15

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## 'THE WOMEN'S PART '

*'A wretchedly carnal thing'..*

The starting point of this discussion of tensions in the discourse of love was the Petrarchan idealisation of love and women. It seems appropriate that it should conclude by focusing on the alternative discourse of denigration. As we have seen, there is not a linear progression from one viewpoint to another: the two co-exist in the dualistic discourse which prevails throughout the period, forming the kind of dialogue which the drama is so well-suited to express. The subject of this chapter, like that of the previous one, is the complex relationship between love, sexuality and sin, or what the contemporary moralist would term love and lust. The focus of that lust is not the idealised beloved or the virtuous heroine but her antithesis, the unchaste woman, one, as Biron puts it in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 'that will do the deed'. In the confrontation between the chaste maid, or matron and the tyrant, as I have shown, the inclination towards beauty which was thought to be capable of leading man to divine contemplation, becomes, paradoxically, a catalyst in arousing his lust. Desire is portrayed as a conflict between will and reason, inspired by an ideal of femininity which derives from the Petrarchan, and expressed in terms of chastity and restraint. Desire for this ideal is summed up by Shakespeare in his comment upon Tarquin in *The Rape of Lucrece*: 'Haply that name of chaste unhapp'ly set / This bateless edge on his keen appetite.'(8-9) Chastity is not merely a desirable female virtue here but, being obtainable only in its destruction, is the spur to a desire which can never be fulfilled. The unchaste woman, on the other hand, is associated with sin; she offers fulfilment but in possessing her, her lover's desire, once satiated, is likely to turn to disgust. The projection of masculine fears and doubts about sexuality, so often projected onto

women, as I indicate in earlier chapters, is here, as in Chapter Four, confirmed as women 'prove' themselves to be whores.

The misogynists of Renaissance drama, from Hamlet to Vindice and Flamineo, insist, with the satirists that 'Frailty, thy name is woman.' They hold the view that woman is the weaker vessel, more subject to temptation than man because of her natural concupiscence. It is a view which dates back to the early days of the Christian church as well as possessing the support of well-respected Greek and Roman writers. In his *De Contemptu Mundi* Bernard of Cluny sums up the extremes of contemporary attitudes. Woman is:

a guilty thing, a wretchedly carnal thing, herself mere flesh, quick to betray, apt from both birth and training to deceive. A bottomless ditch she is, a most poisonous viper, beautiful rottenness, a slippery by-way, a bane to the state....delicious poison.<sup>1</sup>

The description is built up of a series of metaphors which effectively convey the conflicting emotions of fascination and loathing with which he views female sexuality. The fact that these are, as John Peter points out, 'the clichés of early Christendom' in the sense of broadly based complaint, rather than sharply focused satire does not prevent their frequent repetition by subsequent commentators.<sup>2</sup> The revulsion against the flesh which is such an important part of the ascetic tradition is projected onto the female sex whose beauty is merely a mask for corruption. The unchaste woman is one who fails to suppress her essentially carnal nature, and who, like Eve, tempts man to his spiritual downfall.

According to Nicholas Breton in *The Goode and the Badde* (1616), a 'Wanton Woman' is 'in countenance a witch' and 'in condition a kinde of Divell. Her beck is a

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<sup>1</sup> Ed.H.C. Hoskier (London, 1929) ii. 457

<sup>2</sup> John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) p.35

net, her word a charme, her looke an illusion and her companie a confusion.' <sup>3</sup> Unlike the virgin, whose 'life is a pilgrimage, her death but a passage, her description a Wonder and her name an Honour', Breton's 'wanton woman' is a descendant of Eve, characterised by her power to deceive. <sup>4</sup> Whereas the good woman is described in terms worthy, under the old religion, of canonisation, the bad woman is demonised. Her ability to attract men is described in terms of enchantment and entrapment; she charms and entices them into her 'net.' The difference between her and her virtuous sister is expressed in terms of their sexuality. The polarisation of women into virgins and whores, though it was popularised in a wide range of literature of the period, is not so much a reflection of a simplistic view of women but an extension of the rhetorical tradition of debate which forms the basis for so many arguments about love and lust. The nature of drama makes such an opposition effective but adds its own complexity by presenting a range of commentary and inter-action on the subject. The woman's body is a focus of tension, and the ambivalence which characterises so much of contemporary discourse about love is displaced onto women.

*'Venus' sweete delights'...*

The unchaste woman is, like her idealised counterpart, a construction of men. She personifies a sexuality which both fascinates and repels and which has complex associations of mystery and enchantment; temptation and betrayal. Her literary heritage is that of Venus, the goddess of love, Circe, the enchantress, and Delilah, the seducer of Samson. Spenser's Acrasia, in *The Faerie Queen*, is all of these things. The description of her bathing nymphs conjures up a vision of the birth of Venus:

As that faire Starre, the messenger of morne,  
Her dewy face out of the sea doth reare:

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Breton, 'The Goode and The Badde', *Works, vol.II*, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grosart (New York: Ams Press, 1966) p.12

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.12

Or as the Cyprian goddess, newly borne  
Of th' Oceans fruitfull froth, did first appeare...

(II.xii.65)

The enchantress herself is portrayed with seductive imagery:

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

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

(II.xii.72-73)

The language is seductive, but the adjectives 'wanton' and 'lascivious' indicate excess; the fair lady is a 'witch', and her eyes are false. The lover is helpless in her power; not conventionally bound, like the Petrarchan lover to an adored mistress, but caught up in the nets of an enchantress.

Whereas in the traditional Petrarchan sonnets it is male desire for the chaste and idealised mistress which is expressed, here it is female desire, rather than male which dominates. Unlike the ideal mistress, Acrasia is not a source of inspiration to good, but to evil in the form of lust: she sucks 'his spright', and his masculinity. The

eyes, traditionally associated with light, and capable, like Juliet's, of metaphorically illuminating the universe for her lover, are hypnotic and compelling: they do not 'discourse'; indeed, Guyon's are shut. The erotic quality of the scene carries with it a warning about female duplicity and the loss of identity involved in the surrender to passion, but following the predatory images of Acrasia's 'greedily depasturing delight' is a description of the enchantress lying on a bed of roses, 'as faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin.' It is a description with a powerful sensual appeal to the reader, unveiling a passive Acrasia to the 'male gaze' as opposed to showing her in action. The effect of the whole scene is complex. The musicians urge the need to live, and love, for the moment. The adjective 'pleasant' is juxtaposed with sin but, as Stephen Greenblatt suggests, the effect of the words is 'absorbed into a world in which the conceptual boundaries are blurred.'<sup>5</sup> The pleasure/ danger motif of love tragedy is conveyed in terms of the seductive power and the dangers of lust, to which it is all too easy to succumb. Despite the beauty of the scene and the sensuous appeal of the poetry we are left in no doubt of the power of lust to transform men into beasts, and it is the female figure of Acrasia who is the focus of both desire itself, and the revulsion against desire which is evoked in the scene.

The personification of Venus in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* similarly illustrates the conflicting emotions associated with sexuality. Venus is eager for Adonis's love, and the poem makes it clear that it is a physical expression of his love that she requires. She is beautiful and fascinating, a goddess of love and nurture, but at the same time, a symbol of sexuality. She promises fulfilment without 'satiety':

And being set I'll smother thee with kisses  
And yet not cloy thy lips with loathed satiety  
But rather famish them amid their plenty.

(17-19)

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p.172

When she kisses Adonis the impression is that of a bird of prey rather than a lover. The idea of food which is abundant, stimulating the appetite for more, created in the opposing images of famine and plenty, gives way to an image of insatiable feeding. Venus is no longer a giver of bounty but, like Acrasia, a predatory figure.

Now quick desire hath caught the yielding prey  
 And glutton-like she feeds yet never filleth  
 Her lips are conquerors, his lips obey  
 Paying what ransome the insulter willeth;  
     Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high  
     That she will draw his lips rich treasure dry,

And having felt the sweetness of the spoil.  
 With blindfold fury she begins to forage.  
 Her face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil,  
 And careless love stirs up a desperate courage  
     Planting oblivion, beating reason back,  
     Forgetting shame's pure blush and honour's wrack.

(547 -58)

Here, Venus is no longer 'a spirit all compact of fire' but the personification of physical appetite, transformed by desire into an almost bestial figure. Images of gluttony accompany her passion for Adonis who, as its object, is 'a banquet to the taste.' (448) Like Acrasia, who is described as feeding her lusts with her lovers (II.xii.85) Venus 'reape(s) sweet pleasure' of Adonis. (III.vi. 463) As the goddess of love she argues convincingly against 'fruitless chastity' but Adonis dismisses her reasoning:

I hate not love, but your device in love  
 That tends embracements to every stranger,  
 You do it for increase a strange excuse,

When reason is the bawd to love's abuse. (789)

There is a comic absurdity in Adonis' predicament, and the poem as a whole is erotic in its effect, but Adonis is stating here the conventional Renaissance view of those who confuse lust with love. Venus's argument is, he points out, a product of her passion rather than her reason; which has been suborned to act as 'bawd' to her desires. It is Venus who, at the end of the poem, curses love, but her words are a development of the views of Adonis expressed here, defining the difference between ideal love and the excessive passion which is fleeting and unsatisfactory; which has 'sweet beginning but unsavoury end.' Venus herself is perceived by her lover as the personification of 'sweating lust' rather than love. *Venus and Adonis* invites the reader to appreciate the pleasures of love, whilst at the same time pointing out love's pains and frustrations. In this reversal of traditional roles, Adonis is the chaste beloved whilst the goddess Venus proves that she is all too easily overcome by human passion. There is wit and humour in the poem as well as sensuousness but it has a darker side which underlines the destructive nature of love and which casts doubt on the pleasures of love which so easily turn into lust. Significantly, in view of the representation of women in terms of their sexuality, it presents sexual appetite as a female attribute. The description of the Bower of Bliss and the encounter of Venus and Adonis both demonstrate the fascination of female sexuality. Spenser explains it in terms of sorcery, leading to loss of control and even bestiality whilst Shakespeare ironically pits female desire against male reluctance. Whilst effectively conveying the pleasures of love, both poets emphasise the transforming effects of lust, which can turn both men and women into beasts. The power of allurement which both Acrasia and Venus possess is, however, a quality which reinforces the idea of their ability to tempt men from virtue. Again and again in Renaissance literature the motif of female enchantment and allurement is repeated, as if to absolve men from full responsibility for their actions.

In drama, the mystique of female sexuality must be enacted as well as described if it is to be conveyed effectively. The most obvious example is that of Cleopatra, who is presented as an enchantress who has trapped Antony in a world where pleasure counts for more than power. Her Egypt is indeed a paradise of the flesh, a place of 'wastfull luxuree' (Faerie Queen:II xii.80) Like the Bower of Bliss it is eventually destroyed, less brutally, but as effectively by the invasion of Caesar and his army. Yet although Cleopatra exhibits some of the qualities of the enchantress who sets out to ensnare men, she is warm, human and loving.<sup>6</sup> Attempts to denigrate her cannot compete against her powerful dramatic presence. Like so many of his characters she stage-manages many of the scenes in her life and even arranges her own death. As a result, she rises above the contempt of some of the commentators in the play, refusing to be categorised as whore and strumpet. She meets her death as queen and lover, and even appropriates masculine honour by dying 'after the high Roman fashion.'

*'A commodity will lose the gloss with lying'...*

The world more commonly portrayed in Renaissance drama bears a closer resemblance to that of contemporary womanhood. Unlike the legendary queen of Egypt and the great enchantresses of myth and literature, women were 'cabin'd cribb'd and confin'd,' operating in a world where men made the rules. That is not to suggest that they submitted meekly. There is no doubt that some did break the rules and enjoy a degree of freedom, as the plays, pamphlets and moral exhortations of the period suggest. The alternative value system, to which I have referred in earlier chapters, which acknowledges human fallibility and the body's needs with an earthly cynicism, destroys both the mystique of chastity and that of female sexuality. In this essentially reductive view, sexuality is not related to abstract concepts of honour, but to expediency. Appetites are there to be indulged and society's immediate values are more

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Two

appealing than those of a more abstract nature. Thus fashion, change and novelty are more important than tradition, constancy, and familiarity. I have pointed out in Chapters Five and Six how playwrights such as Middleton, Marston and Beaumont and Fletcher, in particular, draw attention to the discrepancy between a golden age of virtue and a corrupt present, with woman's chastity, or lack of it, forming one of their most frequent points of reference. A decline in the virtue of women is frequently used as an indicator of changing values, as those chapters illustrate. Thomas Nashe in the pamphlet *Pierce Penniless*, published in 1592, comments wryly:

Make a privy search in Southwark and tell me how many inmates you find, nay, go where you will in the suburbs and bring me two virgins who have vowed chastity and I'll build a nunnery.<sup>7</sup>

Nashe's comments form part of an attack on lechery, of which both men and women are found guilty, but it is significant that the comparisons he produces are the legendary courtesan, Lais and the infamous Clytemnestra and Helen, placed in a London which is personified as a woman. He asks, confident of the agreement of his readers, 'Is there any place so lewd as the Lady London?'

Paroles, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, is speaking for the values of Lady London when he points out to Helena that virginity is outmoded:

'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying: the longer kept, the less worth. Off with't while 'tis vendible. Answer the time of request. Virginity like an old courtier wears her cap out of fashion, richly suited but unsuitable, just like the brooch and the toothpick, which wear not now. Your date is better in your pie and your porridge than in your cheek, and your virginity, your

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nashe, 'Pierce Penillesse' in *Three Elizabethan Pamphlets* ed. G.R. Hibbard (Harrap: 1951) p. 132

old virginity, is like one of our French withered pears: it looks  
ill, it eats drily, marry, 'tis a withered pear'....

(I.i. 150-159)

The argument is that of the Ovidian suitor, persuading his mistress to put pleasure before prudence, yet, at the same time, it is also that of the cynical observer reflecting on declining standards. The argument of Paroles is echoed, with varying degrees of conviction throughout the period, as illustrated by the go-betweens and would-be seducers in my earlier discussion. The emphasis is on the concept of virtue as 'vendible', but more often than not, as we have seen, the argument is used, not only much as a weapon of seduction, but as a satirical device for criticising society. It is an indicator of the concern over shifting values, the conflict between unyielding moral standards and new temptations, that the age-old problem of accommodating the life of the spirit to the demands of the flesh is projected onto what Posthumus called 'the woman's part', with women being made to exemplify both the ideals of an ascetic past, and the reality of a pragmatic present.

*'There's language in her eye'...*

The insistent voices of the many male commentators on women, both within and outside the drama, attempt to demystify femininity as they demystify love. By 'reading' a woman's body man is able to categorise and control it, and in doing so, perhaps control his own response. Whilst the virtuous heroine is, with few exceptions, characterised by her restraint in sexual matters: what Posthumus calls 'pudency', her unchaste counterpart is assumed to be driven by a restless seeking after pleasure, summed up in a comic context in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Falstaff, who reads invitation in Mistress Ford's eyes. 'I do mean to make love to Ford's wife. I spy entertainment in her, she discourses, she carves...she gives the leer of invitation.' (I.iii.37-39) Since it is the projection of his own desires that he is reading, he is able to find the same message in the eyes of Mistress Page: 'she gave me good eyes too .... did

so course o'er my exteriors, with such a greedy intention that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass.' (I.iii.53-60) It is, of course, Falstaff who is being ridiculed here, and the women gain their revenge for his assault on their virtue, but the interpretation of female desire as insatiable appetite is frequently expressed. The body-language of Cressida is interpreted by Ulysses in a detailed and public exposition in which he reads whoredom into her behaviour when he comments:

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip;  
Nay, her foot speaks. Her wanton spirits look out  
At every joint and motive of her body.

(IV. vi. 56-8)

Ulysses's reference to Cressida's eyes, cheeks, and lip are reminiscent of the blazon of the sonnet, but this is not admiration of courtly compliment which is part of the rhetoric of love and even of seduction. It is a deconstruction of femininity: Cressida's body is fragmented, and endowed with a language of its own; a message of invitation.

This boldness, defined as 'wanton spirits', which reaches out rather than remaining still and distant is part of the male construction of female sexuality, closely linked to the view that women in general, unlike men, were ruled, not by their reason, but by their appetite, which once awakened was insatiable. As Gosynhill puts it in his *Schoolhouse of Women* (1541), quoting Tiresias as his authority, 'the woman is more lecherous than a man.'<sup>8</sup> Helkiah Crooke writes authoritatively from a medical point of view:

That women are more wanton and petulant than males, we think happeneth because of the impotency of their minds: for the imaginations of lustful women are like the imaginations of brute beasts which have not reason to restrain them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Gosynhill, 'The Schoolhouse of Women', in *Half Humankind*, p.146

<sup>9</sup> Helkiah Crooke, *Microsomographia*, first edn. 1618, in *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* ed. by Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995) 54-57,

Othello's decision to kill Desdemona: 'She must die, or she'll betray more men' is based upon this theory of female behaviour. He is influenced by Iago's philosophy which presents Desdemona as a 'super-subtle Venetian' who, when her appetite is 'sated' must seek a new source of sexual pleasure. In Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) De Flores, the would-be lover of Beatrice-Joanna, similarly interprets his mistress's behaviour. Observing her apparent change in affections, from the man to whom she is betrothed, Piracquo, to the newly-met Alsemero, he argues :

Then I'll put in for one: for if a woman  
Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,  
She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic,  
One, ten, a thousand, ten thousand,  
Proves in time sutler to an army royal .

(II. ii. 60-3)

His words are reminiscent of Othello's: 'I had been happy if the general camp / Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body / So I had nothing known.' The fact that, unlike Othello, De Flores revels in this evidence of his mistress's inconstancy, underlines the nature of his passion for her. It is only by her fall from virtue that he himself can hope to gain her favour, but, ironically, although he assumes that her behaviour is inspired by lust, he makes it clear that he values her virginity. His vision of her sexuality is wittily contrived and grotesquely reductive: an invitation to the audience to join in acknowledging a universal truth about women. It is also the way in which he gains ascendancy over his aristocratic mistress; his ability to define her as a whore releases him from his former attitude of dog-like devotion. She is transformed from 'queen' into 'quean.'

*'Must my life be made the world's example?'*

More often than not, in what Madeleine Doran calls 'the tragedy of sex', the recognition of the grossness of the body comes to weigh more than its pleasures.<sup>10</sup> It is women who are used to symbolise and to expiate that grossness and, although men are portrayed as being tempted by beauty and betrayed into lust, it is women who bear the greater burden of punishment and abuse for their sins, as demonstrated by the adulterous wives discussed in Chapter Four. They provide a means by which men can indirectly deny and denigrate their own sexual feelings, and a focus for the genuine fear of spiritual and physical corruption in the form of disease. Woman as a creature of appetite is personified in the aptly named Levidulcia in Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1609). She and the chaste heroine Castabella, as their names suggest, are almost caricatures, embodying respectively, sensuality and chastity, the extremes of female sexuality as defined in the period. Levidulcia is not possessed of the enchantments of Venus but she enthusiastically seeks lovers, with the assistance of her friend Cataplasma, making it clear that she is not discriminating in her choice of partner: 'I could clasp with any man'. (II.iv.61-62) In contrast with Castabella, to whom love is a 'chaste affection of the soul / Without th' adult'rate mixture of the blood.' (II.iii.1-2) Levidulcia expresses love in terms of physical need, informing Languabeau that the best way to approach a woman 'lies not through her reason but her blood'. (I.iv.62-3) On one level Levidulcia appears to be confirming the traditional view of women as lecherous, and acting as a mouthpiece for the condemnation of her own sex, yet she follows this comment with an attempt at philosophical justification:

If reason were  
Our counsellor, we would neglect the work  
Of generation for the prodigal

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<sup>10</sup> Madeleine Doran, *Endeavours of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964) p.140

Expense it draws us of that which is  
 The wealth of life. Wise Nature, therefore, hath  
 Reserved for an inducement to our sense  
 Our greatest pleasure in the greatest work,  
 Which, being offered thee, thy ignorance  
 Refuses ...

(I.iv.74-82)

Although hers is not, by contemporary standards, the voice of reason but its opposite, Levidulcia's words possess a certain earthy common sense. It is an effective counterbalance to Castabella's rarified views of love as 'chaste affection'. Levidulcia makes a convincing case for sexual desire as an essential aspect of procreation, a primary aim of the human race. Her own frank enjoyment of sex is demonstrated in her actions. In a scene of novella-like intrigue, she hides one lover only to be greeted by the next. The comedy is broad, and Levidulcia's enthusiasm, though it is expressed in a way which recalls the contemporary moralist's association of sexuality with appetite, is comically conveyed as a preference for men of 'brawny flesh' rather than the 'smooth-skinned fellows' whom she compares with 'candied suckets.' (II.v.31-36)

To G. Wilson Knight 'the wordly wise acceptance of sex by Levidulcia 'has the effect of deflating the lust nausea which is present in so many tragedies of the period.<sup>11</sup> It is true that her voice, like those of so many of the serving women who act as foils to the chaste heroines of Renaissance drama, argues for a positive enjoyment of sexuality. Her attitude to adultery is summed up in the Homilist's condemnation; to her it is 'no sinne but a pastime.' She invites the audience to laugh at her intrigues, and it is she who sums up the absurdity of Castabella's wedding night, with its reluctant bride and impotent groom:

Why sure their generation was asleep

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<sup>11</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama* (London: Phoenix House, 1962)

When she begot those dormice, that she made  
 Them up so weakly and imperfectly  
 One wants desire, the t'other ability.

(II.iii.36)

In the context of this comment it is impossible to take the plight of Castabella and her husband too seriously. Despite the fact that she has been forced into marriage, the threat to the heroine's honour has been temporarily lifted by her husband's impotence and it is likely that Levidulcia's analysis of the situation would move an audience to laughter rather than to disapproval. Moreover, her adultery, regarded, in contemporary Christian terms as a sin, appears, in its comic context to be more of a venial one than D'Amville's ruthless attempted rape of his daughter-in-law. If he and Levidulcia can be said to represent lust in the play, his is a far more threatening version than hers.

The didactic tone of the ending introduces a note which might seem, to a twentieth century audience, to clash with earlier, comic scenes. In the context of previous events and the relatively sympathetic way in which the character has been presented, Levidulcia seems to be harshly treated. The consequences of her adultery are now brought home by the fact that both her lover, Sebastian, and her husband, Belforest, are killed in a fight over her honour. When she confesses her sins to the audience her self-abasement seems out of character in view of the cheerful acceptance of her own sexuality expressed earlier in the play, and she ends up making the gesture of a tragic heroine. These are not inconsistencies on Tourneur's part, however, so much as attempts to illustrate the complex and even contradictory attitudes towards love which prevailed at the time. The fate of Levidulcia is an illustration of the ambivalence of attitudes towards sexuality in general, and towards women in particular. This kind of suitably moral ending is, perhaps, also a sop to convention on the part of the dramatist. Levidulcia's cheerful embracing of an Ovidian approach to sex; her down-to-earth commentary and her use of her friend, Cataplasma as go-between, are all symptomatic of the kind of freedom which women in the period were criticised for

exploiting. Yet, by the end of the play she speaks the conventional words of penance, admitting responsibility for the dead bodies of her husband and Sebastian:

Is this the saving of my honour, when  
 Their blood runs out in rivers, and my lust  
 The fountain whence it flows?

(IV.v.62-3)

In her final address to the audience, sexuality is no longer a pleasure but a sin.

Levidulcia defines herself in the uncompromising terms of the misogynist:

The sea wants water enough to wash away  
 The foulness of my name. O, in their wounds  
 I feel my honour wounded to the death.  
 Shall I outlive my honour? Must my life  
 Be made the world's example? Since it must,  
 Then thus in detestation of my deed,  
 To make th' example move more forcibly  
 To virtue, thus I seal it with a death  
 As full of horror as my life of sin.

(IV.v.77-85)

She stabs herself to the accompaniment of a moralising comment: 'O with what virtue lust should be withstood / Since 'tis a fire quenched seldom without blood.' (IV.v.89-90) To make the moral even clearer, Levidulcia's confidant, Cataplasma, condemned by the judge as 'the poison that / Infects the honour of all womanhood' (V.ii. 7-8) is condemned to be whipped until she faints for loss of blood. She is to be set to 'painful labour' (38) in order to 'mortify' the flesh. It is not that D'Amville escapes unpunished but the ending of the play confirms the view of woman as 'a wretchedly carnal thing'. Levidulcia's brief ascendancy gives way to an assertion, not only of moral values, but of the importance of 'chaste affection' in a woman. The voices of the two advocates of sexual adventure, so eloquent in performance, are silenced.

The careers of the heroines of *The White Devil* and *The Insatiate Countess* (c.1610) like that of Levidulcia, are finally shaped by men and culminate in repentance. The title of *The Insatiate Countess* (written by Marston in collaboration with Barksted and others) appears to confirm its heroine in the role of the stereotypical lustful woman, whereas that of *The White Devil*, if it is understood to refer to Vittoria, rather than her brother, Flamineo, is ambiguous. In both plays the myth of female power over men is more powerfully evoked than in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. Bernard of Cluny's description of woman as 'delicious poison' and 'beautiful rottenness' is echoed by Cardinal Monticelso's categorising of Vittoria as one of those whores who are 'sweetmeats which rot the eater.' The mingling of fascination and repulsion, of eroticism and moral condemnation is present in both plays, and has, as its focus, the two women who challenge convention and definition by men in the course of the dramatic action. In Painter's version of the story which is one of the sources of *The Insatiate Countess*, there is a description of the way in which

The whole city also rang of the sleights and meanes she used to trappe the noblemen, and of her pollicies to be rid of them when her thirst was stanch'd, or diet grew lothesome for want of change.<sup>12</sup>

Painter's words summon up the stereotype of the lustful woman who, like an enchantress traps her victims, yet is herself in turn victim of her own insatiable appetite. The images of women as deceiver and predator are familiar ones to his readers, often to be repeated, as is the association of promiscuity with a restless desire for change. Painter makes it clear that there is a qualitative difference between male and female desire when he draws a distinction between the feelings of Dom Pietro for the Countess and hers for him. Pietro sings a song of wounded hearts,

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<sup>12</sup> William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure*, Tome II, Novel XXIV (1567) p.69. The original story of the Countess of Celant is told by Bandello, and translated by Belleforest, whose version was used by Painter. Other English versions include translations by Geoffrey Fenton and George Whetstone

death, and sacrifice: all the ingredients of courtly love, whilst the Countess is described as setting out to 'lure him' and 'catch hym wyth her bayte.'<sup>13</sup> Although it is made clear that Pietro wishes to 'enjoy' the Countess's love in a physical sense it is her appetite rather than his which the writer dwells on. Following Painter's example, Marston and his co-authors make Isabella's feminine wiles and her appetite for change the focus of their play.

Although the uncompromising title of the play seems to define the Countess entirely in terms of her appetite, Isabella's description of herself as 'a glorious devil' (IV.ii.3-4) calls to mind the ambivalence with which female sexuality is so often regarded. Less earthy than Levidulcia, Isabella dignifies her sexuality with classical references from the works of Ovid. At the same time, she is, from the moralist's point of view, a 'devil', a source of sin and corruption. Repeatedly she constructs herself in terms which are associated with archetypal female behaviour. Even in her own eyes she is not only Venus but Eve, a personification of erotic love, yet, at the same time, a tempter into sin. As Venus she is the queen of love, offering a skill and expertise in the arts of love which can only belong to the experienced woman. Yet when she speaks of offering to Gniaca 'the fruit that made men wise' (III.iv.78), the audience is reminded of the wages of sin rather than the pleasures of love. A comparison with Eve is also made when the lovers are interrupted by the return of Guido, and Isabella remarks to her maid:

The serpent's wit to woman rest in me,  
 By that men fell, then why not him by me?  
 Feigned sighs and tears dropped from a woman's eye  
 Blinds man of reason, strikes his knowledge dumb:

(III.iv.109-112)

The speech demonstrates her confidence in her feminine powers but it also endows her with the sin of pride. Her bold alignment with the traditional biblical source of evil

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<sup>13</sup> Painter, pp.70-72

confirms the misogynist view of woman and her power over men. She is become, in this image, not only Eve but the serpent itself, an instrument of damnation using the traditional weapons attributed to Satan and to womankind: dissimulation and deceit.

Like Levidulcia, Isabella views love in terms of pleasure, indulging her desires without guilt or inhibition and both women are judged according to a value system which is essentially censorious. The freedom which Isabella claims at the beginning of the play is the freedom to act outside that system and to construct her identity in a positive light. The ambivalence in Isabella's portrayal is evident in the way in which she is presented. Her first appearance as a widow, in deep mourning, is accompanied by *double entendres* which play on popular prejudice on the subject of widowhood. At the same time the scene builds up sufficiently in solemnity to provide a comic reversal of expectations when the apparently grieving widow exclaims to her visitor:

I wail his loss! Sink him ten cubits deeper,  
I may not fear his resurrection:  
I will be sworn upon the Holy Writ  
I mourn thus fervent, 'cause he died no sooner.

(I.i.43-6)

The dramatic reversal set up by Marston is at the same time a confirmation of contemporary prejudice. Isabella's response to her husband's death is relief that 'Now his soul her Argus eyes hath closed' it leaves her 'free as air' 'to fly to pleasure.' (I.i.50-52) <sup>14</sup> Her words form an ironic contrast with those of her lover Gniaca, in a manner which highlights the different perceptions of male and female sexuality. Isabella's widowhood has freed her from her husband's demands and from his authority. The freedom she claims is precisely that which was regarded as dangerous for a woman who had no man to guide her. Gniaca, on the other hand describes himself

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<sup>14</sup> The reference to the many eyes of Argus in relation to the husband watching over his wife recalls Biron's description of Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*, III.i.191-4: see Chapter 1

as 'love's bondsman'. Like Garnier's Antonie and Acrasia's helpless victims, he is 'entrap'd', helplessly enslaved, and temporarily unmanned by his mistress.

Like so many of the unchaste heroines of Renaissance drama, Isabella challenges conventional behaviour only to define herself in terms of masculine criteria. She expresses herself in terms of general principles of behaviour: 'Fair women play / She's chaste whom none will have'. She readily admits to female frailty but boldly links the idea of woman as a 'fallen' creature to one who falls, in a literal sense.

Alas, poor creatures, when we are once o' the falling hand,  
A man may easily come over us.  
It is as hard for us to hide our love,  
As to shut sin from the Creator's eyes.  
I' faith, my lord, I had a month's mind unto you  
As tedious as a full-ripened maidenhead.

(I. i. 87-92)

The sexual innuendo of Isabella's speech could be regarded as evidence of her lewdness but it also invites laughter. Her reference to the tediousness of 'a full-ripened maidenhead' allies her with Paroles in his view of virginity as 'a commodity will lose the gloss with lying', casting a cynical light on the nature of female chastity as a condition to be regretted rather than aspired to. Nevertheless, there is a reminder of the moral judgement that others might make in the comparison that Isabella makes between a woman's concealing her love for a man and hiding her sins from God. The association of love with sin makes it clear that it is lust as opposed to love which inspires her actions.

A similarly complex response is invited when Isabella selects her husband, Roberto, whilst still in mourning, and then rejects him in favour of another lover. Her actions are presented in a manner which borders on the farcical in their haste. In the dance which is held to celebrate her marriage, Isabella's affections seem to change with her partners. The scene serves as a visual enactment of the changeability which is, in

the tradition of the *Metamorphoses*, linked with sexuality and which is the hallmark of the unchaste woman.

Change is no robbery: yet in this change  
 Thou robbest me of my heart: sure Cupid's here  
 Disguised like a pretty torch-bearer...

(II.i.106-8)

Isabella's use of the conventional language of love forms an ironic contrast with the obvious shallowness of her affections, and contrasts with the more earthy comment made after Guido has accidentally fallen into her lap, 'Was I not deep enough, thou god of lust, / But I must further wade?' (II.i.157-158) Alone in her chamber, however, she is allowed to debate the nature of love and lust without the intrusion of farcical action, in a scene which invites the audience to respond sympathetically to her predicament rather than condemn her outrageous behaviour. A serious note of introspection is struck as she, like Chapman's Tamyra, compares her blood to a 'troubled ocean' (II.iii.42) and asks:

Where was my mind before, that refined judgement  
 That represents rare objects to our passions?  
 Or did my lust beguile me of my sense?  
 Making me feast upon such dangerous cates,  
 For present want that needs must breed a surfeit.  
 How was I shipwrecked?

(II.iii.48-53)

Briefly the passage touches on the conflict between love and lust, soul and body which underlies the discourse of love throughout the period, and, as in the case of *Bussy D'Ambois*, the philosophical consideration is given to a woman. The moment is short-lived, however. In language which is borrowed from Marlowe's Ovid, she succumbs

to the 'darts' of 'purple Love.' (I.63) Lust, like Isabella herself, beguiles the senses; it is portrayed in terms of an appetite for sweetness than can only cloy.

Marston highlights the role of lust as a destroyer of marriages by showing the way in which the conventional associations of the wedding night are overturned. Hymen, instead of presiding over the festivities, is invoked only to be dismissed, as the Countess cries 'Hymen take flight,/ And see not me, 'tis not my wedding night.' (II.i.160-1) She compares herself, going reluctantly to her 'nuptial bed', with Andromeda anticipating the embrace of a 'fell monster.' (II.ii.247) The extreme nature of Isabella's reaction against her bridegroom has its comic moments. When she lays claim to familiar classical figures in attempting to describe her passion it is with a self-consciousness which also has a comic effect, dispelling the literary and dramatic illusion. 'Lust, thou art high/ My similes may well come from the sky.' (II.i.203-4) The technique results in a satirical deflation of extravagant sentiments which demonstrably lack depth. At the same time, Isabella effectively conjures up images of herself as both Daphne and Venus, congratulating herself on having surpassed the goddess who once slept with a satyr, on her own superior choice of partner. The mingling of tones which is characteristic of the play makes it difficult to imagine the overall effect of the scene, but the poetry evokes the mythical power of femininity whilst at the same time undermining it.

In Isabella's seduction of Gniaca the erotic prevails over the comic. She overcomes her lover's scruples by offering him all the delights of 'Love's Queen.' (III.iii.100) Again she associates herself with Venus, promising, with a reference to Ovid's *Ars Amandi*, 'I'll study art in love, that in a rapture/ Thy soul shall taste pleasures excelling nature.' (III.iii.103-104) The Venus/ Adonis motif is continued when Isabella compares Gniaca in his hunting clothes to the youth who was the object of the goddess's desire, and in the reference to 'Venus' banquet' and 'Venus' paradise', Gniaca himself pays tribute to Isabella's powers in extravagant terms:

Thou creature made by Love, composed of pleasure,  
 That makest true use of thy creation,  
 In thee both wit and beauty's resident,  
 Delightful pleasure, unpeered excellence.  
 This is the fate fixed fast unto thy birth,  
 That thou alone shouldst be man's heaven on earth.

(III.iv.41-46)

In the throes of his infatuation he exalts his mistress to the divine, but the heaven she represents is not the chaste heaven of Petrarchanism but a paradise of sensual pleasure. At this moment in the play it is a paradise untainted by self-condemnation, or reference to the body's grossness. With an appropriate topical reference he adds, 'For though that women-haters now are common,/ They all shall know earth's joy consists in woman.' (49-50) The irony of the situation would need no underlining for a contemporary audience: Isabella can be described as 'earth's joy' in that she offers fulfilment of sexual desire but her behaviour conforms to all the prejudices of the misogynist. Although she vows:

Never to seek weaking variety,  
 That greedy curse of man, and woman's hell,  
 Where nought but shame and loathed diseases dwell.

(III.iv.97-99)

her behaviour is directly in opposition to her words. It is an illustration of the ambivalence of the play's treatment of sexuality that the Countess herself should remind the audience that to practise the arts of love may have physical as well as moral consequences. 'Variety' is not only as source of pleasure but of the corruption of venereal disease.

Isabella's lovers, like Painter's Dom Pietro, might be considered to be as inspired by lust as their mistress, yet they are portrayed as more morally sensitive. It

could be argued that this discrepancy in itself is evidence of a dual standard of morality, except that in the sub-plot, the situation is reversed, and the citizens' wives are superior to their husbands in both wit and virtue. Like many comic heroines they are resolute and capable and more than a match for the men. In the main, tragic plot, those men who are demonstrably ready to yield to temptation are shown to have a greater awareness of sin than the woman who tempts them, though it is made clear that in some cases, like that of Rogero, criticism of the Countess arises out of resentment at her rejection of him. With a greater degree of altruism Gniaca admits to a feeling of guilt at the betrayal of his friend, Guido. His reaction is contrasted with that of Isabella, for whom taking a new lover is not a moral issue but a question of succeeding in the art of deception. As she puts it: 'Women are witless that cannot dissemble.' (III.iii.119) It is Gniaca who advises Isabella of the dangers of violent passion in terms reminiscent of the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet* :

Wrong not yourself and me, your dearest friend,  
Your love is violent, and soon will end.  
Love is not love unless love doth persevere,  
That love is perfect love that loves forever.

(III.ii.80-3)

This ability to stand aside, temporarily, and make a considered judgement differentiates him from the volatile Isabella who, to conform with her stereotypical image must be led entirely by her appetite.

Similarly, Guido is able to move from the role of lover to that of moral commentator, turning from the particular language of love to that of misogynistic generalisation:

Farewell thou private strumpet worse than common.  
Man were on earth an angel but for woman;  
That seven-fold branch of hell from them doth grow,

Pride, Lust and Murder they raise from below,  
 With all their fellow sins. Women were made  
 Of blood, without souls <sup>15</sup>:

(III.iv.175-180)

Isabella becomes a symbol of all womanhood. The original sin of Eve is levelled against woman who is responsible for man's fall. To it, for good measure, is added responsibility for the seven deadly sins. Guido goes so far as to deny women souls, reinforcing the stereotype of woman as a creature governed only by her appetite. There is nothing to counteract the generalisation. Although Isabella has plenty to say for herself, her plotting of his death immediately proves Guido's argument for the correlation between lust and murder. Misogyny becomes not only moral commentary but a commentary on the dramatic action, accurately predicting events, so that Isabella's actions are made to conform to cynical expectations. It is Guido who points out to Gniaca that he ' [dotes] upon a devil, not a woman'; a woman who has bewitched him and drowned his soul. (IV.ii.60-63) The two men fight over a conflicting image of the woman they have both loved. To Gniaca, she is 'wise, most loving, chaste' (IV.ii.59); to Guido she is a sorceress. He conjures up the vision of woman as a Circe-like figure, capable of enslaving men to 'diseased lust' and swallowing them up in her 'gulf-like' appetite (l.71); only to deflate the image of female power by the sententious comment:

This curse pursues female adultery,  
 They'll swim through blood for sin's variety:  
 Their pleasure like a sea, groundless and wide,  
 A woman's lust was never satisfied.

(IV.ii.80-3)

The repetition of this misogynistic truism indicates the restoration of the balance of power in favour of men. Having at one time been, like Gniaca, enslaved by Isabella,

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<sup>15</sup> A concept that had become proverbial. See Tilley, W 709 and *The Dutch Courtesan*, V.iii.50 'O what is woman merely made of blood.'

Guido is now able to distance himself and pass judgement; to read into Isabella's behaviour, as Ulysses read into Cressida's body language, a formula applicable to all women. It is not, of course, applicable to the women of the sub-plot, who are innocent of all the accusations levelled against them by their hypocritical husbands, but, as the audience is aware, they, unlike Isabella, are faithful wives.

The tone of these comments is echoed in Medina's words in the last act when he invites the man whom Isabella has employed to kill Guido to repent, on the grounds that he is now :

..freed from out the serpent's jaws,  
That vild adulteress, whose sorceries  
Doth draw chaste men into incontinence,  
Whose tongue flows over with harmful eloquence ---

(V.i.10-13)

Medina's words evoke once more the image of Isabella as both serpent and sorceress. She is made to bear the responsibility of tempting men, who would otherwise be chaste, into 'incontinence.' The projection of male guilt onto the female is demonstrated by the fact that, whilst Sago is pardoned, Isabella is forced to face execution. The visit of her ex-husband, Roberto, in the shape of a friar confirms his piety and magnanimity in contrast to her stubborn refusal to accept her fate. When she finally asks forgiveness, however, Isabella is able to conjure up briefly, once again for the audience, the image of herself as woman with the power to fascinate, rather than repel:

O these golden nets  
That have ensnared so many wanton youths,  
Not one but has been held a thread of life  
And superstitiously depended on..

(V.ii.201-4)

The complex and conflicting range of male attitudes towards women and sexuality are brought together in this speech. Isabella's words forge a link between the myth of female sexuality as enchantment, luring men against their will, and the Petrarchan idolisation of the adored mistress. Her 'golden nets' are reminiscent of the 'fine nets' of Spenser's *Acrasia*.( II.xii.77) She reminds the audience of her ability to inspire her lovers, for whom her eyes 'with their majestic light, / Have got new Muses in a poet's sprite.' (l. 208-9) Yet, in accepting her fate she also accepts the moralist's definition of herself as a 'loathed sight' (V.i.184). Her body, like that of Levidulcia, is made to suffer a public penance for its transgressions,

Female transgression is made a central issue in Webster's *The White Devil*.

The heroine Vittoria is, like Isabella, an adulteress, accused of murder and publicly tried and condemned as a whore, yet her portrayal is similarly characterised by its ambivalence. In the opening scenes Webster paints a picture for the audience of a neglected wife, prostituted by her brother for his own advancement, yet Vittoria is, it seems, a willing conspirator in the deception of her husband. To Flamineo she is an 'excellent devil', capable of using her influence over her lover to persuade him to commit murder. The men in the play persistently attempt to define her. Her brother, Flamineo interprets her behaviour to his patron, the Duke, in terms of his cynical perceptions of all women. (I.ii.251-8) To Cardinal Monticelso she is an adulteress and a whore whom he publicly denounces. In the tradition of Renaissance misogyny he relates Vittoria's behaviour to the original sin of the Old Testament: 'I am resolved/ Were there a second paradise to lose / This devil would betray it.' (II.ii. 67-9)

Addressing the assembled company at her trial he demands:

Shall I expound whore to you? Sure I shall,  
I'll give you their perfect character. They are first  
Sweetmeats which rot the eater, in man's nostril,  
Poison'd perfumes. They are coz'ning alchemy,  
Shipwrecks in calmest weather!

(III.ii.78-82)

The Cardinal epitomises both the bitterness of the misogynist and the righteous indignation of the moralist. Sweetness is linked with rottenness, poison with perfumes; female sexuality with deceit, or 'coz'ning' and enchantment. The speech, like the condemnation of Isabella by Guido has all the qualities of the kind of set piece produced by the pamphleteers. Like the former, it is an opportunity to discourse on female frailty. But whereas Isabella's conduct demonstrated the truth of Guido's argument in that, for her, murder was to be a consequence of lust, the connection between the two sins remains 'not proven' in Vittoria's case. Although Monticelso is convinced that 'next the devil, Adult'ry, Enter the devil, Murder', he has no evidence of Vittoria's involvement in her husband's death .(III.iii.108-9) Moreover, by placing this diatribe in the context of a trial, Webster opens it to debate.

The fact that the arraignment of Vittoria is central to the play is a reflection of the way in which female misconduct functions as an indicator of social disorder. The corruption of the court is epitomised by Bracciano's willingness to have murder committed in his name in order to possess Vittoria, but it is Vittoria who is made to stand trial, and who is subjected to public castigation, although no proof can be provided of any crime but 'incontinence.' In her spirited defence, she challenges her attackers, redefining their denunciation of her sins in positive terms.

Sum up my faults I pray, and you shall find  
That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,  
And a good stomach to a feast, are all,  
All the poor crimes that you can charge me with.

(III.ii. 208-11)

It is not an answer to the charge of murder but a demonstration of wit and courage which is dramatically convincing. Vittoria replaces the negative vocabulary of asceticism with a positive picture of epicureanism. In the battle of words between the

Cardinal and Vittoria, Webster allows Vittoria to maintain her dignity and to score points against her adversary. The effect is not necessarily to convince the audience of her innocence but to cast a critical light on the kind of misogynistic assumptions that underlie his accusations. When the Cardinal demands a response to the letter from Bracciano which he produces in evidence, Vittoria immediately focuses on the 'double standard' by which she, rather than her lover, is required to answer for her conduct: 'You read his hot love to me, but you want / My frosty answer.' (198-9) More equivocally she uses the same phrase that is employed by Isabella, the insatiate Countess, as a justification for her behaviour : 'Casta est quam nemo rogavit' (1.200): she is chaste whom no-one has asked. Here, however, it is not an excuse for promiscuity but the climax of an ironic rebuttal : 'Grant I was tempted, / Temptation to lust proves not the act.' (198-199) Far from allowing herself to be cast in the role of whore and seducer she challenges Monticelso's perception of the relationship:

Condemn you me for that the duke did love me?  
So you may blame some fair and crystal river  
For that some melancholic distracted man,  
Hath drown'd himself in't.

(III.ii.201-4)

Though Vittoria is sentenced to do penance in a House of Convertites, it is she who dominates the scene of her trial to the point where it is she who calls the Cardinal 'devil' and who accuses him, metaphorically of a sexual crime: 'you have ravished justice.' (II.i.273) The public and rhetorical nature of the scene enables Vittoria to speak with a more powerful voice than that of Marston's Isabella. Although, like Isabella she is forced to submit to male authority and judgement, she is allowed a scene of triumph. Webster builds upon the impression gained of Vittoria in the early part of the play to create a figure more fascinating and compelling. The Cardinal's references to 'wanton bathing' and 'the heat of a lascivious banquet' (194-5) seem to underline an impression

of sensuality which her dignified response does not necessarily refute. If she is not the 'fair and crystal river' which she describes, she is no ordinary 'strumpet.'

The formal, deliberate attack of the Cardinal which repeats the well-worn rhetoric of misogyny is followed by a more private one in which Bracciano himself turns against his mistress. When a forged letter containing an offer of protection to Vittoria from the Duke of Florence comes into his hands, he immediately jumps to the conclusion that she has betrayed him; she is 'changeable stuff'; a 'whore.' (IV.ii.47.43) Like so many men in Renaissance drama he is quick to redefine the woman he loved: the derogatory terms are ready to hand. If his words effectively sum up contemporary views of woman's fickleness, they also sum up the 'changeable' attitude of men towards them. From being his 'sweet physician' (I.ii.209) earlier in the play she is become the one who will bring him to 'curst disease.' (IV.ii.46-7) The Cardinal's image of 'sweetmeats which rot the eater' is given a more immediate and personal application. Bracciano's description of Vittoria's 'loose thoughts' scattering like quicksilver, develops further the idea of rottenness and disease by referring to the well-known cure for the 'curst disease' of syphilis. (IV.ii.44) In the light of his redefinition of his mistress, Bracciano now re-interprets his relationship with her. His retrospective account is coloured by images of bewitching and enchantment:

How long have I beheld the devil in crystal?  
Thou hast led me like an heathen sacrifice,  
With music, and with fatal yokes of flowers  
To my eternal ruin.

(IV.ii.88-91)

He neglects to mention the way in which he sought out Vittoria and enlisted her brother's help in procuring her. Instead he draws on the myth of woman as temptress, agent of the devil; and of desire as bondage. He concludes with a variation on a contemporary proverb: 'Woman to man / Is either a god or a wolf', summing up the

polarisation of woman into the divine and the bestial, and displacing his own guilt onto his mistress.

In the dangerous world of sexuality, peopled by sorceresses and she-devils, men needed to be on their guard. Outward appearances, conventionally held to reflect the character within, could prove to be deceptive. Monticelso sums up the outraged masculine reaction to the revelation of woman's unchastity by using a biblical image to describe Vittoria:

You see my lords what goodly fruit she seems,  
Yet like those apples travellers report  
To grow where Sodom and Gomorrah stood  
I will but touch her and you straight shall see  
She'll fall to soot and ashes.

(III. ii.63-67)

The contrast between 'goodly fruit' and the 'soot and ashes' of which it is comprised is a recurring theme in Renaissance literature, the drama in particular. Despite an increase in the popularity of adultery as what the Homilist describes as a 'pastime', the voice of censorship is frequently and loudly expressed. In terms of female transgression, adultery and whoredom are rated severely, so that it follows that the unchaste woman might go to considerable lengths to preserve the illusion of chastity. Comments by characters such as Vindice, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, on the theme that 'to be honest is not to be o' the world' reflect the view that morals in court and city are on the decline but this is not a view expressed with approval. The unchaste woman who wishes to be accepted by respectable society must be able to deceive.

***'Their fair, glozing countenance'...***

The fear of a deception which is masked by an outward appearance of respectability goes hand in hand with the pervasive fear of cuckoldry. Gosynhill expresses the prevailing fear of the deception of false appearances in verse:

The wise man sayeth in his proverbs,  
 'The strumpet's lips are dulce as honey,  
 But in her dealing she is sour as herbs,  
 Wormwood; or rue, or worse," saith he .  
 For when them like to mock with thee,  
 With tongue and eye such semblance they show  
 That hard it were them to mistrow.

As though they speke with mouth and heart,  
 With face they made so good a semblance  
 That hard it were a man to start  
 From their fair, glozing countenance;  
 Thus with their sugared utterance  
 The simple man that means but just  
 Deceived are where most they trust.<sup>16</sup>

The customary opposition of sweetness and bitterness is given the authority of the proverbial. The emphasis on the 'fair glozing countenance' and the 'sugared utterance' conjures up the image of female enchantress and male victim. Hamlet, on the other hand, refers more specifically to the fashion of the time when he makes Ophelia into an example of her sex. He uses cosmetics as a metaphor for deception, declaring : 'I have heard of your paintings, enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance.' (III.i.144-8) His words are applied to all women, on the misogynist's assumption that virtue in the female sex no longer exists, or belongs to a former age. He applies a common formula to women which trivialises their femininity, allowing him to define them in a manner which reduces the threat they might present to men.

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<sup>16</sup> Gosynhill, 'The Schoolhouse of Women' (1541) in *Half Humankind* p.154

The stereotype of female duplicity and insatiable appetite is summed up by King Lear. In his madness he describes

yon simp'ring dame  
Whose face between her forks presageth snow,  
That minces virtue, and does shake the head  
To hear of pleasure's name:  
The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't  
With a more riotous appetite.

(20. 114-9)

His comments are like those of the satirist, non specific, made in the context of a personal betrayal but reflecting on the corruption of society as a whole. Like Hamlet he associates women with hypocrisy: modesty is mere coyness or 'simp'ring', masking a raging appetite.

On a more humorous note, the mother in Middleton's *It's A Mad World My Masters* confirms the stereotype of female cunning which is illustrated in the conduct of her daughter, and the adulterous wife of the play, Mistress Harebrain. Having sold her daughter's maidenhead on fifteen occasions she consoles her with the words 'there's maidenhead enough for Sir Bounteous still. He'll be all his lifetime about it yet / And be as far to seek when he is done.' (I.i.151-3) She adds the advice

Be wisely tempered and learn this, my wench,  
Who gets th'opinion for a virtuous name  
May sin at pleasure and ne'er think of shame (154-6).<sup>17</sup>

The clever courtesan who manages to pass herself off as a woman of virtue is a familiar figure in Middleton's comedies, her success in doing so being a measure of the folly and credulity of those she attempts to deceive. In comedy, deception of this kind is the

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<sup>17</sup> In the concluding scene of the play the courtesan, Mistress Gullman, is married. The marriage of a man to a whore is a familiar comic denouement, used by Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure*, and by Middleton in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, though it does not, in these cases involve deception.

basis for a satirical exposure of the values of society; in tragedy it results in disillusionment, death and destruction. The greater the appearance of modesty, the more devastating is the shock of revelation when it is proved to be a facade. The ultimate deception that the unchaste woman could practise was to create the false illusion of chastity. In Middleton's *The Mayor of Queenborough* (1618) this deception becomes the driving force behind the actions of Roxena, whose 'glozing countenance' masks her ruthless ambition. Roxena's boldness is not, like that of Levidulcia, Isabella, and to a lesser extent Vittoria, associated with the flouting of convention, but hidden behind a mask of respectability. As she herself puts it, 'Tis not advancement that I love alone/ 'Tis love of shelter to keep shame unknown.' (III.i.25-26)

Roxena and her chaste counterpart, Castiza, are powerful symbols in a play in which Middleton juxtaposes ancient British history with scathing references to modern times; mystiques of chastity clash with the contemporary culture of commodity. Castiza, described by the unworldly king Constantius as 'a chaste lamp of eternity' (I.II.161) represents the traditional values of modesty and restraint. For her, chastity is a way of life, whilst for the usurper, Vortiger and his female equivalent Roxena, it is a counter in the game of sexual politics. Roxena is portrayed more as a Machiavel figure than a siren. Her lover, Horsus attributes her arrival in England, not to her love for her father, or for him, but to 'her cunning / The love of her own lust, which makes a woman / Gallop downhill as fearless as a drunkard' (II. iii. 166-8) It is a speech which reflects not only an uneasy fear of woman's sexuality but the double standard by which male and female conduct could be judged. If Roxena is to be regarded as a sinner, Horsus himself, as her lover, can hardly be perceived as innocent. It is he however to whom the moralising speech is given, he who passes judgement, though as the play progresses it becomes clear that he is a far from virtuous character.

Horsus defines his mistress in the familiar terms of insatiable appetite, but it is not so much lust which appears to motivate her subsequent actions as ambition. Roxena's means of establishing herself at court is to seize the opportunity to

demonstrate the virginity she does not possess. The boldness of this public gesture is in ironic contrast to the modesty it is intended to indicate. When Horsus collapses in what appears to be a fit, Roxena offers to revive him. Informing the assembled company: 'Tis his epilepsy' she assures them that a certain cure can be achieved by 'a virgin's hand stroked upon his heart', adding, with emphasis, 'but it must be pure virgin, / Or else it brings no comfort.' (II. iii. 219-21) Yet as she kneels by Horsus' side, she begs him not to betray her, reminding him, 'You've had what is most precious' (236) Roxena's actions and her public declaration demonstrate the mystique attached to virginity but her whispered words to Horsus are a reminder of social realities. She effectively pre-empts the discovery of her lack of chastity by involving Horsus from the start in her deception so as to retain the respect of 'chaste opinion' (1.237) .

In presenting a situation in which Vortiger, infatuated with Roxena, determines to rid himself of his virtuous wife, Middleton creates an ironic reversal of traditional values, in which Vortiger, far from valuing his wife's qualities, complains that she is

...so sin-killing modest, that if only  
 To move the question were enough adultery  
 To cause a separation, there's no gallant  
 So brassy impudent durst undertake  
 The words that shall belong to' t.

(III.i. 123-127)

Vortiger accepts Horsus' ingenious solution to the problem of his wife's stubborn fidelity: that he 'prove' her 'a whore ' by engineering her kidnap and rape. In the event he is prepared to cuckold himself in order to rid himself of his wife, whose virtue is a burden to him rather than a matter of pride. In contrast to Othello, who demands the 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's unfaithfulness in order to relieve the pain of uncertainty, Vortiger deliberately manufactures the proof of his 'betrayal' by raping his own wife. The chastity test which follows these events is engineered to bring public disgrace

upon Castiza whilst at the same time it provides another opportunity for Roxena to demonstrate her unscrupulousness by publicly 'proving' her virtue. The other women present at the scene act as foils to Castiza and Roxena, in that they are neither chaste, nor ashamed of their behaviour. Like Levidulcia, they are frank in their appreciation of sexual pleasure. Asked to swear their fidelity they offer excuses which are ludicrously unconvincing. The first pleads a tendency to sleep so heavily that she could not be awakened even by the discharge of a cannon; whilst the second declares herself to be:

...so troubled with the mother, too,  
 I've often called in help, I know not whom,  
 Three at once have been too weak to hold me down,  
 (IV.ii.98-100)

In contrast, Castiza cannot hide her shame when she is unable to testify in public that she has 'known no man but her husband.' This public charade has elements in common with the type of scene, familiar to contemporary audiences, in which the innocent wife is falsely accused, but the blurring of moral issues is highlighted by the fact that the man who has wronged her and the man who has accused her are one and the same, and that, perversely, he rejects the reality of chastity for its appearance. In addition to the other ironies of the scene, it is the King who protests that

Among so many women, not one here  
 Dare swear a simple chastity! here's an age  
 To propagate virtue in.  
 (IV.ii.191-3)

The genuinely chaste Castiza is reduced to silence, whilst Roxena, assured by Horsus that, as a non-Christian, she need not fear committing perjury, is able, once again to testify to her chastity: 'I am as free from man / As truth from falsehood, or sanctity from stain.'(IV. ii. 209-10) The contrast between sanctity and stain is illustrated in the opposition of the women themselves, who also serve to epitomise the polarities of men's attitudes to female sexuality. Castiza is cast in the mould of the 'mirrors of

modesty' yet she is publicly acclaimed a whore: Roxena, who plans to cuckold the King before she becomes his wife, is credited with 'the tender reputation of a maid.' (IV.ii.20) It is Castiza who receives the condemnation which Roxena could be said to have deserved when she is dismissed as 'an infection of black honour' (IV. ii. 215) so that Roxena, preserving the illusion of innocence, can be admitted to the King's bed. In this ironic reversal, Middleton forcefully demonstrates the perversion of values implied by the gap between what is publicly upheld as an ideal standard, and what is commonly practised.

By the end of the play moral values are reasserted. Roxena dies to the accompaniment of moralising comment by Vortiger, although there is considerable irony in the fact that the man who contrived to rape his own wife and engineer her public disgrace is now experiencing the reality and not the illusion of cuckoldry. Informed by Horsus of Roxena's unfaithfulness, he summons up a righteous indignation against her which gives a sadistic edge to his words. Like so many wronged husbands of Renaissance drama, he envisages the body which tempted and delighted him being tortured and engulfed in flames. The violence of his language, with its emphasis on the body's destruction, is typical of the wronged, or jealous husband carrying with it the bitter awareness of the body's betrayal.

Burn, burn! Now I can tend thee.  
 Take time with her in torment, call her life  
 Afar off to thee, dry up her strumpet blood,  
 And hardly parch the skin: let one heat strangle her;  
 Another fetch her to her sense again,  
 And the worse pain be only her reviving;  
 Follow her eternally! O mystical harlot  
 Thou hast thy full due! Whom lust hath crown'd queen before,  
 Flames crown her now a most triumphant whore;  
 And that end crowns all.

(V.ii.117- 26)

Vortiger himself is punished for his sins: his words are those of a dying man, but his death, in combat with Horsus, does not have the same symbolic significance as that of Roxena. For her is reserved the greatest torment, in the form of death by fire. The flames which consume her seem to arise from no earthly source, inviting association with the flames of hell, and by demanding that they 'follow her eternally', Vortiger condemns her to damnation.

It is the revelation of adultery which provokes Vortiger's reaction. More shocking, perhaps, is the revelation of unfaithfulness which takes place on the wedding night, when, however 'out of fashion' virginity might have been regarded in some circles, it was still an expected part of the bride's dower. Roxena's 'impudent confidence' is not challenged by the marriage bed but Evadne, in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610) is exposed as unchaste in a dramatic reversal of expectations on her wedding night. Evadne strikes to the heart of assumptions about female roles, exemplifying, in her situation, the duality with which female sexuality is regarded. She is, at the same time, a bride, whose wedding has been elaborately celebrated with age-old symbolism, and a mistress who has been 'bought' by the temptations of wealth and power. She represents, like Roxena, both the inaccessible and the available.

The opening scenes of the play are dominated by an elaborate wedding masque, which surpasses that of *The Insatiate Countess* and gives no obvious hints of the reversal which is to come. The songs emphasise the bride's modesty and the blushes that only darkness can hide, dwelling in detail on the moment of consummation. The bride's preparations for bed are accompanied by a tableau in which Beaumont and Fletcher oppose the traditional virtues of women to their vices. Aspatia, Amintor's rejected bride, sings of unrequited love, affirming her constancy with the words: 'My love was false but I was firm / From my hour of birth.' (II.i.85), whilst the maidservant, Dula, sings:

I could never have the power  
 To love above an hour,  
 But my heart would prompt mine eye  
 On some other man to fly. (II.i.84-6)

The expectations of chastity, so much a part of the discourse of marriage, appear to be upheld from the outset, when Evadne displays her reluctance to consummate the marriage. So convincing are her modest evasions that Amintor assumes they originate from a girlish reluctance to lose her virginity. He clings to the comfort of convention, assuring his wife:

If you have sworn to any of the virgins  
 That were your old companions, to preserve  
 Your maidenhead a night, it may be done without  
 This means.

II.i.191-4)

He is quickly disillusioned in this interpretation of events by Evadne's reply: 'A maidenhead, Amintor, / At my years?' (II.i.194-5) The mystique of virginity and the ideal of girlish modesty are undercut by this cool assumption that chastity has a 'sell-by' date and that it is churlish in a husband to expect it to be preserved beyond that. Having preserved the illusion of her chaste virtue into the bedchamber, it is Evadne herself who, secure in the protection of her powerful lover, the King, stage-manages the disclosure of her dishonour with maximum intent to shock. She concludes by claiming that she would rather share a bed of snakes than sleep with her husband:

I sooner will find out the bed of snakes,  
 And with my youthful blood warm their cold flesh,  
 Letting them curl themselves about my limbs  
 Than sleep one night with thee.

(II.i.209 -12)

Evadne's denial of Amintor is expressed, ironically, in sensual images which underline the ambivalence associated with desire. Snakes bring to mind Eve in the Garden of Eden, with its accompanying associations with the deception and fall of man. At the same time, Evadne creates a picture of the sensuous movement of the snakes, curling intimately around her body, enlivened by the heat of her desire. When she assures Amintor 'This is not feigned / Nor sounds it like the coyness of a bride,' (II.i.212-213) she mocks his expectations of conventional bridal behaviour. The fact that she insists that it is not a lack of desire that inhibits her sets her apart from the ideal of the chaste woman .

Alas, Amintor, thinkst thou I forbear  
 To sleep with thee because I have put on  
 A maiden's strictness? Look upon these cheeks,  
 And thou shalt find the hot and rising blood  
 Unapt for such a vow. No, in this heart  
 There dwells as much desire, and as much will  
 To put that wished act in practice as ever yet  
 Was known to woman, and they have been shown  
 Both; but it was the folly of thy youth  
 To think this beauty, to what hand so'er  
 It shall be called, shall stoop to any second.  
 I do enjoy the best, and in that height  
 Have sworn to stand, or die.

(II.i.285-297)

What distinguishes Evadne is her audacity, the boldness which contrasts with the modest demeanour associated with the virtuous woman. To that is joined an ability to analyse both her own emotions and the situation in which she finds herself. Her association with the King is a source of strength to her, rather than shame. Like the chaste mistress of the sonnets she denies her lover, yet admits to a keen sexual appetite:

'as much will/ To put that wished act in practice as ever yet/ Was known to woman.'

(II.i.290 -2)

The protection of the King enables Evadne to act and speak in bold defiance of convention. Unlike Evadne, Beatrice- Joanna in *The Changeling* has no powerful protector. Her aim is not to deny her husband but simply to deceive him. The wedding night is, as in *The Maid's Tragedy*, a focus of dramatic tension but not of revelation, in that the audience is aware of Beatrice-Joanna's predicament. As in the earlier play, it is an occasion which demonstrates the polarities of men's attitudes to women. As Sara Eaton points out, she 'internalizes and reflects the inherent contradictions in male perceptions of women, especially as couched in the rhetoric of courtly love.'<sup>18</sup>

Beatrice-Joanna is repeatedly defined by her lover, Alsemero and her servant, De Flores: idealised by the one and degraded by the other. Alsemero links her with 'man's first creation, the place blest / And is his right home if he achieve it.' The association of paradise carries with it the association of Eve and temptation, but Alsemero also links Beatrice-Joanna to the temple where he first saw her, like Petrarch with his Laura. This idealistic perception is contrasted with De Flores' cynical depiction of Beatrice-Joanna as a woman governed by her appetite. Like so many Renaissance misogynists, he reads into his mistress's behaviour a language that he attributes to all women. As we have seen, he is quick to interpret the change in her affections as an indication of promiscuity; again the idea of movement is associated with unbridled sexuality.

According to De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna, though she 'writ'st maid' is 'whore in her affections' because she has transferred her affections from the man to whom she was formally betrothed. (III.iv.142) It is this combination of 'maid' and 'whore' which is essential to De Flores. Although he calls his mistress 'whore', and exploits what he perceives as evidence of her appetite for sex, it is, paradoxically, her virginity that he requires to satisfy him fully.

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<sup>18</sup> Sara Eaton, 'Beatrice-Joanna and the Rhetoric of Love' in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. by David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass, pp. 275 -287,p. 276

The play's more contemporary setting precludes Beatrice-Joanna from demonstrating her purity to Alsemero through the mystical properties of virginal healing power, like Roxena. A more scientific age, Middleton ironically implies, is able to rely on alternative methods. Thus, Beatrice-Joanna, having been 'undone... endlessly' by her servant and lover, De Flores, is dismayed when she finds her future bridegroom to have in his possession a substance which, according to his *Book of Experiment* shows 'How to know whether a woman be a maid or not.' (IV. i. 40)

There is an element of absurdity to the whole scene, even though it is obvious that, to a contemporary audience at least, the issue in itself is not entirely a laughing matter. The fact that Beatrice-Joanna is able to discover the substance, to observe the effects by trying it out on her maid, and then to enact the symptoms with convincing accuracy to Alsemero, is evidence of her conforming to the stereotype of the deceitful woman. In this particular instance, it is Beatrice-Joanna's ingenuity, as well as her acting abilities which are put to the test. Yet, although she is portrayed as fickle, and even dangerous, prepared to kill one lover in order to gain another, she is able to command a degree of sympathy here. The dramatic presentation privileges the viewpoint of the deceiver, rather than the victim. From her first exclamation: 'Bless me! A right physician's closet 'tis,' (IV.i.20) to her detailed examination of the contents of Alsemero's store, it is her situation that engages us. Her bridegroom, though he obviously has justification for trying out his do-it yourself virginity test, emerges as more ridiculous than prudent. As Guardiano remarks in *Women Beware Women* 'It's a witty age', where the ingenuity of a man's methods of detection must match that of the woman who sets out to deceive him. Beatrice-Joanna's consummate performance as she swallows the contents of the (to the audience) now familiar Glass 'M' must be applauded theatrically as much as it might invite moral condemnation. It is not the end of dissembling: like Evadne, Beatrice-Joanna must face the most intimate test of all, that of the wedding night itself. Her approach is to pretend to fear of 'the blushing business' and to prevail upon her maid, Diaphanta, to take her place. This resourceful use of the bed trick satisfies

Alsemero's doubts and fulfils cynical expectations of the cozening skills of women at their most devious.

*'Thy black shame and my justice'...*

Although, dramatically, the unchaste woman is able to command attention, and even sympathy, she is subject, as we have seen in the case of Levidulcia and Isabella, to a harsh moral judgement. To that judgement may be added her own sense of guilt. The long-drawn-out punishment of Tamyra and the self-inflicted martyrdom of Anne Frankford have been discussed in Chapter Four. The retribution which forms the conclusion of sex tragedy is accompanied by an imagery of disease and corruption which was well-established in the period. Vives, in illustrating the social isolation of a woman who had lost her virginity, had described how 'every mother will keep not only their daughters but their sons from the infection of such an unthrifty maid.'<sup>19</sup> His aim was to advise and caution, rather than condemn but the word 'infection' is evocative. Swetnam in his *Arraignment of Women* (1615), makes the same association but with greater vehemence when he addresses 'unmarried wantons who have made themselves more vile than channel dirt' and exhorts them to cleanse their 'black sin' with tears that they might be 'washed and cleansed from this foul leprosy of nature.'<sup>20</sup> The word leprosy implied uncleanness, corruption of the flesh, and contagion, carrying more of a stigma than the image of venereal disease with which it is sometimes linked. He continues his theme by discoursing on the sin of lust;

Lust caused you to do such foul deeds which makes your  
foreheads forever afterwards seem spotted with black shame and  
everlasting infamy, by which means your graves after death are  
closed up with time's scandal,

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<sup>19</sup> John Luis Vives, in *Daughters, Wives and Widows* p.105

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Swetnam, 'The Arraignment of Women' in *Half Humankind*, p.204

adding: 'And yet women are easily won, got with an apple and lost with the paring.'<sup>21</sup>

The weight of condemnation which relates to women does not, of course imply that men escaped blame for their sins. The words of the Homilies on marriage, and those against whoredom and adultery make this clear. The wages of sin are conventionally portrayed as death for both men and for women, as the downfalls of Bracciano, Vortiger and Horsus illustrate. Yet it is women for whom a particularly virulent abuse is reserved: an abuse which combines an acknowledgement of their weaknesses, without any corresponding mitigation, and a bitter anger. For Evadne, the terrible catechism of her brother, Melantius, is the prologue to an invocation of the twin demons of disease and damnation. When he refers to Evadne's 'contagious name' Melantius draws on complex and long standing associations of sexuality with corruption. Compared with the other unchaste heroines, Evadne is allowed a lengthy scene of penance and expiation. Her brother assumes the role of prosecutor, judge and jury, as he demands: 'Tell me / Whose whore you are'. (IV.i.50-1)

Like Othello reading 'whore' on the 'fair paper' of Desdemona, and Ulysses interpreting the language of Cressida's body, Melantius adopts the metaphor of reading, giving his words the authority of a pronouncement:

Thy body is too little for the story  
The lusts of which would fill another woman,  
That she had twins within her.

(IV.i.30-32)

The horror that he expresses at Evadne's sin of lust is uncomfortably associated with an image of pregnancy. His words conjure up, for the contemporary audience the fear of cuckoldry and the threat it presents to patrilineage. He degrades his sister's behaviour as bestiality, advising her to 'seek a kindred/ 'Mongst sensual beasts, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.p.204

make a goat thy brother'. (IV.i.63-5) Evadne's defiance becomes submission to male authority when he forces her to the ground and threatens her with his sword:

When I have killed thee  
 (As I have vowed to do if thou confess not)  
 Naked as thou hast left thine honour will I leave thee,  
 That on thy branded flesh the world may read  
 Thy black shame and my justice.  
 (IV.i. 105-9)

The confrontation between brother and sister might be compared with the public confrontation of Webster's Vittoria with Cardinal Monticelso. The abuse is as vitriolic, but the occasion is private, rather than public, and the fact that he is Evadne's brother gives Melantius's words the authority of patriarchy as well as morality. In an image which reinforces the sexual nature of his sister's offence he envisages her as naked, branded like a criminal, and advertising her shame for the world to read. Whoredom is literally inscribed on her flesh by means of an instrument of torture. The physical torture which Montsurry inflicts on his erring wife, Tamyra<sup>22</sup>, are absent here but Melantius' repeated references to his sister's body, and its interpretation; to her imagined pregnancy and her naked flesh are further instances of the tensions surrounding female sexuality. Melantius' concern for his family honour is, according to convention, tied up with his sister's behaviour, like that of Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, but it is expressed in a manner which is similarly fraught with a sexual imagery in which fascination and revulsion are placed in uneasy opposition.

Evadne is forced into self-abasement and brought face to face with her wronged husband. Kneeling before him she confesses

I do present myself the foulest creature,  
 Most poisonous, dangerous, and despised of men  
 Lerna e'er bred, or Nilus. I am hell ...

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Four

(IV.i. 229-31)

Evadne's humiliation is complete because it is self-inflicted. She punishes herself with words, identifying finally with the ultimate evil of hell. She represents herself as the archetype of all false women, as, like them, a 'cozening crocodile' or like 'those plagues, those killing sores / Men pray against.' (IV.i.245) Deformity, danger, damnation, disease: Evadne calls on the time-honoured categories for the abuse of women in her self-reproach. The scene offers gratification to outraged masculine honour, dwelling as it does on the erring wife's plea to the wronged husband and reversing the situation of the wedding night earlier in the play. Evadne's boldness and defiance are transformed into humility and wifely submission.

The sense that order is restored by submission to masculine authority is a common closure in a number of the tragedies discussed in this chapter, though it is complicated when the source of all authority, the King, is himself at fault, as in *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Mayor of Queenborough*. In *The Changeling*, as in *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Insatiate Countess*, the heroine is forced to confront the conventional interpretation of her actions as defined by her husband. When she is at last challenged by him, she is struck by his use of the term 'whore' which she has never applied to herself:

What a horrid sound it hath  
 It blasts a beauty to deformity;  
 Upon what face so-er that breath falls  
 It strikes ugly. O you have ruined  
 What you can ne'er repair again.

(V.iii.31-35)

Beatrice-Joanna recognises the transforming power of the word which has its own 'cozening alchemy' to turn beauty into deformity. Like Melantius, Alsemero draws on a readily available vocabulary of denigration when confronting his wife. Like Bracciano

in *The White Devil*, he reinterprets, in retrospect, the beauty which he once associated with purity of mind and body. It has become, in hindsight, a mask concealing evil; the 'fair glozing countenance' described by Gosynhill:

There was a visor  
Over that cunning face, and that became you,  
Now impudence in triumph rides upon't;  
(V.iii.46-8)

'Impudence' is the key word here; the opposite of the 'pudency' of the chaste woman. The 'fair-faced saint' is revealed to be 'a cunning devil.' (V.iii.108-9) The juxtaposition of opposite poles of good and evil expresses the extremes of male attitudes to women and the distance that Alsemero has travelled in his feelings for Beatrice-Joanna.

Having admitted that she has become 'a cruel murd'ress' for the love of Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna vows that she has been true to his bed. It is not enough for Alsemero to whom the marriage bed is now 'a charnel.' She has crossed 'that dangerous bridge of blood' which leads from lust to murder. The subtlety of Middleton's portrayal of Beatrice-Joanna is overlaid by the familiar vocabulary of masculine abuse. She is 'all deform'd' to Alsemero, just as Evadne is to Amintor, 'a monster.' In the end, like so many of her guilty counterparts, she endorses his condemnation of her, bidding her father: 'O come not near me, sir, I shall defile you' and condemns her blood to 'the common sewer.' (V.iii.150,153) It is Alsemero who is given the moral authority in the play, as he summarises events and, later, speaks the epilogue. His words acquire particular force when he paints a picture of the adulterer's hell:

I'll be your pander now; rehearse again  
Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect  
When you shall come to act it to the black audience,

Where howls and gnashing shall be music to you:  
 Clip your adult'ress freely, 'tis the pilot  
 Will guide you to the Mare Mortuum,  
 Where you shall sink to fathoms bottomless.

(V.iii.114-120)

Alsemero's words are addressed to De Flores, who does not escape punishment for his part in events but it is notable that, when Alsemero sends him into the closet to 'rehearse again' the 'scene of lust' (114-115) it is he who is described as the 'prey' (113); and Beatrice-Joanna as 'the pilot' who is to conduct him to hell. The heavenly associations of his first meeting are transformed into images of damnation. Like the subject of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 he has learnt 'To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell' though it is not the hell of his own lust which concerns him but that of his wife and her lover. As 'pander', paradoxically, he seems to be inviting them to commit again the act of adultery. The invitation is made ironically when Alsemero sends De Flores to join his mistress, but it is suggestive of a vicarious interest in the performance which is not compatible with moral detachment. Of course, in psychological terms, Alsemero is unlikely to be capable of detachment, but dramatic action and convention combine to make him both wronged husband and commentator on events. The combination of the role of participant and observer, so often featured in the drama, gives a note of ambivalence to his utterances, which, once again, illustrates the duality response to female sexuality.

*'What have I gained from thee but Infamy?'*

The unchaste women of Renaissance tragedy, although they have the power to attract men and deceive them, are themselves susceptible to temptation, in common with their biblical ancestress, Eve. De Flores refers to Beatrice-Joanna as 'that broken rib of mankind.'(V.ii.146) The cynical generalisations which characterise so many male utterances about female sexuality may seem to be validated by their behaviour. They

cheat, cozen and beguile, sacrificing their precious honour, betraying their lovers, or cuckolding their husbands. They are even prepared to commit murder to attain their ends. They are motivated by love, passion and ambition to transgress the boundaries of conventional virtue and in doing so they incur condemnation as 'whore', 'harlot' or 'strumpet'. Unlike most of their chaste counterparts, they are powerful and pro-active, boldly playing the courtship game or asserting their knowledge of men. They do not, like the good heroine, embody the traditional virtues of modesty and constancy, nor are they obliged, like the fabled patient Grizelda to 'suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' Though they are defined and restricted in the men's world in which they move, they adopt alternative values, which bear more relation to worldly reality than the ideals of a chivalric past.

Although the portrayals of unchaste women reflect the tensions associated with sexuality it seems that it is their boldness and ability to deceive which is emphasised more than their ability to fascinate and entice men. It is arguable that the former qualities were easier for a boy actor to convey to the audience. There is no doubt, however, that it is possible to gain an impression of the charismatic qualities of Cleopatra, not only because of what we are told about her, but from her own words and actions in the play. In *Cleopatra*, Shakespeare has succeeded in presenting the positive aspects of female sexuality as well as the negative. Some of these qualities are captured in *Isabella*, the *Insatiate Countess*, and *Vittoria Corombona*, but *Cleopatra* remains an exceptional woman in the drama of the period. More often, in the plays which feature the unchaste woman, the prevailing tone of satire, mingled with moral condemnation, emphasise transgression rather than beguilement. Despite this, it is possible to conclude that the erring women in Renaissance tragedy were presented as victims as well as offenders. This is not to diminish their crimes. The rigorous moral commentary to which they are subjected does not allow the audience to do so. The presence of a dramatic foil, in the form of a model of chastity accentuates the opposing stereotype. The virtuous *Castabella*, *Castiza* and *Aspatia*, in particular, highlight an alternative

mode of female behaviour which is passive, modest and long-suffering. More important, it is chaste. In contrast, sexuality in women is mysterious, even supernatural, a kind of witchcraft, at best to be regarded with suspicion, at worst to be degraded and despised.

The association of the unchaste woman with hell and the devil; with disease and corruption; is a way of asserting control of the dangerous forces of sexuality. By displaying the punishment and debasement of the wayward sex, the playwrights demonstrate the enforcement of masculine control over women, and over men's own wayward sexual urges. The message in these plays, and indeed in those plays which celebrate long-suffering virtue and female sacrifice, might therefore seem to be that chaste modesty is good, and sexuality in women is bad. It is only a part of the message, however. It is not to be expected that a dramatist, writing in an age of censorship, would allow crime to go unpunished. It is a literary convention which has only relatively recently been overturned. At a time when whoredom and adultery were regarded as sinful, we might expect a reinforcement of that view on stage. The theatre presents that view but it does far more. What it offers is a psychologically dynamic context in which there is a constantly fluctuating relationship between the characters on stage and with their audience. It is true that the constraints of society, from the Greek and Trojan camps of *Troilus and Cressida* to the aristocratic world of *The Changeling* are applied more rigidly to women than to men and this is reflected in the drama. As Guardiano puts it in *Women Beware Women*, 'fine snares for women's honesties are set', and those who fall into the snare may be caught up inescapably, though despite the play's title, it is not only women who set those snares. The dramatists, from Shakespeare to Middleton demonstrate to us the significance of female transgression by presenting it through the eyes of men. The nudging asides of the misogynist and the bitter tirades of the wronged lover and the cuckolded husband invite us to join in a condemnation that extends beyond the individual and encompasses all women. Written by men, with male characters taking the parts, and speaking the words, the plays focus

on the betrayal of men. When, in keeping with convention, a moral judgement is made, it is from a male viewpoint. Within this framework, however, as we have seen, there is scope for a challenge and a questioning of this viewpoint.

Thus, Evadne is given the opportunity to confront the King, her seducer, in an active rather than a submissive role. Under pressure from Melantius she takes on the role of a revenger. Like Lady Macbeth she approaches the king's bedchamber, aware of her 'black purpose' but moved by what she refers to as 'the conscience / of a lost virgin.' (V.i.131) She achieves revenge in a manner which underlines the nature of the wrong done to her. Her action of tying the King's arms to the bed is interpreted by him as the prelude to a novel form of love-making as he, unsuspecting, exclaims: 'By my love, this is a quaint one.' Borrowing her brother's imagery, Evadne turns it against the man responsible for her fall. 'Once I was lovely, not a blowing rose / More chastely sweet, till thou, thou foul canker, (Stir not) didst poison me.' (V.i.77-88) She displaces the image of disease which was employed against her onto the King. He is the 'foul canker' who has corrupted her.:

I was a world of virtue  
Till your curs'd court and you (hell bless you for't),  
With your temptations on temptations  
Made me give up mine honour  
(V. i.79-82)

We have only Evadne's word for what took place before the play; her treatment of Amintor, and her unsentimental acceptance of the King's love as a stepping stone to ambition, seem to contradict the views expressed here. On the other hand, it is possible to see her as a pawn in the game of power and corruption, to envisage her, like Bianca in *Women Beware Women*, 'made bold' by her 'acquaintance' with sin. Here, like Bianca, and like Vittoria Corombona, she insists that her lover bear some responsibility for his actions.

It is in *Women Beware Women* with its themes of adultery and incest, in which women are portrayed not only as betrayers of men, but of each other, that the female characters speak with an authority which is not diminished by our awareness of their faults, by the vulnerability of their sex. Bianca complains of the 'continual surveillance' that restricts the behaviour of young women:

'tis not good in sadness  
To keep a maid so strict in her young days.  
Restraint breeds wandering thoughts.

(IV. i. 34-6)

Her words, as well as describing her own situation, challenge the customary upbringing of girls, which subordinated social and educational development to the preservation of chastity. Echoing Vittoria in *The White Devil*, she challenges the Cardinal who attacks both her and her lover, with the words, 'mongst all your virtues/ I see not charity written, which some call / The first born of religion.'(IV.iii.49-51) Isabella, pressured into an arranged marriage with a man whom she despises, speaks passionately of 'the heartbreakings / Of mismatched maids where love's enforced.' (I. ii. 165) She adds, with the conviction of experience: 'Sometimes, by'r Lady, no misery surmounts a woman's. / Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters.' (174-5) Her aunt, Livia, speaking up on her behalf, suggests that it is the husband who gains the most from marriage:

Besides, 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 and served in to them.'

(I.ii.40-3)

Livia may be protesting too much for some members of the contemporary audience, but although she, Bianca and Isabella are corrupted by the society in which they live, they offer incisive criticism of its conventions.

Similarly Roxena, turns the tables on her lover, Horsus, by accusing him of using her merely to satisfy his lust. She pleads eloquently, identifying herself with all women :

I pity all the fortunes of poor women  
 In my own unhappiness. When we have given  
 All that we have to men, what's our requital?  
 An ill-faced jealousy, that resembles much  
 The mistrustfulness of an insatiate thief..

(III.i.45-8)

The adjective 'insatiate', so commonly referred to a woman's lust, is transferred to her lover's jealousy. The scene ends on a note of bathos when Roxena casually sums up the situation with: 'If lost virginity can win such a day / I'll have no daughter but shall learn my way.' (II.i.71-2) By this shift of tone, Middleton undercuts the earlier speech, confirming Roxena in her amoral role. The psychologically convincing gives way to the stereotypical. Nevertheless, the scene allows Roxena, for a time, to challenge Horsus.

One of the most powerful voices is perhaps that of Webster's Vittoria. As we have seen, she is given the public occasion of a trial in which to plead her case. She effectively sums up the double-bind for women in offering up her 'modesty / And womanhood ' to the ambassadors, whilst declaring her need to defend herself and, like Perseus in the masque 'personate masculine virtue' (III.ii.131-134). She challenges her lover, Bracciano, demanding of him

What have I gained from thee but infamy?  
 Thou hast stain'd the spotless honour of my house,

And frightened thence noble society:

.....  
 What do you call this house?  
 Is this your palace? Did not the judge style it  
 A house of penitent whores? Who sent me to it?  
 Who hath the honour to advance Vittoria  
 To this incontinent college? Is't not you?  
 Is't not your high preferment? Go, go brag  
 How many ladies you have undone, like me.  
 Fare you well sir; let me hear no more of you.  
 I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,  
 But I have cut it off: and now I'll go  
 Weeping to heaven on crutches.

(IV.ii.107-123)

What is interesting about this speech is that Vittoria turns back on her lover the accusations levelled against her and against women in her position. Defined by the Cardinal of being 'a most notorious strumpet' she accuses Bracciano of bringing infamy upon her (III.ii.242). She places the responsibility for her situation upon him. The 'stain' upon honour is of his creating; and the image of corruption and disease is his as much as hers. It is only on the point of death that she admits 'O my greatest sin lay in my blood, /Now my blood pays for 't.' (V.v.237-8)

The misogynistic attack on women, as the previous chapters indicate, is part of a tradition, and is full of well-worn cliches. The misogynist himself was an established figure in society and literature, and, for all those who were won over by his words there were others to whom he was not to be taken seriously. Beaumont's play *The Woman Hater* is an example of the misogynist as a comic figure and there are many others. This is not to suggest that the condemnation of women does not take on a more serious note in tragedy - it clearly does; but to emphasise that the voice of misogyny was a recognisable one in the period and was not always heard uncritically. It is a tribute to the complexity of the drama as a medium that we are able also to appreciate the

resilience and share in the hopes, fears and disappointments of women who are thus condemned and satirised. It is Montaigne who remarks in his essay *Upon Some Verses of Vergil*, that '...women are not altogether in the wrong when they refuse the rules of life prescribed to the World, for so much as only men have established them without their consent.'<sup>23</sup> The unchaste women of Renaissance Drama break the most important rule of all, in surrendering their virtue. In exploring the consequences of that fall from grace, the dramatist makes it clear that it is one of the many rules made by men.

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<sup>23</sup> Montaigne, 'Upon Some Verses of Vergil', *Essays: Vol. III*, p.77-78

## CONCLUSION

The plays discussed in the previous pages represent only a sample of those available for discussion but they exemplify the concerns about love and sexuality which reverberate throughout Renaissance drama. Underlying them are the questions which I quoted in Chapter One, from Petrarch's Sonnet 132:

Can it be love that fills my heart and brain?

If love, dear God, what is its quality?

If it is good, why does it torture me?

If evil, why this sweetness in my pain?

These questions go to the heart of the conflicting discourses of the period. The tensions between the concept of love as positive, joyful and even transcendent, and love as pain, weakness, folly and sin are, as I have indicated, the subject of debate over and over again, on various levels of seriousness, from comic banter to bitter satire. When he mockingly comments: 'This is the liver vein, which makes flesh a deity,/ A green goose a goddess. Pure, pure idolatry' Shakespeare's Biron utters the paradox which is at the heart of contemporary thought on love and sexuality: that flesh, traditionally associated with the devil, should assume the shape of a deity; that a young woman should be elevated to the status of goddess. The mockery, which continues in one form or another throughout the period, is directed at the courtly love tradition and its artifice, but it goes deeper, in questioning the status of love itself.

The conflict between the demands of the body and the spirit is brought to life in the interaction of men and 'women' on stage. It is this conflict which I have argued lies at the heart of the portrayal of love. As the players inform their audiences, love can be 'holy and perfect' (Silvius in *As You Like It*) yet it can also be classed, in the words of the King of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, as 'the grosser manner of these

world's delights' (I.i.29). The romantic comedies appear to offer, on one level, an answer to Petrarch's questions, asserting, by their harmonious endings that love is indeed good; that its 'torture' will end and that pain will give way to pleasure. The tragedies in which lovers face death, united in, or comforted by their love for one another, also reinforce the idea of the value of love, despite its unhappy outcome. Yet, as I have argued, accompanying this positive vision are negative undercurrents which are present in even the happiest of comedies. Once love is admitted to be more than chaste adoration, it becomes an expression of sexual desire, associated with sin. The lover admires and desires his mistress; his cynical friend more often than not advises him, like Iago, that 'love is merely lust of the blood and a permission of the will.' (I.iii.334) Sometimes, yet another voice like that of the Friar, in *Romeo and Juliet*, acknowledges the value of love but advises 'love moderately'. Both kinds of advice have their roots in the tradition which places love on different levels, ranging from the bestial to the divine and which advocates the sublimation of desire rather than its fulfilment. Fulfilment is so frequently associated with disappointment. The romantic comedies, in keeping with the ideals of the Reformation, suggest that fulfilment and happiness can be achieved in marriage, but, as I have demonstrated, they too contain hints that disillusionment might follow.

The contrast between the ideal and the feared reality forms a basis for dramatic tension in the portrayal of relationships between men and women in plays as disparate as the courtly comedies of Lyly and the satire of Middleton. The jokes and frequent references to cuckoldry which appear throughout the drama are a verbal illustration of that tension. The dual vision of marriage as what Freevill in *The Dutch Courtesan* terms 'the holy union of two equal hearts'(V.i.69) and Leantio in *Women Beware Women* calls 'the ripe time of man's misery'(III.i.271) is made the subject of tragedy, whilst cuckolded husbands, cunning whores and deceitful wives are part of the merry-go-round of city comedy. More complex themes are introduced when love or desire is frustrated or perceived as unlawful, or even evil. The battle of temptation

is enacted repeatedly in situations which represent, to the moralist, the two major sources of worldly corruption: the city and the court. The male protagonist is torn between the demands of reason and desire; his conflict often accompanied, as in the case of Kyd's *Soliman* and Shakespeare's *Angelo*, by an ambivalent attitude towards the act itself. For the woman who is the object of male desire, it is a re-enactment of the original temptation of Eve which only those of rare virtue can overcome.

The recurrence of the theme of temptation is emphasised in those plays which deal with the subject of marriage and adultery. The concept of sexual love outside marriage as both a pursuit of pleasure and as the road to damnation provides a series of moral dilemmas. Tensions within the marital relationship highlight, once again, male ambivalence about sexuality and women. The use of the Petrarchan language of love in this context highlights the dual perception in plays like *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*, where genuine passion is set alongside both married love and cynical seduction. In the tradition of the morality play sin is made tempting, painted in vivid images of pleasure by Vindice, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and conveyed by means of an assault on the senses by means of elaborate stage business with perfumes, jewellery and music, in Fletcher's *Valentinian*. The demands of the body urge men and women to 'pleasure after pleasure' despite 'that unseeing eye/ That sees through flesh and all.' (*Revenagers' Tragedy* I.i.99, I.iii.68-69). The battle against temptation is sometimes lost by both participants; at other times it becomes a stalemate which is resolved only in death. For, unlike the male seducer, who is confronted only, like Judge Apius, with the question 'How am I devided?' (III.501), relating to his battles between reason and will, his victim, by tradition, in this theatrical world at least, is faced with Lucrece's dilemma: 'My body and my soul, which is the dearer?'

The tragic heroine's decision as to whether to commit suicide in order to save her husband from dishonour or to expiate her sins is the extreme expression of a concern with women's honour which pervades the discourse of love and sexuality in

the period and which manifests itself in the obsession with cuckoldry, jealousy, suspicion and the need to test female virtue. As I have pointed out the adoration and denigration which are opposing perspectives on love can be related to similar perspectives on women. The biblical heritage of mistrust for the body's desires is again and again projected onto the female sex. In *Othello*, the duality of perception concerning love and women, which is a central theme of the play, is made more poignant by the fact that the woman herself is unchanged; it is only in the perception of her husband that she has become 'that cunning whore of Venice.' In Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, Anne Frankford, from being 'perfect all, all truth and ornament' (IV.12) in her husband's eyes becomes a 'devil.' Women are used to symbolise the extremes of both virtue and depravity. The measure of the corruption of the court or the city is the value placed on woman's honour. In tragedy, that honour is either vindicated by a heroic, altruistic gesture of suicide, or its loss is punished as masculine authority and dignity are restored.

The punishment of women who transgress sexually could be read as an expression of misogyny on the part of the dramatists. The particular attention paid in some tragedies to women's expiation for their sins might be said to support this viewpoint. As I have demonstrated, the voice of misogyny is frequently heard in the drama, devaluing love, and assuring the audience that women are fickle and unworthy objects. On the other hand, the misogynist is frequently made a figure of fun, or, as in the case of Iago, completely discredited, and even the long scenes of expiation must be seen in the context of a pattern of inter-action. It is, as I have pointed out, to be expected that the drama should point to a conventional moral resolution. I do not intend to minimise the existence of the moralising discourse. It is an important factor in the drama, reducing love to an indulgence of the flesh, and presenting women as, paradoxically, both the primary agents and the victims of temptation. What I have tried to emphasise throughout is the ability of drama as a medium to reflect the tensions between this discourse and others. As far as gender

relationships are concerned, this means a series of dynamic encounters in which, although male power and male perceptions are frequently reinforced, 'women' are able to speak persuasively for themselves. Moreover, the existence of a dominant voice in the discourse, which may represent respectability or conventional morality can often be found to conflict with the effect produced by the action of the play. This is the case with some of the tragic lovers of drama, and with the women who resist male attempts to define them.

In linking together plays by different authors and of differing genre or period I have inevitably been made to consider questions which I had chosen not to make the focus of my discussion. It is impossible to consider themes like adultery and betrayal without being made aware of differences in the approaches of the various dramatists. Despite the fact that the concept of authorship is by no means as clear cut as it once appeared to be; that many plays have been written in collaboration, and that the text which we have received may have been frequently modified, the voice of the dramatist, where it is recognisable, like the brush stroke of a painter, has its own fascination. The value of a thematic approach has been in the way in which it has highlighted the shared concerns of contemporary writers and theatre-goers across a wide range of material and enabled me to bring together texts for comparison which would not otherwise keep company. Instead of the differences between Shakespeare and his contemporaries which have so often been emphasised, I have been made aware of some of the similarities. The amount of borrowing and sharing of ideas and techniques of presentation which appears to have taken place has been enlightening in what it has revealed about the ways in which different plays explore issues arising out of their common cultural experience.

The insights I have gained on my chosen topic, by following a thematic approach, have convinced me that it would be a useful way of approaching other aspects of Renaissance drama. In the same area there is clearly scope for a detailed

examination of the ways in which the themes I have discussed are treated by the different dramatists. Similarly although I have not made genre an organisational principle, except in the first two chapters, I am aware that a comparison between the treatment of adultery in comedy, tragedy and tragi-comedy might yield further interesting insights. There would also be much to be gained in extending the period of time covered: the competing discourses of love and sexuality are not silenced by the closure of the theatres but continue in the drama and poetry of the Restoration.

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