DISORDERED APPETITES:
FEMALE FLESH IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS MIDDLETON

A dissertation submitted by

Gregory M. Schnitzspahn

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

TUFTS UNIVERSITY
May 2015

Advisor: Judith Haber

Abstract

This dissertation contends that Thomas Middleton's plays and poetry exploit an early modern psychocultural anxiety focused on the insubstantiality of symbolic or linguistic constructs. More specifically, Middleton's works consistently examine the manipulability and immateriality of patriarchally prescribed female social identities—such as maid, wife, and widow—that are based entirely upon a woman's sexual or marital relations with men. Employing principles drawn from psychoanalysis and ecofeminism, I argue that this Middletonian preoccupation bespeaks a more widespread uncertainty in the period about symbolic structures intended to control or contain female bodies and the natural world. My analysis of Thomas Middleton's work therefore points to conceptual technologies that were emergent in the early modern period and which continue to exert influence in the present day.

In the introduction, I describe my guiding principles and theoretical apparatus by reading the typically Middletonian complications of marital and sexual identity in two plays, *The Witch* and *The Phoenix*. Chapter One moves to a discussion of female virginity in *The Changeling*, Middleton's famous collaboration with William Rowley, and argues that the play taps into cultural anxieties about the potential unreliability of symbolic technologies for controlling female bodies and appetites. Chapter Two examines Middleton's early work, *The Ghost of Lucrece*, and contends that this poem's plaintive ghost uses images of

female corporeality as a rhetorical weapon, unleashing great floods of blood, milk, and tears that strain the written language of the poem itself. The third chapter considers how, in *The Widow*, Middleton's radical deployment of two early modern theatrical conventions, widow-hunting and cross-dressing, suggests the constructedness of gender, identity, and even human understanding of reality itself. The concluding chapter begins with a reading of remarriage in *Women Beware Women* before proceeding to a closing discussion of the profound ideological effects of literacy and print culture in early modern Europe.

Acknowledgments

A great many kind and intelligent people have helped me on the long path to the completion of this project. All of my mentors, friends, and colleagues from the English department at Tufts University deserve mention, but to list them all would be impossible. I would, however, like to name three fellow doctoral students—Barbara Orton, Claudia Stumpf, and Lai Ying Yu—who joined me in forming a dissertation writing group that proved instrumental in getting my work back on track after many years of medical and personal disruptions. Another close friend and colleague, Carolyn Salvi, helped with editing and feedback during the final steps of the writing process (and her infant daughter, Mohini, provided much joy and support). I should also acknowledge the contributions of Nolan Nicaise and Daniel Ciba, my time management consultants from the Academic Resource Center at Tufts. While working on my final revisions, two newer colleagues, Alexandra Carter and James Rizzi, kindly volunteered their time to help with proofreading, and both were present at the moment when I submitted the completed dissertation to my committee.

The members of that committee, of course, deserve special thanks. I am grateful and honored that William Carroll, who first introduced me to the works of Thomas Middleton when I was an undergraduate at Boston University, agreed to serve as my outside reader. John Fyler has long been an excellent teacher and

mentor, consistently reminding me to look back to the literature and cultures that preceded the early modern period. Kevin Dunn has always gone out of his way to work with me and provide another perspective on our field. Finally, I cannot begin to express enough praise and gratitude for my advisor, Judith Haber. Although my work on this dissertation was slowed to a near halt at times, Judith remained kind, patient, and supportive. A true mentor and scholar, however, she never ceased to demand rigorous and polished work. I simply cannot thank her enough.

In closing, I must also thank my immediate family who have always encouraged my artistic and intellectual pursuits without question. Mom, Dad, Doug, Radha, Isa, and Kieran, your love and support is a driving force behind the completion of this project. Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my uncle, Henry Schnitzspahn, who passed away while it was in progress.

Table of Contents

In a maiden time professed

Then we say that life is best.

Tasting once the married life,

Then we only praise the wife.

There's but one state more to try

Which makes women laugh or cry:

Widow, widow, and of these three,

The middle's best, and that give me.

--*The Witch* (2.1.131-8)

INTRODUCTION: The Disordered Appetites of Beasts

He means nothing, he has no message; he is merely a great recorder.
--T. S. Eliot, "Thomas Middleton."

Arguably, T. S. Eliot's 1927 essay on Thomas Middleton for *The Times Literary Supplement* established the current era of serious Middleton scholarship, but within the critical landscape that the essay itself helped to create, many of Eliot's observations now sound puzzling and contradictory, if not downright ludicrous. While Eliot acknowledged Middleton's importance in both his literary criticism and his own poetry, he also clearly struggled to find some consistent message or meaning in the scant handful of plays that were then attributed to the early modern writer. Thomas Middleton, Eliot declared, "is merely the name which associates six or seven great plays" (445). Yet Eliot clearly admired those "great plays," and his dismissal of Middleton as an empty authorial signifier seems very much at odds with his contention that this playwright "understood the female better than any of the Elizabethans" and that he could therefore produce "a real woman[,] as real indeed as any woman of Elizabethan tragedy" (445).[1] Despite these potentially thrilling claims, however, Eliot continued to temper his admiration by insisting that Middleton's work "remains inscrutable,

1. The second citation refers directly to Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, discussed at length in Chapter One. Also, Eliot uses "Elizabethan" as a rough synonym of "Renaissance." In the 1927 *TLS* piece he uses the term to refer to many poets and playwrights active after the reign of Elizabeth I including Webster, Fletcher, Shirley, Tourneur, and, of course, Middleton himself. Coincidentally, when Eliot mentions "Tourneur," he might be thinking of the writer who penned *The Revenger's Tragedy*, now widely believed to be Middleton, not Tourneur.

unphilosophical, interesting only to those few who care for such things" (445-6). With these perplexing comments, modern Middleton criticism begins.[2]

Now, nearly a century after Eliot first brought Middleton into the critical spotlight, perhaps the time has finally come for "those few who care for such things." In 2007, exactly eighty years after *The Times* ran Eliot's unsigned article on "Thomas Middleton," Gary Taylor brought forth Oxford's *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, an unabashed effort to persuade twenty-first-century readers that Middleton should be considered "our other Shakespeare" (58). Even more recently, in 2012, Taylor has argued that the *Collected Works* "necessitates a rebirth of Middleton criticism, allowing us to look with new eyes upon an unfamiliar canonical landscape" ("Unintroduction" 13). Certainly, this landscape would be unfamiliar to the towering figure of twentieth-century letters who once surveyed only an obscure and uninteresting "name" with a peculiar talent for understanding the female. But now, gazing through the "new eyes" of the *Collected Works* and informed by decades of social and critical progress, Celia Daileader argues that "even a casual glance at the *Collected Works* Table of Contents reveals Middleton's feminist sympathies" ("Thomas Middleton" 466).

2. Middleton, of course, was never completely lost to obscurity in the 300 years between his death in 1627 and Eliot's piece for *TLS*. In 1817, for instance, William Hazlitt discussed Middleton at length in his "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth," and he sounded somewhat like Eliot when he commented that "Middleton's style was not marked by any peculiar quality of his own" (214). Nonetheless, as Gary Taylor stresses, Eliot's influential essay, which appeared exactly 110 years after Hazlitt's, "put Middleton in the literary canon, on the critical agenda, in the university curriculum" ("Lives and Afterlives" 55). As for Eliot's acknowledgement of Middleton in his own poetry, the title of the second section of *The Waste Land*, "A Game of Chess," undoubtably refers to Middleton's play *A Game at Chess*, and Eliot's own note to line 138 of his famous poem—"And we shall play a game of chess"—erases any doubt: "Cf. the game of chess in Middleton's *Women beware Women*."

Of course, Daileader's statement may be intentionally provocative and bold, but it is also not so radically different from what Eliot wrote about Middleton and his "real women" eighty-five years earlier. Perhaps then, Eliot merely failed to recognize that he had, in fact, detected the message and meaning he so longed to find.

Throughout his career, Thomas Middleton exploits a pervasive anxiety in early modern England about the insubstantiality of cultural constructs, especially those pertaining to women. In order to generate either comic or tragic tensions, that is, Middleton repeatedly displays the persistence of disorder, randomness, and unchecked impulse in the very midst of the supposed structure and stability offered by economic, legal, and social systems. Such systems, of course, exist almost entirely through symbols and language, and Middleton's plays and poetry regularly thrust the material substance of the living body, the ubiquitous stuff of the biological and natural world, back into the ostensibly ordered and artificial field of symbolic abstractions. Thus, what Eliot regarded as a stylistic flaw in Middleton, a "mixture of tedious discourse and sudden reality" (445), might be better regarded as a deliberate strategy for producing captivating works of art by disrupting the smooth surface of cultural expectation and order. That is to say, Middleton exploits his culture's precarious faith in its own symbolic constructs by

destabilizing, exposing, or completely upending those constructs with unexpected eruptions of such "sudden reality."

Viewed through the lens of recent cultural and ecofeminist theory employed in this study, then, Thomas Middleton appears fascinated by patriarchal culture's strained attempts to impose intelligible meaning and form upon the unfathomable, shapeless wilderness of experience and existence. As I expound upon my theoretical and critical perspective throughout this introduction, I will argue that the subjective consciousness of the civilized human organism—innately equipped for survival with language, symbols, and representations—operates under the vain assumption that it exists in independence from its greater ecological context and that the culture of early modern England fully embraces this delusion while simultaneously harboring a troubling sense of its speciousness. Furthermore, because even the most radically male-dominated societies cannot escape their biological dependence on regeneration through the maternal womb, a patriarchal culture demands that its structures appropriate, contain, and codify human sexuality and, specifically, the generative and nurturing biological capacities of the female body. Living in a world shaped by these patriarchal imperatives, Middleton's plays and poetry repeatedly take up those women who either actively or passively challenge their social identities——especially the three patriarchally sanctioned "female estates" of maid, wife, and widow. While this persistent Middletonian theme might not necessarily amount to some deliberate

authorial "message," nor demonstrate genuinely "feminist sympathies," it certainly filled theaters and sold stationers' wares in seventeenth-century London.

Apparently then, both Middleton and his audiences were fascinated by the failure or slippage of patriarchal constructs intended to control women and their bodies. In the next section of this introduction, I will conduct an extended discussion of selected examples from Middletonian texts—primarily *The Phoenix* and *The Witch*—that demonstrate this fascination and introduce the core principles guiding my readings of Thomas Middleton and early modern culture. I will begin with a particularly memorable scene from Middleton's earliest surviving major play, *The Phoenix*, which exposes the ontological borderlines between human and beast—and, by extension, those between civilization and wilderness, order and chaos—as troublingly constructed and thin. Although patriarchal order shores up these shaky bulwarks within the fiction of this play, contemporary audiences must have walked out of the theater fraught with doubt about the ideological constructs that establish difference between human and beast—or perhaps that is how they walked in. In *The Witch*, Middleton pursues a similar dramatic effect through a somewhat different strategy. As we shall see, this play's overarching plot structure is built entirely upon the Middletonian commonplace of women who forge, defy, or in some way complicate their symbolic social identities. Through three related plots that follow three different women, *The Witch* effectively argues that these important female identities are

nothing more than manipulable performances in language. Again, order is restored at this play's denouement, but, as in *The Phoenix* and countless other works from the Middleton canon, *The Witch* surely connects with an offstage anxiety about the insubstantiality inherent to the psychocultural constructs at the foundations of early modern English reality.

"The Disordered Appetites of Beasts"

Completed around 1603 when Middleton was still only in his early twenties, *The Phoenix* follows its title character as he observes the troubling transgressions of his people in the Duchy of Ferrara. While secretly surveying his subjects, this "disguised magistrate" discovers a ship's captain arranging the sale, quite literally, of his wife, Castiza, to a wealthier, and even seedier, man. As the captain counts his five-hundred crown payment, Phoenix steps aside to bemoan this bizarre transaction and praise the institution of marriage:

> Reverend and honourable matrimony,
> Mother of lawful sweets, unshamed mornings,
> Dangerless pleasures, thou that mak'st the bed
> Both pleasant and legitimately fruitful: without thee,
> All the whole world were soiled bastardy.
> Thou are the only and the greatest form

That put'st a difference between our desires

And the disordered appetites of beasts,

Making their mates those that stand next their lusts. (8.166-74)[3]

Here, Phoenix professes his conviction that marriage recasts human sexuality by making it legitimate, pleasant, lawful, dangerless, unshamed, and ordered since, somehow, it simply "put[s] a difference between" human sexual desires and those "disordered appetites of beasts." Although the acceptably Epicurean "pleasures" and "sweets" of the marriage bed might be indistinguishable from the rude thrusts of mating animals or illicit fornicators, the state of wedlock, says Phoenix, makes all the difference.[4] However, the disguised prince also seems to be in a state of anxious denial, whistling past a graveyard, as it were, because if matrimony erects some barrier between the human and the bestial, then on the streets of Ferrara this boundary proves conspicuously artificial, porous, and flimsy, particularly when it comes to human sexuality and female flesh.

Indeed, the captain's sale of his wife refigures her as a commodity, much like livestock, while simultaneously exposing the seller's own disordered appetites. Apparently hoping to reassert patriarchal order and authority over the mess he has uncovered, Phoenix finds the "most deformèd deed" (4.273) not only "monstrous and foul" (8.193), but also to be clear proof of the captain's inability

3. All citations of Middleton are from Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino's *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works.*
4. I adapt "acceptably Epicurean" from Lars Engle, who has very recently noticed "the rather original synthesis of Epicureanism and reverence" in a speech that considers marriage what "makes us human" while simultaneously stressing "sexual pleasure and safety as key attributes of its pure enactment" (442-3)

to subdue the baser passions of his own flesh: “O, they must ever strive to be so good; / Who sells his vow is stamped the slave of blood” (7.22-3). Despite this harsh judgement of the captain and his deed, the prince expresses little sympathy for Castiza, the commodified wife. To him, it is not this sexually experienced, actual mother, but patriarchal culture’s personified ideal of matrimony, the pristine “mother of lawful sweets,” who suffers the great indignity. Phoenix even declares the remarried widow complicit in her own dehumanization and holds her culpable for the defilement of her marriage. Upon learning of the captain’s intended deal, Phoenix first recoils at the perversity of the deed and then resolves to find a solution with his servant, Fidelio, who happens to be Castiza’s son from her previous marriage:

> PHOENIX Take courage, man; we’ll beget some defence.
>
> FIDELIO I am bound by nature.
>
> PHOENIX I by conscience.
>
> To sell his lady! Indeed, she was a beast
>
> To marry him, and so he makes of her. (4.280-3)

By this odd logic, the sale of Castiza on the open market merely completes a transformation to beast that, somehow, *she* began with her regrettable choice of a second husband. Rather than putting any difference between her desires and the disordered appetites of beasts, marriage, for Castiza, turns out to be both the means and the sign of her concupiscence. Further, Phoenix’s consolation to

Fidelio, "we'll beget some defence," imagines a sanitized and regulated patriarchal version of conception to replace the untamable processes of the female womb. These men resolve to symbolically "beget" in order to solve the problems engendered by Castiza's desiring, maternal body.[5] Each man also identifies the source of his obligation in language that progresses from the material and biological to the abstract and cultural. The prince's bond to social values through "conscience" displaces Fidelio's corporeal and organic bond to his mother through "nature" (a potentially messy, corporeal word that suggests bodily functions, sexual urges, semen, menses, female genitalia, and the natural affection between parents and their offspring).[6] Take courage, indeed, man; both Castiza's son and her sovereign face the difficult task of refining and supplanting biology and nature with patriarchy's ideal forms.

Of course, Phoenix later insists upon the transformative, humanizing power of the "only and greatest" of these forms despite the fact that, at this moment, he argues that it is Castiza's marriage itself which *makes* her a beast.[7]

---

5. To "beget," like other procreative words, straddles the line between conceptual and corporeal reproduction. *OED* points out that "beget," when used in a procreative sense, is "usually said of the father, but sometimes of both parents." In "Male Pregnancy and Cognitive Permeability in *Measure for Measure,*" Mary Thomas Crane provides a thorough discussion of the blending of the literal and metaphorical senses of "pregnant" that seems relevant here. See especially 276-77.

6. See *OED* entry for "nature, n," especially "I. Senses relating to physical or bodily power, strength, or substance," and "II. Senses relating to mental or physical impulses and requirements."

7. "Form," of course, can have several senses. For instance, *OED* "form, n." def. 4.a suggests precisely the determination of *difference* that I will soon discuss at length: "in the Scholastic philosophy: The essential determinant principle of a thing; that which makes anything (matter) a determinate species or kind of being; the essential creative quality." In Phoenix's marriage paean, I also read the meaning given at *OED* "form, n." def. 15.a in use from 1386 onward: "Often *depreciatively*: Mere outward ceremony or formality, conventional observance of etiquette, etc." (italics in original). Both senses, I think, combine here to reveal Phoenix's uncertainty about the principle determining the essence of carnal necessities.

Taken together, these conflicting assertions betray an uneasy awareness that the boundary which "put[s] a difference between" the human and nonhuman might not hold, and that the threat of sliding back into bestial disorder always looms.[8] Or, even worse, perhaps the prince realizes that this boundary has been an illusion all along, a crumbling bulwark that must be shored up with his words and authority. In their introduction to the play for *The Collected Works*, Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps seem to agree that Phoenix labors to uphold this conceptual line and impose order on the world, especially when it comes to sexuality. They read Phoenix's praise for marriage as an attempt by the prince to place "a social value on matrimony" that will then make "order out of actions which, in every outward way, are identical to the 'disordered appetites of beasts'" (93). Since even twice-married Castiza turns out to be a "beast," Phoenix seems to discover the frightening precariousness and superficiality of the difference or order constructed with matrimony's social value. Yet Danson and Kamps somehow conclude that "in Middleton, social value is not merely a surface covering a deeper reality, an externality that hides a more real internality; it

8. Throughout this section, I read Phoenix's use of the word "beast" to suggest the breakdown of an ontological distinction between human and animal. While "beast" need not necessarily refer to a nonhuman animal—see works cited by Höfele, Fudge, and Shannon below—it certainly suggests the troubling similarities between the human and other fauna: see *OED* "beast, n." def. 4. Certainly, in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago's famous "beast with two backs" comment not only suggests the intrinsic primality of human sexuality, especially when in conflict with Desdemona's "smooth as monumental alabaster" skin (5.2.5), but also dehumanizes Othello on the grounds of his sexual capacity and appetites, much like "an old black ram" (1.1.87) or a "barbary horse" (1.1.110). In Phoenix's marriage paean cited above, it seems clear to me, not to mention Danson and Kamps, that the referent of "our" (8.72) is something like "humanity" directly opposed to animals or beasts. Although it seems unlikely to me, if Phoenix does in fact intend an entirely figurative sense of "beast" here, then the trope itself points to the blurry distinction between human and animal desires . . . precisely the subject of the current analysis.

creates form, meaning, difference, and thereby puts the 'human' in human life" (93). Perhaps the editors confuse the young playwright with his young character here, since "in Middleton," the difference, form, and meaning created by social value almost always turn out to be deviant, confused, or counterfeit. Or maybe they genuinely believe that Middleton finds "deeper reality" in what patriarchal rulers like Phoenix manufacture when they assign social value, even though such fabrications undergo continual threat and strain in his works. In any case, the Oxford editors fail to see Phoenix's speech as an early example of one of Middleton's more consistent observations: maintaining cultural constructs, even simply keeping the "'human' in human life," requires constant vigilance and effort.

Indeed, Middleton likely intended the wife-selling scene in *The Phoenix* to enthrall his audiences by touching on a widespread concern in early modern English society about the difficulty of keeping the "'human' in human life." In his recent *Stage, Stake, and Scaffold*, Andreas Höfele contends that the early modern subject "is always in danger of lapsing from human to beast" owing to a "mode of thought prior to the rigid Cartesian segregation of man and beast," and that "there is every reason to believe that Shakespeare's time retained a stronger sense of that precariousness than subsequent modernity" (25-27).[9] This lurking sense of

9. Höfele specifically considers the close relationships between the theater, the bear-baiting pit, and the executioner's scaffold. Just below, I allow Erica Fudge to comment directly on bear-baiting, but Höfele also undertakes a startling reading of Lupold von Wedel's 1584 account of a visit to the Bear-Garden in which the distinction between lower-class human spectators and the animals in the pit was *intentionally blurred* by the

precariousness seemingly provokes Phoenix's attempt to distinguish human pleasure from nonhuman lust, but his effort only emphasizes, rather than dismisses, the danger. As Erica Fudge points out in her discussion of the Southwark bear gardens, such attempts can unwittingly undermine the very difference they strive to create. Considering the voyeuristic consumption of violence at the bear gardens, Fudge argues that "to watch a baiting, to enact anthropocentrism, is to reveal, not the stability of species status, but the animal that lurks beneath the surface. In proving their humanity humans achieve the opposite" (15). If *enacting* the segregation and privilege of the human species at the bear gardens unwittingly acknowledges itself as just so much *acting*, then the entertainments available in Bankside must have either titillated some perverse curiosity about this paradox, or, more likely, offered an endless repetition of the enactment, a welcome and reassuring *argumentum ad nauseam.* Perhaps then, the bearbaiting pits thrived precisely because they simultaneously reinforced and questioned the convincingness or conclusiveness of the species boundary. If so, Castiza's figurative lapse from woman to beast in *The Phoenix* may well have been intended to transpose this curiosity from bear garden to playhouse. By intervening in both the sale and the metamorphosis, and in vehemently arguing

producers: "Further species blending occurs when a man, in the manner of a zookeeper, throws food among the crowd, which responds accordingly and in doing so spills over into the animals' performance space. Confusedly scrambling, showered with more food, and frightened by the fireworks, the people who have come to see the beasts are now seen as beasts themselves. 'As downe amongst the dogges and beares [they] go,' the species boundary is redrawn between those middle- and upper-class members of the audience who retain the status of spectators and the scrambling rabble, the common herd that becomes the object of their amusement" (34-5). As will become more apparent in the pages that follow, the danger of lapsing seems particularly keen for the poor and powerless.

for matrimony as the "only and greatest form that put'st a difference between our desires and the disordered appetites of beasts" does Phoenix really only succeed in revealing "the animal that lurks beneath the surface"? Or, just as spectators used the timber structure of the bear garden amphitheaters to establish reassuring distance from the animalistic violence in the pits below, did they return home at night only to use the social structures of marriage and male dominance to assert difference between their sexual activity and the breeding behavior of their beasts?

Dissatisfied with the precarious species status forged at the bear-baiting pit or at the marriage altar, Western Europe would soon develop the more stable philosophical status offered by the Cartesian worldview. Scholars working on the "nonhuman renaissance," such as Laurie Shannon, Fudge, Höfele, and others, consistently name René Descartes as the inaugurator of modernity's human/animal split since "the *cogito* also elaborated a border between an allegedly thinking man, the *cogito*, and his opposite, the instinct-bound beast or *la bête-machine*" (Shannon 171). Yet, by articulating this border in the mid-seventeenth century, Descartes merely takes the final steps in affirming, via rational discourse, a distinct and privileged position for the human, and his philosophical species boundary arises as the conclusive response to a long-emerging concern in Western Europe. Although attempts to elaborate a rigid species boundary at the bear gardens were counterintuitively futile, as Fudge points out, they still testify to a pre-Cartesian yearning to establish such boundaries. "Definitely 'before the

cogito,'" says Höfele, "there is ample evidence of the kind of dualism which opposes humans to other creatures" (26). Decades before the cogito, one finds Middleton's Phoenix onstage, struggling to pin down and articulate this dualism in order to quell his palpable anxiety about the possibility of women like Castiza, and "our desires," lapsing from human to beast.

Throughout the Middleton canon, *women* and their bodies prove particularly prone to undergo or provoke such lapses. Indeed, the young playwright who wrote *The Phoenix* apparently expected his audience to take interest in the disguised prince's attempt to establish and maintain a line of species demarcation, and also to recognize the latent potential for women, specifically, to blur this line and destabilize patriarchal notions of humanity. For instance, in a comic exchange that takes place just before Phoenix learns about the intended sale of Castiza, the humor relies on the hazy distinction between desiring women and copulating beasts:

PHOENIX Sirrah, what guests does this inn hold now?

GROOM Some five-and-twenty gentlemen, besides their beasts.

PHOENIX Their beasts?

GROOM Their wenches, I mean, sir; for your worship
knows those that are under men are beasts.

PHOENIX How does your mother, sir?

GROOM Very well in health; I thank you heartily, sir.

PHOENIX And so is my mare, i'faith. (4.6-14)

As examples of comic wit, the groom's coarse wisecrack pales in comparison to the prince's bilingual pun, but it is still the exact same quip: mothers, *ou mères*, and "wenches" are difficult to distinguish from "mares" and "beasts." Just later in the same scene, then, his "worship knows" that Castiza "was a beast to marry" the captain because she positions herself below him, both literally and figuratively. Despite his insistence that matrimony distinguishes "our desires" from "disordered appetites," Phoenix comfortably participates in early Jacobean culture's understanding that wenches, mothers, and wives scarcely differ from the other living things domesticated for use by men. One might even wonder, then, just why Phoenix finds the sale of Castiza so troubling since other household "beasts" were surely exchanged on the market.

While it might seem to be Middleton's fantastic invention for the plot of *The Phoenix*, wives were quite literally bought and sold in the markets of early modern England and these real life wife sales involved blurring the line between animal and human. As Samuel Pyeatt Menefee convincingly argues in *Wives for Sale*, "wife-selling *was* an established British institution," and "wife sales were popularly believed to be a legal and valid form of divorce" (1). Although fictitious, the wife-selling scene in Middleton's earliest play is often cited among the evidence supporting this observation and it also tantalizingly hints at just how ubiquitous the custom may have been, at least among the lower classes. Tangle,

the "old crafty client" who informs Phoenix of the pending transaction, assures the astounded prince that wife sales are "common," that "Pistor, a baker, sold his wife t'other day to a cheesemonger" (3.154), and that one should "ne'er fear the captain; he has not so much wit to be / a precedent himself" (4.260-4). Menefee also recounts some rather disturbing elements of the practice to which not even Castiza's monstrous husband subjects her: "throwing a halter over a wife who had been lured to market" and thereby figuring the woman as livestock, "was considered a necessary element of the sale" (70). Social historian E. P. Thompson also chronicles English wife-selling and confirms that "the wife was sold like a chattel and the ritual, which casts her as a mare or cow, is degrading and was intended to degrade" (458).[10] If Phoenix's paean to matrimony accurately reflects a widespread hope in early modern England that marriage stands as the "only and greatest form" to establish difference between man and beast, or comfortingly "puts the human in" normative sexuality, then this bestializing, degrading aspect of the sale publicly enacts and acknowledges the ephemerality or instability of

10. To be fair, I must admit that these are somewhat concessionary statements from Thompson who wishes to "remove the wife sale from the category of brutal chattel purchase and place it within that of divorce and remarriage" (427-8). However, in reading Thompson's chapter on wife sales in *Customs in Common*, I find that he struggles mightily to set himself apart from Menefee who "scooped" the more established historian with his graduate research. Although he does ultimately concede the dehumanizing element of the ritual, Thompson distinguishes his analysis from Menefee's by noting that "the consent of the wife is a necessary condition for the sale" (428). Some of Thompson's interpretations of the historical record, though, seem strained. For instance, he finds that the record of a man who was "struggling to place a halter around the neck of a young woman" as she "resisted the attempt with all her strength," somehow proves that "both the halter and her consent were essential to confer legitimacy on the transaction" (433). The authorities did not side with this husband, but, as Thompson and Menefee both note repeatedly, wife-selling was not officially sanctioned or legal. What's more, Thompson's reading seems *very* questionable since the husband's forceful actions clearly prove that *he* believed the bestializing halter, and most certainly *not* his wife's consent, to be the essential element to confer legitimacy on the transaction.

this difference. Being married depends upon being human, and both states are things of social value, so the logic behind the degradation seems simple enough: take the human back *out* of human life, reveal the animal that has been lurking beneath the surface all along, and matrimonial bonds can be easily dismantled. While this folk custom could prove tremendously useful to, say, a baker or a ship's captain hoping to unbind himself from an unwanted wife, it could also be extremely troubling for a patriarchal ruler, wielding power and authority forged in the same fires as the symbolic shackles of matrimony. Or, perhaps collective anxiety about the instability of these fundamental cultural constructs could turn out to be even more useful to a fledgling playwright hoping to captivate a theater full of playgoers, all vaguely troubled by notions not yet dismissed by Descartes's rigid segregation of man and beast.[11]

Thompson's, Menefee's, and even Middleton's accounts of early modern wife sales all demonstrate that Andreas Höfele's "danger of lapsing from human to beast" certainly lurks in the psyche of pre-Cartesian England, focused squarely on women. But if the wife-selling ritual recasts women as beasts while

11. Yet again, Thompson's work both helps and hinders my argument here. In this case, I might appear to loosely juggle historical chronology, but I think Phoenix himself provides the evidence that Thompson misses. That is, the renowned social historian makes emphatically clear that "certainly there were instances of wives being sold before 1660, but I know of none before the eighteenth century which affords clear evidence of the public auction and the halter" (442). While pinpointing the first definite, recorded instance in 1553, and observing a clear decline of the practice in the 19th century, Menefee finds wives for sale "throughout the British Isles, perhaps as early as 1073, with scattered cases as late as the twentieth century" (2). I would then quibble with Thompson that the halter may be a mere ornament to reify an idea—circulating in the 16th century, according to Höfele, Shannon, and Fudge—that human beings, or wives in this case, can lapse into beasts. I concede that the historical record shows an increase in wife-sales after 1660, and "clear evidence" of the halter only appears in the 1700s, but selling a wife *most certainly* equates her with a beast, as is obviously the case in 1603's *The Phoenix*: see lines 4.6-14 and 4.280-3, cited above.

authorizing men to play the role of their human masters, then it also, rather awkwardly, makes these transacting men guilty of bestiality. Although the men might not quite degenerate into beasts themselves, their carnal desires and experiences teeter precariously on the brink of criminal deviance. "Those that are under men are beasts," scoff the same men who embrace, nuzzle, and penetrate such "beasts" while somehow purporting to retain the grace of human distinction and dignity.[12] When they mount their women, then, early modern males must occupy a position akin to that of the wealthiest spectators in the high galleries at the bear-gardens, engaged with, but vertically distinguished from, the unstable fray of rabble and beasts down below. These vertical markers of difference and dominance—identities of "top" and "bottom," so to speak—blend refutation with acknowledgment, disgust with intimacy, denial with admission; they are enforced, constructed, and strained, but gratifying all the same.

Considering women as less-than-human also requires an acrobatic denial of threads woven deeply into the fabric of both cultural and biological life. Women, their bodies, and various forms of contact with female bodies are fundamentally necessary to the survival of patriarchal societies, but vexingly so. Men of every social strata literally *emerge* from those beastly female bodies, draw nourishment from them, live alongside them, desire and penetrate them, and, in

12. Since wives, like Castiza, slip so easily from humans into beasts, one might notice that, aside from abstinence and masturbation, early modern men are left with only the criminal options of rape, bestiality, and sodomy for their sexual gratification.

time, extract their own sons (and daughters) from their wombs. Although they might climb high into the scaffolding afforded by a dominant social position, men still cannot fully escape their own corporeality and the species instability which they would more comfortably pin on those down below, including their wives and mothers. Quite simply, patriarchal cultures require maternal flesh for their replenishment and continuance, and each step to raise men above women on the human-to-beast spectrum simultaneously makes human biology and heteronormative *male* desire more shameful, troubling, and inexplicable. For this reason, Middleton's Phoenix champions matrimony as that which makes, not Castiza, nor women in general, but "*our* desires" more human. Both reprehensible and indispensable, then, women, their bodies, and even the heteronormative desires of men serve as troublingly apparent affirmations of the biological foundations underlying human consciousness and culture. When prince Phoenix mounts his impassioned defense of matrimony, then, the very grounds of patriarchal consciousness, authority, and civilization are at stake.

Neither Maid, Widow, nor Wife?

In the reading above, I have examined how the wife selling episode from *The Phoenix*—as well as historical evidence for actual wife sales—testifies to period anxieties about constructing symbolic difference between human (or, at the very least, woman) and beast. But the marriage between the despicable Captain

and Castiza is a thorough perversion of that "only and greatest form," and *The Phoenix* only exposes what might happen when patriarchal power fails or neglects to maintain order and difference. In the readings that follow, I will introduce Middleton's obsession with interrogating and problematizing those symbolic forms and identities through which patriarchy attempts to assert control over the corporeal, the bestial, the natural. Throughout the Middleton canon, that is, one finds the failure or slippage of culturally constructed identities that categorize women based solely upon their sexual and marital relations with men.

Before focusing on Middleton exclusively, I would like to begin this discussion with something of a digression into works by other authors in the period, and related events, in order to establish the degree to which Middleton was participating in what was, indeed, a widespread set of anxieties. Gary Taylor and John Jowett have repeatedly argued that Thomas Middleton revised Shakespeare's original text of *Measure for Measure* sometime around 1621, when the play was nearly two decades old but had not yet been printed.[13] Near the conclusion of this play—a far more famous example of the "disguised magistrate" genre than *The Phoenix*—the Duke of Vienna begins to question a woman by asking her to remove her veil. She refuses, telling the Duke that "I will not show

13. On Middleton's hand in the text of *Measure*, see Jowett and Taylor's jointly authored *Shakespeare Reshaped, 1606-1623*, Jowett's critical introduction to the "genetic text" of the play (1542-46) in *The Collected Works*, as well as two pieces by Taylor in the Oxford *Companion*: a section on the "textual introduction and apparatus" (681-89) as well as his discussion of the play's place in the Middleton canon (417-21).

my face / Until my husband bid me" (5.1.168-69).[14] In the exchange that ensues, the Duke demonstrates a typically patriarchal understanding of female identity that is based entirely upon a woman's marital and sexual relations with men:

> DUKE What, are you married?
>
> MARIANA No, my lord.
>
> DUKE Are you a maid?
>
> MARIANA No, my lord.
>
> DUKE A widow, then?
>
> MARIANA Neither, my lord.
>
> DUKE Why, you are nothing then; neither maid, widow,
> nor wife!
>
> LUCIO My lord, she may be a punk, since many of them are
> neither maid, widow, nor wife. (5.1.170-79)

While Taylor and Jowett's "genetic text" of *Measure for Measure* cannot say for certain whether or not Middleton added or otherwise amended this dialogue, the Duke's questions and Mariana's riddling responses surely would have satisfied the man hired by the King's Men to revise Shakespeare's original text. In his own plays and poetry, that is, Thomas Middleton consistently writes about women

14. All *Measure for Measure* citations are drawn from Taylor and Jowett's edition of the play in Oxford's *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*.

who, like the veiled Mariana, confound the categorical system of "female estates" imposed upon women living in the patriarchal cultures of early modern Europe.[15]

Considering just how often Middleton portrays extraordinary maids, wives, and widows, Jennifer Panek concludes that audiences of the time "were evidently fascinated by women who challenged the boundaries of their prescribed roles" ("Women's" 271). Indeed, such challenging women appear not only in Middleton's works but also in countless plays, poems, and pamphlets produced by others in the period. Around the same time that *The Phoenix* was first performed by the Children of Paul's, for instance, Samuel Rowlands penned the satiric *Tis Merry when Gossips meet*, a poem that follows a maid, a wife, and a widow who gather at a tavern where they discuss their standard female identities even while they "drinke like men" (16). Or, in Joseph Swetnam's *Arraignment of Women*, an anti-feminist tract from 1615, the misogynistic author sounds much like *Measure*'s Lucio as he admonishes those "vnmarried wantons" who are "neither maidens, widdowes, nor wives, but more vile then filthy channell-durt" (27). Often cited in recent scholarship, this particular comment seems to have also made an impression in its own time, and the title page of a 1617 response to *The Arraignment*, Esther Sowernam's *Esther hath hanged Haman*, proudly declares its

15. Indeed, in an essay on Middleton's lost plays—including one titled *The Puritan Maid, the Modest Wife, and the Wanton Widow*—Doris Feldmann and Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador consider it "common knowledge" (331) that Middleton's own works usually question the ostensible stability of these identities. Their essay details those themes "which had long troubled Elizabethan minds" and therefore "pervade and organize the majority of Middleton's plays" including "the moral value and cultural prestige of virginity and/or (married or widowed) chastity; the sexual and economic threat of widowhood; the hierarchical ordering of women's natural roles and the possibilities of containing their bodily functions; the dichotomy of woman/wife and whore" (331).

(clearly pseudonymous) author "neither Maid, Wife, nor Widow, yet really all and therefore experienced to defend all" (qtd. in Henderson and McManus 218).[16] But perhaps the period's most famous, or infamous, example of a woman who challenges these prescribed roles turns up in a highly topical riddle that asks how a "Page, a Knight, a Viscount, and an Earl" could be married to "a maid, a wife, a widow, and a whore" (qtd. in O'Connor 1124).[17] For Middleton and his audiences, the solution would have been obvious: the riddle refers to recent news from the Jacobean court about Frances Howard Devereux Carr and her confusing, at times conflicting, claims to the symbolic identities of maid, wife, and widow. And, of course, since this woman who challenged the boundaries of her prescribed roles was suspected of carrying on an affair, faking her virginity, and plotting the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, many simply labeled her a whore.[18]

Like the aforementioned riddle, Middleton's 1617 play, *The Witch*, alludes to the scandals surrounding Frances Howard, but if the riddle pokes fun at this woman's dubious assumption of the identities of maid, wife, and widow, then the

16. Along with Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a Mad Dogge,* and *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*, an anonymous play from 1620, the antithetical tracts by Swetnam and Sowernam constitute a pamphlet war that is widely known as "The Woman Controversy." All of these works are available through *Early English Books Online*, and see Henderson and McManus, Kehler, and Woodbridge (*Women* 300-22) for extensive descriptions and analysis of The Woman Controversy. It is also worth mentioning that both the identity and the gender of "Esther Sowernam" are unknown, a potential complication to "her" categorical identity.
17. Marion O'Connor opens her introduction to *The Witch* for Oxford's *Collected Works* with this riddle, and I adopt her method of introduction here. The riddle's "Page, a Knight, a Viscount, and an Earl" refer to Robert Carr's rapid rise through those ranks.
18. See Chapter One for more detail on Frances Howard Devereux Carr, her marital history, and her involvement in the Overbury murder. For Middleton, whose now lost *Masque of Cupids* was written for Frances Howard's second marriage to Robert Carr in December of 1613, the scandals were evidently fascinating. Both *The Witch* (1617), discussed just below, and *The Changeling* (1622), the subject of Chapter One, allude heavily to the convicted murderess, her marriages, and her shifting categorical identities.

play questions the substance and stability of those identities themselves. In *The Witch*, each one of three interconnected plot lines focuses on a woman who is categorized by her sexual and marital status. Except that "none of these ladies," as Marian O'Connor puts it, "actually meets the terms of sexual conduct defining the social category to which she is assigned" (1127). In one plot line, for instance, a young "maid" named Francisca manages to conceal not only her sexual experience, but also the pregnancy and childbirth that result from that experience.[19] Furthermore, Francisca apparently believes that the only necessary qualification for virgin identity is a convincing social performance, and she even continues to speak of "*we* maidens" (1.1.136, emphasis added) *while* revealing her pregnancy to the audience in an aside.[20] Unlike Francisca, the play's widowed Duchess does not intentionally counterfeit her social identity, but she does attempt to manufacture it by using a bed trick to blackmail a young gentleman, Almachildes, into murdering her husband. Once her husband is dead, the Duchess embraces the cultural stereotype of the "lusty widow" and spends the remainder of the play positioning herself for a sexually gratifying remarriage—at least until the Duke steps out of his grave to explain that his wife is neither a murderess nor

19. Such a deception, according to historian Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, might prove relatively easy in the period since "Early Modern clothing styles, with full skirts and aprons, allowed most women to go until late in the pregnancy without showing clear visible signs" (65).
20. In another moment that reveals Francisca's understanding of maidenhood as performance, she complains about those other gentlewomen who "can make merry with a friend seven year / And nothing seen: as perfect a maid still / (To the world's knowledge) as she came from rocking" (2.1.36-8). Furthermore, Francisca's false virginity is perhaps the play's strongest allusion to rumors about Frances Howard, and O'Connor's introduction points out that "Francisca" even seems to be an intentional homophone of "Frances Carr" (1125).

a widow since he faked his own death with Almachildes's help (5.3.125). Thus, through the lives of a maid's child and a widow's husband, *The Witch* uncouples these symbolic female identities from their supposed referents in the more tangible reality of the flesh.

But while *The Witch*'s Francisca and Duchess plots demonstrate that "maid" and "widow" are mere signifiers that can slip away from their signifieds, the play's third plot line stresses that the identity of "wife" does not refer to anything in tangible reality at all. Isabella falls under the competing conjugal claims of two symbolic rituals: a solemnized marriage to Antonio and an earlier "handfast" betrothal to Sebastian.[21] According to Sebastian, who returns from three years away at war only to witness Isabella's marriage to Antonio, the earlier handfasting takes precedence and Isabella remains his "wife by contract before heaven" (1.1.3). But when Sebastian asks Hecate, the play's titular witch, to undo the marriage between Isabella and Antonio, the witch responds that even her supernatural powers "cannot disjoin wedlock: / 'Tis of heaven's fast'ning" (1.2.170-1). Nor, for that matter, can *The Witch* undo this tangle of marital fastenings, and the play ends up resolving its wife plot by abruptly dropping Antonio to his death, offstage, through "a false trapdoor" (5.3.30). Of

21. Incidentally, a handfast is the same kind of variously recognized marriage, or marriage betrothal, that exists between Claudio and Juliet as well as Mariana and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (1.2.130-32, 5.1.205-6). For more on handfasting (and other possible symbolic meanings of clasped hands) see Katherine Rowe's *Dead Hands* as well as Dale B. J. Randall's discussion of the matter in "The Rank and Earthy Background of Certain Physical Symbols in 'The Duchess of Malfi" (172-9). Rowe's study also directs attention to a fascinating pair of period texts on the subject of hand signs: John Bulwer's *Chirologia, or the Natural Language of the Hand* and *Chironomia or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*, both dating to 1644.

course, the sudden accident also clears the way for Isabella—who only agreed to marry Antonio after he convinced her that Sebastian was dead—to finally enter an official marriage with her first love (5.3.51-62). And, because her marriage to Antonio was never consummated, at the moment she marries Sebastian, Isabella will simultaneously qualify as maid, wife, and widow—just like Frances Howard. Thus, in both Middleton's play and the popular riddle, as O'Connor's introduction points out, these socially vital female identities "exist merely by sleights of language" (1128). Then again, perhaps some deceptions, such as Francisca's "concealed great belly" (1.1.134) or the virginal body double allegedly employed by Frances Howard, are not *merely* linguistic. Nonetheless, O'Connor's comment still affirms Middleton's fascination with the insubstantiality of language, and it also makes for a useful point of entry to the theoretical principles that inform my own readings of both Middleton's works and his culture.

Theoretical Apparatus: Language and Symbols Superimposed Upon a Wilderness of Flesh

For early modern audiences, the possibility that maids, wives, and widows could exist through mere "sleights of language" must have been both unsettling and captivating because patriarchal order depends upon the supremacy of the symbolic over the corporeal, of the patronymic over the maternal body. "The problem," says Luce Irigaray, "is that, by denying the mother her generative power and wanting to be the sole creator, the Father, according to our culture,

superimposes upon the archaic world of the flesh a universe of language and symbols" (*Irigaray Reader* 41). Yet in this palimpsestic arrangement, the Father's artificial universe never fully displaces the flesh, and that archaic world always lurks just below the surface, threatening to bleed through and reveal the instability and hubris of patriarchal order and ideology. For Middleton, this persistent threat provides a wellspring of comic and tragic intrigue, and his works repeatedly pull back an exterior of language and symbols in order to reveal the underlying world of flesh.[22] In *The Phoenix*, for instance, the prince finds that animal lust can bleed through an all-too-thin veneer of matrimony's legitimate pleasures. And in *The Witch*, Middleton employs a similar strategy in triplicate by exposing the artificiality and speciousness of three patriarchally mandated symbolic identities that are plainly intended to control the carnal desires and reproductive capabilities of the female body.[23] Middleton's works consistently suggest that cultural constructions which exist in language alone cannot effectively contain or control the physical world and the animal body.

22. One scene from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* employs this method quite literally when two promoters, charged with enforcing the religious and social mandate of Lent, confiscate a basket of forbidden mutton from a wench, only to discover that she has gulled them by hiding even more flesh, her unwanted infant, behind the meat (2.2.136-88).
23. In one early scene from *The Witch* it is precisely the disconnect between superimposed symbolic identities and the underlying realities of flesh that creates darkly comic tensions when Francisca and Isabella discuss their respective social identities of maid and wife. Through a series of double entendres about the "swelling" (2.1.101) in her "stomach" (2.1.117) and even more explicit asides to the audience—"there's another with me, though you see't not" (2.1.65)—Francisca flaunts her continued performance of maiden identity despite the condition of her pregnant body. As for Isabella, when Francisca asks how she slept the night before, she responds with ironic honesty: "more than I thought I should: I've had good rest" (2.1.67). Although Isabella is "for the married life" (2.1.71) and entitled to chaste sex within marriage, Antonio's inexplicable impotence means it is not the "maid" but the "wife" in this scene who has not yet experienced sexual intercourse.

If, as Jacques Lacan rather famously proposes, "it is the world of words that creates the world of things" (*Ecrits* 65), then Middleton's plays and poetry push the ineffable and illegible back into this world that is ostensibly shaped by language. Practicing psychoanalyst Bruce Fink helps explain how words "create" things in his description of the relationship between what Lacan terms the symbolic and the real: "Canceling out the real, the symbolic creates 'reality,' reality as that which is named by language and can thus be thought and talked about" (*Lacanian Subject* 25). The structures and logic of language are therefore imprinted upon anything and everything that can be apprehended by consciousness. But what Fink describes as "canceling out" only occurs from the perspective of beings that think and talk, and an unintelligible wilderness of things carries on in utter indifference to one particular species's world of words.[24] Thus, when Middleton depicts randomness and disorder in the midst of familiar cultural forms—what Eliot described as a "mixture of tedious discourse and sudden reality"—he exposes the hubris or insubstantiality of the symbolic structures that consciousness imposes upon its surroundings. One might even recognize that Phoenix's paean to matrimony calls for that "only and greatest form" to "cancel out" the "disordered appetites of beasts," to refashion human

24. Very recent scholarship in the developing field of "object-orientated ontology" proposes similar ideas that work to de-privilege the perspective of human cognition. For instance, in a September 10, 2011 post at his scholarly blog, "larvalsubjects," Levi Bryant proposes a new definition for the word "wilderness" in which it "signifies not the absence of humans or civilization, but rather the entanglement and separation of beings without any entity, God or human, occupying the place of sovereign." This shift in ontological perspective explains the possibility for interruption, discord, and fracture in the symbolic reality of human consciousness described by Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva, Fink and many others. See also Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought*.

sexual desire as something that can be thought about and talked about (and therefore regulated). But some fraction of untamable, disordered appetite always remains, and in a universal bed trick Fudge's "animal that lurks beneath the surface" always turns up between the sheets of Phoenix's pleasant and fruitful bed.

Lacanian psychoanalysis can also help to account for this lurking animal and provide one possible perspective on those early modern anxieties about the pressing need to put "difference between" human and beast. According to Lacan's highly structuralist version of alienation, human subjectivity emerges when a developing child begins to experience its reality through the proxy of language and symbols, thereby shattering a prior state of beatific interconnectedness with the mother, the body, and the rest of creation. No longer woven into the fabric of the natural universe, the alienated subject now *acts upon* an external world that it can think and talk about. In effect, human subjectivity founds itself by constructing this distinction and distance from its biological or ecological context. Once again, Fink proves useful here because his understanding of alienation stresses the estrangement of the speaking subject from the animal flesh:

> The person is forced to give up some of his being, and here we can refer to this being as that of the living being, the life of the body, our animal existence, and thus the immediate pleasure taken or obtained from the

> body. To put it in terms that are as general as possible, we lose much of our animal being in order to come into being as "social" animals. (Bears do not come into being in this way: They may have a personality—be friendly or affectionate—without there being what Lacan refers to as "subjectivity.") This is essentially what Lacan calls alienation. (*Lacan to the Letter* 116)

But while the development of subjectivity depends upon this distance from the life of the body, the alienated subject must nonetheless continue to coexist with its animal self, with a sometimes uncooperative living body. Culture and consciousness must therefore strain to make sense of this supposedly banished beast that always lurks within, to regulate it, to put it into words.

If the alienated subject defines itself in opposition to its animal being and acts upon its external world (rather than seeing itself as an interconnected part of that world), then alienated subjectivity also helps explain the often antagonistic relationship between human civilization and its environment, therefore bringing us to the ecocritical principles that also guide my readings of Middleton. Although any form of ecocriticism might seem an odd tool to bring to a poet and playwright raised in London's Cheapside and known for his depictions of urban life, Middleton certainly portrays the relationship between the city and the wilderness

which surrounds it.[25] In his own ecocritical study of this "city writer," Bruce Boehrer similarly contends that Middleton "depicts the natural world as a site of vicious disorder in need of human restraint and rational management" (575) and as "a resource that Londoners [. . .] exploit with cynical rapacity" (576). To be sure, burgeoning cities like early modern London surely consume ever more of the natural resources around them, and urbanization refigures natural landscapes in much the same way that consciousness "cancels out" external reality with superimposed language and symbols. But while Boehrer's ecocritical reading examines those relatively rare instances when external "nature" turns up in Middleton's work, I have found that Middleton almost always portrays the human body itself, especially the female body, as a "site of vicious disorder" and as the (sexual) resource most often consumed "with cynical rapacity." In other words, Middleton seems at least somewhat aware that the human organism remains forever a part of what its own subjective consciousness sets apart as otherized "nature."[26]

25. Then again, as Gary Taylor points out, Middleton spent the last two decades of his life in the relatively rural village of Newington, separated from the city by marshy fields, and so "for most of his adult life, he had to walk through that stubbornly rural world to get to the urban rush-and-clutter of actors, alewives, and aldermen" ("Lives and Afterlives" 39).

26. Two essays from the foundational *Ecocriticism Reader* might help support my impulse here to consider human flesh as natural or wild. As Suellen Campbell puts it in an excellent piece that reconciles poststructuralist and ecological theory, human beings "belong not only to networks of language and culture but also to networks of the land" (136). Similarly, Scott Russell Sanders considers that his readership lives in the antiseptic, artificial world of late twentieth century America, but even in this setting, one solitary and ubiquitous contaminant remains from the scrubbed out world of nature: "only the body itself stubbornly upholds the claims of biology, and even this biological datum our reader treats with chemicals designed to improve or delay the workings of nature" (193).

By examining these links between the body, gender, sexuality, and the natural world, this study also owes a debt to recent work in the hybrid field of ecofeminism. In a succinct synopsis of this lesser-known subcategory of ecocritical thought, Greta Gaard explains that "ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1). In other words, the Father's superimposed universe of language and symbols associates women (and other categorically oppressed people) with the non-human world, with disordered savagery, and it therefore regards both as viable targets for exploitation and abuse. If forests may be harvested for timber to build ships that project military or commercial power, then maternal bodies may be marked with a patronym and cultivated to produce the next generation of patriarchal citizens. Yet by deeming women close at hand—mothers, wives, and daughters—part of an unforgiving and turbulent nature, this exploitative ideology goes hand in hand with the same psychocultural anxiety that this introduction reads in Phoenix's reaction to the sale of Castiza.

Furthermore, two of ecofeminism's foundational works, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* and Susan Bordo's *The Flight to Objectivity*, trace this anxiety back to ideologies developed in early modern Europe. According to Merchant, the scientific and commercial philosophies of Sir Francis Bacon, often couched in feminizing metaphors, epitomize a new worldview in

which "disorderly woman, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled" (127). For Bordo René Descartes's *Meditations* signals the emergence of a collective subjectivity which casts "nature as an unruly and malevolent virago" and thereby perceives a world in which there is "no organic unity, but only 'I' and 'She'" (111). Bordo, drawing on the same postmodern psychoanalysis that I have explained above, also describes the antagonistic relationship between the *ego sum* of patriarchal subjectivity and this malevolent virago:

> 'She' is *Other*. And 'otherness' itself becomes dreadful — particularly the otherness of the female, whose powers have always been mysterious to men, and evocative of the mystery of existence itself. Like the infinite universe, which threatens to swallow the individual 'like a speck,' the female, with her strange rhythms, long acknowledged to have their chief affinities with the rhythms of the natural (now alien) world, becomes a reminder of how much lies outside the grasp of man.[27] (*Flight* 111)

With their "strange rhythms," the bodies of women thus become the territory upon which patriarchal subjectivity, culture, and technology attempt to exert claims of dominance over the dreadfully alien world around them. Man cannot control the weather that makes or breaks a fruitful harvest, but he can enforce social codes of sexual behavior for daughters, wives, and mothers.

27. Surely informed by Lacan's concept of alienation (*Flight* 45-6), Bordo even describes a psychocultural *alienation* from nature that "was initially experienced as loss, that is, as estrangement, and the opening up of a chasm between self and nature" (*Flight* 100).

While some ecofeminists, such as Susan Griffin, have criticized "the fiction that women are either biologically or metaphysically […] closer to nature" (215), the fact remains that female bodies might *appear* far more connected to the exterior world than their male counterparts. Only female bodies, that is, bring forth new bodies, only they feed children with breastmilk, and only they menstruate in cycle with the moon, the tides, and the bodies of other women. While such remarkable powers might have once inspired reverence or awe, for the patriarchal cultures of early modern Europe the corporeal unboundedness of a woman's body presents a pressing threat to the fixed and definite order of language, symbols, and images. Mikhail Bakhtin's famous theory of "grotesque realism" describes an aesthetic response to this threat through the individuated or "classical" body image that was enforced in the European Renaissance. While the "grotesque" body of earlier, medieval traditions celebrates the human being's corporeal connection to the natural world, this "classical" body image attempts to deny or efface that connection, to set the human apart from its ecological context.[28] And further, as ecofeminism might suspect, grotesque body imagery includes a disproportionate number of organs and functions that are specific to the female body. For instance, Bakhtin describes the classical body image as one in

28. Bakhtin frequently describes the grotesque body as one that blends with the natural world: "The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth, and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout" (26-7).

which "conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown" (29), while the grotesque body "is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth" (320). Although Bakhtin himself does not explicitly make the connection, the female body—capable of lactation, menstruation, and birth—quite simply appears more grotesque and open than the ostensibly closed-off and individuated bodies of men. Or at least, as Peter Stallybrass has argued in his well-known essay, "Patriarchal Territories," early modern English culture viewed female physiology in precisely this way. According to Stallybrass's widely accepted argument, that is, the writings of several English conduct book authors and sermonizers consistently display "the assumption that woman's body [. . .] is *naturally* 'grotesque,'" that it is a wild "horse to be broken in" (125-26, italics in original).[29] For a culture working hard to develop its distinction from the matter and processes of the natural world, the female body bespeaks the animal within.

The body of woman, with its indispensable and highly visible role in heteronormative reproduction, will always prove troubling to advancing civilizations invested in their distinction from the natural world. According to Ynestra King, a pioneering voice in ecofeminism, even postmodern patriarchal

29. Stallybrass also notices that Bakhtin remains "largely silent" (125) on gender. Perhaps such silence results from the fact that Bakhtin must account for the nursing mothers who frequently turn up in Renaissance art. Indeed, Bakhtin concludes that the image of the nursing mother (often the Madonna, presumably), survives in the classical mode, although modified for the new aesthetic: "In the new canon the duality of the body is preserved only in one theme, a pale reflection of its former dual nature. This is the theme of nursing a child. But the image of the mother and the child is strictly individualized and closed, the line of demarcation cannot be removed. This is a completely new phase of the artistic conception of bodily interaction" (322).

consciousness continues to scapegoat mothers as the unwanted vestiges of an untidy and savage existence to which civilized beings must never return:

> It is as if women were entrusted with and have kept the dirty little secret that humanity emerges from nonhuman nature into society in the life of the species, and the person. The process of nurturing an unsocialized, undifferentiated human infant into an adult person—the socialization of the organic—is the bridge between nature and culture. The western male bourgeois subject then extracts himself from the realm of the organic to become a public citizen, as if born from the head of Zeus. He puts away childish things. Then he disempowers and sentimentalizes his mother, sacrificing her to nature. The coming of age of the male subject repeats the drama of the emergence of the polis, made possible by banishing the mother, and with her the organic world. (130)

But, of course, the male subject cannot really banish the mother or the organic world, and patriarchal ideology itself cannot exist in independence from the biological life and the maternal body. For precisely this reason, the psychocultural Father remains forever locked in a struggle with female flesh for control over the power of conception. And, while its origins surely lie in a far more distant past, this struggle for mastery over nature and woman develops rapidly amidst the

technological and ideological progress of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[30]

According to Michel Foucault, the sexual prohibitions and prescriptions of the modern, industrial world arose over recent centuries in order "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (37). But Foucault's explication of a bourgeois system that turns in upon its own underpinning in procreative biology does not take full account of the maternal body's unique importance. While male bodies surely play an important and indispensable role in conception, they are necessary for only a fleeting moment compared to the maternal body's months of pregnancy and years of nursing. And furthermore, until the very recent advent of genetic testing, paternity could never be as certain as the physical, umbilical connection between mother and child. On the other hand, writing less than a decade after Foucault, Luce Irigaray does not miss the fact that modern patriarchies disempower and disregard their most important players: "Women's bodies—through their use, consumption, and circulation—provide for the condition making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown 'infrastructure' of the elaboration of that social life and culture" (*This Sex* 171). Levi-Straussian exchange of female bodies not

30. Indeed, Susan Bordo perceives René Descartes presiding over a "psychological birth" (*Flight* 7) in the period or "a parturition from the organic universe of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, out of which emerged the modern categories of 'self,' 'locatedness,' and 'innerness'" (*Flight* 100).

only restocks the population, but it creates and affirms the very structures of authority that those populations serve. Therefore it also begins to distance the human from its ecological reality, to move procreative sexuality into the realms of the social, the legal, the commercial, and the religious. In a highly ecofeminist moment, Irigaray observes how this shift becomes part of the fiction of male dominated societies: "without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom"" (*This Sex* 170, punctuation in original). Indeed, systemized patriarchy depends upon an integral sense of human privilege, of a self and purpose that are no longer grounded in the maternal and the ecological, that begins to give figuratively literal birth to itself in the early modern Europe of Middleton's era. Patriarchal dominance over the ongoing processes of biological reproduction, however tenuous or superficial, affirms the human as something beyond the animal self. The exploitation of women's bodies puts the human in human life.

"A Trim Reckoning": Critical and Cultural Contexts

According to this study's view of Thomas Middleton and early modern culture, the wife-selling episode in *The Phoenix* and the false female identities in *The Witch* both expose the limitations, shortcomings, and failures of entities and identities articulated, or completely constructed, through language. More than just the Captain's sale of Castiza, Phoenix comes face to face with the ambiguous and

immaterial substance of matrimony, legitimacy, humanity, and the overarching symbolic order of patriarchy. In *The Witch*, the stability and reliability of that symbolic order faces three separate problems: Francisca's intentional counterfeiting of maidenhood, the Duchess's erroneous belief that she is a widow, and the competing marital claims to Isabella. By maintaining apparent control over women and the bodily business of propagating the human species, these core constructs claim to impose fundamental order upon the reality apprehended by human consciousness. Not just in the Middleton canon, but in early modern England more generally, this order appears to suffer endless uncertainty and nagging doubt.

Of course, other early modern literary and cultural studies conducted over the past few decades also comment on a dawning realization that the ordered reality perceived by human minds and cultures might be fleeting, intangible, and illusory. David Scott Kastan and Stallybrass, for instance, interpret the anti-theatrical tracts as anxious responses to the fact that "the categories of class and gender seem notably constructed and mutable," and that "acting itself threatens to reveal the artificial and arbitrary nature of social being" (9).[31] Or, as Robert Watson puts it, "class, gender, even race were at risk of being disguised—which may have been the safe way of saying they were at risk of being exposed as merely costumes, merely constructed" (9). In response to this risk, sumptuary

31. See also Laura Levine's *Men in Women's Clothing* for an excellent extended discussion of gender and antitheatricality in the period.

laws and anti-theatrical tracts spring up in as "a way of enforcing an illusion of order" (Watson 9). But any effort to assert illusory order also acknowledges or even creates its counterpart: the impending chaos that such fabrications safeguard against. Moreover, this conundrum certainly extends far beyond anxieties about theatricality and cross-dressing.

From a new historicist perspective, for instance, Louis Montrose reads the caution found in an oft-reprinted sixteenth-century homily—"where there is no right ordre, there reigneth all abuse, carnall libertie, enormitie, syn and babilonical confusion"—as evidence that the Elizabethan state endeavored to establish a "systemization of nature and society" even though it "could not effectively contain the ideologically anomalous realities of heterodoxy, nor arrest the social flux, that it had helped set in motion" (*Purpose* 20-1). While I am not persuaded that the Tudor and Stuart regimes are solely behind the flight to such systemization, nor that only "social being" comes into question, we can certainly regard the works of Thomas Middleton and his contemporaries as textual artifacts left by an entire culture irritably struggling to uphold "right ordre" against the encroaching tide of "babilonical confusion" that always threatens to come rushing in. More than merely the setting for a political authority's confrontation with the social flux and heterodoxy that it sets in motion, the cultural, legal, religious, economic, and technological conditions of early modern England provide, in my view, extremely fertile grounds for a basic paradox of the human condition: the

self-manufactured reality inhabited by the consciousness of civilized *homo sapiens* all-too-readily unravels and reveals its *constructedness*.[32] The same cognitive capability that generates (and functions through) conceptual structures inevitably turns back on such abstractions, only to find *mere* structures. Even though a sense of this *mereness* may be, itself, just one more construct, what seems manifestly real, constant, and significant from one angle suddenly appears illusory, mutable, and inconsequential from another.

This study focuses on signs of anxiety about the constructedness of culturally mediated reality in plays and poetry by Thomas Middleton, but he was certainly not the only early modern playwright or poet to exploit this potential paradox of consciousness. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, Shylock famously argues for a human species identity, a common biological being that underlies artificial and arbitrary cultural distinctions:

> Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses,
> affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the
> same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the
> same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and
> summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? (3.1.50-4)

32. With reservations, I am *constructing* a word just outside standard English diction. I find no other word to accurately portray the sense I intend: the perceptible quality of being constructed—quite real, and not quite artifice, but also not what one might call entirely organic. Shortly, I will commit a second offense with "mereness."

Shylock dismisses Jewish and Christian social identities as externalities superimposed over the shared experience of the human body and obscuring a more real, more stable internality. Where Shylock finds human flesh beneath these mere outward costumes, Corvino, in Jonson's *Volpone*, finds nothing at all when he strips away the meaning and value of one particular construct: "Honour! Tut a breath; there's no such thing in nature, a mere term invented to awe fools" (3.6.38-9). Then again, Corvino merely echoes notions about honor that Sir John Falstaff expressed on the English stage a decade earlier: "What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is / that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning!" (*1HIV* 5.1.133-4). Breath, says Falstaff, cannot set a broken limb, and both he and Corvino reject this unsatisfying *mereness* of what exists only in thoughts and discourse, instead preferring the relative substantiality of the body and those tangible things found "in nature." Of course, Shylock, Corvino, and Falstaff do not necessarily represent the sentiments of their early modern audiences, but their shared distrust of language and social values must, nonetheless, be intended to resonate with those audiences.

Shakespeare later returns to the notion that the body and nature might offer the only stable alternatives to the insensible abstractions of language in Edmund's soliloquy on bastardy from *King Lear.* In many ways, this speech inverts Phoenix's paean to marriage: rather than matrimony, Edmund addresses personified nature, and where Phoenix commends social form and custom,

Edmund aligns himself with the "lusty stealth of nature" (1.2.11) and the compact dimensions of his own body. Phoenix hails the "legitimately fruitful" marriage bed, but Edmund embraces his own "soiled bastardy" and rejects the law of established patriarchal authority: "Thou nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound" (1.2.1-2). And, while Corvino and Falstaff only *declare* "honour" a mere "breath" or "air" with yet more words, Edmund *enacts* the same proposition, rolling the syllables of "bastard" about on his tongue until, in droning repetition, the term begins to shed its meaning and return to airy nothing: "Why bastard? Why base? [. . .] Why brand they us / With base? baseness? bastardy? base, base?" (1.2.6, 9-10). By the time he considers that "fine word—legitimate" (1.2.18), Edmund has already unmoored its cumbersome syllables from meaning, from value, from reality. Yet Gloucester's illegitimate son neither deconstructs nor retreats from a world that brands him with words; he instead uses this perspective to manipulate language and the reality structured by it. After enacting the potential meaninglessness of "base" and "legitimate," Edmund performs the vice figure's generic confession, to the audience, of his plot. Using a forged letter, Edmund tells us that he hopes to "awe fools" himself and, ultimately, invert the patriarchal order: "if this letter speed, / and my invention thrive, Edmund the base / shall top the legitimate" (1.2.19-20). Just like the identities of maid, wife, and widow in *The Witch*, the letter that Edmund holds is a forgery, a sleight of language, an illusion performed through signifiers slipping

away from meaning. Much like the other period examples discussed throughout this introduction, Edmund's speech on bastardy bespeaks an early modern preoccupation with the mereness and manipulability of highly constructed, yet vitally important, social identities.

Along with Shakespeare and Jonson, Middleton wrote for a world that was rapidly advancing in terms of its symbolic, linguistic, and technological complexity while it was simultaneously uncertain about the stability of its symbols. In Middleton's hands, a sense of this underlying uncertainty would develop into a near obsession with the insubstantiality of those social constructs that regulate human sexuality and female bodies. For instance, Phoenix's praise for matrimony immediately turns to disgust over the horrifying prospect that a sexually experienced woman might conspire to be "made strict by power of drugs and art, / An artificial maid, a doctored virgin" (8.178-9). Although he affirms the capacity of marriage to transform animal lusts into lawful sweets, Phoenix still harbors the discomfiting belief that it is all too "rare to have a bride commence a maid" (8.176) and that this subversive deceit brings "a foul contempt against the spotless power / Of sacred wedlock" (8.181-2). Yet Phoenix offers neither examples nor details of such elaborate doctoring, and these "contempts" seem the stuff of paranoia, rumor, and hearsay. The speech moves from one vague anxiety about the uncertainty of a distinctively human identity to another vague anxiety about the uncertain authenticity of maids. Phoenix therefore betrays an uneasy

sense that perhaps maidenhood and the sacred power of wedlock are *never* certain and, perhaps, there's no such thing in nature. In *The Witch*, *The Changeling*, and elsewhere, Middleton returns to this subtly metatheatric conceit again and again, repeatedly sending boy-actors out onto the stage to pose as women posing as virgins.[33] Playing artificial maids, these performers then assume a vice-like posture, leering over the edge of the stage and revealing to the audience that, just as easily as Edmund forges Edgar's handwriting, *they* can counterfeit virgin identity. Indeed, much as Shakespeare's famous bastard wrings the last drops of significance from the droningly repeated syllables of "base" and "legitimate," Middleton's plays and poetry persistently unmoor female social identities from their meaning and social value.

Maid, Wife, Widow, and Wife Again

The questions at the core of *The Witch*, questions about what exactly makes a maid a maid, a wife a wife, or a widow a widow, may well have been troubling the national and spiritual consciousness of England for generations by the time Middleton was born in the twenty-second year of Elizabeth I's reign. The Tudor Queen's father had, of course, only married her mother after publicly declaring that his first marriage was null in the eyes of God, that Catherine of

33. The most glaring examples of false virgins are Francisca, discussed above, and Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* who will be the subject of Chapter One. For a few more suggestions of forging (or restoring) virginity in Middleton, see *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* 1.1.111-3, 2.1.105-6; *A Mad World, My Masters* 1.1.162-64; *The Puritan* 3.5.276-84; and *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* 6.440-41.

Aragon was not actually his wife. Although Cardinal Wolsey had prepared a plausible—albeit complicated and technical—canon law argument to use in claiming nullity, Henry nonetheless insisted that his marriage to Catherine had violated Levitical Law.[34] Despite a papal dispensation that expressly allowed her marriage to Henry, Catherine remained the wife of his deceased brother "by contract before heaven"—to borrow Sebastian's turn of phrase (*The Witch* 1.1.3)—and her vehemently repeated claims that the earlier marriage was never consummated were therefore meaningless. Or so said Henry, and his monumentally historic perseverance on the matter left Catherine without *any* social or marital identity: neither wife, widow, nor maid, and not even punk.

Catherine's eventual banishment to this limbo of marital identity (although certainly better than the fate of Anne Boleyn) makes Juan Louis Vives's earlier dedication of his *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* to her particularly ironic. In this female conduct manual, that is, Vives declares that Queen Catherine, her marriage to Henry unquestioned at the time, will recognize "the resemblence of your mynde and goodness: bicause that you have ben both mayde, wyfe, and wydow, and wyfe agayne: as I pray god you maye longe contynue" (11). Over the remainder of this study, I will organize my chapters around Vives's dedication, focusing each on a maid, a wife, a widow, and a wife again. Although this organizing structure might appear somewhat arbitrary, I have already

34. For a more detailed explanation of Wolsey's plan and Henry's insistence, as well as my analysis of the symbolic and ideological repercussions of Henry's argument, please see appendix.

demonstrated Middleton's enduring interest in the female identities of maid, wife, and widow. And, as I will argue in my concluding chapter, the figure of "wife again," through her return to an earlier point in an expected series of life stages, potentially exposes the changing and arbitrary nature of these female identities. Furthermore, the particular "wife again" that Vives was addressing, Catherine of Aragon, was easily stripped of *that* marital identity by one of the period's most prominent figures of patriarchal authority.

In Chapter One, which focuses on female virginity in *The Changeling*, the theoretical claims made throughout this introduction find perhaps their most direct reiteration and support. In this famous Jacobean tragedy's main plot, generally attributed to Middleton, a patriarchal fantasy about reading female flesh comes to fruition in the form of Alsemero's Glass M and its liquid that tests for the "presence" of female virginity. So the alchemical test, which comes complete with instructions, purports to confirm a purely social or symbolic identity in the empirical, biological reality of a woman's flesh. Of course, the fact that this technology seems to actually *work* within the fiction of the play does not prevent Beatrice-Joanna from concealing her body's sexual experience, just like Francisca in *The Witch*. When Alsemero gives her the test, that is, she quite simply fakes the results. This integral plot device, not found in the playwrights' source material, feels characteristically Middletonian since it gives voice to fantasies of symbolic

order and then promptly complicates and undermines them. In doing so, *The Changeling* also taps into much larger cultural anxieties about the potential unreliability of symbols and other technologies for controlling the natural world, about controlling or containing disordered appetites.

Chapter Two examines Middleton's early poem, *The Ghost of Lucrece*, a conventional female complaint poem that clearly responds to and continues William Shakespeare's treatment of the oft revisited story handed down from Roman antiquity. In Middleton's hands, the disembodied spirit of Lucrece—who converses with the only other speaker in the poem, the composing poet—rails against Tarquin in terms that, paradoxically, highlight and magnify the raped and self-murdered female flesh from which her spirit and voice have long since departed. In life, Lucrece's animal self, her body, proved an unmanageable liability for the otherwise perfect wife who once exemplified patriarchal expectations of conjugal chastity. The ghost in Middleton's poem, on the other hand, takes up images of female corporeality as a rhetorical weapon, unleashing great floods of blood, milk, and tears that gorge and stuff Tarquin's own disordered appetite. Written at the outset of Middleton's career, *The Ghost of Lucrece* also looks back to the cultural traditions and influences that came before it, not only to Shakespeare's relatively recent *The Rape of Lucrece*, but also to veins of cultural material that run much further back. The living Lucrece, according to her ghost, imagines the lost prehistory of a golden age that predates

patriarchal rule, and this chapter also considers the psychocultural link between civilized humanity's alienation from the natural world and the gendered subject's alienation from the mother.

The theatrical conventions of widow-hunting and cross-dressing come to the forefront in Chapter Three's discussion of *The Widow*, an under-appreciated comic masterpiece. Although the cross-dressing comedies of Middleton's contemporaries are better known and better studied, this play pushes the familiar comic device of the period to extremes in order to suggest the constructedness of not just gender and identity, but also human understanding of reality itself. Indeed, *The Widow* builds its main cross-dressing plot line to an astounding and disorienting conclusion, and one of the play's earlier scenes even pursues the confusion of gender *without* the use of clothes. In this way, *The Widow* uses cross-dressings and metatheatrics to extend relatively common questions about the haziness of gender difference to the borderlines distinguishing scripted action from accident, character from actor, and fiction from reality. The play's titular widow, Valeria, might even seem an afterthought, especially since she does not take the stage until Act 2 and only appears in four of the play's ten scenes. But at the center of the play's metatheatric muddling, Valeria insists upon finding essential reality and rejects all things inauthentic, from cosmetic adornments to the theatrical stereotypes of the widow-hunt: "I would have one that loves me for myself, sir, / Not for my wealth" (2.1.70-71). While, unlike the maid and wife

examined by the previous two chapters, Valeria's female social identity does *not* turn out to be an empty performance or an unsustainable illusion, just about everything else in the play does. By the time this widow discovers which one of her suitors loves her for her real self, the play has cast unshakable doubts on the whether or not anything can be "real" at all.

The concluding chapter begins with a discussion of *Women Beware Women*'s treatment of remarriage and the potentially disruptive figure of a "wyfe agayne," as Vives once described Catherine of Aragon in his female conduct book. In this play, one of Middleton's most famous, the courtiers Livia and Guardiano procure Bianca, Leantio's new bride, for a forced liaison with the Duke of Florence. But the pair's method of distracting the young wife's mother-in-law with a game of chess that precisely mirrors the Duke's sexual advances seems to suggest that reality can be as ordered and manipulable as the virtual world of the chess board. Later, when Leantio is dead and Bianca remarried to her rapist, the play concludes with its infamous masque, also produced by Livia and Guardiano. But this time things do not go according to plan. Indeed, neither the dramatic form nor the written script of the masque can contain or control the disordered and vengeful appetites of its masquers, a fact that is highlighted by the Duke's nearly farcical attempts to reconcile a written summary of the plot with the action on stage, which "swerves a little from the argument" (5.1.160). This reading of *Women Beware Women* prompts a closing discussion of the profound ideological

and cultural effects of rising literacy and print culture in early modern Europe. While a woman's progress through the life stages of maid, wife, and widow can be set out clearly and precisely in written or printed language—as it is in Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman*—any remarried "wyfe again" suggests the constructedness of these identities and the fungibility of the individuals who inhabit them. Bianca's remarriage in *Women Beware Women* demonstrates that not even the rising technologies of print and writing can control the same disordered appetites that Phoenix finds on the streets of Ferrara.

CHAPTER ONE, Maid . . .
"What the Act Has Made You": Approving Virginity in *The Changeling*

> *By any material reckoning, virginity does not exist. It can't be weighed on a scale, sniffed out like a truffle or a smuggled bundle of cocaine, retrieved from the lost-and-found, or photographed for posterity.*
>
> --Hanne Blank. *Virgin: The Untouched History.*

Deep within the secret vaults of Vermandero's castle, Alonzo de Piracquo's lifeless body slumps to the cold floor. Just minutes earlier, Piracquo hung up his sword in order to follow De Flores, unhindered, into the locked, narrow passageways running throughout this "most spacious and impregnable fort" (3.1.4). But De Flores, Vermandero's most trusted servant, betrays his master's intended son-in-law, bludgeoning him from behind with a heavy key and then twice driving a rapier through him, each time hissing, "I must silence you" (3.2.18-9). Alonzo succumbs to his wounds quickly, falling silent without ever knowing that his own betrothed, Beatrice-Joanna, ordered the assault so that she might rid herself of "two inveterate loathings at one time: / Piracquo and his dog-face [De Flores]" (2.2.147-8). With her father's choice of a husband dead and her dog-faced assassin on the run, Beatrice figures, she will be free to fulfill her impulsive desire to marry Alsemero, a handsome stranger just arrived in Alicante. But things will not be so simple.

Unexpectedly, Beatrice's hired killer soon turns on her and assaults the very core of her social being. Rather than money, De Flores demands that Beatrice hand over her virginity as payment for permanently silencing Piracquo.

At first she resists with desperate reasoning and verbal pleas, but reluctantly, without words, she yields to her hired assassin's sexual blackmail. In order to go ahead with a marriage to Alsemero, then, Beatrice must counterfeit the precious social identity that her body no longer warrants. For a time, she passes herself off successfully, and neither the sense, wisdom, nor technology of Valencia's confident patriarchal powers can correctly read the flesh of this 'virgin' bride as an utter forgery, a transgressive performance. In the end, though, Beatrice's false identity and fraudulent union unravel, and the play comes to its tragic climax which reveals "but one thing, and that is she's a whore" (5.3.107). *The Changeling* horrifies and captivates by building its main plot around the troubling possibility that female virginity, for all its social value and significance, does not exist outside the highly subjective act of reading its uncertain, manipulable signs. In doing so, the play undermines patriarchal order by showing that the stability and security of ideal human constructs, be they impregnable forts or impregnable virgins, are always threatened by the disordered, untamable flesh that lurks within.

"I Pray, Bury the Finger": Unwelcome and Inextricable Flesh

Just after completing the contracted murder, De Flores spots the glimmer of something useful in the dim silence of the vault:

O, 'tis a diamond

He wears upon his finger. It was well found:

This will approve the work.

[*He struggles with the ring*]

What, so fast on?

Not part in death? I'll take a speedy course then:

Finger and all shall off. [*He cuts off the finger*] So, now I'll clear

The passages from all suspèct or fear.

(3.2.22-7)

The murder scene ends with De Flores dragging the corpse of Alonzo de Piracquo offstage, working doggedly to clear the passageways of the incriminating flesh and blood. Tucked away in his pocket, though, he keeps both ring *and* dismembered finger, and the macabre detail makes for a perplexingly risky move in De Flores's otherwise well-planned and well-executed attack. Middleton and Rowley, this chapter contends, add the fused ring and finger to their source in order to emblematize a key notion, at work throughout their play, about the uneasy intersection of artificial and organic, the inseparability of grotesque and classical.[35] The dead man's finger, stubbornly lodged within the circumference of the ring, represents the persistence of disordered flesh within finely wrought civilization and order.

35. Ring, finger, and any postmortem dismemberment are absent from the playwrights' source, John Reynold's 1621 collection of "true crime" tales, *The Triumphs of God's Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Wilful and Premeditated Murther*.

For many critics, the gruesome finger-severing amounts to a symbolic castration, especially since fingers penetrate rings and gloves with obvious sexual allusion at other moments in the play, but if De Flores symbolically seizes Alonzo de Piracquo's phallic power when he takes his finger, then he gains nothing but feeble libido and compromised authority.[36] Consider, for instance, that Alonzo rather meekly submits to a postponement of his marriage and sexual satisfaction (2.1.113-22), or that his own brother predicts his impending cuckoldry and troubled future as "half-father" to his own children (2.1.136-8). Further still, although Vermandero—who rather prudently refuses "to give survey / Of our chief strengths to strangers" (1.1.166-7)—ostensibly intends to grant Alonzo de Piracquo intimate access to his daughter's body, he withholds corresponding access to the secret chambers deep within his fortress.[37] The patriarch insists that *Alsemero*, to whom he has just been introduced, "must see my castle / And her best entertainment" (1.1.205-6), and, even before he becomes Beatrice's new betrothed, *this* young nobleman soon enjoys the full "liberty of the house" (3.4.12). Such masculine privilege, however, seems unavailable to "our son Alonzo" (2.1.110) who solicits De Flores in private conference (2.2.158-167) for a much-desired tour of the castle vaults, and this arrangement certainly seems

36. Richard Burt spells out the reading explicitly: "Consider The Changeling, in which we are invited to read De Flores's cutting off Alonzo's finger as a castration: it recalls both De Flores's earlier image 'I should thrust my fingers | into her sockets' where 'sockets' means both the fingers of Beatrice-Joanna's glove and her vagina, and an earlier pun on Isabella's ring, both jewel and vagina, into which suitors may 'thrust' their fingers" (191). Burt refers to 1.1.236-8 and 1.2.26-31. For some other critics who read the cutting as a symbolic castration, see Garber ("Insincerity" 19), Haber (99), Malcolmson (150), Rieger (86), Suzuki (98), and Whigham (342).

37. See Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories," on the association of securing female bodies and homes or fortresses.

unauthorized since Alonzo inadvertently covers up his own disappearance and murder:

ALONZO

I am glad I have this leisure. All your master's house imagine
I ha' taken a gondola.

DE FLORES

All but myself, sir—[aside] which makes up my
safety.—

(3.2.2-5)

While all Alicante supposes Piracquo out for a pleasurable boat ride, De Flores also convinces his unknowingly complicit victim to remove the sword strapped to his thigh—both a symbolic and practical loss of phallic power—so that, unpointed, he can only scream "O, O, O!" when finally run through with his killer's hidden rapier (3.2.18).[38] So if cutting off the finger does suggest penectomy,[39] then the postmortem operation merely joins this much larger set of images and dialogue that depict Piracquo's ineffectual virility and problematic

38. Because De Flores ambushes Piracquo from behind, the disarmament turns out to be unnecessary, perhaps wholly symbolic. Of course, De Flores might simply be an abundantly cautious murderer, but the play still insists upon the image of Piracquo lacking a sword when De Flores pushes the rapier into him.

39. I choose the more accurate "penectomy" partly under the influence of Gary Taylor, who argues that Freudian "castration" conflates penis and testicles and that the current ubiquity of this view colors our current understanding of both term and procedure. See Freud, *Outline* (25-6), and Taylor, *Castration* (51-62). I might also add that any consideration of "castration" usually focuses on the effects that removal of the testes and/or penis has on the *survivor* of the procedure, in biological, social, psychological, or even mythological terms. Accordingly, I find the desecration of Piracquo's corpse far less "castratory" than the moment of ambush, when the victim's swordlessness imparts a kind of martial impotence. For relevant discussions of castration including its effects on a survivor see aforementioned works by both Freud and Taylor, as well as Dympna Callaghan's "The Castrator's Song: Female Impersonation on the Early Modern Stage" in *Shakespeare Without Women*.

inclusion in closely linked systems of biological regeneration and patriarchal power. Ultimately, though, while the amputation resonates with this concatenation of emasculating images, the severed finger makes a far more dramatic impression when De Flores delivers it *to* Beatrice than when he takes it *from* Piracquo.

De Flores intends for the *ring,* not the finger, to "approve the work." He expects Beatrice to be fluent in a vocabulary of Alonzo's personal effects, and he believes that the jewelry will metonymically stand in for both the dead man and the deed completed.[40] However, although De Flores encounters little difficulty cutting Piracquo's "heart strings" (3.4.32), completely disposing of his carcass in secret, and cleaving finger from hand, he simply, and rather absurdly, cannot push, pull, slice, or otherwise remove the uncooperative lump of flesh from the ring. As a result, the intended signifier literally contains a grisly bit of what it should only represent:

BEATRICE

Is it done, then?

DE FLORES Piracquo is no more.

BEATRICE

My joys start at mine eyes; our sweet'st delights

Are evermore born weeping.

40. De Flores refers to the ring/finger as a "token" (3.4.27), and one contemporary meaning of "token" was a *metonymic* object that identified or authenticated a person, as when a diplomatic envoy carries an object which verifies that they speak on behalf of the person represented. See *OED* "token, n." 7. a.

DE FLORES

I've a token for you.

BEATRICE For me?

DE FLORES

But it was sent somewhat unwillingly:

I could not get the ring without the finger.

[*He shows her the finger*]

BEATRICE Bless me! What hast thou done?

(3.4.24-30)

At this moment, as the stage direction makes quite clear, Beatrice reacts to the sight of the disembodied finger in front of her, certainly not the more recognizable ring that it still wears. Her vastly different responses to the verbal news of her fiancé's murder and to the sight of his dead flesh also indicate a dramatic shift in her conception of the murder. Fully invested in the meaning and values dictated by her culture, Beatrice initially imagines her murder plot as violence enacted upon *symbols and language* rather than an animate body. Indeed, Beatrice first ponders Alonzo's murder in precisely this way, as the rubbing out of a name: "If there were none such name known as Piracquo, / Nor no such tie as the command of parents" (2.2.19-20). Turning Piracquo's *name* to "no more" brings Beatrice tears of joy because this erasure in language undoes those bonds of kinship

recently tied between noblemen, in which Beatrice *is* the metaphorical knot.[41] Perhaps, if De Flores had brought an un-fingered ring to approve his work, then the man-made symbol of Alonzo and his fate might have fit far better with Beatrice's sanitized notions of homicide. But the ring "stuck / As if the flesh and it were both one substance" (3.4.39-40), thereby translating an intended metonym into a gruesomely literal synecdoche of flesh.

On one level, the severed finger simply makes for a thrilling and ghastly onstage spectacle, but, unlike Beatrice, the audience has just witnessed the brutal murder and already knows exactly what "token" De Flores keeps in his pocket. Surely, the reappearance of ring and finger is macabre, but Beatrice's reaction does far more to expose the naiveté of a consciousness groomed to function almost entirely within an abstract world of language and symbols, a consciousness completely disconnected from the life of the body or, in this case, the morbidity of murder. Although De Flores finds it quite puzzling,[42] Beatrice's astonishment also makes perfect sense from the standpoint of recent ecofeminist theory because the fictions of patriarchal ideology consistently denigrate and deny the flesh. Dorothy Dinnerstein, for instance, argues that:

41. As Vermandero puts it, "[Piracquo] shall be bound to me, / As fast as this tie [Beatrice] can hold him" (1.1.222-3). My bracketed insertion follows the Oxford editors who gloss "this tie" as "Beatrice" (1.1.223n), but of course, by "this tie" Vermandero could also or simultaneously refer to the marriage arrangement.
42. De Flores responds with bewildered pragmatism that borders on comedy: "Why, is that more than killing the whole man? / I cut his heart strings: / A greedy hand thrust in a dish at court / In a mistake hath had as much as this" (3.4.31-4).

> People under the most diverse cultural conditions have felt an opposition, an antagonism, between what is humanly noble, durable, strenuous, and the insistent rule of flesh, flesh which is going to die and which even when death is remote makes humbling demands: we must feed it, we must let it sleep, we must get rid of its smelly wastes. (126)

Ultimately powerless to negotiate with the flesh and its imperatives, Beatrice's culturally constructed consciousness insists that she block out what symbolic authority cannot shape or control. Yet Beatrice must now face reality in the finger before her; she must gaze upon the grotesque physicality of her crime, the fact that what De Flores has done involves something other than a tidy translation of "Alonzo de Piracquo" to "none such" or "no more." Moreover, since patriarchy specifically holds *woman* to be "representative of the body principle in all of us that must be pushed down" (Dinnerstein 126), the murderess also experiences an even more humbling, and far more radical, confrontation with her own corporeality.

De Flores's assault thrusts Beatrice up against the *animal* existence of her own body and forces her into acknowledgement of the bestial disorder that lurks within. As De Flores's extortive rape scheme builds to its carnal, offstage climax, the play unleashes a small barrage of metaphors that figure Beatrice and De Flores as copulating beasts. When Beatrice fully grasps that she cannot escape "his dog-face" she turns to the audience and laments in an aside, "Was my

creation in the womb so cursed, / It must engender with a viper first?" (3.4.169). Her question first explicitly considers her corporeal conception before the Edenic metaphors envision her entwined with a slithering serpent. Finally, when Beatrice's speech disintegrates into unintelligible breath, De Flores takes cynical pleasure in comparing her to a quivering bird: "'las how the turtle pants" (3.4.173). While this metaphor has been (and should be) read in many ways,[43] it also functions as subtle stagecraft by amplifying Beatrice's rapid breath and heartbeat throughout the expansive space of a playhouse. The line invites an audience to hear and feel the soft pulse and breath in Beatrice's bosom—the minuscule traces of her body's instinctive behaviors that are otherwise unstageable. At this moment, Beatrice-Joanna turns out to be just another corporeal creature from the wilds outside of Vermandero's citadel, unshaped by the ideals of culture and outside the mechanisms of patriarchal control. Like the dead finger stuck within the inorganic ring, her body and its reflexes stick, disturbingly, at the center of Beatrice's cultural role of perfect virgin.

That flesh within the ring upends Beatrice's comfortable notion of symbolic reality, and *The Changeling* repeatedly presses this point upon its audiences: that some disordered, unwelcome, bestial, and corporeal being—governed by instinct and impulse, irrational loving and loathing—always lies

43. Judith Haber, for instance, reads the comment as a reference to Jonson's *Hymenai* citing similar observations by Bawcutt, Frost (Introduction), and Hopkins. For Haber, the image taps into an "erotic logic" that conflates desire and disgust, loving and loathing, virgin and whore (168-9n2).

beneath the polished surface of abstract form and order. On one level the play unsettles and enthralls its early modern audiences by gesturing towards the unnoticed ubiquity of animal flesh, and the most captivating horror that Middleton and Rowley's 1622 masterpiece depicts, then, is not merely murder, deceit, nor, as most recent readings of the play accept,[44] the unreadability and unknowability of female sexual histories. The true horror arises from the play's exploration of the possibility that learning, discourse, and meaning simply cannot save human subjectivity from the harsh realities of its ecological context and its biological grounding. In other words, human flesh smuggles wilderness and disorder into the most precisely wrought symbolic constructs, and female flesh, particularly and conspicuously, sticks in the secret spaces of patriarchy's structures. Especially when it comes to the patriarchal ideal of perfect female virginity—a smooth, sterile, symbolic identity which still insists on its grounding in the flesh of women—one can *never* get the ring without the finger.

"Though Thou Writ'st 'Maid,' Thou Whore in Thy Affection*": *The Manipulable World of Words

The Changeling's main plot connects with contemporary anxieties about detecting female virginity in tangible reality because virginity, a purely social identity, declares itself an empirical condition of the physical body, "as if the flesh

44. The critical commonplace is cemented by Marjorie Garber's foundational 1995 reading of the play in "The Insincerity of Women."

and it were both one substance" (3.4.40).[45] Decades ago, Christopher Ricks observed that *The Changeling*'s poetic strategy focuses on "a group of words, each of which has two meanings, one of them sexual; at the beginning of the play the two meanings are distinct; by its end, they have become inextricable" (291). Although he limits this thesis to the play's poetics, diction, and wordplay, Ricks picks up on *The Changeling*'s overall thematic concern with the inextricability of *corporeality,* which surely includes sexuality, from the reality experienced through symbols and language. The uncannily fused ring and finger emblematize this inextricability, but the main plot's intrigue focuses on a specific, and far more problematic, intersection of artificial construct and organic flesh: the precious maiden identity that Beatrice-Joanna and her culture superimpose upon her body. De Flores himself remarks that the ideals expressed in language and human flesh are not always in accord: "Though thou writ'st 'maid,' thou whore in thy affection./ 'Twas changed from thy first love, and that's a kind/ Of whoredom in thy heart" (3.4.145-7). Beneath the semblance of maiden identity, De Flores points out, lurks the grotesque reality of Beatrice's whorish heart, the instincts and impulses of a human body. Like the rotting, dead flesh within the perfect circle of the ring that De Flores brings to approve his work, human flesh and blood can never fully conform to the precise ideals available in symbols and language.

45. Indeed, one might even think of the main plot as the tragedy of virginal identity itself. As Annabel Patterson points out, Middleton and Rowley's most significant alterations to the source for *The Changeling* make "virginity and its overvaluation a central theme of [their] tragedy" (1633).

Throughout *The Changeling*, the world of words and the world of things are frequently at odds.

The conventional wisdom circulating in Middleton and Rowley's Europe, however, presumed a much closer correspondence between abstraction and flesh, between the qualification to label oneself 'maid' in writing and some tangible thing within the biological body. Prompted by what David Hillman describes as the widespread "idea that important truths lie hidden within the body" (82) and the "anatomist's fantasy of absolute legibility" (98), early moderns poked, prodded, and dissected their way into the flesh of humankind.[46] Moreover, when anatomical observation—a new technology exemplified by texts like Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*—gazed into the mysterious reproductive organs of female bodies, it often sought out one particular part that was presumed to harbor one particular truth. "The true mark of virginity," as Laurent Joubert says in 1578's *Erreurs Populaires*, is "the *dame du milieu*, which the ancients called the hymen, belt, or zone, and cloister of maidenhood. It is a membrane stretched across the passageway, and which must be broken in defloration" (213). Joubert actually endorses something he calls the "second maidenhead" which is located at the "neck of the womb"(220), but both of these maidenheads, along with a long list of other fragile features of the vagina that were purported to rip, break, or tear

46.To be clear, by "important truths" Hillman means abstractions like "virtue and sin" which "were often imagined as literally inhabiting bodily innards" (82). Perhaps we find something very similar in the early twenty-first century searches for hidden genetic markers for everything from risk of disease to sexual preference.

while engaged in their intended sexual function, reassuringly made virginity into a concrete, biological fact. When it came to maidenhood, flesh confirmed social identity. Except, according to both twenty-first century medicine and even many of Joubert's early modern contemporaries,[47] a hymenal membrane "which must be broken in defloration" simply does not exist, and, aside from cases of venereal disease or pregnancy, the female body does not display *any* reliable sign of prior sexual experience.[48]

As it developed the detached perspective of science and reason, early modern consciousness encountered a vertiginous, anxiety-provoking gap between its cultural perceptions and empirical reality. Examining female bodies for the true marks of a social identity could only lead to delusion, disappointment, or confusion, and Middleton and Rowley intended *The Changeling* to enthrall audiences living through the uncertainty of what Marie Loughlin calls the

47. Joubert concedes that "the modern physicians, Fernel, Sylvius, Vassaeus, and others, consider this to be a fable, affirming that there is no obstacle, diaphragm, hedge, or little wall (however one might want to call it) in this passageway" (214). Joubert proposes a more reliable, "second maidenhead" located at the "neck of the womb" (220), but eventually accepts the existence of the hymen: "I was of their opinion for a long time; but in the end I was made aware of it by Falliopio" (217). For detailed surveys of early modern medical literature that offered conflicting opinions on the hymen, along with early modern acknowledgements that it could either be "broken" without sexual penetration or congenitally absent, see Bicks (60-93), Blank (32-41), Carroll "Virgin Not" (294-6), Kelly (17-39), and Loughlin (13-52).

48. Perhaps this traditional notion of the hymen as a seal which must be broken when a woman first has sex may have begun with cases of 'imperforate hymen,' the congenital abnormality "with an incidence between 0.1% and 0.05%" that gynecologists currently treat with corrective surgery (Aydemir 61). In any case, the hymen, nothing more than a ridge of tissue within the vagina, simply does not systematically 'break' or otherwise reliably display signs of sexual activity. For one concise summation of the current clinical view on the subject, see Blomkvist, et al.: "Studies in forensic medicine, intended for use as evidence when prosecuting alleged sexual assault against a minor, reveal very few cases where a physician can make a definitive statement as to whether gynaecological [sic] examination of the hymen indicated past vaginal intercourse or not. To our knowledge, no studies have found reliable evidence of hymen rupture in adolescent girls following voluntary vaginal intercourse. Hence, from an anatomical point of view, the state of the hymen has in reality little to say about previous sexual activity or experience."

"desperate and conflicted search for the hymen as the seal of virginity" (39). In her well-titled *Hymeneutics*, Loughlin argues that such desperation developed as some early moderns began to skeptically and methodically examine long-held cultural beliefs:

> Although the conception of the hymen as the sign of virginity, as a membrane that in some way seals the generative organs of the virginal woman until torn in the moment of first coitus remains widespread in the twentieth century, the debate over the veracity of this powerful and pervasive cultural fiction is a concern of anatomists and physicians from at least the late sixteenth century, when Vesalius and some of his contemporaries began to test the assumptions of the ancients (especially Galen) against the evidence of actual dissection and observation. (30)

Undoubtedly, the general population shared at least some portion of this concern, and an unimaginable number of informal, bedroom experiences—just like documented, empirical experiments—could not possibly find a biological seal of virginity. Although many surely believed in this fictional membrane, as most still do today, one need look no further than Middleton's own canon to find indications that the hymen was the subject of widespread uncertainty and doubt.

Before and after collaborating with Rowley on *The Changeling*, Middleton repeatedly questions the reliability of the "true mark of virginity." As early as 1603's *The Phoenix*, Middleton suggests that a previously-visited vagina might be

"made strict by power of drugs and art," and that some unspecified medical sleight of hand could create "an artificial maid, a doctored virgin" (8.178-9). Roughly fifteen years later, in collaboration with Rowley on *A Fair Quarrel*, Middleton again suggests that experts could reconstruct the body's natural seal of virginity using some vaguely described technique: "we physicians are the truest / Alchemists that from the ore and dross of sin / Can new distill a maidenhead again" (2.2.133-4). Even in Middleton's final dramatic effort, 1624's *A Game at Chess,* the notion of new distilled maidenheads persists when the Jesuit Black Bishop's Pawn tells the Virgin White Queen's Pawn that, if she yields her virginity to him, "there's art to help thee / and fools to pass thee to" (2.1.125).[49] On one hand, the possibility of doctored membranes and bodily passages actually reinforces conventional belief in the hymen, but, on the other, it also subverts that belief by casting doubts on the *authenticity* of the hymen and any other purported signs of virginity that can be found on the body. If the courtesan in *A Mad World, My Masters* can resell her maidenhead "fifteen times" (1.1.162), that is, then this mythical membrane simply cannot attest to the truth of virginity.

In *The Changeling*, Middleton embarks on his deepest exploration of uncertainty about the signs of sexual experience on female bodies, and in the play's long opening scene, the playwrights firmly establish Beatrice-Joanna's faith

49. For a few other examples of forged, reconstructed, or recycled "maidenheads" in Middleton's works, see *Patient Man/Honest Whore*: "When for each several city she has seen/ Her maidenhead has been new and been sold dear" (6.440-1); *Mad World*: "Fifteen times thou know'st I have sold thy maidenhead/ to make up a dowry for thy marriage, and yet there's/ maidenhead enough for old Sir Bounteous still" (1.1.162-4).

in the cultural fiction of the hymen as well as her belief in virginal identity as a substantial, embodied entity. Pleading with her father for a stay of her impending marriage and defloration, Beatrice personifies the abstraction that grants her body its desirability and value:

> Nay, good sir, be not so violent. With speed
> I cannot render satisfaction
> Unto the dear companion of my soul,
> Virginity, whom I thus long have lived with,
> And part with it so rude and suddenly;
> Can such friends divide, never to meet again,
> Without a solemn farewell?
>
> (1.1.195-202)

As both Arthur Little and Sara Luttfring point out, Beatrice's "divide" and "part" diction alludes to the impending rupture of her genital tissues once she submits to vaginal penetration (Little 28; Luttfring 108). The poetic entreaty thus provides a double-dose of embodiment by envisioning the violence that will be inflicted upon a collection of anatomical myths *and* her metaphorical friend.[50] The opening act of the play sets Beatrice and her "dear companion" deep within a patriarchal

50. Later in the play, Beatrice returns to this conceit and again personifies her virginity as a victim of violence. When De Flores, with language "so bold and vicious" (3.4.126), makes his coital intentions clear, Beatrice launches into a protest that unbelievably values personification above person: "Why, tis impossible thou canst be so wicked/ Or shelter such a cunning cruelty;/ To make his death the murderer of my honour!" (3.4.125).

world of language and symbols, an ordered place where tropes are literal and where hymens and virginity are very real.

But De Flores's rape snuffs out this "dear companion" and displaces Beatrice from her culture's field of language and abstractions. When Beatrice realizes that De Flores intends "to make his [Alonzo's] death the murderer of my honour" (3.4.125), she falls to her knees and weeps in a desperate attempt to negotiate with him, but he immediately shuts down her stream of words: "Let this silence thee: / The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy/ my pleasure from me" (3.4.162-4). When Beatrice's words deteriorate into uncontrollable panting, her rapist tells her that "silence is one of pleasure's best receipts: / thy peace is wrought forever in this yielding" (3.4.171-2). These demands for silence echo those at Piracquo's murder, except this time De Flores kills off a metaphor while foreclosing the social authority and financial leverage that his master's daughter attempts to wield over him. As the scene ends, then, De Flores not only drags Beatrice offstage, but also into a linguistic void, a terrifying wilderness unshaped by culture's speech, meaning, and order. At this moment, the play also leaves its audience in silence to picture the disordered acts that take place out of earshot, and this particular act of defloration, just like virginity itself, can only be observed by imposing meaning upon blankness.

When the play resumes, it maintains this silence and continues to withhold speech by way of a dumbshow that depicts all Alicante's puzzlement at Alonzo de

Piracquo's disappearance, the seamless substitution of Alsemero as groom, and the new pair's wedding, all watched by a smiling De Flores. But as the dumbshow concludes, the ghost of Piracquo suddenly appears to the smug De Flores and shows "*him the hand whose finger he had cut off*" (4.1.1 *s.d.*).[51] The image of ring encircling dead finger, wrought metal joined with disordered flesh, resurfaces once more in this wordless landscape. Although the ghost's gesture might somehow anticipate the revenge that Alonzo's brother threatens but never enacts (perhaps another example of Piracquo family impotence), it also points back to the corporeal crimes of murder and rape underlying the pomp and pageantry when "*Beatrice the bride"* crosses the stage "*in great state*" (4.1.1 *s.d.*).[52] Symbolic gown and grotesque body, maiden perfection and whorish contagion, are always, like ring and finger, joined together as if one substance.

Married to Alsemero through the unheard language of the wedding ceremony, but physically deflowered by De Flores, Beatrice herself breaks the

51. The ghost following a wedding procession may also recall the ominous figure of Hymen, extinguishing nuptial torches, from Revenge's dumbshow in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*.

52. In his study of the dramatic subform, Dieter Mehl observes that, just before "the tradition of the dumb show came to an end," Middleton was among the very last playwrights to employ the device that could be used either merely to advance a plot or to emphasize a dramatically or morally significant moment (166). I think that, by 1622, the dumbshow in *The Changeling* must have exerted nostalgic, unfashionable, or awkward emphasis on the marriage ceremony especially given the theatrical convention of weddings happening just offstage. Mehl also traces the dumb show in secular Elizabethan and Jacobean theater to "a characteristic trend of the time, the desire to make abstract spiritual experiences and conflicts visible as concrete scenes and to impress a moral idea on the spectators by appealing directly to the senses," and this trend rose from the older traditions of morality plays, pageants, and parades (17). Other than merely prolonging the silence in which Beatrice is "undone" and moving along the plot, this dumb show clearly impresses upon its audience that the terms of patriarchal exchange through marriage do not always describe an underlying reality.

long silence with the play's first words since her peace was wrought by yielding: "This fellow has undone me endlessly" (4.1.1). Indeed, the things that constitute Beatrice's cultural identity—her stately clothing, her mythological hymen, her metaphorical companion—have all been undone or "fearfully distressed" (4.1.2) in what Michael Neill calls "a radical unstitching of the self" (111). Soon, Beatrice will learn that gown, maidenhead, and virginal self can all be laced or stitched back up again once she stumbles upon one of early modern patriarchy's most humiliating secrets: that female virginity does not signify anything in the tangible reality of the body but exists *only* in manipulable signs and language. For now, though, Beatrice still believes her culture's fictions:

> One that's ennobled both in blood and mind,
> So clear in understanding (that's my plague now),
> Before whose judgement will my fault appear
> Like malefactors' crimes before tribunals,
> There's no hiding on't—the more I dive
> Into my own distress.
>
> (4.1.5-10)

Beatrice has been raised by her cultural fathers to believe that virginity or its absence can be observed and/or palpated, and, therefore, Alsemero will detect the signs of truth now etched into her anatomy. To her even greater horror, however, Beatrice soon finds that her new husband might not even need his innate

judgment and understanding because, it seems, he “does practise physic for his own use” (4.1.22).

Letting herself into his “right physician’s closet” (4.1.20), Beatrice finds Alsemero’s copy of *Secrets in Nature*. A quick perusal then leads her to discover that this text contains detailed instructions for a “true experiment” (4.1.45) which provides a conclusive, empirical test of female virginity. Indeed, there is "no hiding on’t”: by improving upon the unreliable, subjective observations of both anatomists and new husbands alike, Alsemero’s “physic” turns out to be a countermeasure to the “art” of maidenhead-restoration, and this true experiment might close the gap between the patriarchally controlled world of words and the disordered world of the flesh. That is, although Beatrice still *writes* herself a “maid” in counterfeit, the test’s chemicals will accurately transcribe both the whoredom in her heart and her recent sexual experiences into legible, definite signs. As the text explains, just a “spoonful of the water in the Glass M” (4.1.47-8) brings about unmistakable symptoms that appear “in order / as if ’twere circumscribed” (4.1.114-5): “’twill make her / incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last / into a violent laughing; else dull, heavy, and lumpish” (4.1.49-51). Armed with this test, Alsemero now appears to be “master of the mystery” (4.1.39), and Glass M thus embodies what Val Plumwood attributes to the slow “rise of technology” in the centuries between Plato and Descartes: patriarchal consciousness shifts into a newfound sense of “not so much

the separateness and inferior moral status of nature, but confidence in controlling it" (109). Yet, as the remaining sections of this chapter will explain, Glass M only exposes this confidence as so much hubristic propaganda, and *The Changeling* connects with nagging doubts about the cultural constructs and technologies installed to serve as patriarchal authority's apparatus for order and stability amongst the chaos of the natural world.

"She Will Not Search Me, Will She, Like the Forewoman of a Female Jury?": Glass M in Historical Context

As almost every recent critical discussion of *The Changeling* points out, Beatrice-Joanna's murder solicitation and feigned virginity allude to Frances Howard's confessed involvement in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury as well as the annulment of her first marriage to Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex.[53] Overbury, imprisoned in the Tower for refusing a royal embassy assignment, had run afoul of the current Countess of Essex for vocally opposing her desired remarriage to his friend, Robert Carr, soon-to-be Earl of Somerset. As prosecutors and confessors would later allege, Overbury fell victim to poisons procured by Frances's female agent, Anne Turner, that were "concealed in tarts and jellies sent by the Countess to the prisoner" (Lindley 147-8). Meanwhile, the argument for nullity of the first marriage—supported by Essex, the Howards, Somerset, and even King James—hinged upon an extremely dubious claim of non-

53. For some examples that cemented the reading in the 1980s and 1990s, see Heinemann (178-9), Amster (227-8), Randall ("Some Observations" 62), Bromham and Bruzzi, and Simmons (154-63).

consummation owing to the young husband's selective impotence with his wife, and only his wife. In an apparent attempt to pacify a skeptical, though titillated, public, a panel of midwives and matrons examined Frances Howard's genitals and "fownd her straight as a child of ix or te[n] yeares owld" (qtd. in Lindley 109). As this observation of her anatomy purportedly proved, Frances Howard was still a virgin. The grounds of non-consummation were thus established, and James approved the Essex annulment in September of 1613. But Frances had requested a veil for modesty during the examination of her vagina, and this well-known detail led to rampant speculation that another woman, some genuinely "straight" virgin, had taken her place before the female inquisitors. Despite such suspicion and rumor, Frances Howard married the Earl of Somerset just two months after the annulment in a lavish wedding celebration that included a performance of *The Masque of Cupids*, a now-lost work written for the occasion by none other than Thomas Middleton.[54] Nine years later, when Frances Howard Devereux Carr's trial and conviction for the Overbury murder had generated nearly universal doubt about the integrity of her virginity test, Middleton and Rowley portrayed a young

54.The editors of Oxford's *Collected Works* make a strong case for two brief songs as the only remaining fragments of the lost masque. These remnants suggest that the masques were playfully promiscuous, and perhaps connected with notions of Howard and Carr's sexual attraction and their recent past as adulterous lovers. For instance: "Whilst the world continued good / People loved for flesh and blood. / Men about them bore the dart / That would catch a woman's heart. / Women likewise, great and small, / With a pretty thing they call / Cunny, cunny, won the men / And this was all the Cupid then" ([Second Song] 9-16). This notion of prelapsarian sexuality also conflicts with Alsemero's notion of man's "right home back" (1.1.9) at the outset of *The Changeling*.

woman from Alicante, guilty of plotting murder and fraudulently passing a virginity test in order to pursue her desired marriage partner.[55]

Although *The Changeling* certainly resonates with public impressions of Frances Howard, the play does not dramatize or re-present these scandals so much as it opportunistically engages with the same cultural anxiety—about the pressing need to control female flesh and its desires—that made the sordid details of the real-life divorce, remarriage, and murder so compelling. In his careful analysis of *The Trials of Frances Howard*, historian David Lindley points out that, "it is the fear of female sexual self-expression which underlies, unacknowledged, much of the commentary on the divorce" (121). Alastair Bellany further elaborates on this fear when he contends that Frances Howard's pursuit of marital and sexual contentment was interpreted as a sign that the court, and perhaps the entire nation, had become a place "where all sexual order and discipline had broken down, where the patriarchal controls that regulated (especially) female sexuality had been violated and subverted" (164). The failure, slackening, or circumvention of such controls, Bellany goes on to say, permitted or even sanctioned "a dangerous female sexual disorder that had resulted in an innocent man's death" (165). *The Changeling* engages with these same suspicions, and, beginning when Beatrice-Joanna first meets Alsemero and feels an internal, uncontrollable, "giddy

55. I draw on extensive accounts of the Howard-Devereux-Carr-Overbury affair found in Bellany, Lindley, Underdown (19-67), and in the introductory material from Oxford's *Collected Works* by Jones-Davies and Hoenselaars for The *Masque of Cupids* (1027-8), O'Connor for *The Witch* (1124-8), and, of course, Patterson for *The Changeling* (1632-6).

turning" (1.1.159), the play builds its own portrayal of horrific disorder lurking in high places. Although De Flores easily identifies Beatrice's giddy attraction to Alsemero as "a kind of whoredom in thy heart," Alicante's patriarchal authorities, much like those at James's court, fail to make the same diagnosis, and thereby allow this "turning" to spin into deceit, adultery, and murder. So both the play and the news from court suggest the horrific consequences if female desires go unchecked, and, in each case, it is specifically the failure (or suspected failure) of a virginity test that permits disordered, female desires to slip away from patriarchal control.

The play's most direct and explicit allusion to Frances Howard—and especially the titillating scene of her gynecological examination by a panel of matrons and midwives—comes when Beatrice decides to use Glass M to make "an easy trial" (4.1.101) of her waiting-woman's maidenhood or, as Frances Dolan suggests, "to test the test itself" (20). As her mistress crosses the stage to retrieve the glass, Diaphanta turns to the audience and expresses her trepidation in a highly topical joke: "She will not search me, will she, / Like the forewoman of a female jury?" (4.1.102-3). Although countless critics and editors point out that Diaphanta's comment clearly refers to the female jury that found Frances Howard's body straight and virginal, few, if any, stress that the answer to her

question would be, quite simply, *no,* her body will not be probed or searched like Howard's.[56]

Even though *The Changeling* suffers no shortage of graphic images and suggestions, it never attempts, much less considers, a *direct* examination of female anatomy, and only once even mentions a maidenhead or hymen (2.1.116). Instead, the play depicts a far more objective, though less-intuitive, test accomplished through Glass M. Of course, since the gory details of an exam like the one administered to Frances Howard might have included the use of a "male member made of wax" (Lindley 109), some critics conclude that the use of these testing chemicals seems necessary for an onstage performance.[57] But, as Gary Taylor argues, Middleton "repeatedly inventively circumvents the prohibition on performing live sex acts in the theater" (*Castration* 28), and, especially in a play that implies intermingled sex and violence taking place just offstage on multiple occasions, it seems unlikely that the playwrights felt unable to somehow depict direct searches of female bodies. Nor, given both the Middletonian commonplace of redistilled maidenheads and the rumors that Frances Howard had outwitted her own examination, does it seem very likely that they considered a direct,

56. Mary Floyd-Wilson, in 2013's *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*, probably comes closest: "By staging and subverting a different sort of virginity test in The Changeling, Middleton and Rowley shift the focus away from the strictly physical evidence of blood and hymens to emphasize, instead, a set of reproducible symptoms that denote a hidden or occult quality inherent either in the virgin's body or in virginity itself" (96).

57. According to Mara Amster, "Middleton and Rowley's test is designed specifically for the theatrical venue. Unlike the majority of virginity tests, which focus on the color or consistency of a woman's urine or rely on the passage of hours for any visible indications, all the symptoms induced by the Glass M mixture can be visibly enacted on stage in an obvious and pronounced manner" (229). Likewise, Dale B.J. Randall argues that Glass M's "test as we have it is very much in touch with tradition but modified to be stageworthy" ("Some Observations" 360).

anatomical evaluation too reliable for a plot which requires a *beatable* virginity test.

Instead, as Diaphanta's alliterative emphasis on that "forewoman of a *female* jury*"* perhaps suggests, the play diverges slightly from its historical referent in order to interrogate the desire for a new, and specifically *male* method for revealing the reproductive secrets hidden within female bodies. The technologies in Alsemero's closet strive to replace a gynecological intuition that, in reality, had long been solely in the possession of women like the midwives and matrons who examined Frances Howard.[58] If these women got it wrong, or, worse, colluded with the dissembling murderess at the Howard exam, then when it comes to testing Beatrice's virginity Alsemero's physic removes such unreliable women from the equation entirely. Of course, in historical fact, it was not until the eighteenth-century innovations of forceps and obstetric manuals that men and medicine began to realize anything remotely like the mastery over the mysterious, maternal world of the flesh promised by *Secrets in Nature*.[59]

58. As Caroline Bicks contends in her study of early modern midwives and subjectivity, male physicians and medical writers had once left the lowly details of *accouchement*, including virginity testing, to women, but this indifference faded and these same experts eventually sought to improve upon their "troubled positions of authority in the matter" (72). I will expound further on this point in my discussion of Glass C, just below.
59. For an excellent discussion of man-midwives in eighteenth century England, see: Blackwell, Bonnie. "*Tristram Shandy* and the Theater of the Mechanical Mother." ELH. 68.1 (2001): 81-133.

"Sure He Does Practise Physic For His Own Use": The Tools to Master the Mystery

Alsemero exudes confidence about his mastery over both nature and women and spends the afternoon of his wedding day in preparation for the night's consummation by roaming "whole parks and forests, as great rangers do" (4.1.61). But his absence also provides Beatrice with the pivotal opportunity to let herself into his private chamber, a space brimming with glasses and phials that are the physical manifestations of "your great man's wisdom" (4.1.23). Picking up her new husband's copy of *Secrets in Nature*, Beatrice-Joanna scans the table of contents which immediately directs her to "'folio forty-five'" (4.1.28):

> 'If you would know whether a woman be with child or
> not, give her two spoonfuls of the white water in Glass C—'
> Where's that Glass C? O, yonder I see't now.
> '—and if she be with child, she sleeps full twelve hours
> after, if not, not.' (4.1.30-5)

While reading aloud, Beatrice demonstrates patriarchal subjectivity's ideal of lockstep correspondence between signifier and signified: just as an entry in the table of contents had referred her to page forty-five, the text mentions "Glass C" and Beatrice easily spots the right glass, clearly marked with the letter "C." At least within the closet, the symbolic order successfully superimposes itself over spatial and material reality, and the text of *Secrets in Nature* accurately maps,

catalogs, and controls this highly constructed world of things in which every container bears its symbol. Mizaldus's testing method, however, presumes that this same logic of correspondence functions outside the closet doors, that nature and the mysterious biological processes of the female body can be reduced to manageable symbols and language. If two measured spoonfuls of white liquid make a pregnant woman (presumably not yet showing any indisputable signs of pregnancy) sleep exactly twelve long hours, then these precise quantities of liquid and time give men of physic, like Mizaldus and Alsemero, the same confident knowledge and mastery over the contents of a woman's womb that they have over the printed page and the measured ingredients within their glasses and phials.

In the early seventeenth century, however, Glass C's definitive pregnancy test might appear something like the speculative technologies of present-day science fiction: desirable, perhaps possible, but still far off and fanciful. According to Eve Keller's study of generative bodies in early modernity, for instance, early term "abortions" were not necessarily subject to moral or legal rebuke because "it was considered impossible to determine with any certainty that a woman was even pregnant" (133). Further, as is still the case today, the first months of pregnancy could be hard to read, even for the impregnated mothers themselves, and the jumble of physiological signs coming from potentially pregnant female bodies proves "ultimately unintelligible" (Keller 134). Yet Glass C translates such unintelligible symptoms into twelve hours of sleep. The test's

unstageable result obviously goes unstaged, and although Beatrice fears that her activity with De Flores could have resulted in a conception—"none of that water comes into my belly!" (4.1.36)—Glass C does not serve a logical function in the plot other than glimpsing a far-off, unrealized male fantasy.

Indeed, early modern men were completely reliant upon women to report the one truly dependable sign of pregnancy, and for a shamefully expectant mother, like *The Witch*'s Francisca with her "concealed great belly" (1.1.134), there most certainly *was* "hiding on't." As Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks explains, expanding breasts and midriffs, the cessation of menstruation, and morning sickness all might be attributed to causes other than pregnancy, "but only at quickening — that is, when the mother could feel the child move within her body, which usually happens in the fourth or fifth month — was the mother regarded as verifiably pregnant" (84). Besides a pregnant woman's voluntary admission of quickening within her body, the only other way that men could "know whether woman be with child or not" was through the intuition and perception of the same untrustworthy midwives who had recently found a murderess virginally pure and straight. As Caroline Bicks points out in her study of *Midwiving Subjects*, even "secular and ecclesiastical courts relied on her [the midwife] to search for the signs of pregnancy, virginity, impotence, rape, birth, and witchcraft" (3). The tools in Alsemero's closet, then, intend to make knowledge that was still only accessible through the sensory experience of women (be it first- or second-hand)

into an objective, quantifiable truth that could be read and verified by men. If real, Glass C would take one giant leap towards the realization of patriarchy's desire, in Irigaraian terms, to become "sole creator" and usurp the generative power of maternal bodies by superimposing a "universe of language and symbols" upon the archaic world of the flesh (*Irigaray Reader* 41).

Yet, because such certain, objective proof of pregnancy was still three hundred years away, the presence of this test in *Secrets in Nature* also casts an odd light on the other procedure found on page forty-five: "how to know whether a woman be a maid or not" (4.1.41).[60] Horrified, Beatrice reads on about this second test and finds that Alsemero need not rely on his ennobled sense and judgement in order to read her body's sexual history:

> 'Give the party you suspect the quantity of a spoonful
> of the water in the Glass M, which—upon her that
> is a maid—makes three several effects: 'twill make her incontinently gape,
> then fall into a sudden sneezing, last
> into a violent laughing, else dull, heavy, and lumpish' (4.1.47-51)

60. It was not until the early twentieth century that Western medicine would find a reliable, accurate test for pregnancy. Even then, it was quite gruesome, rather bizarre, and still depended on a female intermediary, although not a human one. A doctor would inject a female rabbit with urine taken from a potentially pregnant woman, then kill and dissect the rabbit a few days later to determine if its ovaries had reacted to the presence of a hormone called "HCG." In a way, the rabbit test actually suggests how little difference there is between the physiology of humankind and disordered beasts, and it certainly attests to the great lengths that men were still willing to go in order to become master of the mystery. See Davis, Susan E. and Margo DeMello. *Stories Rabbits Tell*. New York: Lantern Books, 2003 (293).

If the prospect of pregnancy testing may have raised eyebrows, then virginity testing must have seemed downright extraordinary. At least the proposed liquid in Glass C tests for something tangible, definitive, and biologically consequential that—even long before twentieth-century medicine could conclusively detect early signs of conception—an observable birth or miscarriage eventually confirms, albeit retroactively. Glass M, on the other hand, tests for something that suitors and husbands can *never* conclusively verify.[61] It tests for something that, as Kathleen Coyne Kelly puts it, "has no existence as a pre-cultural condition" (3). No other living thing values or acknowledges virginity, and a first sexual experience has no more biological impact or significance than any subsequent coital encounter that does not result in pregnancy or disease. Quite simply, there is no "whether a woman be a maid or not" outside the realms of culture and language.

Although such claims might sound like postmodern, theoretical anachronisms, by the time of his 1622 collaboration with Rowley on *The Changeling*, Middleton had already touched on the idea that maidenhood might at least be indefinite and equivocal many times. For instance, although virginity and sexual experience should be mutually exclusive, in *A Mad World, My Masters*

61. The dogeared page from *Secrets in Nature* tries to covers up the insubstantial nature of virginity with some neat sleight of hand by proposing Glass C's test of a genuine, biological fact, and then quickly moving on to Glass M's test of a cultural construct. That is, Glass C anticipates viable medical technologies that will detect the elusive, but very definite and real, fact of biological conception; *Secrets in Nature* then slides Glass M into this speculative space and approaches the question of "whether a woman be a maid or not" (4.1.41) on the same terms, *as if* female sexual experience were another observable metric, like heart rate, body temperature, or blood type.

Penitent Brothel urges Mistress Harebrain—who has just cuckolded Master Harebrain by having sex with none other than Penitent himself—to reform, pointing out that "she's part a virgin whom but one man knows" (4.5.69). To Peter Saccio, editor of *Mad World* for Oxford's *The Collected Works*, this "part a virgin" notion "sounds as absurd as being 'slightly pregnant'" (416) and only makes sense among the farcical elements of Penitent's sudden bout of, well, penitence. Yet this comment from Saccio's twenty-first century introduction, just like folio forty-five of *Secrets in Nature*, understands the cultural construct of virginity in the same definite, black-and-white terms as the biological fact of pregnancy. Middleton, on the other hand, appears somewhat more skeptical of this understanding. A decade after *Mad World*, for instance, in a scene from *More Dissemblers Besides Women* devoid of anything like Penitent's hypocritical farce, the playwright revisits this exact same notion of *partial* virginity for sexually experienced women. In this play, The Lord Cardinal echoes Penitent's sentiment and language, nearly word-for-word, when he implores the Duchess to remain in widowed chastity because "she's part virgin who but one man knows" (2.1.81). Neither Middletonian man mentions any partial pregnancies, but both insist that female virginity can survive repeated intercourse so long as only one penis does the penetrating.

Then again, Penitent and The Lord Cardinal both intend this exception specifically for husbands (never mind Penitent's sudden amnesia about sleeping

with Mistress Harebrain), yet Middleton also portrays the "but one" rationalization in a case of sex outside of wedlock, if only once. *A Trick to Catch the Old One* opens with Theodorus Witgood in a foul mood and bemoaning his financial ruin when Jane, his courtesan, points out her own far greater loss:

> I have been true unto your pleasure, and all your
> lands, thrice racked, was never worth the jewel which
> I prodigally gave you: my virginity.
> Lands mortgaged may return and more esteemed,
> But honesty, once pawned, is ne'er redeemed.
>
> (1.1.36-40)

Here, Jane expresses a very recognizable, conventional notion of absolute virginity in which just a single sexual penetration forever robs a woman of her most valuable "jewel."[62] For Witgood, this means that Jane's prodigal gift of unmarried sex *with him* makes her now unquestionably a "whore," and he repeatedly takes sidesplitting delight in pointing this out after he dupes Walkadine Hoard into marrying her (5.2.12, 111).[63] Yet, at the comedy's conclusion,

62. Perhaps Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" influences Middleton here. In the earlier poem, Leander's argument about the insubstantiality of virginity—"Of that which hath no being do not boast: / Things that are not at all are never lost" (275-6)—comes up against a conceit that Jane and Hero share: "Jewels being lost are found again, this never; / 'Tis lost but once, and once lost, lost forever" (569-70).

63.In her introduction for the Oxford text, Valerie Wayne makes a compelling argument that even though Witgood calls Jane a "whore," one needs "an understanding of the diverse ways that word was used in early modern culture" (375). Certainly, Wayne is correct that Jane should not necessarily be taken for a common prostitute or "strumpet" (375), but the editor also becomes somewhat dismissive of some cultural stigma. Witgood and Lucre, for instance, certainly enjoy demeaning Hoard because his new wife is a whore or a "quean" (5.1.18). Further still, since Hoard marries Jane because he has been duped into believing she is a wealthy widow, he should not expect her to be a sexually inexperienced virgin, yet he still tries to back out of the marriage to a "whore."

"reverend and honorable matrimony" transforms Jane into the faithful wife of Hoard, and a moved Witgood *returns* the metaphorical jewel he was given, only slightly the worse for wear: "excepting but myself, / I dare swear she's a virgin" (5.2.159-60). Jane's virginity *is* redeemed, and her metamorphosis from virgin to whore and back again suggests that maybe virginity is not the kind of stable, definite thing that can be tested for.

Within the world of *The Changeling*, however, virginity appears definite and stable when Beatrice tests the test on Diaphanta, and Dale B. J. Randall passionately argues that, "we are meant to believe that bottle M *works*" ("Some Observations" 354). For Randall, examples of virginity testing in the historical record indicate that Glass M's test, "is a serious, explicable, and congruous element in the play" ("Some Observations" 366).[64] Granted, the test does work in the play (that is, unless Diaphanta is also faking it) and, in the reality of 1622, straight-faced attempts to empirically verify maidenhood were far from unheard of. Still, rampant skepticism about the results of Frances Howard's recent inspection and Middleton's own recurring depictions of "artificial maids," "doctored virgins," and other unreliable proofs bespeak contemporary skepticism about the efficacy of such tests.[65] Although real-world "physic" hoped and strived

64.To be fair, Randall's argument serves as a corrective to a number of critics who dismissed the tests as unbelievable nonsense. Randall names Baines, Bawcutt, Doob, Schoenbaum, and Simmons.

65. A virginity test in *Hengist, King of Kent*, also produces a false positive (2.4.221-51). Unlike Glass M's test, the test in *Hengist* is pure fraud, and we are most certainly not meant to believe that it works. Roxena claims that the right hand of a virgin will ease an epileptic fit, "but't must be pure virgin, / Or else it bring no comfort" (2.4.225-6). She thus "proves" her virginity when she cures Heresus's epilepsy with her right hand… except Hersus himself is in on the scam: "Pish, this cures not" (2.4.230).

to achieve exactly what Glass M realizes in the play's onstage world, this does not necessarily reflect confidence that maidenhood could be measured so conclusively and objectively once the curtain closes and everyone goes home. To the contrary, sustained public fascination with the failures and circumventions of supposed methods for verifying virginity—and especially the beguiling of the play's chimerical test that actually *works*—suggest deep anxieties about early modern patriarchy's project of establishing dominion over the natural world.

In fact, because the technological apparatus in Alsemero's closet ultimately fails to master any of the secrets in nature, *The Changeling*'s dramatic tensions *work* by showing just how slippery and illusory patriarchy's claims of dominion can be. When Alsemero finally administers the water from Glass M to his new bride, for example, Beatrice easily beats the test by faking the effects of this "strangest trick to know a maid by" (4.2.143) on her first, unrehearsed attempt. For many critics, like Deborah Burks, the test's humiliating flop underscores the fact that "women's bodies, though fleshly and material, are elusive and undecipherable" (779), and that, overall, the play "exploits its culture's anxiety about the difficulty of ascertaining the facts of women's sexuality" (778). To deal with his own bouts of this anxiety, Alsemero keeps his copy of Mizaldus close at hand, going so far as to leave it out on his wedding day with the testing page marked by "its leaf tuck'd down upon it, the place suspicious" (4.1.29). Faced with conventionally unanswerable questions about

pregnancy or sexual experience, a man like Alsemero might read, and reread, *Secrets in Nature* because the text offers the reassuring power to, fittingly, *read* female flesh. "The potions and philters in Alsemero's pharmacy, like the book of recipes he follows," says Marjorie Garber in an influential essay on the play, "are designed to decipher, and thus control, women's bodies and women's pleasure" ("Insincerity" 34). But Glass M, a fiction that "reflects the fruits of a male fantasy" (Garber "Insincerity" 26), does not really detect so much as it simultaneously imagines and imposes the very code that it claims to "decipher." If Middleton's earlier plays suggest the ambiguity and social-construction of virginity, then the diagnostic tools in Alsemero's closet might be forever doomed to mislead or fail because, quite simply, there is *no* stable, definite thing to 'ascertain,' no untranslated language awaiting the discovery of its Rosetta stone. Although Mizaldus and Alsemero disagree, the logic of numbered pages and lettered glasses does not apply to the secrets of female flesh, at least not in 1622.

Virginity tests like Glass M therefore exemplify the delusion, if not utter futility, of a patriarchal effort to assert authority and establish control over nature and biology—or at least over regenerative sexuality—by plotting the constructs of language and culture onto human flesh. But as Kathryn Schwarz points out, if "the cultural fantasy of virginity" supposes the female body to be the stable site of chastity in the material world, then this "referral of social to bodily truths does not put knowledge on solid ground" (13). The main plot of *The Changeling* depends

on this instability, and, by compiling a vocabulary of performable symptoms, folio forty-five unwittingly grants Beatrice the duplicitous power to manufacture empirical signs for a purely social identity with no definite connection to empirical reality. As Tassie Gwilliam explains, "the tools for detecting the loss of virginity offer to women the tools for evading detection" (522), and the "phantasmatic enterprise" of virginity testing ultimately dredges up the far more radically troubling possibility "that perhaps virginity is itself always counterfeit, a simulacrum constructed out of desires and fantasies" (520). Or, as William Carroll describes the same disturbing epiphany in his study of early modernity's "fetishized commodity that is and is not," if women can counterfeit the (already unreliable) marks of virginity, then precious maidenhood might turn out to be "constituted by nothing more than a set of manipulable signs" ("Virgin Not" 296). After decades of repeatedly circling back to both the ambiguity of virginal identity and the questionable validity of its signs, Middleton writes the virginity testing episode into *The Changeling*. The test's failure to put knowledge on stable ground connects with *this* nagging, cultural uncertainty—fresh in public consciousness thanks to the Frances Howard scandals—about whether or not *anything at all* constitutes the precious jewel of female virginity, or if it is an airy nothing.

Even if most early moderns believed that virginity had an essential substance, then, as Mara Amster contends in her study of *The Changeling*, "the

act of 'seeming' virginal — the performance of the outward signs of virginity takes precedence over the reality of 'being' a virgin" (226). In his discussion of one particular method for virginity testing, Joubert demonstrates this peculiar logic in which the interpretable signs of virginity matter more than the (otherwise unobservable) reality that they signify:

> And if, upon probing her, the conduit is found to be very narrow, such that the candle will go in only with great difficulty, what will be said? That she is a virgin? Certainly, but *she will be one no longer, after the candle has been inserted*. For probe her once again and the probe would go in so readily that you would judge, on the contrary, that she is not a virgin.
>
> (216, emphasis added)

On one hand, Joubert accepts the erroneous assumption that a single penetration with a candle will permanently alter a woman's anatomy, but he also intends to correct a "popular error" here by pointing out that any loosened, un-narrowed woman must be considered "equally deflowered" whether violated by a "virile member" or even by "the finger of the maiden herself, foolish enough to have corrupted her own body" (216). Despite his clear sense of the fundamental difference between the penetrations of candles or virile members, Joubert accepts that *being* a virgin depends entirely on the interpretation of signs, on "what will be said" and how "you would judge."

In a comic scene from 1606's *The Puritan Widow,* Middleton pokes fun at this epistemological problem when one of his fools values bodily signifiers far above what they claim to signify. Meeting a supposed conjuror, Edmond, son of the titular widow, jumps at the opportunity to procure a supernatural restoration of his betrothed's lost virginity:

> Why, look you sir, I'll tell't you as a friend and a conjuror. I should marry a 'pothecary's daughter and 'twas told me she lost her maidenhead at Stony Stratford. Now if you'll do but so much as conjure for't and make all whole again—
>
> (3.5.279-83)

For Joubert, the supremacy of potentially flawed virginal signifiers renders their true referents inaccessible and unknowable, but for Edmond virginity completely unmoors from meaning and truth itself becomes irrelevant. This groom-to-be simply does not care about the facts of his betrothed's sexual and moral history, about assuring his paternity in any impending pregnancy, about protecting himself from venereal disease, nor even about the gossip circulating in Stony Stratford—only *the signs* of virginity matter.

Ultimately, Alsemero ends up looking even more foolish than Edmond because he trusts his instruments of physic to make *being* a virgin, into a knowable, empirical fact, and to thereby shape the mysterious female body into an intelligible and ordered thing. When Jasperino comes to Alsemero with a report of

suspicious “words passed” (4.2.102) between Beatrice and De Flores, Glass M “proves" the dissembling bride’s virginal purity and dismisses justified concerns about her chastity and fidelity. If the strawberry-spotted handkerchief in another Jacobean tragedy provides the “ocular proof” which falsely confirms Othello’s suspicions about Desdemona, then Glass M “proves” the exact opposite, though just as falsely:

> See, now, ’tis settled in a melancholy
>
> keeps both the time and method. [*He crosses to Beatrice*] My Joanna:
>
> Chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning’s womb,
>
> That brings the day forth; thus my love encloses thee.
>
> [*He embraces her, and*] *Exeunt*
>
> (4.2.148-51)

Although Beatrice had earlier feared the clear judgement and understanding of his “ennobled blood and mind,” Alsemero turns out to be utterly dependent upon his texts and chemicals to diagnose, and therefore construct, his new bride’s precious virginity. How, one might even wonder, can he be so certain that this trick “has ne’er missed, sir, / Upon a virgin” (4.2.140-1) when it seems he has no way to verify the test’s results other than the test itself? Using only his own innate senses, Alsemero cannot even detect the *identity* of a sex partner in the darkness of his

own bedchamber, much less blindly palpate the condition of some elusive, anatomical structures that baffled the period's medical authorities.[66]

Alsemero's obsessive study of Mizaldus also exposes a deep lack of confidence in, or distrust of, his natural ability to sense whether or not his own virile member, like Joubert's candle, "will go in only with great difficulty." In this way, Glass M functions like an alchemical prosthesis, a sort of technological, figurative "strap-on" that artificially improves upon the biological phallus. The glasses and phials in Alsemero's closet also align with the play's other conspicuously phallic tools for making men into masters, the subplot's "commanding pizzles" (4.3.65). Cristina Malcolmson rightly reads the pizzles as representations of a "force which is explicitly masculine and brutal" intended for the political and sexual "subjugation of women" (149). But since they are literally made from the dried penises of slaughtered bulls, the "commanding pizzles" also embody the simultaneous, and closely associated, patriarchal project of subjugating the natural world. Indeed, Lollio uses these older, reliable instruments of phallic power to control the disordered impulses of madmen who "imitate the beasts and birds, / Singing, or howling, braying, barking; all / As their wild fancies prompt 'em" (3.3.213-5). Unsurprisingly, patriarchal civilization fixates on such technologies that bring order to both wilderness and women, but if the

66. I refer here to the bed-trick that Beatrice proposes to Diaphanta in 4.1 which is in-progress at 5.1. With the most famous examples to be found in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, bed-tricks are commonplace and unremarkable in Jacobean theater after about 1598. The apparent plausibility of this theatrical convention only confirms how uncertain men must have felt about their ability to perceive *anything* about female bodies in the darkness. See Dessens, *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama*.

threat of Lollio's pizzle really does make the feral madmen "as tame as the / ladies themselves" (4.3.65-6), then Glass M's more subtle, esoteric power turns out to be ineffective and impotent.

For this reason, *The Changeling*'s main plot contains something akin to what Joseph Campbell finds at the core of both Goethe's *Faust* and George Lucas's *Star Wars*: "the message that technology is not going to save us. Our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough" (xiii). Unlike Luke Skywalker on American movie screens of the late 1970s, however, Alsemero does *not* turn away from the tools that, on the London stage of 1622, must have appeared as fascinatingly fantastic as a detachment of single-seat spacecraft mounting an improbable assault on a moon-sized space station.[67] In his considerations of early modern culture, often of Middleton specifically, Gary Taylor frequently returns to the idea of "text technologies" that supplement human biology "by producing a prosthetic, artificial memory system" ("Lives and Afterlives" 25).[68] Text, as Taylor points out, artificially preserves the biological memories that flicker through living brains, or stabilizes the passing breath that is momentarily shaped into words by larynx, tongue, and lips. Through a similar method, Glass C and Glass

67. Oddly, in *The Changeling*, it is De Flores who—like Luke Skywalker shutting down his targeting computers and trusting his feelings—relies on his intuition. Although he does not mind a little "whoredom in thy [Beatrice's] heart," De Flores can be certain of Beatrice's virginal purity without Mizaldus's empirical tests: "And were I not resolved in my belief / That thy virginity were perfect in thee, / I should but take my recompense with grudging / As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for" (3.4.119-22). Nor, after sleeping with Beatrice, does De Flores make any mention of hymenal blood, tightness, or any other physiological signs that verify his intuition.
68. Taylor deploys nearly the same language in *Castration* (206) which leans heavily on Middleton's *A Game at Chess* in support of its argument, and he first articulates the idea in *Cultural Selection* (150-1).

M claim to transcribe bodily history into legible signs, and, since the liquids (likely produced from recipes in the text) only function as tests when accompanied by their written instructions, these technologies entirely depend upon text. And, of course, Glass C and Glass M are also labeled with alphanumeric text.

"That C = child and M = maid, once seemed a sufficiently revealing if seriocomic code," Marjorie Garber concedes in an essay focused on early modern Roman numerals, "but clearly these letters that are also numbers carry with them, potentially, an even greater kind of power" (*Symptoms* 187). Garber's passing comment appears to be the only mention, in a considerable body of critical discourse on the play, of the possibility that those marks might represent numbers. Especially considering that Beatrice declares she will know Glass C "from a hundred" (4.1.36) and that Glass M "is ten times worse" (4.1.40), it seems odd that more critics have not commented on the exponential relationship between glasses C and M. For that matter, the entire play definitely takes interest in arithmetic and numbers, particularly the relationship between numerical figures and the human body. In their early exchange about impulsive loving and loathing, for instance, Beatrice and Alsemero exchange the rhetorical examples of "a thousand other tastes" (1.1.113) and "scarce a man among a thousand" (1.1.117). Similarly, in the subplot, Lollio declares that "every part has his hour" (1.2.69-77) before he matches each hour of the day with a part of the body, and he later

measures Antonio's madness by questioning him on the logic of addition and multiplication (3.3.175-9). Of course, folio forty-five of *Secrets in Nature*'s prescriptions of "twelve hours" sleep and "three several effects," also diagnoses pregnancy and virginity in quantitative terms as it attempts to apply numerical, objective precision to the body and its behaviors. Overall, the play's characters seem enthralled by the potential of what historian Elizabeth Eisenstein describes as the period's "new confidence in the accuracy of mathematical constructions, figures, and numbers," owing to the rise of the printing press and its "method of duplication that transcended older limits imposed by time and space and that presented identical data in identical form to men who were otherwise divided by cultural and geographical frontiers" (699). If twentieth- and twenty-first-century science fiction speculates on the possibility of overcoming space and time through future technological advances, then *The Changeling* directs a similar speculative gaze at the developing technologies of printed text and mathematical construction, perhaps even to the developing perspective of empiricism itself.

Much like *Star Wars*, though, the play reveals underlying currents of distrust and anxiety about a growing reliance on these new technologies and the supposed objectivity of quantitative measurement. In one clear example, *The Changeling*'s fifth act begins in the middle of the night as a clock strikes one and Beatrice takes the stage, impatient for Diaphanta to return from the nuptial bed-trick. She has time to speak only ten harried lines before an odd interruption:

"Hark! By my horrors! [*Strike two*] / Another clock strikes two" (5.1.10-1). Of course, the play might merely intend to compress stage time here, but because the second stroke surprises Beatrice and since she also identifies that it comes from *another* clock, the disjointed chiming also gives an impression that the castle's tools for marking and measuring time are inaccurate, woefully out-of-sync, or otherwise untrustworthy and disorientating.

As some recent scholarship on the early modern experience of numbers and measurement makes clear, these seemingly random peals might be intended to connect with a specific wariness in the period. In *Shakespeare and the Mismeasure of Renaissance Man*, for example, Paula Blank considers that Renaissance consciousness "replaced the 'qualitative' view of reality dominant among the ancients with a 'quantitative' view based, centrally, on procedures of measurement" (2). Blank ultimately contends that Shakespeare—whose characters frequently scorn or distrust "arithmeticians" (123-4)—found these quantitative procedures inadequate and misleading: "the mind that measures cannot measure itself" (197). Further, and perhaps more to the point, Patricia Parker argues that early modern England, which had only recently been introduced to the computational convenience of Hindu-Arabic numerals, experienced widespread "suspicion of and resistance to arithmetic's new 'infidel'

numbers" (236).[69] *The Changeling* might be equally suspicious of the exotic trick taught to Alsemero "by a Chaldean" (4.2.113) and its numbered potions that supposedly make female bodies legible and measurable.

Even though the glasses bear alphanumerics, not these newer numerals, the play certainly does consider the Hindu-Arabic system's decimal marker and, especially, the strings of zeroes produced by the kind of exponential multiplication seen in the "ten times worse" progression from Glass C (100) to Glass M (1,000). The *cipher,* says Alfred Crosby, "that eerie Hindu-Arabic sign" (151), was long regarded by wary Europeans as "terrible zero, a sign for what was *not*" (113).[70] According to Parker, the terrible, eerie zero was also "particularly suspect because it could not only be easily altered but could fraudulently multiply by its strategic insertion" (236).[71] These suspicions certainly inform the explicitly Hindu-Arabic and decimal image that De Flores employs to articulate his certainty about the serial infidelity of women:

> if a woman
>
> Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,
>
> She spreads and mounts like arithmetic,
>
> One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand,

69. As Garber points out in *Symptoms of Culture,* "those who wrote in Roman numerals calculated on an abacus" (189), so the adoption of Hindu-Arabic numerals made computations, which had recently been physical, into a wholly symbolic operation.

70. Perhaps, *The Changeling* makes the connection between this numerical signifier (with no signified) and virgin identity, which similarly signifies *no* thing in tangible reality.

71. That is, "0" can easily be made into a "6," "8," or "9" by introducing an extra loop or tail, and if one adds an extra, forged "0" at the end of, say, "10," it then becomes "100."

Proves in time sutler to an army royal (2.2.57-64).

In De Flores's account, female infidelities will multiply after just one taste of illicit pleasure, and his arithmetical trope not only suggests infinite, insatiable sexual appetite, but it does so through a fitting proliferation of these untrustworthy, "infidel" zeros that stretch out between the numeral "1" and the point from which it flies: 1.0 to 10.0, then on to 100, then 1,000, and 10,000. Further still, since Alonzo de Piracquo is the betrothed, or point, that Beatrice flies from, this swelling number and its ever-longer string of 0's also surely foreshadows the unsuspecting man's cry of "O, O, O!" (3.2.18) when De Flores runs him through. That scream, in turn, returns in Beatrice's own cry of "O, O, O!" (5.3.139) while detained in the closet with De Flores, her partner in both sex and murder.[72]

To these, Beatrice soon adds two more cries from the closet—"O, O!"—and the mounting "O"s finally prompt her father to ask, "what horrid sounds are these?" (5.3.140-1). Indeed, what horrid sounds *are* these? What does this multiplying string of "O"s and "0"s that spreads and mounts throughout the play signify? At this moment, does each "O" represent the instinctive sounds of a female body in the throes of orgasm, death, or both? Transcribed onto a page, can

72. Michael Neill argues that "*The Changeling* is a play that could scarcely be written without *Othello*" (96), and, although Neill's claim seems a little exaggerated, these screams certainly do recall Othello's tortured cries of "O, O, O" (5.2.198) over suspicions about his wife and an "arithmetician" (1.1.19). Of course, the written signifiers of Othello's broken language also point back to his own name, and in *The Changeling* there might also be a connection between the screams, zeroes, and the "o"s that permeate—and dangle at the tips of—all but two of the male characters's names: De Flores, Vermandero, Alsemero, Jasperino, Alonzo and Tomazo de Piracquo, Lollio, Antonio.

these "O"s be distinguished from the zeroes that stretch through De Flores's image for the dangerous disorder of female infidelity? Does an enraged Beatrice imagine Diaphanta crying out an orgasmic "O!" while she takes "the bride's place" (4.1.128) in Alsemero's bed—a deceitful chore for which, incidentally, the virgin is promised "a thousand ducats" (4.1.76, 129)—or does the waiting woman scream, "O, O, O!," when De Flores sets fire to her apartment and murders her?[73]

Standing in for the dissembling bride, Diaphanta's body experiences defloration and death just offstage while, back onstage, Beatrice works herself into a crescendo of "O"s and "0"s alike:

> O this strumpet!
> Had she a thousand lives, he should not leave her
> Till he had destroyed the last.
> *Struck three o'clock*
> List! O my terrors
> Three struck by Saint Sebastian's.
>
> (5.1.64-7)

O, 000, O! Passions of the flesh—sex and death, loving and loathing—contrast with a jumbled excess of symbols in this climax of "O"s, and this moment also brings the current analysis full circle, back to the image with which it began. That

73. For extensive discussions of zero's destabilizing potential in the European Renaissance, see Parker, and also Brian Rotman's *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, especially its reading of the new numerals and mathematics in Shakespeare's *King Lear* as "the rupture in the Medieval world brought about by the transactions of Renaissance capitalism" (86).

is, just before a *third* clock at Saint Sebastian's contradicts the two others that chimed over the course of the past seventy lines, the ghost of Alonzo de Piracquo makes one final appearance. Although the ghost does not again hold up the hand bereft of one finger, its eerie reappearance surely points back to the grisly murder that Beatrice first conceived of in sanitized, symbolic terms, and it must also recall Piracquo's "last token" (3.4.37): the manufactured circle of metal filled with inextricable flesh. From here until its end, the text of the play runs thick with ring-shaped "O"s, symbols inscribed to represent the sounds of flesh in either ecstasy or agony, if there is a difference. Finally, this ambiguous "O" also rhymes with and collapses into terrible zero, that most infidel number which endlessly troubled early modern consciousness because, like virginity itself, it signifies nothing, absence, that which *is* only because it is *not*.

"De Flores, Help a Little": Resolution

The zeroes and O's that run throughout the play surely represent the horrifically exhilarating potential for numbers, language, and symbols gaining momentum throughout early modern Europe, and this chapter has attempted to trace Middleton and Rowley's general strategy for simultaneously fascinating and disturbing by connecting with several closely associated cultural concerns in the period. For one, *The Changeling* prods at an early modern anxiety centered on the persistence of disordered and bestial flesh within the structures—both literal and

figurative—of patriarchal civilization. As Frank Whigham puts it, the play portrays "an inescapable contamination by uncontrollable ungratified desire, already alive in the blood of both high and lower alike" (342). Even more than ungratified desire, however, the primary contaminant in the play is the bestial blood that runs through the veins of even a perfect, virgin noblewoman, and Beatrice only commits her crimes in order to put her animal and cultural selves in accord. If she comes to desire De Flores, then that desire is always bound up with an ongoing effort to preserve the ideal, personified "companion" of her soul: "I am forced to love thee now / 'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour" (5.1.47-8). Indeed, one might say that De Flores and Beatrice exploit the fact that subjective consciousness apprehends reality through highly-manipulable language, symbols, and signs; Beatrice can keep *writing* herself "virgin" while her heart and body slip further and further away from what the word claims to signify. Surely, this forgery also resonates with the recent news from court about Frances Howard and the period's frantic search for some tangible, ocular proof of virginity in the material world. Finally, if the play enthralls its audience by showing them their own nagging doubts about the corporeal reality of virginity, then it drives the point home by shattering the optimistic technological fantasy of Glass M. Even if this "strangest trick to know a maid by" really *works*, even if it successfully superimposes the patriarchal order of symbols, language, and arithmetic over the

mystifying wilderness of woman's flesh, then it completely fails Alsemero, the supposed "master of the mystery."

If tragedies end in death and comedies end in marriage, then Middleton and Rowley wrap up their disturbing, tragic masterpiece with something of a homosocially comic ending. With Beatrice and De Flores both confessed of their crimes and dead, Alsemero consoles his father-in-law: "Sir, you have a son's duty living; / Please you accept it" (5.3.216-7). With these words, the two patriarchal figures demonstrate their absolutely perfected Lévi-Straussian relationship, a completed kinship exchange between two men that is free of the troubling, messy intermediary of female flesh. When she lies wounded and dying, Beatrice herself considers her tragic fall to death as her father's blood-letting, a therapeutic purge of shameful flesh:

> Oh come not near me, sir. I shall defile you.
> I am that of your blood was taken from you
> For your better health. Look no more upon it
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly;
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction.
>
> (5.3.150-1)

Whigham's "inescapable contamination by uncontrollable ungratified desire" drains out of Alsemero and Vermandero's patriarchal paradise with Beatrice's blood; their bond is polished and perfected.

From this perspective, the play's most capable practitioner of physic is De Flores, the "wonderfully necessary man" (5.1.92) who knows how to fire off a "piece" in order to "scour the chimney" (5.1.89) and how to "clear the passages from all suspèct or fear." Indeed, Vermandero's most trusted servant seems to make his living by cleaning out the unwanted detritus from within the passageways of his master's patriarchal structures. Although he could not purge the horrific flesh and blood from within the circumference of Alonzo's ring, De Flores cleanses Beatrice's grotesque, contaminating female flesh from the symbolic kinship relation between Alsemero and Vermandero. In the end, with De Flores's help, Alsemero and Vermandero do get the ring *without* the finger.

CHAPTER TWO, Wife . . .
"When Gods Did Reel What Goddesses Had Spun": Revisiting the Past in *The Ghost of Lucrece*

Quid dicemus? Adultera haec an casta iudicanda est?
(*What shall we call her? An adulteress or chaste?*)
--Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God,* I.XIX.

Most critics agree that Thomas Middleton's 1600 poem, *The Ghost of Lucrece* is just not very good. Consider, for example, David L. Frost's unkind assessment: "the sense is often impossible to extricate from a mesh of images and convoluted syntax as each new explosion of apostrophes, to Tarquin, Chastity, Collatine, Iniquity, Lust, or Saint Vesta, spatters the page with question-marks and exclamations" (*School* 27). More recently, in one of the very few articles to focus solely on *The Ghost of Lucrece*, Celia Daileader confesses that she is "not about to argue that Middleton's poem, penned in the author's teens, is great art" ("Writing Rape" 84). Similarly, Joseph Campana finds that *Ghost*'s poetics are of "lacklustre quality," but he attributes the problem to the young writer's choice of genre, wondering if "the complaint suited Middleton's otherwise capacious talents" (470). Aesthetic shortcomings aside, the poem provides an intriguing and useful view of Middleton's interests and concerns at a time when he was consciously stepping into a life spent in the world of letters. As David Holmes puts it, "However inconsiderable [*Ghost* and other Middletonian juvenilia] may be as literature, they are diacritically significant of the man who wrote them, and are valuable guides to many of the thematic patterns of his

drama" (8). Likewise, G. B. Shand calls the adolescent Middleton's poem "an important early step toward the sympathetic evocation of the female subject which marks some of his later work" (1985). While still only in his teens, then, Thomas Middleton had already begun to probe early modern England's concerns about the stability and solidity of its culturally constructed reality, especially those patriarchal constructs that govern women, sexuality, and the body.

In the pages that follow, I will show that Thomas Middleton's revision of the Lucrece narrative focuses on human corporeality, and that the physical body comes into direct conflict with classical and Elizabethan notions of wifely chastity, an impermeable state of perfection that not even Lucrece can sustain. In the previous chapter, I have explored the early modern ideal of virginity and an accompanying insistence that this cultural identity can somehow be observed in the female body. But if, as the patriarchal fantasy would have it, the very first sexual penetration of a woman's life breaks some sort of biological seal and leaves behind permanent and legible signs, then what of conjugal chastity? How does one read the constancy of a wife, a sexually experienced woman whose hymen is no more?

Most versions of the Lucrece story begin with one possible answer to this question when Tarquin, Collatine, and the other Roman princes camped outside Ardea decide to test conjugal chastity by returning to their homes and conducting surveillance against their own wives. To their dismay, almost all of the Roman

men find their wives engaged in late night feasting and socializing, conspicuously oral and public activities that raise serious doubts about their marital fidelity (at least as the husbands see it). "In contrast," says Livy in his *History of Rome*, "though it was late at night, they came upon Lucretia, sitting in the middle of the house busily spinning, surrounded by her maidservants who were working by lamplight" (80). The picture of wifely chastity, Lucrece is thus doubly enclosed within her home and within her circle of spinning maidens. Further, since they testify to the chastity of the woman under examination, these unbroken boundaries effectively function as a marital hymen, or, at the very least, Collatine and his kinsmen read them in this way. For the observing men, that is, these enclosures provide the definitive signs of Lucrece's wifely constancy. But just as the prospect of taking Beatrice-Joanna's "perfect" virginity arouses De Flores in *The Changeling*, the signs of Lucrece's marital chastity only enflame Tarquin's desire to destroy and consume the wifely perfection that he and Collatine observe.[74]

In the most famous early modern treatment of the story, *The Rape of Lucrece*, William Shakespeare emphasizes this paradoxical provocation: "Haply that name of 'chaste' unhappily set / This bateless edge on his keen appetite" (8-9). Indeed, that Tarquin's "keen appetite" can pierce through the

74. Just before the extorted rape in that play—a rape which has many parallels to the rape of Lucrece—De Flores tells Beatrice about the value of her virginity: "And were I not resolved in my belief / That thy virginity were perfect in thee, / I should take my recompense with grudging, / As if I had but half my hopes agreed for" (3.4.119-22).

domestic barriers protecting Lucrece must have been tremendously upsetting to the husbands of early modern England, who appear to have felt that their wives could only be kept safe from the gazes and desires of other men if enclosed within the home. Peter Stallybrass and Linda Woodbridge have long since identified anxieties in the period about "open" or "loose" women who transgress the bounds of the home, but this patriarchal preoccupation seems focused on sealing up and controlling the bodies of sexually experienced *wives*, in particular.[75] In Jonson's *Volpone*, for one example, Corvino rails violently against his young spouse, Celia, for being seen "at an open window" while a "crew of old, unmarried, noted lechers / Stood leering up like satyrs" (2.5.3, 6-7). Similarly, in Middleton's own *Women Beware Women,* Leantio compares his wife, Bianca, to a precious jewel that must be kept hidden within the house, "cased up from all men's eyes" (1.1.170). But Bianca rather spectacularly validates Leantio's fears when she allows herself to be seen at an open window by the Duke of Florence, who immediately finds himself so "infinitely taken" (2.2.14) with the young wife that his insatiable desire leads directly to the cuckolding and murder of her husband. The condition of wifehood puts a woman's initial defloration and her continued sexual activity on public display, and married, deflowered women might therefore appear more sexually open and accessible than inexperienced virgins. "Marriage,"

75. See Woodbridge's *Women and the English Renaissance*, as well as Stallybrass's "Patriarchal Territories, The Body Enclosed" in *Rewriting the Renaissance,* Ferguson, Quilligan, and Vickers, eds. Admittedly, Woodbridge's discussion of the "The Gossips' Meeting" (chap. 9) examines not only wives but also maids and widows outside the home. That said, in the antifeminist works under consideration, the gossips typically conspire for the advancement of wifely insubordination.

as Heather Dubrow puts it in her study of Stuart epithalamia, "opens the virginal bride's body not only to her husband but also to his potential rivals" (75).[76] Furthermore, the bodies of deflowered wives could not be expected to reveal any signs of extramarital sexual activity, and husbands would have to rely instead upon containing their spouses within the artificial boundaries of the home. For early modern husbands, then, the most troubling aspect of Lucrece's rape might be that, even though the heretofore perfect wife voluntarily remains indoors and surrounds herself with a figurative, conjugal hymen of spinning maidens, these precautions fail to protect her. To the contrary, her chastity actually invites the sexual transgression that, under duress, she surrenders to after allowing Tarquin, her prince and kinsman, to enter her home.

Thus, in the hands of a young Thomas Middleton, the Lucrece story centers on the troubling difficulty, if not impossibility, of enclosing a sexually active female body within the constructed boundaries of marital chastity and the patriarchal home. Indeed, *The Ghost of Lucrece* frequently figures this famous wife's rape as a breach of the all too permeable walls of Collatine's city and his house. Calling to her rapist, her husband's cousin, the ghost asks, "Tarquin my kinsman: was it thou didst come / To sack my Collatine's Collatium?" (156). Later, Middleton's ghost of Lucrece calls to her husband, again comparing her rape to the outright failure of his marital or patriarchal bulwarks:

76. Dubrow also contends that Stuart epithalamia and other marriage rituals, such as carrying the bride across the threshold often work to counter such anxieties by symbolically putting "women indoors" (75).

> Come, Collatine, the foe hath sacked thy city.
> Collatium goes to wrack, come Collatine.
> Come Collatine, all piety and pity
> Is turned to petty treason. What is thine
> Is seized upon long since, and what is mine
> Carried away. True man, thou sleep'st at Rome
> Even while a Roman thief robs thee at home.
>
> (269-75)

Home, town, and husband all collapse into the impotent name that unites them, and they all prove ineffective at sealing off Lucrece's body from the disordered appetites that loom outside their figurative and literal boundaries.

The foundations of patriarchal civilization and order are therefore at stake in *The Ghost of Lucrece*, and the poem uses its representations of nature and the fluids that flow from female bodies to undermine the self-proclaimed dominion of patriarchally controlled reason, order, and technology. To the male-dominated societies of the Roman Kingdom or Tudor England, the female body—even the famously disciplined and heavily fortified body of Lucrece—always represents the turbulent and unmanageable presence of nature within the artificial structures of civilization. And, for this reason, as recent ecofeminism helps to explain, patriarchal civilizations have long since approached nature and woman as an associated pair of unruly and dangerous others that must be brought under control.

Val Plumwood's groundbreaking 1993 work, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, for instance, identifies the ideological dualism at the core of patriarchal civilization:

> The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him. (3)

Yet this patriarchal master's power over both wife and nature is fleeting, if not delusional, and he remains in constant fear that what he has split off and put beneath him will slip through his fingers and out of his control. In *The Ghost of Lucrece*, and throughout his career, Middleton exposes this precarious and illusory state of patriarchy's self-declared mastery over nature and woman.

The Anxiety in Fluids

An unaccomplished teenager writing *The Ghost of Lucrece* around 1600, Thomas Middleton surely labored under what twentieth-century literary critics

have described as "the burden of the past" or the "anxiety of influence.'"[77] Six years after its publication, William Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* remained relevant and highly regarded—at least among the "wiser sort," according to Gabriel Harvey (Smith 232)—and Middleton's unabashed emulation appears to be a deliberate effort to fashion himself a serious poet on par with his established superior.[78] For critic Mark Hutchings, *The Ghost of Lucrece* even "echoes" Shakespeare's narrative poem "in title and subject," and it "may be regarded as the first of Middleton's responses to the work of his older contemporary" (24). Yet, of course, *both* poems echo earlier verse on the subject by Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, and all of these English Lucrece poems, in turn, harken back to much older, classical versions by Ovid, Livy, and others.[79] Through its examination of Thomas Middleton's self-conscious attempt to fashion his future as a poet and playwright by looking back to the literature and traditions of the past, this chapter will maintain a steady interest in the mutually constructive relationship between past and present.

---

77. The quoted phrases refer to the titles of W. J. Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*.

78. If Gabriel Harvey's famous comment truly reflects English literary tastes in the late 1590s, then one can imagine that Middleton chose to write a continuation of *The Rape of Lucrece,* rather than, say, *Venus and Adonis,* in an attempt to display his maturity and sophistication: "The younger sort takes delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis: but his Lucrece, & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort" (qtd. in Smith 232).

79. Middleton and Shakespeare would have most likely known the foundational Latin versions from Livy's *Ab urbe condita* and Ovid's *Fasti*, as well as English versions in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, Book VII of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. For a more comprehensive review of the story's reiterations, see Ian Donaldson's *The Rapes of Lucrece*, Stephanie Jed's *Chaste Thinking*, and G. B. Shand's introduction to *Ghost* in Oxford's *The Collected Works*, especially his discussion of Middleton's influences (1987-88).

Even the earliest accounts of Lucretia's rape from Roman antiquity always refer to earlier narratives in a long chain of literary influence that never quite reaches its purported referent in historical fact. In an extensive study of the story's reiterations throughout Western literature and art, Ian Donaldson explains:

> That the story takes the form it does—a form shared to some extent by other, rather similar, stories—may indicate that it has been subjected to a certain deliberate narrative shaping; a shaping that is satisfying not merely in aesthetic terms, but in other ways as well. Though the story may well contain elements of historical fact, these elements—along with others which are clearly fictitious—appear to have been fashioned into a powerful aetiological myth, intended to rehearse and to explain the origins of certain fundamental Roman ideals. (8)

Since its inception at this hazy crossroads of history and myth, then, the Lucrece story has always been caught up with the ideological concerns of its tellers in an ongoing exchange of mutually constitutive influence. Both *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Ghost of Lucrece* therefore position themselves in this ever-evolving discourse with a pseudo-historical past, and their reinterpretations of the story disclose the concerns of an early modern society that is deeply indebted to the cultural residue of Greek and Roman tradition.[80]

80. I use Donaldson's formulation here especially since I will later focus on etiologies, but Stephanie Jed expresses nearly the same thought: "From the perspective of the legend's transmission, we can begin to see the rape not as an inevitable prologue to Rome's liberation but as a historical figuration, formed and reformed in order to serve various interests and needs in different historical moments" (6-7).

Middleton's Lucrece poem, more explicitly than Shakespeare's, engages with the literary trends of its more immediate past through its intentional participation in the genre of female complaint poetry, a fading fashion just past its peak of popularity in the early 1590s.[81] A textbook example of the form, Middleton's contribution gives voice to the disembodied spirit of a famously wronged woman who calls out from the past, but only when mediated by a contemporary poet's stanzas of rhyme royal.[82] In this way, the Elizabethan complaint poems epitomize one of Harold Bloom's tropes for the influence of the literary past: "The mighty dead return, but they return in our colors, and speaking in our voices, at least in part, at least in moments, moments that testify to our persistence, and not to their own" (141).[83] Yet while Bloom's well-known theory of literary influence contends that poets labor to escape their precursors, the complaint genre's derivative ghosts invoke their forerunners by name. Both Samuel Daniel's Rosamond and Michael Drayton's Matilda, for instance, complain explicitly about public sympathies for Shore's wife stemming from the

81. The most famous female complaint poems include versions of Thomas Churchyard's "Shore's Wife" which first appears in the second edition of *The Mirror For Magistrates* in 1563*;* Samuel Daniel's *Delia and the Complaint of Rosamond* in 1592; Thomas Lodge's *Complaint of Elstred* in 1593; and Michael Drayton's *Matilda* in 1594. Both *A Lover's Complaint,* printed in a 1609 edition of the sonnets, and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), especially the post-rape section, also qualify as female complaints, but Shakespeare's contributions to the genre diverge from the standard since, in each, a *living* woman voices the complaint. For a much more thorough discussion and survey, see John Kerrigan's *Motives of Woe*: *Shakespeare and the "Female Complaint": A Critical Anthology* and Richard Danson Brown's "'A Talkatiue Wench (Whose Words a World Hath Delighted in)': Mistress Shore and Elizabethan Complaint."

82. In the introduction to his anthology of complaint poems, John Kerrigan calls this paradox the "genre's repeatedly male structuring of the feminine" (8).

83. Bloom's "ghost" trope figures most prominently in his final "ratio" of *apophrades*, yet Bloom later settles further into the idea of "haunting." In his prologue to the second edition of 1997, Bloom finally concedes that Shakespeare felt the anxiety of influence, if only when it comes to Marlowe who clearly "haunts" Shakespeare and others for several decades (xxii, xxxi, xlvi).

popularity of her complaint poem in *A Mirror for Magistrates*.[84] So when the young Middleton reaches for "quill," "paper," and "ink" in order to "call up the ghost of gored Lucretia" (30-34), he makes a conscious attempt to establish his own poetic voice in an ongoing conversation among his literary predecessors, and he does so by adopting a subject and a form that are almost always involved in interpretive contact between past and present.

Still, *The Ghost of Lucrece* defines itself against *The Rape of Lucrece*, and those few critics who discuss *Ghost* at length routinely compare and contrast the two works in a critical exercise that reveals the later poem's challenge to the patriarchal status quo. In a piece focused on Middleton's version, for instance, Celia Daileader unapologetically disparages the work of the senior poet to the benefit of the younger, arguing that *any* retelling of Lucrece effectively "re-rapes her" ("Writing Rape" 83) and that Shakespeare "doesn't just represent the rape, he lingers on it, and, most disturbingly, he *eroticizes* it" ("Writing Rape" 84). On the other hand, says Daileader, Middleton rewrites neither Lucrece's rape nor her suicide, and "insofar as he revenges her and imagines her redemption, he un-rapes her" ("Writing Rape" 86). Noticing a slightly different break from Lucretian orthodoxy, Laura Bromley proposes that Shakespeare's Lucrece sacrifices herself

84. Daniel's Rosamond complains that "Shore's wife is graced and passes for a saint. / Her legend justifies her foul attaint. / Her well-told tale did such compassion find, / That she is passed and I am left behind" (qtd. in Helgerson 39). In Drayton's "Matilda, the Faire and Chaste Daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater," the plaintive woman compares herself to both "Faire Rosamond, of all so highly graced" (29) and "Lucrece, of whome proud Rome hath boasted long" (36). Furthermore, Matilda notes that "Shore's wife is in her wanton humor sooth'd / And modern Poets, still applaud her praise" (43-44). This note is indebted to Helgerson's observation.

for “the reestablishment of a just order” (266), but that Middleton’s ghost cares nothing for order or resolution and merely “speaks in the bitter, satiric voice which came to be heard with increasing frequency in both the poetry and drama of the [early Jacobean] time” (274). Finally, Donald Jellerson concurs with Bromley on *Ghost*’s intense topicality, suggesting that Shakespeare’s poem only concerns itself with the “tyrannical act of sexual violence prompting the birth of Republican Rome,” while Middleton’s “employs its heroine’s lament to draw out the moral, political, and religious implications of that history for its present moment” (59). So according to this, admittedly small, critical consensus, Middleton’s early poem subtly, but radically, reshapes its cultural inheritance from Roman antiquity—an act that Harold Bloom would surely term a “misprision”—and this revision questions or subverts a longstanding manifestation of patriarchal order in art that Shakespeare’s poem seems quite content to leave undisturbed.

Despite this fundamental difference, Middleton’s Lucrece poem still borrows directly from its predecessor, and a reader working from an ecocritical or ecofeminist perspective notices that it does so in ways that speak to its composer’s fast developing interest in the fragile boundary between patriarchal civilization and the disordered surroundings of the natural world. That is, Middleton reiterates and intensifies specific themes, images, and metaphors from the work of his older contemporary that expose the insubstantiality of humanity’s

artificial structures, literal and figurative alike. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, for instance, the young Middleton would have found Tarquin repeatedly compared to a wolf stalking its prey (677, 878) and the night of the crime silent except for "owls' and wolves' death-boding cries" (165). Indeed, Shakespeare's poem seems intent on extending this predatory theme, perhaps even straining to do so when its rapist creeps through Collatine's house and "night-wand'ring weasels shriek to see him there" (307). Similar animal images, though thankfully not wandering weasels, reappear in Middleton's poem. Lucrece's ghost, for instance, twice compares her rapist to a tiger (Middleton 167, 259) and bemoans her fall to "his paws of blood and fangs of lust" (255). Yet Shakespeare's Lucrece narrative might make its deepest and most lasting impression on Middleton and his work when, in the moments just before the titular rape, it coaxes these bestial metaphors into a disturbing confrontation with human language, order, and reason:

> Here, with a cockatrice' dead killing eye
> He rouseth up himself, and makes a pause
> While she, the picture of pure piety
> Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws
> Pleads in a wilderness where are no laws,
> To the rough beast that knows no gentle right,
> Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite. (Shakespeare 540-46)

Here, Lucrece's bedchamber becomes wilderness, her body carrion, and her pleas meaningless because Tarquin's animal appetite simply disregards the language and symbols that are always superimposed upon the life of the body. Throughout his own career, Middleton portrays similar breakdowns of human meaning and order, and perhaps his impressions of this very stanza remain with him more than two decades later when he imagines Beatrice-Joanna reduced to unintelligible panting during her own equally ineffective attempt to reason with De Flores in *The Changeling*'s rape scene.[85] Or, in *The Phoenix*, a play written just a few years after *Ghost,* perhaps the "foul appetite" of Shakespeare's "rough beast" inspires Phoenix's consideration of that paper-thin boundary between "our desires / And the disordered appetites of beasts" (8.172-73).

Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* also invokes the bestial through a steady stream of avian images, as when it figures Tarquin as a sharp-clawed "gripe," or vulture, in the passage discussed above. These images foreshadow direct comparisons of Tarquin and Lucrece to Tereus and Philomela, respectively, in the latter half of the poem (1079, 1128, 1134).[86] Of course, Middleton's poem makes

85. As Chapter One discusses in much greater detail, De Flores calls attention to the nonhuman quality of Beatrice-Joanna's quivering bosom and shallow breath when she realizes she cannot escape from his sexual aggression: "'Las, how the turtle pants!" (3.4.173). Of course, while Middleton certainly appears influenced by the avian/bestial images found in *Rape*, Bawcutt, Frost, Haber, and Hopkins have all correctly noted that this line from *The Changeling* clearly alludes to the mention of turtledoves in Jonson's *Hymenai*.

86. The full extent of bird imagery and allusion in *Rape* runs far too thick to detail here. That said, a handful of bird comparisons that surround the rape itself deserve mention since they continue the predatory theme that the poem begins with owls, wolves, and weasels. When confronted by her rapist, for example, Shakespeare's Lucrece can only tremble "like to a new-killed bird" (457), in a simile which once again resembles, perhaps inspires, De Flores's remark from *The Changeling*: "'las how the turtle pants" (3.4.173). Furthermore, when Shakespeare's Tarquin brandishes his sword "like a falcon towering in the skies" (506), Lucrece continues to tremble, "as fowl hear falcon's bells" (511). Finally, in a revolting image of Tarquin's postcoital stupor, the poem observes that the satiated

this rather obvious connection between the rapes of Lucrece and Philomela as well (454, 590, 593, 596-97), but it also grabs hold of and echoes one particular avian metaphor from its immediate predecessor that works to render Tarquin's threat bestial, nocturnal, and predatory: "the dove sleeps fast that this night-owl will catch" (Shakespeare 360). These exact words resurface in Middleton's poem when the ghost begins *six consecutive* stanzas by calling out to "Tarquin the night-owl" (199, 206, 213, 220, 227, 234) and once, for good measure, refers to her rapist as a "night-observing owl" (205). Through this borrowed and repeated turn of phrase, then, *Ghost* clearly echoes its immediate forbear's interest in avian metaphor, but it also arrives at this refrain of "Tarquin the night-owl" at the end of a much larger pattern of anaphoric address which invokes Tarquin's transgression of social order and expectation: "Tarquin the ravisher" (143), "Tarquin the Roman" (145), "Tarquin my guest" (147), "Tarquin my kinsman" (150, 157), "Tarquin the prince" (164, 178), "Tarquin the traitor" (185), "Tarquin the lecher" (192). With each successive label that it tries and discards—especially those that are scoffingly ironic when spoken by a soul who has been raped and betrayed by her "prince," "kinsman," and "guest"—the ghost's complaint works to reconstruct the living Lucrece's sense of order and security in social structures, the ineffectual "laws" and "gentle right" of Shakespeare's poem, before its bestial night-owl swoops in to shatter that order, seven times over.

---

rapist moves like a flightless, "gorged hawk" (694).

Yet *The Ghost of Lucrece* draws even more heavily on its predecessor's imagery of bodily fluids and, in particular, the prominent image of blood streaming from the dead Lucrece's self-inflicted wound.[87] Shakespeare's Lucrece, already "sod in tears" (1592) and dripping from a "tear distained eye" (1586), assembles her husband, father, and other kinsmen: "And then this pale swan in her watery nest / Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending" (1611-12). The story of Tarquin's assault concluded, Lucrece plunges a knife deep into her bosom and falls dead to the horror of the assembled Roman men. Lucius Junius Brutus then steps forward, removes the blade, "and as it left the place, / Her blood, in poor revenge, held it in chase" (1735-36). This blood rushing from Lucrece's breast effectively flushes the Tarquins from power, and some of the poem's most famous lines linger on the draining of this bodily fluid:

> And bubbling from her breast, it doth divide
> In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood
> Circles her body in on every side,
> Who, like a late-sack'd island, vastly stood,
> Bare and unpeopled in this fearful flood.
> Some of her blood still pure and red remain'd,
> And some look'd black, and that false Tarquin stain'd. (1737-43)

87. As with the avian images, this tendency in *Rape of Lucrece* is simply too expansive to detail here. In *Shakespeare's Ocean* Daniel Brayton performs a thorough ecocritical reading of the *Rape*'s many fluid metaphors and proposes that the "entire poem is structured on an analogical relationship between human characters as embodiments of forces that ebb and flow and the marine environment" (104).

This lifeless body, "bare and unpeopled," will be paraded through Rome as the symbol of resistance to the Tarquins' tyranny. But, while it still bubbles forth its blood, it testifies primarily to the troublesome biological fluids that always threaten to leak from female bodies.[88]

Before the rape in Shakespeare's poem, the body of Collatine's perfectly chaste wife holds this blood, along with all its other fluids, in perfect continence—even though the carefully contained blood still produces a provocative display of blushing red and white "heraldry in Lucrece' face" (64) that fans the flames of Tarquin's lust. Once subjected to the penetrations of rape and stabbing, however, this sealed body turns out to be dramatically, hyperbolically leaky, and even its spilt blood spills its own tears:

> About the mourning and congealed face,
> Of that black blood a watery rigol goes,
> Which seems to weep upon the tainted place:
> And ever since, as pitying Lucrece' woes,
> Corrupted blood some watery token shows;
> And blood untainted still doth red abide,
> Blushing at that which is so putrified. (1744-50)

88. See Gail Kern Paster's influential examination of the Renaissance notion of women as "leaky vessels" in *The Body Embarrassed* (23-63). Both Daileader ("Writing Rape" 78) and Shand (1986) note Paster's work in their analysis of the fluids that flow through *Ghost*.

Since pooled blood does, in fact, develop dark clots surrounded by watery liquid, Shakespeare's gory passage is forensically accurate, but it also expands the etiological scope of the Lucrece story to explain the natural phenomenon.[89] According to this poem, Lucrece's traumas shape not just the ideological fabric of the Western world, but also the biological realities that can be observed in the present moment. It is a formulation in which even blood responds to the Lucrece narrative's mighty influence.

Of course, the famous image also influenced a young Middleton. If blood and tears spread through *The Rape of Lucrece*'s climactic suicide scene, then those same bodily fluids utterly drench *The Ghost of Lucrece*'s every page. Middleton's female complaint literally uses some form of the word "blood" a total of forty-seven times over its scant 654 lines, while Shakespeare's narrative, nearly three times longer and still quite bloody, makes "only" twenty-nine such

89. Although it seems poetic fancy for Lucrece's tainted blood to turn black and weep, Ross Gardner, co-author of *Bloodstain Pattern Analysis with an Introduction to Crime Scene Reconstruction*, says that these lines actually give a fairly accurate description of blood spilt from a fatal wound, and that Lucrece's blood would indeed develop solid, "jelly like" clots surrounded by "a straw or pink colored fluid (which is mostly water) which of course remains fluid and continues to flow" (personal communication, 21 April 2014). The medical/forensic accuracy of the "black blood" and "watery rigol" was noted as far back as 1860 by John Charles Bucknill in *The Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare* (283-84) and as recently as Amy Greenstadt's 2006 piece for *Shakespeare Quarterly* (67). Since Greenstadt treats the phenomenon as a matter of course and Bucknill's medical opinion is certainly dated, I contacted Bevel, Gardner, and Associates, Inc, a forensics firm specializing in blood evidence, for a knowledgable and current opinion on the matter. Although it does not do much to advance the current analysis, Gardner also pointed out that the 'crimson' color of the blood and the 'bubbling' suggest that Lucrece's blade likely hits a major artery on the left side of her chest: "Blood from the veins is generally un-oxygenated and not as bright red, blood from arteries on the left side of the heart or pulmonary vein is oxygenated and tends to be brighter "crimson" red. […] An arterial source has greater pressure behind it so you get more active bleeding, "bubbling" up from a deep chest wound or even spurting. If the victim is laying face up and the wound is in the chest, they are effectively a container, no significant external bleeding should be happening. But if you pressurize the source, you have active external bleeding" (personal communication, 21 April 2014).

invocations.[90] Similar deluges of tears, milk, and ink also flow through *Ghost*, so that, as G. B. Shand puts it, the entire poem figures Lucrece's body "as a copiously flowing vessel or source, awash in incessantly shifting tides, floods, fountains, rivers, streams and baths of tears and blood" (1985-86). In Middleton's hands, the "two slow rivers" that drain from the body of Shakespeare's Lucrece become innumerable, and the "fearful flood" turns to an unstoppable tide that rises higher and higher with every line.

Except, of course, Middleton portrays the disembodied *ghost* of Lucrece, who does not narrate the rape and self-murder of her former body but speaks instead of overflowing and flooding in the present tense. In one of *Ghost*'s most compelling stanzas, for example, the plaintive spirit mingles her metaphoric blood, tears, and breast milk, and then crams them into the gaping mouth of her rapist, utterly overwhelming his destructive appetite:

> Thou art my nurse-child, Tarquin, thou art he.
> Instead of milk, suck blood and tears and all.
> In lieu of teats, Lucrece thy nurse, even she,
> By tragic art seen through a crystal wall,
> Hath carvèd with her knife thy festival.

90. In arriving at the number for *Ghost* I count thirty-eight instances of "blood" (16, 52, 77, 79, 85, 96, 101, 102, 107, 115, 122, 125, 132, 134, 137, 141, 160, 198, 207, 255, 349, 388, 414, 424, 428, 434, 435, 549, 559, 564, 564, 574, 575, 588, 591, 600, 602, 604), seven of "bloody" (13, 36, 45, 105, 487, 572, 583), and two of "bleed" (246, 563). For *Rape*, I count eighteen appearances of "blood" (655, 999, 1029, 1181, 1207, 1316, 1357, 1377, 1439, 1454, 1655, 1736, 1742, 1746, 1748, 1749, 1836), four of "bloody" (430, 1487, 1648, 1840), four of "bleed" or "bleeds" (228, 1551, 1732, 1824), and three of "bleeding" (1449, 1774, 1851).

Here's blood for milk; suck till thy veins run over,

And such a teat which scarce thy mouth can cover. (136-42)

Daileader reads this as a vengeful, "deeply aggressive" counterattack or "force feeding" of Tarquin that "reduplicates the rape upon *him*" ("Writing Rape" 78). But while the passage certainly does perform this inversion of victim and aggressor, it also reimagines Lucrece's bodily fluids writ supernaturally, if not impossibly, large. A few lines earlier, for example, the ghost first plans to extinguish Tarquin's lust with blood alone, but she warns that "if this spring of blood cannot suffice, / I'll rain down tears from my elemental eyes" (134-35). Not subject to the limits of a physical body, the fluids in Middleton's poem are no longer the socially problematic fluids of female biology which require containment. Rather, these are the infinitely more powerful and indifferent fluid forces of nature that such female fluids only emblematize. Indeed, *The Ghost of Lucrece*'s prologue claims that it is written on "paper from the *Via Lactea*" (31), and the poem fills that astronomical sheet with female tears, milk, and blood that thunder down on the absent object of the complaint, Tarquin, with the limitless force of the cosmos.

With this magnification of the bodily fluids found in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, Middleton's reiteration taps into early modern anxieties about the potential instability and permeability of the individual body. As Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism suggests, the cultural proclivities of the European

Renaissance favored representations of the human form as seamless, stable, and marked off with "borderlines dividing the body from the outside world" (29). In *The Ghost of Lucrece,* such artificial borderlines cannot contain the plainant's raging superfluity of blood and tears (Tarquin's force-fed mouth and veins, for instance, stand no chance). The poem depicts the ghost's paradoxically disembodied body which, unbounded and overflowing, is not divided from the outside world at all.

Even without the hyperbolic emphasis available in poetry, bodily fluids like those that slosh throughout *Ghost* always complicate conscious subjectivity's distinction from the disorder of the surrounding world. The slightest drip or splotch of urine, blood, saliva, menses, milk, or any other secretion presents an embarrassing threat to individual subjectivity because these fluids testify to the animal life of the body, a life that largely evades the control of consciousness and resists the regulations of culture. Indeed, as Luce Irigaray points out, *all* liquid matter, not just that of the body, confounds the symbolic apparatus of patriarchal subjectivity and civilization:

> Now if we examine the properties of fluids, we note that this "real" may well include, and in a large measure, a *physical reality* that continues to resist adequate symbolization and/or that signifies the powerlessness of logic to incorporate in its writing all the characteristic features of nature. (*This Sex* 106-7)

Indeed, logic and language will always fail to contain fluids rolling in from a "wilderness where are no laws," despite an insistent drive to tame what Irigaray describes as "nature that is resistant to such a transcription" (*This Sex* 107). Yet when Shakespeare's Lucrece spills her weeping blood onto the ground, those fluids only get channeled into the canals and sluices of a long-established pseudo-historical story underpinning the political and ideological principles of Rome and its cultural descendants in the Western world. When Middleton's poem unleashes its cosmic washes of blood and tears, on the other hand, it abandons its cultural inheritance, the narrative of rape and the republic, in order to expand upon its immediate predecessor's suggestions of this powerlessness of language, law, and logic.

Yet while Middleton's early poem challenges the power of writing and symbols to contain the bodily or the biological with constructed borderlines, it also begins to propose the even more radical possibility that language itself, the primary tool for containment and control, might be subordinate to the biological body and the natural world. Beginning when the composing poet calls for a "quill from the white angels' wings" (30) in its prologue, the *Ghost of Lucrece* remains highly conscious of the fact that its own composition depends upon the use of an implement literally plucked from the natural cosmos. The very act of writing out Tarquin's hot "lust," for instance, sets fire to "this pen of mine" which ends up a "quill and feathers, burnt to ashy dust" (402-4). A few lines later, the ghost, or

perhaps the poet, calls for a sturdier replacement: "Send me Prometheus' heart t'indite withal, / And from his vulture's wings a pen of blood" (413-14).[91] As G. B. Shand's introduction to Oxford text of *Ghost* discusses in detail (1986-87), it is not entirely clear here whether the hand of the poet or the ghost holds the quill in such metapoetic moments. In fact, Jellerson reads the entire poem as Lucrece's postmortem struggle to "become the writer rather than the written" (64) in which she "possesses the poet, takes over a large part of the poem, and ultimately wrests a pen from the poet's grasp" (63). Yet the male poet had borrowed that pen from his female subject's disordered realm of beasts and blood in the first place, and her act of reclamation blends together the ostensibly disparate acts of writing and bodily discharge, the outpourings of ink and blood:

> Bleed no more lines my heart. This knife, my pen,
> This blood, my ink, hath writ enough to lust.
> Tarquin, to thee, thou very devil of men
> I send these lines. (563-66)

Here, the ghost swirls ink into her metaphoric mixture of blood, tears, and milk. The ghost might well wrest away the poet's pen with these particular lines, but in a poem that begins with the young Thomas Middleton claiming that his quill and ink can approximate the reproductive power of the female body—as will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter, the dedication figures Lord

91. This could be yet another conceit inspired by Shakespeare, since his Lucrece, so often figured in bird metaphor, begins to write to her father and husband, but hesitates, "first hovering o'er the paper with her quill" (1297).

Compton as the "baptiser of mine infant lines" (8)—she does far more to expose its hubris.

With this emphasis on bodily fluids, and especially blood, Middleton's early poem also inverts the patriarchal logic that Beatrice-Joanna articulates near the conclusion of *The Changeling.* While bleeding from her own wound, Beatrice tells her father to keep his distance:

> O come not near me, sir. I shall defile you.
> I am that of your blood was taken from you
> For your better health. Look no more upon't,
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly;
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction. (5.3.150-53)

Because of this therapeutic blood-letting, as the previous chapter of this dissertation demonstrates, Alsemero and Vermandero end up with a perfect, sterilized, Lévi-Straussian relationship between father- and son-in-law, a symbolic tie uncluttered by female body and untainted by female blood. In *The Ghost of Lucrece*, on the other hand, this "common sewer" becomes a spectacularly overflowing geyser. The poem not only exposes but exponentially increases the female body and its flowing fluids that have always been at the center of a story told and retold by men for thousands of years in support of patriarchy's political, ideological, and cultural values. Of course, such flesh and fluid also appear in *Ghost*'s most powerful and prominent influence, but Shakespeare's *Rape of*

Lucrece concludes with these fluids securely contained by male language, history, and politics. Near the conclusion of that poem, Collatine and Lucretius "weep with equal strife" (1791) before bizarrely arguing over "who should weep most, for daughter or for wife" (1792). Finally, though, Brutus stops up this messy outpouring from father and son-in-law and intervenes for the better health of Rome:

> Courageous Roman, do not steep thy heart
> In such relenting dew of lamentations;
> But kneel with me and help to bear thy part,
> To rouse our Roman gods with invocations,
> That they will suffer these abominations,
> Since Rome herself in them doth stand disgrac'd,
> By our strong arms from forth her fair streets chas'd. (1828-34)

In Shakespeare, these verbal invocations sweep the disgraced streets of Rome, but when Middleton reworks Lucrece, the instability and tenuousness of this antiseptic power become the unspoken subject of the poem. Familiar with versions of Lucrece's story by Shakespeare and others, the teenage poet recognizes that neither the Tarquins nor Lucrece's flawless chastity can contain or control the disgraceful flesh, fluids, impulses, and desires that are an inescapable and unsettling part of the human condition. So when Middleton re-presents Lucrece as a vengeful, plaintive ghost speaking through his own developing

"voice" and "colors," as Bloom would have it, she rains down upon both Tarquin and all of patriarchal civilization with torrents of the alienated, physical self that subjectivity denies.

When Gods Did Reel What Goddesses Had Spun

In the previous section, we have seen that Middleton's refashioning of Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* frequently recycles metaphors, images, and language that resonate with the younger poet's developing interest in threats to the order and expectation of human culture and consciousness. *The Ghost of Lucrece* echoes its forbear's permeable bodies, overflowing fluids, wild beasts, and especially its "night-owl," but, while its predecessor ends with a stopping of tears and the founding of the Roman Republic, Middleton's Lucrece poem allows these threatening and disordered images to run free. In the section that follows, I intend to develop this proposition further by showing that, much like an ecofeminist, Middleton's ghost links patriarchal tyranny to a moment on the distant horizon of human prehistory and to the development of technologies and ideologies that render the natural world a manipulable resource, an external object for consumption. In doing so, Middleton's contribution to the Lucrece tradition opens up an opportunity to expose the tenuousness of early modern patriarchal order by suggesting that human subjectivity and civilization are always contained within what *The Rape of Lucrece* refers to as a "wilderness where are no laws" (545).

Early in her complaint, the ghost looks back on the "night before Tarquin and lust came hither" (290) and recalls how she rallied her retinue of domestic maidens to spin at double speed. As she encourages the chaste labor that Collatine and Tarquin witness in most versions of the story, Lucrece speaks of a long-lost past, a prehistoric golden age:

> My maids, those airy sinews in your hands
> Were of a finer thread than that you spin.
> It was a merry age in golden bands
> When Saturn sowed the earth and did begin
> To teach bad husbands a new way to win.
>
> Then was true labour exercised and done,
>
> When gods did reel what goddesses had spun. (325-31)

According to Celia Daileader, this passage contains something of a protofeminist sentiment since it describes "a golden age in which female deities reigned" ("Writing Rape" 81). Of course, cooperation between reeling gods and spinning goddess actually suggests something more like the absence of gender hierarchy than the outright reign of female deities, but this stanza does propose that an era of harmony between male and female preceded patriarchal rule. Daileader also points out that one can simultaneously read the passage's "bad husbands" in an "agricultural sense" and in a spousal sense, as "obliquely referring to Collatine" ("Writing Rape" 81). Indeed, by putting both possible

meanings of the word "husband" into play, the poem touches upon the observation at the heart of recent ecofeminist thought: that patriarchal ideology associates women with nature and authorizes the manipulation and exploitation of both.[92] Middleton seems sensitive to the hubris of this dualistic ideology from the earliest moments of his career, and when his spectral version of Lucrece grows wistful about this "merry age in golden bands," her complaint begins to target patriarchy's destructive appetite for the dual exploitation of women and nature.

In effect, this is a moment of proto-*eco*feminist sentiment, something that becomes even more apparent in the next stanza when the ghost goes on to damn the current age of male tyrannies and technologies. In this later, iron age—a period that encompasses Tarquin's Rome, Elizabethan England, and even the present—a new regime simultaneously ravishes woman and land alike:

> Those times are waxen bald. A prouder air
> Blows in the heaven and breathes upon the earth.
> That age is out of date. Another heir
> Claims his possession by an iron birth,
> And in an iron throne of death and dearth
> Rules this young age, sucking until it whine
> Even at the dugs of Pluto's Proserpine. (332-38)

92. Greta Gaard explains this core claim best: "Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1). Similarly, Ynestra King argues that "the basic prototype for nature/culture dualism" is "the domination of men over women" (117)."

Here one finds a clear picture of the same tyrannical husbandry, in both senses of the word, that ecofeminism identifies and questions. Jove and his new, male authorities have brought "death and dearth" to once fruitful lands, and by creating themselves through an "iron birth," these new rulers promise a technological replacement for the female body's natural powers of parturition (not unlike Middleton's own claims for his pen in the dedication to Compton). Furthermore, the "iron throne" of patriarchal power doubles as an iron cradle, an image that does not infantilize the sucking, whining occupant so much as it evokes his dangerously insatiable hunger and relentless consumption. And when this male child's gaping mouth feeds incessantly "even at the dugs of Pluto's Proserpine," the allusion to yet another mythic rape invokes a female breast and body that are intimately linked to the seasonal fecundity of the land.

With these stanzas, Middleton's poem reads gender into a long-established poetic tradition that includes a fanciful longing for humanity's preagricultural past. The "Ages of Man" myth, which always includes ages of gold and iron, first appears in writing around 700 BC with Hesiod's *Works and Days* before it reappears in countless revisions and retellings, most notably those written by

Virgil and Ovid in Augustan Rome.[93] In Hesiod's version, Lucrece's "bad husbands" need not practice husbandry at all, because

> They were endowed with all things good; spontaneously then
> The earth bore rich, abundant fruit; and these contented men,
> Living in peace, enjoyed its works and all its many goods.
> Abundantly supplied with sheep, beloved of the blessèd gods. (117-20)

If Hesiod claims that the earth once provided sustenance spontaneously, then Virgil, who emulates the agricultural instruction poetry of *Works and Days* in his *Georgics*, puts this idyllic past in even more direct contrast with the impending future of earth-ravaging machinery and privately held land:

> Before Jove took power, no settlers broke the fields with their plows:
> it was impious then to mark off the land and divide it
> with boundaries; people sought land in common and Earth herself
> gave everything more freely when no one made demands. (129-32)

93. For a thorough survey of other early versions of the myth by Aratus, Lucretius, Catullus, and others, see Patricia Johnston's *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age: A Study of the Georgics* (15-40). One other classical reference to Hesiod's "golden race" bears mentioning here. In Plato's colloquy, *Cratylus*, Socrates discusses Hesiod's "golden race" with Hermogenes: "I suppose that he means by the golden men, not men literally made of gold, but good and noble; and I am convinced of this, because he further says that we are the iron race." The entire dialogue (which, like *Ghost*'s version of the Golden Age, touches on Persephone/Proserpine) considers whether or not names and language have inherent meaning. If he was familiar with it, *Cratylus* could certainly have helped attune Middleton to the constructedness and slippage inherent in language.

In both his grammar school years and his short time at Queen's College, Middleton would surely have come into contact with these versions of the myth in their original Greek and Latin.

A young Middleton would have also likely encountered Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a popular volume which most certainly influenced Shakespeare.[94] In Golding's translation, the young Middleton would have found lines of English verse comparing the fruitful lands of the Golden Age to those that end up "waxen bald" under Jove:

> The ground, untilled, all kinds of fruits did plenteously afford.
> No muck nor tillage was bestowed on lean and barren land,
> To make the corn of better head and ranker for to spread.
> Then streams ran milk, then streams ran wine, and yellow honey flowed
> From each green tree whereon the rays of fiery Phoebus glowed. (124-28)

In this vision of the Golden Age, the running streams of white milk and red wine sound very much like the female bodily fluids that flow throughout *The Ghost of Lucrece*, and it is tempting to suggest that Golding's liquid imagery influenced a teenage Middleton. Regardless, *The Ghost of Lucrece* still diverges slightly but significantly from its most likely sources by associating the lost age of preagricultural ease with cooperation between gods and goddesses—perhaps even

94. For what can be said of Middleton's time at Oxford and some solid conjecture about the grammar school education he most certainly received, see the section of Gary Taylor's biographical sketch, "Lives and Afterlives," from *The Collected Works* dedicated to the young man's education (31-36). For the influence of Golding's Ovid on Shakespeare, one need look no further than the relatively recent collection of essays, *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*, edited by A. B. Taylor.

suggesting the outright matriarchal reign that Daileder reads—and even more explicitly linking the dismal technologies and toils of the subsequent Iron Age to the rise of patriarchal power and tyranny.[95]

The ghost's retelling of the Ages of Man also places the origin of patriarchy's antagonistic relationship with nature and woman so far back in the past that it can only be accessed through myth or legend. Although scholars such as Patricia Johnston have conclusively established that "the basic source in Greco-Roman literature for the idea of a Golden Age is Hesiod's account of the myth" (16), the notion of an untilled earth that freely provides sustenance might also be read as a faint trace of humanity's prehistoric past preserved in the medium of orally transmitted myth. Just as Aratus, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, and Ovid all reworked Hesiod's vision of the Golden Age, Hesiod himself may have merely set down in writing what had been passed on to him through oral tradition across untold generations. Classicist J. Gwyn Griffiths concurs, arguing that the version of the myth which appears in *Works and Days* voices "folk-memories of still earlier phases when man was a food-gatherer and a nomadic herdsman" ("Archaeology" 114) and that the oft-repeated legend "is essentially a

95. My claim is that versions of Golden Age from antiquity do not treat the ages of man in such clearly gendered terms, and such claims of absence and omission always feel tenuous. At the very least, I find no other mention of cooperation between gods and goddesses in multiple translations of any of the significant versions I have identified as likely sources above. Further, Gordon Campbell's *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution* confirms my impression with its extensive survey of golden ages and similar prehistories in classical literature. Campbell's description of the topos's defining attributes includes the "lack of agriculture," the "absence of property," and "the bounty of the earth" but nothing like Middleton's "when gods did reel what goddesses had spun" (13). See also Campbell's long, detailed appendix, "Table of Themes in Prehistories and Accounts of the Golden Age" (336-53).

social heritage of early origin" whose "creation must surely reach back into a distant tradition" ("Did Hesiod" 93).[96] Yet the story of the Golden Age need not be a "folk-memory" rooted in prehistoric fact in order to reflect the dissatisfaction of its more recent tellers with their lives spent in agrarian or industrial toil. For any given present, that is, the myth provides a fantasy of the past in order to counter a pervasive sense of loss connected to developing civilization's ever-growing detachment from the ecological world.[97]

Nostalgia for a preagricultural and pre-patriarchal past is certainly not unique to the Greek and Roman classical world, and *The Ghost of Lucrece's* association of agricultural toil and patriarchal rule likely draws on a similar connection found in the Judeo-Christian creation story. In Genesis, God punishes Eve and her future daughters with the pains of childbirth, enmity with serpents, and permanent subjugation to their male marriage partners: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (3:16). But this gendered hierarchy

96. Margaret Wason concurs, going so far as to suggest that the myth anticipates the insights of modern archaeology: "To his Golden Age Hesiod has ascribed the two significant features of of the Palæolithic period, articulate speech, which distinguished men from the higher animals, and food-gathering as the means of production" (11).
97. For that matter, one might even expect to find analogs of Golden Age sentimentality in *every* human civilization, the global present included, because large populations can *only* sustain themselves through the "muck" and "tillage" of agricultural intervention in the environment. The necessity of agriculture to human civilization—of manipulating the environment rather than responding to it—is a truism accepted by scholars in various disciplines. Peter Bellwood, an Australian professor of anthropology and archaeology, explains that every permanent civilization depends upon the active subsistence strategy of agriculture: "the human status as top mammal depends without question on food production. Hunting and collecting entirely from the wild could not possibly support even a tiny fraction of the world's current population" (1). As Jack Harlan describes the relationship between food production and urbanized civilization, "city dwellers are consumers, not food producers, and agriculture is a prerequisite for any high civilization" (159).

comes at a price for man as well. If Eve must labor in childbirth, then Adam and his sons must suffer through a different kind of labor in the postlapsarian world:

> And unto Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground. (3:17-18)

Since Adam must now "eat the herb of the field" and sweat over his meal of bread—a food that requires the arduous labors of farming, harvesting, milling, and baking grain—Genesis is clear that the first patriarch's punishment *is* agriculture and its technologies, "to till the ground from whence he was taken" (3:23).[98] While these divine directives authorize masculine exploitation of both women and earth, they also suggest that this social and ecological dominance entails profound loss, detachment, and sorrow.[99]

As etiologies that look back to a simultaneously preagricultural and pre-patriarchal past, both Genesis and *The Ghost of Lucrece*'s version of the Golden

98. Evan Eisenberg argues in *The Ecology of Eden* that these passages from Genesis and similar creation myths are "based in ecological fact" and describe post-Neolithic mankind's "alliance with annual grasses" (95).
99. Commenting on this creation story that "has served ever since as the basis of patriarchy and the subordination of women" (32), theologian Ronald Simkins finds an argument running throughout Genesis that insists upon male agency and dominance as it compares procreation and agriculture: "Just as a man sows seeds into the soil and thereby causes the arable land to produce vegetation a man can sow his seed, semen, into a woman causing her to give birth to a child" (51).

Age myth address a nearly universal sense of alienation from the natural world—or from "mother nature," to indulge in an apt cliché—that might best be understood in psychoanalytic terms. In the Lacanian concept of alienation, as explained in the introduction to this dissertation, the illusions, imperfections, and failures of language permeate subjective consciousness because every human child must develop a repertoire of intelligible language and gestures in order to indicate, and therefore fulfill, its biological needs. But before the speaking subject forms and enters this symbolic reality, the mother's body attends to all of its physiological needs seamlessly, without the distorting medium of language. The development of subjectivity therefore requires the irreversible loss of a blissful, beatific harmony with the mother and her nourishing female body. In Julia Kristeva's feminist interpretation of Lacan, the mother's "replete body, the receptacle and guarantor of demands, takes the place of all narcissistic, hence imaginary, effects and gratifications," and this condition continues until "the subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, *separates* from his fusion with the mother, *confines* his *jouissance* to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility on to the symbolic order" (*Revolution* 47).[100] These first steps into subjectivity and into the symbolic, then, are steps away from the mother and her body, and this path

100. Or as Sueellen Campbell puts it with less psychoanalytic technicality in an essay that attempts to reconcile poststructuralism and ecology, "we emerge from the unity of infancy only when we begin to experience ourselves as separate from everything else, especially our mothers' bodies" (Glotfelty 134). In an essay on "Ecofeminism and Meaning," Susan Griffin discuses the modern human's separation "from nature, and also from self, from the needs of and the life of the body" and considers this condition "one means through which both the social construction of woman and the social construction of nature is created" (223)

also leads the subject to a corresponding separation from the ecological environment and its resources that will, from now on, fulfill its biological needs and provide its nourishment. As a result, woman and mother remain psychically situated at the border of the human being's cognitive and corporeal selves, at a Cartesian crossroads of mind and body, human and animal. In an earlier work, Kristeva observes this psychic liminality when she considers motherhood as "a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'" (*Desire in Language* 238). Alienation from a conceptual mother that is intimately linked to the life of the body and the natural world, then, is the foundational experience of human consciousness, and visions of the prehistoric past, such as those found in Genesis or the Ages of Man myth, reflect a lingering sense of loss.

This psychological alienation from the mother's body and the natural world, I would argue, is manifest in the gendered version of prehistory that appears in *The Ghost of Lucrece*, and it might also exert influence over much more recent, and ostensibly objective, theories about humanity's "matriarchal" past.[101] Until recently, that is, many serious scholars, archeologists, and

101. Beginning in earnest with Johann Bachofen and his 1861 book, *Das Mutterrecht*, nineteenth-century amateurs proposed the notion of prehistoric matriarchy based upon their readings of classical myth. Around that time, archeologists began to discover "Venus figurines" at Paleolithic sites in Europe, and Bachofen's matriarchal theory gained traction by explaining the proliferation of such "goddess" images with a preexisting conclusion. In the twentieth century, Robert Graves, among others, further popularized the matriarchy hypothesis with *The White Goddess* in 1948, and Marija Gimbutas's scholarly work on *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, published in 1974, reinforced the idea for an even more recent generation of serious academics and feminists. Even archeologists working in the late twentieth century—including, most notably, James Mellaart, the first director of excavations at Çatalhöyük in Anatolia—imagined matriarchal social hierarchies and religious systems based upon the ubiquity of apparently female images among the surviving artwork. As recently as 2000, the French archeologist Jacques Cauvin similarly argued that anthropomorphic figurines recovered from a pre-agricultural society in the Euphrates valley were not only female, but a specific, divine personage. "She was not only a 'fertility symbol,'" writes Cauvin,

anthropologists have interpreted the artwork and other artifacts left behind by prehistoric cultures as proof that humanity's baseline social structure is one of female dominance. For one example of how patently subjective and tendentious, if not ludicrous, such interpretations can become, Marija Gimbutas insists that prehistoric art frequently features a bucranium, or bull's head, because mother-worshippers noticed "the extraordinary likeness of the female uterus and fallopian tubes to the head and horns of a bull" (*Goddesses* 265).[102] Cynthia Eller debunks such "feminist matriarchalism" in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*, a book that makes the simple but cogent point that feminists simply "do not need matriarchal myth to tell us that sexism is bad or change is possible" (188).[103] A central pillar of Eller's argument is that, something like a massive Rorschach test, interpretations of the unknowable prehistoric past ultimately reflect the beliefs, values, and desires of

---

"but a genuine mythical personality, conceived as a supreme being and universal mother, in other words a goddess who crowned a religious system which one could describe as 'female monotheism'" (32). Perhaps unintentionally, Cynthia Eller's book (cited in the main text) also makes for a comprehensive guide to the very scholarship she discredits. For a balanced, thoughtful, and fascinating view of the current relationship between "goddess feminism" and archeology, see Kathryn Rountree's "Archaeologists and Goddess Feminists at Çatalhöyük: An Experiment in Multivocality." And, although intended for a popular audience, Michael Balter's *The Goddess and The Bull* provides a lively overview of the controversy centered on the "mother goddess," not to mention the controversial reputation of James Mellaart. For some more recent interpretations of prehistoric female figures, see Lewis-Williams and Pearce (113-5, 123-48).

102. It should be obvious that I think the comparison is a massive and unlikely stretch. Gimbutas acknowledges her debt to Dorothy Cameron's *Symbols of Birth and Death in the Neolithic Era*, and, unsurprisingly, Cynthia Eller takes both to task by noting the unlikelihood that fine structures like fallopian tubes could be found in prehistoric excarnation and burial as Gimbutas and Cameron propose (144-7). With Occam's razor in hand, however, one realizes how many assumptions must be made to reach this conclusion about prehistoric visualizations of human anatomy, and, most likely, bucrania represent bull's heads in prehistoric artwork that consistently depicts human and animal figures . . . but contains no other anatomical diagrams.

103. Eller also nicely handles the fact that apparently female images are nearly ubiquitous in what survives of prehistoric art by pointing out that a cultural taste for representations of women "can coexist with male dominance" (141) and that the profusion of female images among stone age artifacts only proves that "then, as now, women seemed to be depicted more often than men" (156).

whoever does the interpreting. So in much the same way that the history of Lucrece's rape was constantly reshaped to suit the beliefs and needs of its tellers' present, interpretations of "venus figurines" and other "goddess" images probably say more about the sociopolitical beliefs of the interpreters than the prehistoric people who produced the art.

Of course, this is not to claim that *The Ghost of Lucrece* contains some kind of uncanny archeological insight, but its stanzas on the Golden and Iron ages certainly *do* connect with the psychocultural concerns of their early modern present by suggesting the novelty, tenuousness, and artifice of male-dominated civilizations that demand control over both women and nature. Much recent ecofeminism identifies this oppressive relationship between male authority and feminized nature in modern society, and two of ecofeminist theory's foundational works trace such antagonism back to the ideological developments of seventeenth-century Europe. In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant argues that Sir Francis Bacon established, especially in his posthumous *New Atlantis,* the "Baconian doctrine of dominion over nature" (192) in which a "new image of nature as female to be controlled and dissected through experiment legitimated the exploitation of natural resources" (189). Similarly, in *The Flight to Objectivity*, Susan Bordo sees Rene Descartes' 1641 *Meditations* as both symptom and cause of an "anxiety over *separation* from the organic female

universe of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (5).[104] But as this chapter has shown, Middleton and Shakespeare engage with similar concerns decades earlier, and traditions of etiological nostalgia reflect humanity's psychic separation from the organic female universe many millennia before Bacon and Descartes articulate and endorse that separation. When Middleton's ghost bemoans the rise of the Iron Age and its male appetite that not even Proserpine's seasonal breast can satisfy, she recognizes an ancient link between agriculture and patriarchy, two institutions of modernity that endorse an ideology of ownership, manipulation, and exploitation. And as the work of Merchant and Bordo makes clear, this ideology was, in 1600, on the verge of dramatic intensification, expansion, and development.

Middleton's gendered vision of the Golden Age in *The Ghost of Lucrece* bespeaks his keen personal sense of psychocultural anxieties about controlling and containing both female flesh and the natural world, but it also reflects other powerful influences from the period that might link human prehistory with gendered power relations. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, the last immortal to abandon mankind as the world descends into the Iron Age is a female,

104. Although Merchant and Bordo both clearly acknowledge that Bacon, Descartes, and their peers were steeped in a Western tradition that is rich with sources for this antagonistic alienation from "mother-earth," they also each attribute a good deal of agency, perhaps too much, to the respective subjects of their studies in originating or perfecting such alienation. Val Plumwood singles out Bordo's focus on Descartes for criticism: "Such an account lets off dominant earlier traditions, especially those of earlier rationalism and of Christianity, much too lightly. It fails to recognise how deeply rooted in the western tradition is the oppositional account of reason and the associated master account of human identity and denigration of nature" (74). In this chapter, I propose that the roots run far deeper still.

virgin goddess: "And Lady Astrey [Astraea], last / Of heavenly virtues from this earth in slaughter drownèd past" (1.169-70).[105] Of course, Astraea's departure does not necessarily mark the transition from the Golden to the Iron Age as a gendered one, but, as historian Frances Yates makes abundantly clear, English art and literature in the late sixteenth century—most famously Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (V. Pr. 9-10, V.1.11)—associate Queen Elizabeth and her reign with the return of this virgin goddess and the Golden Age (29-87). "Shakespeare," says Yates, "can hardly have failed to know the popular identification of Elizabeth with Astraea" (75), and so the teenage Middleton would have been equally familiar with the association of Elizabeth's virginal power and the Golden Age.[106]

Any historical moment's subjective readings of the prehistoric past—"readings," that is, of the long dead who left behind no written records—are always more about that reader's *present*, about the moment of the history's retelling. Gordon Campbell arrives at this conclusion in his extensive study of the Golden Age and other classical prehistories, arguing that such pseudo-historical accounts serve to "provide an aetiology for the way things are, or seem to be, today," and that every successive reworking of the Golden Age myth contributes to an ongoing

105. Stanley Lombardo's recent translation of the same passage emphasizes Astraea's virginity: "when the other gods are gone / Virgin Astraea abandons the bloodstained earth" (1.152-53).

106. Yates points out that Shakespeare specifically mentions Astraea twice, in 1 Henry VI and Titus Andronicus (74-75). He also makes a fleeting reference to the Golden Age in *As You Like It* (1.1.103) and a much more significant one in Gonzalo's speech, frequently associated with Montaigne's *Of Cannibals*, from *The Tempest*: "All things in common nature should produce / Without sweat or endeavor: treason, felony, / Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine, / Would I not have; but nature should bring forth, / Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance, / To feed my innocent people / [. . .] /I would with such perfection govern, sir, / T' excel the golden age" (2.1.160-69). Shakespeare mentions the Golden Age in only one other work, *The Rape of Lucrece* itself: "Then virtue claims from beauty beauty's red, / Which virtue gave the golden age to gild" (59-60).

"tradition in which we learn far more of the writer's political and ethical concerns with the present than of his ideas about the past" (9-10). While one hopes that the systematized science of modern centuries can provide a more objective and accurate view of the prehistoric past than one obtained through myth and folklore, even the conclusions of recent archeology are subject to a similar reshaping due to the politics and ethics of the present. In 1972, Gloria Steinem's vision of a lost "gynocratic age" in which "women were worshipped because of [childbirth], considered superior because of it" (qtd. in Eller 1-2), for one example, might speak mostly to the Western world's growing willingness to allow women to control their own pregnancies at that time. Such strained interpretations of prehistoric culture, art, and scientific knowledge might not be remotely trustworthy, but they do testify to the anxieties of a still male-dominated present that is just beginning to rethink its age-old assumptions. While the interpretation of archeological and ecological fact varies over time, what matters most here is that Middleton's ghost of Lucrece, the book of Genesis, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Spenser's Elizabethan iconography, and even Eller's modern "feminist matriarchalists" *all* look back to an idealized, pre-agricultural past from the perspective of an alienated, patriarchal present. Even the nameless, faceless dead of the prehistoric past return, and, like Harold Bloom's poetic ghosts, they return draped in the colors and voices of any given present.

The Ghost of Lucrece emblematizes this palimpsestic interplay of past and present through its complex, and often muddled, dialogue between the voices of its composing poet and his female subject. As it appears in Valentine Simmes' 1600 printing, the poem's front matter works hard to establish the name of its up-and-coming poet. Its first two lines are an address to Lord Compton from "T.M." (2), followed by a dedication which is also signed by "T.M." (19). A second dedication, in Latin, puns on the name "*Thomas Medius*" (20) and is once again signed by "T.M." (28). Yet in these slant references, "Thomas Middleton" already begins to fade into his own developing powers of wordplay and linguistic representation, and "T.M." or "*Thomas Medius*" steps aside for the more fictionalized poet who speaks the prologue in which he calls for those cosmic writing implements that the ghost will seize from him by the poem's conclusion: "Reach me a quill from the white angels' wings, / My paper from the *Via Lactea*, / My ink from Jove's high nectar-flowing springs" (30-32). Since this poet's voice interrupts his ghost repeatedly, and since the poem closes with that same voice blazoning the ghost's absent body (599-655), the framing device ostensibly exaggerates the patriarchal paradox of the complaint genre, in which, as G. B. Shand puts it, "Lucrece's very words are contained by male reportage" (1987). Yet Shand's mostly futile effort to track the poet's "masculine interruptions" only reveals the poem's indeterminacy on the matter: "That the status of these possible poetic interventions remains dubious suggests how blurred is the poem's line

between the 'female' subject and her objectifying male presenter" (1987).[107] For that matter, the dedication from "T.M." to Lord Compton even blurs the line between creation accomplished through male language and female physiology:

> Thou, that rocks't comely honour in thine arms,
>
> Thou patron to the child-house of my vein,
>
> And godfather to th' issue of my brain:
>
> To thee, baptiser of my infant lines [. . .]
>
> (3-7)

But this male appropriation of pregnancy through language, not to mention any linguistic "containment" of Lucrece's body, feels uncertain and tenuous in the ensuing mess of beasts, blood, milk, tears, and ink, especially since it is never entirely clear who holds the pen or who is speaking. The poem might begin and end with ostensibly stable language, but its progress from start to finish is awash in disordered physicality.

In *The Ghost of Lucrece*, Thomas Middleton lends his voice and colors to his titular ghost, and their collaboration insists that even Lucrece's perfect wifely chastity cannot contain the overflowing physicality of her body and its fluids. In doing so, the early modern reworking of a literary tradition inherited from the classical past raises nagging doubts about patriarchy's self-declared dominion

107. In his introduction to the Oxford edition of the poem, Shand also describes a memorable 1996 production at the Globe Education Centre starring Mark Rylance and Joy Richardson that staged the poem in the manner of a dialogue between ghost and poet. Shand even presents a list of that production's attributions of lines to each character, but the gist of his discussion seems to be that the poem itself makes such decisions arbitrary and problematic (1986-88).

over nature and women. Perhaps, then, it is Middleton who retroactively haunts Lucrece.

CHAPTER THREE, Widow . . .
"The Part That Overcomes the Lady"

Metatheatre assumes there is no world except that created by human striving, human imagination. Tragedy cannot operate without the assumption of an ultimate order. For metatheatre, order is something continually improvised by men.
--Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form.*

Like many other plays by Thomas Middleton, *The Widow* reflects its author's lifelong fascination with identity and disguise. It is therefore a fitting coincidence that the play survives through twenty-eight copies of Humphrey Moseley's 1652 printing, all of which bear a title page incorrectly identifying the author(s) as "Ben Johnson [sic]," "John Fletcher," and "Tho : Middleton." At some point in the seventeenth century, however, a single copy of Moseley's printing fell into the hands of an unidentified reader who cared enough about the true identity of *The Widow*'s author to cross out the names of Jonson and Fletcher and write "alone" beside that of Middleton. As David Lake contends, the original misattribution of authorship can likely be traced to former actor Alexander Gough, whose brief preface for Moseley's edition also proclaims the play to be "the art of Johnson, Fletcher, and Middleton" (38-39).[108] But Gough was only an infant when *The Widow* was composed around 1615, and while the out-of-work actor could have been in error, both Gary Taylor and Lake point out that the manuscript of a play written by all three famous writers would have commanded a

108. The range of pages above indicates Lake's discussion of the play's authorship, which includes the citation from Gough's preface. Gough's preface, as well as a facsimile of the altered title page, can also be found in Levine's edition of *The Widow*. For other information in this paragraph I have drawn from Gary Taylor's introduction to the play in the Oxford *Collected Works* (1074-77), as well as his discussions of its authorship (379-82) and his editorial practice with the text itself (1084-93), both in the Oxford *Companion*.

higher price from Moseley than one written by Middleton alone. In either case, Gough's involvement in the misidentification is also something of a fitting coincidence because he probably retained a manuscript copy of *The Widow* from his days working as a cross-dressed boy actor for the King's Men. When the company revived the play in the 1630s, Gough would have played either one of the female parts or perhaps one of the young male leads who, as we shall see, engage in a richly gendered role-play. And Middleton, I think, would have approved of a former transvestite boy actor obscuring his own identity as sole author of the play because *The Widow* pushes its period's theatrical conventions of cross-dressing, disguise, and metatheatrics to such extremes that even recent critics and editors seem to have trouble keeping track of identity in the play.[109]

The text of *The Widow* blurs identity far more thoroughly and spectacularly than Gough's fraud (or error) muddied its authorial provenance in 1652. As in *The Witch*, the interconnected plot lines of *The Widow* each center on a maid, a wife, and a widow, and the artificiality of these culturally constructed identities certainly fascinated Middleton throughout his career. But while the maid, wife, and widow in *The Witch* turn out to "exist merely by sleights of

109. I have corrected Gary Taylor's edition of the play for the Oxford *Collected Works* on two occasions while working on this chapter: the nondescript character names of "First Suitor" and "Second Suitor" were originally in error in a footnote (4.1.21n) and at a prompt in the main text of the play (4.1.94.1). I have also noticed that Susan Zimmerman's "Disruptive Desire" is in error when it comes to the audience's knowledge of Marcia's identity, which is entirely withheld right up until the final moments of the play (51). And Kathryn Jacobs makes a somewhat similar error when she asserts that an audience would be "well informed" (141) about a twist at the end of the play in which the titular widow has pretended to give away all of her wealth—a key component of the remarrying widow's stereotypical identity on the Jacobean stage.

language" (O'Connor 1128), the social identities of *The Widow*'s three categorized women remain relatively stable and secure. In this play, Middleton instead questions or undermines the three "female estates" by setting their representatives within a larger framework of indefinite and shifting identity. Indeed, the play epitomizes Swapan Chakravorty's observation that Middleton's "work displays a readiness to use role-playing and cross-dressing on the stage to suggest the fictionality of social identities" (15). In a similar assessment, Farah Karim-Cooper notes that early modern theatrical disguise alludes "to the fluidity of identity" (279) and that "Middleton's use of disguise reveals a preoccupation with the enactment of gender and the materials that enable it" (280). *The Widow* takes this preoccupation to radical lengths, suggesting not only the insubstantiality and instability of gendered social identities but also the indistinctness of the boundary between fiction and reality itself. The metatheatric conceit at the core of the play therefore presents a significant complication to its titular widow's insistence that her next marriage will not live up to the cultural and theatrical stereotype: "I would have one that loves me for myself, sir, / Not for my wealth" (2.1.70-1). But by the time *The Widow*'s widow finds out which of her suitors loves her for herself, the play has cast serious doubt on whether any identity can be "real" at all.

"Methinks a Woman's Lip Tastes Well in a Doublet": Middleton's Radical Cross-Dressing

The Widow destabilizes perceptions of identity and reality largely through the use of cross-dressing, and this particular form of disguise, commonplace in Elizabethan and Jacobean comedy, has garnered a tremendous amount of critical attention in recent decades. I will therefore build to my discussion of cross-dressing and identity in *The Widow* by surveying this substantial field of critical discourse. It would not, in fact, be an exaggeration to say that just about everyone conducting serious study of Renaissance theater in the late twentieth century wrote, or at least read, about cross-dressing on the streets and stages of early modern London.[110] Reaching its height in the 1980s and 1990s, the era of cross-dressing criticism was surely motivated by changing attitudes toward gender and sexuality in mainstream culture as well as developing scholarship—most notably, Thomas Laqueur's important work on the "one sex model" and Judith Butler's foundational theories presented in *Gender Trouble*—which was beginning to consider the intertwined categories of biological sex and cultural gender as equally constructed and historicizable.[111] Indeed, postmodern literary criticism seems to have recognized that the early modern theater shares its own interest in

110. The late twentieth century's critical fixation on cross-dressing may have even played a part in fostering current interest in Thomas Middleton because critics working on early modern transvestitism frequently turned to Middleton's extended handling of the topic with Thomas Dekker in *The Roaring Girl*, as we shall soon see.
111. Although scholars such as Greenblatt (180n) and Howard (423n) drew on Laqueur's earlier article in *Representations*, "Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," his 1990 book-length work, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud,* certainly made an even greater impact on scholars studying early modern cross-dressing. I am also tempted to cite directly from Judith Butler's famous work here, but the majority of readings I mention in this survey predate the publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990. In any case, the ideas behind *Making Sex*, *Gender Trouble*, and the cross-dressing critics were surely in circulation at conferences and in publications of the mid and late nineteen-eighties.

the constructedness and performativity of gender. Moreover, the writers of cross-dressing comedies and their audiences appear to have had at least some sense, however vague, that the social and linguistic categories of male and female might have more to do with cultural convention than biological fact.

In "Fiction and Friction," a well-known chapter from his 1988 *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt articulates the possibility which seems to have been just as captivating for Middleton and his contemporaries as it is for postmodern scholars: that "sexual difference, the foundation of all individuation, turns out to be unstable and artificial at its origin" (76). Clothing and other outward cultural markers attempt to manage this instability, but as Jean Howard explains, "cross-dressing, like other disruptions of the Renaissance semiotics of dress, opened a gap between the supposed reality of one's social station and sexual kind, and the clothes that were to display that reality to the world" (96). Cross-dressing therefore highlights the fact that the cultural categories of gender require constant maintenance and regulation, and, as Laura Levine puts it in an influential study of antitheatricality, it effectively exposes the fact that "gender too may exist only in the theatricalization of itself, only insofar as it is performed" (8). Although such assessments seem to imply that early modern England had to face a troubling existential secret about gender and identity, the sheer number of cross-dressing plots and subplots generated by playwrights around the turn of the sixteenth century suggest that, to the contrary,

contemporary audiences were intrigued and amused by plays that underscore this performative essence of gender—plays which were performed, of course, by all-male companies. Phyllis Rackin makes this very point when she argues that the Elizabethan and Jacobean theaters capitalized on a historical moment when "the sex-gender system was not yet stabilized in modern terms, and its instability made it a subject of intense interest" (121). All of these critical readings observe an early modern sense that "supposed reality," as Howard puts it, could be disturbed, exposed, or even subverted by a simple change of clothes. In effect, then, cross-dressing performs a nearly automatic disruption of culturally presumed order, and nothing could be more typically Middletonian.

Historian David Cressy has pushed back against this particular vein of literary criticism, insisting that "neither the records of ecclesiastical justice nor the London comedies reveal, in my reading, a sex-gender system in crisis. Indeed, one could argue that the system was robust enough to play with, with a measure of festive tolerance and allowance for good clean fun" (*Travesties* 114). While Cressy's dismissive assessment does provide an important reminder that male and female were viewed as stable and definite categories in the period, the "sex-gender system" need not be in "crisis" in order for transgressions of that system, like cross-dressing, to prove fascinating. In fact, the more "robust" the sex-gender system, the greater the potential for anxiety and disorientation when its firm categories of male and female fail to effectively describe or explain the world.

Furthermore, as Stephen Orgel points out in his discussion of *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir*, the two well-studied pamphlets from 1620 concerned with contemporary transvestite fashion, "the new cultural phenomenon was not the style of dress but the anxiety it provoked" ("Subtexts" 16). Marjorie Garber similarly contends that the period's cross-dressing comedies "tapped into larger cultural anxieties, of which the *Hic Mulier* pamphlets were a sign" (*Vested* 31). Thus, while cross-dressing was nothing new, cultural anxiety about transvestitism appears to be a highly visible symptom of a growing distrust in symbolic categories themselves, a sign of pervasive uneasiness about the period's deepening investment in the technology of symbols and language. Indeed, symbolic systems were not in crisis in the period, but undergoing expansion and development, and Middleton's plays and poetry repeatedly exploit nagging cultural doubts about a growing dependence upon language, law, and technology to make sense of the world.[112]

Although Shakespeare's cross-dressing comedies have received the lion's share of the critical spotlight, it is Middleton, above all of his contemporaries, who most dramatically responds to whatever cultural crisis, anxiety, or taste for "good clean fun" that recent cross-dressing criticism recognizes in early modern England. Shakespeare, for instance, employs some form of cross-dressing a total

112. The past few paragraphs give only a partial survey of this wellspring of interest in early modern cross-dressing. For some other examples see Catherine Belsey's "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," Orgel's "Nobody's Perfect" and " *Impersonations*, and Rose's "Women in Men's Clothing."

of seven times.[113] The Middleton canon, in comparison, contains a total of twelve transvestites, and most of Middleton's cross-dressers are considerably more problematic and radical than those found in the works of his older contemporary. Indeed, several investigations of early modern cross-dressing—including those by Greenblatt (92), Howard (114-5), and Lisa Jardine ("Twins" 34)—bemoan Shakespeare's relatively conservative handling of gender in *Twelfth Night*, a play that opens up thrilling, non-normative erotic possibilities only to leave them "appropriately contained within the admissible boundaries of the patriarchal household" (Jardine "Twins" 34). In stark contrast, however, *The Roaring Girl* concludes with its title character, Moll Cutpurse, swearing off the possibility of any such containment within marriage (11.215-26), while the play's other (briefly) cross-dressed woman, Mary Fitzallard, gladly marries into the Wengrave patriarchal household.

Although they do not always, like Moll, walk offstage in a brazen refusal of marriage, and therefore the conventional resolution of the comic genre, Middleton's many cross-dressers are consistently unsettling, innovative, outrageous, and sometimes subversive. *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, for

113. Shakespeare begins staging female-to-male cross-dressers with Julia in *The Two Gentleman of Verona,* and he later returns to the device with his three most famous cross-dressed heroines—Rosalind, Viola, and Portia—as well as *Cymbeline*'s Imogen. Aside from these five women in men's clothing, Shakespeare also portrays male-to-female cross-dressing twice: first when a male page is dressed as Sly's "wife" in *The Taming of the Shrew*'s framing plot and again with Falstaff's humiliating disguise as the "fat woman of Brentford" (4.2.63) in *Merry Wives*. Also, although I do not count it among the seven examples of Shakespearean cross-dressing that I mention in my main text, one might add Cleopatra's famous metatheatric comment: "Antony / shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' the posture of a whore" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.260-3). For a brief overview of Middleton's cross-dressers see my following paragraph and note.

instance, contains not just one, but two female-to-male cross-dressers. One of these women, Aurelia, simply dresses as "a gentleman / That lately came from Rome" (1.2.136-7) in order to gain access to her former lover, Lactantio. But another one of Lactantio's past mistresses, pregnant with his child, also disguises herself as a male page and remains undetected right up until she goes into labor when forced to perform dancing leaps at the behest of an instructor. Cinquepace, the instructor, is so convinced by the "page's" performance of masculinity that he refuses to accept transvestitism as an explanation for the biological signs of labor and impending childbirth: "By this light, the boy's with child! / A miracle! Some woman is the father" (5.1.223-4).[114] While the daft reaction is surely meant to be funny, Middleton's vision of cross-dressing nonetheless accepts that a woman could pass herself off as a boy even at the full term of pregnancy.

And, at times, Middleton takes cross-dressing into even more radical territory. In *No Wit/Help Like a Woman*, for instance, Kate Low-water disguises herself as a young gentleman in order to use her titular "wit/help" to exact revenge for her family on an indulgent widow by courting and *actually marrying* her. Then again, the play backs down from this potentially breathtaking scandal of two women in a solemnized marriage by way of a double nullification: first by Mistress Low-water's confession of an existing marriage (to Master Low-water)

114. The scene seems to be an inverted parody of Ambroise Paré's anecdote, which appears in Laqueur's work and is so often cited in the era of cross-dressing criticism, about Marie Garnier, a fifteen year old girl "who one day was 'rather robustly' chasing her swine, which were going into a wheat field. As Marie in mid-pursuit leaped over a ditch, 'at the very moment the genitalia and male rod came to be developed'" (Greenblatt *Shakespearean Negotiations* 81).

and then by the revelation of her female identity, which absolves her/him of the charge of bigamy (9.520-21, 556-60). Elsewhere in the Middleton canon, one finds at least six other examples of women dressed in men's clothing, and Middleton also portrays several men who dress as women, including both Dick Follywit's impersonation of a female courtesan in *A Mad World, My Masters*, as well as the ambiguous encounter, possibly sexual, between the male speaker of *Microcynicon*'s fifth satire and the tempting male transvestite, Pyander, dressed "in a nymph's attire" (35).[115] As the next section will explain in detail, however, Middleton takes male-to-female cross-dressing to its most daring extreme in *The Widow* when Ansaldo, disguised in women's clothing after multiple run-ins with Latrocinio's gang of thieves, finds himself in a same-sex marriage.

"I Think it Was a Shirt; I Know Not Well, For Gallants Wear Both Nowadays"

Middleton's most spectacular deconstructions of gender and identity turn up in *The Widow*'s main plot line as it follows a character named Ansaldo through a labyrinth of disguise, cross-dressing, and misrecognitions. Moments before Ansaldo first appears in the play, a band of thieves prepare for a robbery by

115. I have already mentioned the cross-dressing of Moll Cutpurse and Mary Fitzallard from *The Roaring Girl.* In *The Nice Valour*, yet another of Middleton's cross-dressed women conceals her pregnancy along with her female identity. Bellafront, the whore of *The Patient Man and The Honest Whore*'s title dresses as a male page in order to gain access to her love interest who isolates himself from women. In *Wit at Several Weapons*, Lady Ruinous dons male disguise while working amongst a crew of male tricksters. And, in *Anything for a Quiet Life*, Middleton withholds the identity of Selenger from his audience until, at the play's conclusion, "he" takes the stage "*as a woman"* (215 *s.d.*), but once out of her disguise "Selenger" never speaks word.

disguising themselves with “blue coats and beards” (3.1.4). The thieves quickly hide as Ansaldo, their mark, and another traveler, Latrocinio, come into view. It soon becomes clear, however, that the two travel companions are strangers who have only just met on the road, and before long Latrocinio reveals his true identity through a song:

LATROCINIO

Well, here comes one I’m sure you never heard then.

[*He sings a*] *song*

I keep my horse, I keep my whore,

I take no rents, yet am not poor.

I travel all the land about

And yet was born to ne’er a foot.

With partridge plump, with woodcock fine,

I do at midnight often dine,

And if my whore be not in case

My hostess’ daughter takes her place. [. . .]

And all this comes of ‘Deliver your purse, sir!

[*He draws a weapon*]

ANSALDO How, sir?

LATROCINIO

Few words. Quickly, come, deliver your purse, sir.

ANSALDO

You're not that kind of gentleman, I hope, sir,

To sing me out of my money.

LATROCINIO 'Tis most fit

Art should be rewarded. You must pay your music, sir.

Where'er you come.

(3.1.22-43)[116]

The song's conclusion—which solves its own riddle through a variation on the English highwayman's iconic catchphrase of "stand and deliver"[117]—embodies many of *The Widow*'s overarching concerns as it unmasks Latrocinio by blending the song's fiction with the scene's reality. "Deliver your purse," in other words, is at once an utterance of the song's riddling speaker and the man singing the song, Latrocinio, who both turn out to be highwaymen. But the song also functions as something of a metatheatric joke because when Latrocinio tells Ansaldo that "art should be rewarded," the actor who plays him effectively tells a theater full of London playgoers the same—that they, too, "must pay [their] music." As for Ansaldo, he manages to save himself from the robbery's metatheatric price of admission by pulling a pistol on Latrocinio, who flees. When one of the

116. I have included a significant section of Latrocinio's "deliver your purse" song because it further illustrates ideas proposed in my introduction about early modern patriarchy's understanding of the thin borderlines between human, particularly woman, and beast. In the song's misogynistic humor, the singer's kept woman and his kept beast, his "whore" and his "horse," become nearly as indistinguishable as the words that represent them.
117. See Gillian Spraggs, *Outlaws and Highwaymen* (158, 181) and David Brandon, *Stand and Deliver!: A History of Highway Robbery.*

highwayman's bearded and blue-coated associates arrives, however, Ansaldo unwisely reveals that he wields only "an uncharged pistol" (3.1.95). The entire gang of thieves then descends upon Ansaldo and drags him away under Latrocinio's order to "bear him in to th' next copse and strip him" (3.1.104). A scene that begins with robbers getting dressed ends with them undressing their victim.

By the next scene, however, the focus of the Ansaldo plot line shifts slightly from the potential power of intentional disguise to accidents of misrecognition and mistaken identity. Having escaped from Latrocinio's gang wearing only a long, white undershirt, Ansaldo returns to the stage, desperately making his way towards a house he has spotted by a light in the window. Just outside the gates of the unfamiliar house, however, Ansaldo stops dead in his tracks when he sees another man fast approaching in the night and takes him for one "of the thieves come back again" (3.2.82). But the approaching man is Francisco, another young gentleman who is rushing to keep an adulterous appointment at the house with Philippa, the sexually dissatisfied young wife of Brandino. Francisco has been delayed by his own violent encounter with Latrocinio's band, and when he spots Ansaldo staring back at him from the gate to the house and dressed only in the long, white undergarment, he also freezes in terror. Yet Francisco does not mistake the billowing shape for a thief:

Life, what should that be? A prodigious thing

> Stands just as I should enter, in that shape too
>
> Which always appears terrible […]
>
> Why may't not be the spirit of my father
>
> That loved this man so well, whom I make haste
>
> Now to abuse?
>
> (3.2.85-7, 97-9)

Until this moment, Francisco felt no qualms about cuckolding his dead father's friend, Brandino, but the sight of Ansaldo in a flowing white undershirt abruptly awakens his sense of decency and morality, or at least his fear of supernatural retribution.[118] A case of mutually mistaken identity therefore leads Francisco to break his appointment with Philippa— "he keeps his promise best who breaks with hell" (3.2.120)—and forever abandon the path to a rakish life.

Upon seeing Francisco depart so suddenly, Ansaldo concludes that the "thief" in the distance has "gone to call the rest, and makes all speed" (3.2.120) and therefore sets to knocking at the door in a desperate effort to obtain safe

118. As Heller (16, 68-76), Holmes (142), and R. Levine (lii) point out, Francisco's reaction to the sight of this "prodigious thing" closely resembles that of Penitent Brothel after his encounter with a succubus (which assumes the shape of his own adulterous lover) in Middleton's earlier comedy, *A Mad World, My Masters*. Yet Penitent's supernatural experience is real within the fiction of his play, while Francisco merely mistakes Ansaldo for a portentous spirit because of the long, flowing undergarment that he wears. I find the difference significant since *The Widow* so often concerns itself with mutable identity, and so even Francisco's reformed self seems another role, another disguise—brought on by his misreading of an article of clothing. In their notes, Taylor and Warren claim that the kind of undergarment or "shirt" that Ansaldo wears (see my discussion below) "was the usual costume for representing a ghost or apparition" (3.2.49.2n). While they may be correct, the annotators provide no source for this assertion and I cannot confirm the existence of this wardrobe convention after consulting the standard tomes on early modern theatrical costuming—Marie Channing Linthicum's *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* and Stella Mary Newton's *Renaissance Theatre Costume and the Sense of the Historic Past*. In a more recent study, *Pursuing Shakespeare's Dramaturgy*, John Meagher confesses that he is simply "not sure how spirits were costumed" (246).

refuge. Inside, Philippa hears the knocking, presumes that Francisco has finally arrived, and sends Violetta, her waiting woman, to admit him. When Violetta returns from the door, of course, she brings the strange news that "a gentleman's forthcoming, and a lovely one, / But not Francisco" (3.3.19-20). Giddy at her mistress's good fortune, Violetta goes on to describe the unexpected visitor, lingering on his clothing, or lack thereof:

> I've often heard you say ye'd rather have
> A wise man in his shirt than a fool feathered,
> And now Fortune has sent you one, a sweet young gentleman,
> Robbed e'en to nothing but what he first brought with him.
> The slaves had stripped him to th' very shirt, mistress.
> I think it was a shirt; I know not well,
> For gallants wear both nowadays.
>
> (3.3.23-9)[119]

Although Ansaldo's blank "shirt" identifies neither his gender, social rank, nor any other aspect of his identity, Violetta can still tell that he is a handsome young gentleman.

Indeed, throughout this scene, Ansaldo's undershirt—a blank, amorphous swath of white cloth—functions something like the ink blot in a modern

119. In their notes to the Oxford text of the play, Michael Warren and Gary Taylor explain Violetta's comment that "gallants wear both [smocks and shirts] nowadays" as a highly topical joke because "the second decade of the 17th century witnessed a brief flourishing of unisex fashions" (3.3.29n).

Rorschach test. First, Francisco's repressed guilt causes him to perceive the outline of his father's ominous spirit, and then Violetta, who expects a man behind the door to satisfy her mistress's heterosexual desires (and perhaps her own vicarious longings), discerns the shape of a sexually enticing young man among its folds: "But for a face, a hand, and as much skin / As I durst look upon, he's a most sweet one" (3.3.30-1). Philippa, however, will never see Ansaldo in the ambiguous undergarment because her waiting woman takes the liberty of dressing Ansaldo in "one of my old master's suits" (3.3.34), before she introduces her mistress to the "the loveliest, / Proper'st young gentleman" (3.3.37-8).[120] Once introduced, Philippa finds Ansaldo's appearance in her husband's suit more than adequate, but she will not get her wished-for chance to commit adultery with him, at least not just yet, because he insists upon leaving at once to keep a pressing appointment.

A few scenes later, however, Ansaldo comes rushing back to the house after once again running into Latrocinio's newly disguised gang in an encounter that also includes Philippa's husband, Brandino. Because she now expects Brandino to return to the house, searching for "that rascal in my clothes" (4.2.245), Philippa orders Violetta to dress Ansaldo "up in one of my

120. Violetta even finds Ansaldo so heterosexually enticing in his ambiguously gendered undergarments that she fears "my master's clothes" might "spoil him" (3.3.39), or, on the other hand, that Philippa might be overcome by her own desire for male flesh if she had seen Ansaldo without Brandino's old clothing: "I would 't'ad been your luck to have seen him / Without 'em, but for scaring you" (3.3.40-1). Warren and Taylor note that "Violetta mocks Philippa's sexual interest in young men" (3.3.41n), but "scaring" here seems to gesture to both desire and fear, considering Francisco's recent interpretation of Ansaldo in dishabille.

gowns and headtires. / His youth will well endure it" (5.1.76-7). While her waiting woman sets to work on Ansaldo's cross-dressing, Philippa remains on stage to deliver a vice-like soliloquy in which she explains the extent of her plan:

> I've thought upon a way of certain safety,
> And I may keep him while I have him too,
> Without suspicion now. I've heard o'th' like.
> A gentleman, that for a lady's love
> Was thought six months her woman, tended on her
> In her own garments, and (she being a widow)
> Lay night by night with her in way of comfort;
> Marry, in conclusion match they did together.
> Would I'd a copy of the same conclusion.
>
> (5.1.85-93)[121]

Putting Ansaldo in female disguise will conceal his identity from Brandino and also afford Philippa easy access to the hidden object of her heterosexual desire. But beyond such immediate sexual gratification, Philippa's soliloquy also envisions a longer term "conclusion" in which her own identity will shift from wife, to widow, and back to wife again, leaving her satisfied with old wealth from a first marriage and young flesh from a second. Even while her husband still lives,

121. I call Philippa's soliloquy "vice-like" because she explains her machinations to the audience in a soliloquy, but when she gloats that "I may keep him while I have him," I also hear an inverted echo of one of Shakespeare's most famous vices after his successful wooing of the widowed Lady Anne: "I'll have her, but I will not keep her long" (*Richard III* 1.2.217).

then, Philippa already sees herself living up to the stereotype of what Jennifer Panek describes as the "lusty widow, that familiar figure who can be traced back through Chaucer's Wife of Bath to Classical literature" (*Widows* 2). Like cross-dressers, such lusty widows were "popular fare" (Panek "Women's" 276) on the stages of early modern England, and Philippa's scheme based upon the example of a widow and her cross-dressed lover brings together these two conventions of the Jacobean stage.

Once dressed in drag, Ansaldo becomes a prop in Philippa's carefully orchestrated torment of her old husband and the now penitent Francisco, who returns to the house as Brandino's guest. Telling the two men that the thief who stole Brandino's suit also "robbed a sweet gentlewoman last night" and "basely stripped her" (5.1.108-09), Philippa introduces Ansaldo, explaining that she has lent this "gentlewoman" her own clothes: "Is't not a goodly manly gentlewoman?" (5.1.148).[122] Philippa can barely contain her laughter as she watches first her husband (5.1.157 *s.d.*) and then Francisco (5.1.166 *s.d.*) shower Ansaldo with courteous kisses. Both men are clearly enamored with the young man in woman's clothes, and when Philippa learns that Francisco has gone so far as to suggest marriage to the boy she has dressed up as a girl she cannot help herself from staging a transgressive prank. She enlists Ansaldo as the chief accomplice in her plot, the cross-dressed boy actor in her personal city comedy:

122. Taylor and Warren gloss "manly" as "independent, courageous" and point out the readily apparent pun on the sense familiar to modern ears.

> Then, at his next solicitings, let a consent
>
> Seem to come from you. 'Twill make noble sport, sir.
>
> We'll get jointure and all—but you must bear
>
> Yourself most affable to all his purposes.
>
> (5.1.246-8)

Ansaldo consents, the match is made, and Philippa encourages Francisco to seal the betrothal with a deeply physical kiss: "Give her a lip-taste" (5.1.270).[123] Although every kiss enacted on the early modern stage takes place between two men, Middleton doubles and underscores this ever-present homoerotic charge by having two male actors playing male characters *taste* the other man's lip. The play then takes this male-male match to even more outrageous heights when the two men come back on stage just before the play's conclusion, literally married to each other. As Philippa leads the groom and "bride" back on stage after their nuptials, Violetta introduces the newlyweds and delivers the punchline to her mistress's joke: "Here they come! / Here they come, one man married to another! […] Ay, man to man" (5.1.407-9). With this solemnized, same-sex marriage between two men in *The Widow*, Middleton takes cross-dressing comedy well over the top. Ansaldo's plot, however, has not quite reached its conclusion.

123. Philippa's graphic suggestion also echoes Sebastian's famous comment after kissing the cross-dressed Mary in Middleton's earlier collaboration with Dekker on *The Roaring Girl*: "methinks a woman's lip tastes well in a doublet" (8.47).

"My Daughter, Marcia!": Shifting Gender (and Reality) With Words Alone

In his famous discussion of the cross-dressing plot in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Stephen Greenblatt asks, "what if Olivia had succeeded in marrying Orsino's page Cesario? And what if the scandal of a marriage contracted so far beneath a countess's station were topped by a still greater scandal: the revelation that the young groom was in fact a disguised girl?" (66-7). But Greenblatt's questions about the "greater scandal" of same-sex marriage were answered by Middleton centuries before he posed them, and not once, but twice: first with the marriage of the disguised Kate Low-water and Lady Goldenfleece in *No Wit/Help,* and later with the union of Ansaldo and Francisco which takes things into even more taboo ground by exploring what would happen if a beautiful young bride turned out to be, well, a disguised boy. In each of these plays, these same-sex "marriages" simply do not count, a fact which actually supports Cressy's notion that the sex-gender system of the time was "robust enough to play with" and which makes them both hysterically, though uncomfortably, funny.[124] Yet, as it turns out, the marriage of Francisco and

124. In *No Wit/Help*, as explained above, the revelation that Lady Goldenfleece's new husband is already "married to another" (9.520) frees her to marry Beveril (9.528) and Kate removes her male disguise in order to absolve her of the charge of bigamy. Legally, the play presumes, this marriage is a nonentity. With the marriage of Francisco and Ansaldo, there is no reason to suspect that Philippa has given up on her intention to take Ansaldo as a second husband —"would I'd a copy o the same conclusion"—after Brandino eventually dies, even though her "sweet revenge" (5.1.224) on Francisco exposes her plan to share her bed with the supposed "gentlewoman." In *Epicoene*, Jonson deals with the legality a little more explicitly when Dauphine frees his uncle, Morose, "of this unhappy match absolutely and instantly" (5.4.159) by revealing that his "wife," Epicoene, is really a disguised boy. Dauphine then confirms with his confederates that "this is *justum impedimentum*, I hope, / *error personae*?" (5.4.202-3). Although the legal opinions of Dauphine, Otter, and Cutbeard might not be technically accurate, they certainly seem to reflect the attitude and assumptions of the play's intended audience toward the validity of the marriage of two men.

Ansaldo *does* count, and *The Widow* plays its final and greatest trick on its two chief tricksters when, as Philippa and Violetta laugh at their own cross-dressing comedy, one of the widow Valeria's old suitors immediately recognizes Ansaldo dressed in women's clothes: "My daughter Marcia!" (5.1.411). Completely unbeknownst to the play's characters and audience up until this moment, Ansaldo has been a disguised girl all along.

Undoubtedly, this twist that concludes the Ansaldo plot line draws upon the ending of Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, but Marcia's father unveils Ansaldo's original/final gender and identity with nothing more than those three words of recognition. Language alone suddenly flips perceptions of a body on stage and its underlying gender without the slightest change to its outward appearance. In Jonson's play, on the other hand, Dauphine quite literally unveils Epicoene, to audience and Morose alike, by dramatically swiping the "*peruke*," or wig, from the head of the boy actor whom his uncle has taken for a bride (5.4.198 *s.d.*). Furthermore, when that peruke comes off Dauphine's boy actor in *Epicoene*, a crack opens in that play's fiction through which the audience can clearly see the *theater's* boy actor, effectively bringing reality rushing onto the stage and sending suspended disbelief crashing back to earth. But while *Epicoene* builds a visually stunning metatheatric moment around the boy actor's peruke, *The Widow* performs its final, dizzying transvestite twist with words alone, and Middleton

effectively reverses the polarity of Jonson's climactic moment. Where Jonson pulls the curtain aside, that is, Middleton adds ever more layers of fiction. Gary Taylor also reads the difference between the two endings this way, noting that the conclusion of *Epicoene* "strips away theatrical pretence" (Introduction 1076) while *The Widow* does nearly the opposite:

> In Middleton's play, Jonson's world is turned upside down: the discovery *undoes* a cruel practical joke, it *enables* a marriage, and it *insists* upon pretence by revealing that a supposedly male character is 'actually' female. Of course, since even 'actual' females were played by male actors, Middleton's conclusion remains ambiguous, as Jonson's does not; spectators can leave a performance still arguing and asking about Ansaldo's 'real' gender. The play can leave us feeling that […] we cannot really tell the difference between men and women—that, indeed, there may be no essential difference, beyond performance.
>
> (Introduction 1076)

If Jonson wants hard reality to rush on to the stage, then Middleton wants the uncertainties of fiction to come rushing off the stage and into the world. Then again, while Middleton's play certainly highlights the fictitious performativity of Ansaldo's "real gender," the plot line still resolves itself by revealing, just as Jonson's play does, a backstop of supposedly fixed, essential gender behind its cross-dressed bride, and this revelation has very real legal and social

consequences within the world of the play. Yet Middleton puts Ansaldo's gender through so many disguises and inversions that this very gender fixity ends up feeling distant, slippery, uncertain. Like the queen shuffled between two jacks in a game of "three-card monte," that is, Ansaldo's "real gender" is always on the move, never where it is expected, and even the most astute observers eventually walk away, realizing that their perceptions of reality are subject to the whims and manipulations of the conman, the playwright, or the transvestite.

Indeed, Middleton's comedy seems to take advantage of what Marjorie Garber calls the "transvestite effect" (*Vested* 36), cross-dressing's troubling potential to uncouple gender from any stable referent or meaning. "The transvestite," Garber explains, "is both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification. It points toward itself—or, rather, toward the place where it is not" (*Vested* 37). Although the Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis informing this moment in Garber's reading would be completely foreign to Middleton, his play's concatenation of retroactive and simultaneous cross-dressings centered on Ansaldo/Marcia might make the same point: that transvestitism emphasizes the fallibility of subjectivity's perception of the world. Human consciousness, that is, apprehends reality through a symbolic system that imposes its own order on what it claims to passively describe, and cross-dressing's unauthorized use of gendered symbols strains that system and exposes

its hubris.[125] Yet as much as Middleton uses cross-dressing in *The Widow* to show that there might be nothing at all where culture expects an essential reality of gender, he might be even more concerned with highlighting the endless permutations of performance, interpretation, and meaning that can be projected onto that blank nothingness. When Latrocinio and his thieves strip Ansaldo/ Marcia down to his/her unisex undershirt, for instance, Middleton comes as close as possible to doing with a live actor what Jonson's Puppet Dionysus does in *Bartholomew Fair* when he lifts up his garment to display a lack of genitals (5.5.95-9).[126] Clothed only in the long, white undergarment, the boy actor playing Ansaldo is, as Paula Berggren puts it, "shorn of all outward marks of identity" (11), a blank on which gender and identity can be both read and written.[127] Where Francisco reads the ominous shape of his father's ghost, Violetta perceives a sexually tempting young man, and, at play's conclusion, the old suitor

125. Consider, for instance, how an attempt to summarize Ansaldo's cross-dressings in English begins to strain the English language, which has relatively little inflection for gender: played by a male actor, a female character, Marcia, disguises herself (?) as a young man, Ansaldo, who ends up cross-dressing (?) yet again when he (?) puts on Philippa's clothes. How should we describe the action of Marcia cross-dressed as Ansaldo putting on women's clothes? Crisscross-dressing? Should we accept the plot's fiction of "his" gender or insist on "hers" at that moment? And, in either case, how do we account for the gender of the boy actor who inhabits them both?

126. In her examination of antitheatrical impulse and cross-dressing on stage, Laura Levine says that the gesture performed by Leatherhead's puppet "represents the destruction of referentiality itself" (5). I largely agree, and, in this section that is admittedly heavy with comparisons of the two playwrights, I would argue that they each pursue the same goal through opposite strategies. Where Jonson "represents the destruction of referentiality," Middleton forces such a surfeit of referentiality upon his audience so that, to borrow from Shakespeare's Orsino, "it may sicken, and so die" (*Twelfth Night* 1.1.3).

127. Berggren goes on to consider the shrouded boy actor's moral effect on other characters in the play: "A cipher, this phantom presence awakens the distraught consciences of Middleton's prospective sinners" (11). The assessment accurately describes Francisco's reaction to the shirted figure, and his awakened conscience and resulting departure *would have* frustrated Philippa's adulterous designs. But Violetta—the only other character in the play to see Ansaldo/Marcia dressed in the shirt besides the thieves—opens the door expecting the bearer of her mistress's heterosexual satisfaction, and finds it improved upon. Besides Francisco, I find no other character in this play whose conscience is awakened by the sight.

inscribes the identity- and gender-constituting labels of "Marcia" and "daughter."[128] If the transvestite really does point to "the place where it is not," as Garber would have it, then Middleton seems less concerned with trying to represent that vacant place than he is with staging ever more and more pointing.

"Come, Come, Make Me Your Woman": Performing Gender

So far, this chapter's analysis has followed the fluid and slippery gender of Ansaldo/Marcia, but *The Widow* questions the stability and legibility of gender and identity long before the arrival of its cross-dresser at the beginning of its third act. The play opens with Francisco arriving at Brandino's house under the false pretense of purchasing a fraudulent warrant from the justice's clerk, Martino, who keeps a collection of various unfinished warrants that require "but the name and nature of your malefactor" (1.1.67). These "blanks" (1.1.56) subtly foreshadow Ansaldo's white undershirt and contribute to the play's overarching notion of mutable identity—and they also eerily resonate with the authorial misattribution on the title page of Moseley's 1652 printing, not to mention the correction of one surviving copy. Francisco has also really only come to Brandino's in order to catch a glimpse of Philippa, so when Martino prompts him for a name to put on

128. Literary critics are, of course, also liable to project their own reading onto Ansaldo's blank. Lucy Munro, for instance finds "some hints of [Ansaldo/Marcia's] 'masculine' character" (177) despite her essential femininity. Munro notes that the name "Marcia" puns on "martial," that Philippa calls her "a goodly manly gentlewoman," and that "she foils Latrocino's initial attempt to rob her by producing a pistol" (177). But Ansaldo's phallic weapon turns out to be an "uncharged pistol" (3.1.95), and I would argue that it is one of many details in the robbery scene that tip Ansaldo/Marcia's concealed, female gender.

the warrant he offhandedly supplies the name of "One Astilio; / His offence, wilful murder" (1.1.74-5). This apparently fictitious name comes dangerously close to blurring into Francisco's reality, however, since the next scene opens on his conversation with two friends: Ricardo and *Attilio*, who should probably steer clear of any farsighted or pseudo-literate constables.

Furthermore, the conversation between these three gentlemen quickly moves to shifting identity as Ricardo, who is actively engaged in pursuit of the widow Valeria, insists that Francisco's current heartache stems from his financial security and that he should sell off his remaining lands in order to become a widow-hunter who trusts in "Fortune," like himself. Yet Francisco insists he simply has "no luck" (1.2.47) with women and begins to tell his older friend about his frustrated love for Philippa:

FRANCISCO

I never yet loved but one woman.

RICARDO

Right, I begun so too, but I have loved

A thousand since.

FRANCISCO

Pray, hear me, sir. But this is a man's wife.

RICARDO

So had five hundred of my thousand been.

(1.2.57-61)

This typically Middletonian comic banter illustrates Francisco's inexperience as well as Ricardo's complete embrace of his own identity as rake and widow-hunter; at this point in the play, Ricardo *is* a theatrical stereotype, a stock figure from the city comedies of the period. He even says that if he had kept his lands he would now have a wife and children, and have "undone myself" (1.2.27). This "self" depends on perpetual pursuit of a widow, but by the play's conclusion, Ricardo will strain the conventions of the widow-hunter convention, and this rakish banter quickly moves to dazzling and elaborate metatheatrics which work hard to display the instability of gender and identity.

After repeatedly urging Francisco to sell his lands (1.2.16, 24, 37, 53), Ricardo decides to mentor his unseasoned friend by taking a look at his wooing tactics, telling him to "come, come, make me your woman" (1.2.79). With Attilio looking on in silence, the two men begin the role-play, but Francisco almost immediately objects that Ricardo portrays an unrealistically available woman: "One shall seldom / meet with a lady so kind as thou played'st her" (1.2.106-7). Thus, at Francisco's urging, the two men resume the wooing lesson with gender roles reversed, and Ricardo's rather predictable advances—"fairest of creatures, I do love thee infinitely" (1.2.119)—meet with the stern and shrewish rebuke of Francisco's woman: "hang thee, base fellow" (1.2.125). The mere performance of

rejection, however, puts Ricardo into a shockingly real fit of sexual aggression, both verbal and physical:

RICARDO [*to Attilio*] What a pestilent quean's this! I shall
have much ado with her; I see that.
—Tell me as you're a woman, lady, what
Serve kisses for? But to stop your mouths.
[*He makes to kiss Francisco*]

FRANCISCO Hold, hold, Ricardo!

RICARDO Disgrace me widow?
[*Ricardo throws Francisco down*]

FRANCISCO Art mad? I'm Francisco.

ATTILIO Signor Ricardo, up, up!
[*Attilio pulls Ricardo off Francisco*]

RICARDO Who is't? Francisco?

FRANCISCO Francisco, quoth'a! What are you mad sir?

RICARDO A bots on thee! Thou dost not know what injury
thou hast done me. I was i'th' fairest dream. This is
your way now, an you can follow it.

FRANCISCO 'Tis a strange way, methinks.

(1.2.133-46)

A strange way, indeed. Perhaps even more than in the Ansaldo/Marcia plot, gender and identity become radically unstable in this scene, if only for Ricardo. Furthermore, although Francisco might allude to some previous experience with cross-dressing—"I see you ne'er wore the shoe that pinched you yet" (1.2.112)—and Ricardo points out that he *is* wearing a man's "hose and doublet" rather than a "farthingale" when it is his turn to play the part of a lady (1.2.84-5), this gender slippage occurs *without* the use of any clothes or props whatsoever, just as when "Ansaldo" makes his final transformation into "Marcia" at the play's conclusion. Like other cross-dressing comedies of the period, *The Widow* brings up the possibility that gender identity is an arbitrary and manipulable construct. But unlike those other comedies, *The Widow* finds ways to do so without even using clothes.

Yet the subversive potential of Francisco and Ricardo's role-play runs deeper still, and through their impromptu play-within-the-play, which Susan Zimmerman describes as "a meta-theatric tour de force" (51), *The Widow* truly muddles the already indistinct borders between reality and performance, nature and artifice. Middleton encases this scene's baseline fiction, the heteronormative wooing performed by Ricardo and Francisco, in so many interlocking layers of illusion and allusion that reality and fiction become utterly indistinguishable. Before the final exchange in which Ricardo clearly loses sight of the distinction, for example, the two young gentlemen cannot stay in character for more than two

lines of dialogue without interrupting their own performance, quibbling like actors at an early rehearsal. This backstage banter might seem to be the "reality" surrounding the fiction of the wooing, except that Ricardo's commentary on the performance is something of a performance itself, considering that he repeatedly turns to Attilio and speaks in aside about his intention to undermine Francisco's acting, or to "put him out" of his part (1.2.94-5, 102, 126-7). Yet it is Ricardo, of course, who ends up put too far *into* his part, allowing the wooing fiction to eclipse even this exterior reality when, in his final aside to Attilio, he calls Francisco "quean," having clearly confused the reality of his pursuit of Valeria, or widows more generally, with the fiction when he disturbingly throws his "widow" to the ground. So ever more fictions fit in ever more frames of "reality," like a set of nesting dolls, and, of course, all this amateur acting and deceit is performed by the theater company's professional actors in a scene which contains some intricate moments of self-reference.

Most strikingly, the dialogue between Francisco and Ricardo abounds with jokes and double entendre playing on the fact that an original audience would likely recognize the actor playing twenty-one year old Francisco from his cross-dressed portrayal of *female* roles in recent performances. These very specific metatheatrics, which would be lost in any subsequent production, begin when Ricardo tells Francisco that he is "as likely a / fellow as any in the company" to win a rich widow for himself (1.2.13-4). Later, during one of the many

interruptions to their role-play, the younger actor's very recent graduation from female to male parts, "in the company," seems to be the joke when Ricardo gibes that he might laugh at his friend *without* a dress on (1.2.82-8). And Francisco's suggestion to switch gender roles includes apparent innuendo about this actor's transvestite past: "Come, come, I'll play the woman; that I'm used to. / I see you ne'er wore shoe that pinched you yet" (1.2.111).[129] So none of the men in this scene actually don women's clothing, but cross-dressing still lurks just around its corners.

In *The Widow*'s role-playing scene, the fact that a man recognized for playing women's parts plays a man playing a woman exponentially complicates the already doubled existence of every person, object, or action that appears on stage. The scene's carefully orchestrated metatheatrics include gender doublings (and re-doublings) that greatly intensify the simultaneous reality and fiction inherent to theatrical production, the "curious ambiguity" that James Calderwood describes as "duplexity" in his study of *Shakespearean Metadrama* (12). Yet perhaps *multi*plexity would better describe the layers of Middleton's metadrama that pile upon each other here. By calling attention to the roles previously handled

129. Warren and Taylor make a compelling case for the metatheatric jokes about the Francisco actor in their notes to the Oxford text, and Taylor takes the assertion for certain fact in both his introduction to the text for the *Collected Works* and in his discussion of the play's place in the Middleton "canon and chronology" in the Oxford *Companion* (379-82). For sake of brevity in my main text, I have left out two potential innuendos that the editors point out. In one of these, they suggest a possible allusion that the Francisco actor played the titular role in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Woman* (1.2.103n), and, in another, they propose the possibility that the Francisco and Ricardo actors had been Beatrice and Benedick in an earlier production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* based on Ricardo's comment that he will have "much ado with her" (1.2.134n).

by the actor playing Francisco, this scene also packs yet another layer of gendered complexity into the play's conclusion, because this same young actor walks on stage with the cross-dressed youth playing Ansaldo/Marcia, "one man married to another." Moreover, although "he" will not officially appear in the play until the beginning of the third act, Ansaldo might be dimly present in this earlier scene through one last metatheatric possibility that would be both subtle and profound. In production, that is, the actor who plays the largely silent part of Attilio—a character whose name already blurs with the one on Francisco's warrant—would likely double the cross-dressed part of Ansaldo/Marcia.[130] If so, then the same young actor's body that wears the long white undershirt, the same body upon which, later, the play will blur gender and identity with such vigor, quite literally steps in the middle of Ricardo's frenzy of gender confusion in order to reestablish Francisco's fixed, male identity in the play.

Such metatheatric complexities acknowledge the artificiality of not only the performance taking place on stage, but also the presumably more stable and organic reality of life offstage. That is to say, any dramatic performance might appear to be a mimesis of reality, but the theater's artificial forms and conventions also impose their own order on a culture's understanding and experience of its

130. Since the two characters never appear on stage together, the Oxford editors suggest the possibility of doubling (1123). Also, in addition to his three brief lines (1.2.140, 2.1.77, 2.2.29), one of which is probably shouted as he pulls Ricardo off of Francisco, Attilio also speaks two short lines in chorus with Francisco (1.2.153, 2.1.80). Although I suspect that a vaguely detectable doubling could further intensify the metatheatric virtuosity of this scene, the scantiness of Attilio's speaking part and the fact that his voice might often be masked by other voices and/or stage noise, could also be designed to disguise it. In either case, a doubling of Attilio and Ansaldo/Marcia seems intended by the text of the play.

reality. In his study of *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, Richard Hornby agrees, arguing that "drama has an operative function similar to that of language. Rather than mirroring life passively, drama is instead a means of thinking about life, a way of organizing and categorizing it" (26). In this way, theater and other narrative fictions operate somewhat like the symbolic order of Lacanian psychoanalysis, shaping and even displacing reality rather than merely describing or representing it, and one might even take the analogy so far as to say that a culture's collective unconscious is structured like its shared fictions.[131] Metatheatric play thus admits to its own artificiality while calling attention to its attempts to organize, categorize, and displace real life. Or, as Lionel Abel claims in the study that coined the term, "metatheatre gives by far the stronger sense that the world is a projection of human consciousness" (113). In his famous essay on "Shaping Fantasies," Louis Montrose makes a closely related claim about the mutually constitutive interplay of theater and reality, pointing out the ongoing "dialectic between the theatre and the world" in which drama "also creates the culture by which it is created" (86). Yet Montrose only considers Shakespeare's "claim" to this dialectic through the play-within-the-play of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a relatively contained example of metatheater that remains comfortably

131. Structured like its theater *and* other narrative fictions, that is. The allusion, of course, is to Lacan's famous and oft-repeated observation, articulated with greatest clarity in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: "The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently *the unconscious is structured like a language*" (149, emphasis added). In another excellent study of metatheater, Mark Ringer also comes close to a Lacanian paradigm when he says that "metatheater calls attention to the semiotic systems of dramatic performance" (8).

on stage. When taken to a Middletonian extreme, on the other hand, the kind of overt, metatheatric self-referentiality that one finds in Francisco and Ricardo's wooing rehearsal utterly shatters the fourth wall, rendering theater and reality indistinguishable, their dialectic unintelligible.

The wooing scene also crosses reality and theatricality—not to mention gender identities—so many times that it becomes nearly impossible to tell if Ricardo's assault on Francisco represents a genuine moment of temporary psychosis or if it is a feigned part of his mischievous effort to "put him out."[132] In either case, however, his violent behavior clearly reflects a theatrical convention of the period. At this point in the play, Ricardo belongs among what Jennifer Panek describes as "a league of fictional suitors on the early modern English stage […] who accost the widows they wish to marry with bawdy insinuations, frank sexual boasts, and on more than one occasion, physical aggression" (*Widows* 3).[133] Of course, Ricardo directs such physical aggression towards his male friend rather than the widow he intends to marry—and even then Francisco only plays the part of a hypothetical woman, not necessarily a "widow" as he is called just before being thrown to the ground. So perhaps Ricardo loses himself in the multiple

132. In his second to last aside to Attilio, Ricardo uses the masculine pronoun— "Now by this light, he thinks he does't indeed" (1.2.126)—but, just eight lines later, in the last of these asides which have heretofore been set apart from the wooing fiction, Ricardo refers to Francisco/lady with the feminine pronoun: "I shall / have much ado with her" (1.2.134-5).

133. Elsewhere, Panek points out Middleton's fascination with, and perhaps hostility towards, the widow-hunter, saying that he is "more likely to satirize the mercenary suitor than the desirous widow" ("Women's" 276). For more on the widow-hunter as theatrical convention, see Ira Clark's "The Widow Hunt on the Tudor-Stuart Stage" as well as Kehler's comments on the convention which point out that Shakespeare comes no closer to it than Richard Gloucester's wooing of Lady Anne (39).

layers of fiction because, for now at least, he *is* little more than a stock figure from the early modern stage, a recognizable fiction unmoored from any essential self.

Indeed, when he returns from his "fairest dream" and blames Francisco's performance of prudish femininity for his lapse into violence, Ricardo even compares himself to some frequently typecast, virile actor who apparently chases after wealthy widows in most of his roles:

> Learn you to play a woman not so scornfully, then,
> For I am like the actor that you spoke on:
> I must have the part that overcomes the lady.
> I never like the play, else.
>
> (1.2.147-50)

In a tremendous pun, "the part that overcomes the lady" is obviously both phallic and theatrical, but Ricardo's "explanation" for his behavior also indicates that he and Francisco were very recently discussing the theater and its actors in an earlier, offstage conversation. But perhaps this conversation did not take place entirely offstage, because the highly metatheatric scene appears, at least in retrospect, to open with the three men walking onstage while talking about a play:

> Nay, mark; mark it, Francisco. It was the naturalest courtesy that ever was ordained: a young gentleman being spent to have a rich widow set him up again. (1.2.1-4)

If this is, in fact, the tail end of the same conversation in which Francisco “spoke on” the heartthrob actor who always has "the part that overcomes the lady," then Ricardo’s comments seem to be about a play that features a match between a wealthy widow and a depleted young suitor, like many from the period. Whether or not these lines refer to a play featuring a widow-hunt, there can be no question that Ricardo fashions himself in the image of what he has seen in the theater: “I am like the actor.” Even though Ricardo is a fiction himself—and likely, considering the scene’s metatheatrics, one portrayed by an actor often cast in parts that overcome ladies—other stage fictions help to structure his conception of what is “naturalest” in his own reality and the kinds of virile “parts” he should play in it. Yet these fictions themselves purport to reflect the “real” world and “real” gallants such as Ricardo. *The Widow* therefore indulges in elaborate and disorientating metatheatric play, and it also depicts the mutually constitutive dialectic between theater and reality—what Louis Montrose has called “shaping fantasies”—in action.

Furthermore, Ricardo’s double entendre in which “part” means both theatrical role and biological organ—a bit of wordplay that Lisa Jardine finds “commonplace” in the drama of the period, at least when it comes to “the woman’s part” (“Boy Actors” 61)—also functions as a crossroads for the play’s various approaches to its overarching theme about the transient and unfixed nature of identity, especially social identities that structure carnal desires. In other

words, *The Widow* is consistently concerned with the relationship between parts and parts, between one's theatrical or social role and some essential or "naturalest" being. Ricardo's comment on "the part that overcomes the lady" encapsulates this concern because it simultaneously refers to biological anatomy *and* highly constructed performance: the "part" that Ricardo must have is at once a penis or other body part that can provide a lady with sexual gratification and the sexually triumphant male role in a play, itself a supposed reflection of real-world philanderers.[134] Recall also that Ricardo tries out a similarly phallic allusion in the scene's opening lines when he approves of a "spent" gallant having "a rich widow set him up again" in an evocative wordplay that fuses sex and money, the spoils on either side of a successful match between a widow and a gallant. So at least at its outset, the play emphasizes the artificiality of Ricardo's stereotypical identity and his wholehearted embrace of it, but it will soon introduce the widowed object of his affections, who rejects the theatrical stereotype of the rich and lusty widow and insists that she will only "take one that loves me for myself" (5.1.305). Yet *The Widow*, through its over-the-top cross-dressing and metatheatrics, makes a considerable effort to propose that one's self is almost always a projection or performance.

134. As Tiffany Stern has shown, "parts" can also refer to the actor-specific portions of a play's text.

"A Wise Man Likes That Best That Is Itself": Widowhood and Cross-dressing

If the presence of his hand in so many plays and poems that touch upon cross-dressing demonstrates Middleton's enduring fascination with transvestitism, then the fact that he also produced as many, or more, works that deal directly with widowhood surely reflects what Jennifer Panek identifies as a "near-obsessive preoccupation with widows, particularly the remarrying kind" (*Widows* 157).[135] Given the frequency with which he treats the two subjects, it should not come as much of a surprise that both devices appear in *The Widow*, nor that cross-dressers and widows also appear alongside each other in two of Middleton's earlier plays, *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* and *More Dissemblers Besides Women.* Yet, in other plays, Middleton seems to suggest that his two frequent interests are linked by more than mere coincidence, and that widowhood, as a social and theatrical category of being, might turn out to be as much of a performance or construct as gender. In *A Trick to Catch the Old One,* for instance, Witgood's courtesan, Jane,

135. Keeping count of Middleton's widows can be more difficult than computing the number of his cross-dressers. In *Widows and Suitors*, Panek grapples a bit with questions about collaboration and attribution, arriving at a number of widow plays somewhere between seven and ten (*Widows* 157), but by the time she writes "Women's Life Stages" for *Thomas Middleton in Context*, Taylor and the other Oxford editors had settled these questions and the Middleton canon. On the other hand, the *Collected Works* also complicated the count by revealing the title of a lost Middletonian play called *The Puritan Maid, The Modest Wife, and the Wanton Widow*, and after its publication Panek seems to have abandoned tallying efforts and returned to her earlier figure for her shorter piece, saying only that Middleton was "exceptionally fond of plots involving widows — seven appear in his comedies alone" ("Women's" 276). In my own count, I find 13 examples in the Middleton canon as established by Oxford's *Collected Works*, presuming, of course, that the aforementioned lost play features a widow based upon its title. The other twelve instances include only one nondramatic example, a section in the mock-almanac, *Plato's Cap* (225-60); characters in eight plays: Castiza in *The Phoenix*, Lady Plus in *The Puritan Widow*, Valeria herself in *The Widow*, Lady Goldenfleece in *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, the Duchess of *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, Livia in *Women Beware Women*, Lady Ager from *A Fair Quarrel*, and Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy*; and false widows in three others: Thomasine in *Michaelmas Term*, *The Witch*'s Duchess, and Jane's performance of the Widow Meddler in *A Trick to Catch the Old One.* There is, of course, some redundancy between this footnote and my main text above, but my aim here is to gather my current count in one place.

portrays the fictional "Widow Meddler" in order to gull Walkadine Hoard into a very real marriage, and two other Middletonian women, Thomasine from *Michaelmas Term* and the Duchess in *The Witch*, fully believe themselves to be widows although their husbands have only faked their own deaths. So even the fact that widowhood requires the seemingly objective qualification of a dead husband does not prevent Middleton from suggesting that this social, legal, and sexual identity can be mistaken, performed, or otherwise confused.[136] Of course, there is no reason to doubt the identity of *The Widow*'s title character, but Valeria also only appears in four out of ten scenes in the play named for her. Indeed, while *The Widow* is structured around the widow, it seems more interested in using cross-dressing, metatheatricality, and disguise to explore general questions about the instability of identity.

For what reason, then, did Middleton feel that these concerns deserved such prominence in a play entitled *The Widow*? Valeria does conform to a conventional theatrical type of the period, as discussed above, but relatively recent research by Vivien Brodsky and other historians shows that such rich, remarrying widows and their suitors seem to have been primarily the figments of theatrical imagination.[137] At least for such *wealthy* widows, that is, remarriage

136. Especially compared to the period's anxieties over locating biological or anatomical grounds for *virginal* identity, the death of a husband seems a highly empirical and verifiable basis for identity. See my discussion of female virginity and Beatrice-Joanna from *The Changeling* in chapter two of this dissertation.

137. "Despite the persistent stereotype of the wealthy widow in popular literature and drama," writes Elizabeth Foyster, "wealthy widows who considered remarriage were notable because of their rarity" (112). As Ira Clark puts it, the theater frequently depicts victorious widow-hunters, like Ricardo, who are set up again by rich widows, but "all of these achievements on stage run counter to demographic data" (413). Still, the theatrical convention might

would mean an unwelcome return to legal coverture and the loss of the financial and social power available in widowhood, or as Merry Wiesner-Hanks would have it, "women who could afford to resisted all pressure to remarry and so retained their independence" (95). Although young, childless women like Valeria retain their heterosexual desirability, and even older women supposedly lusted for younger, male suitors, widowhood in early modern England made rich and powerful women into *virtual men*, at least in terms of their legal, social, and financial identities. As social historian Amy Froide puts it in an effort to distinguish between the "never married" and the "ever married" (16), widows of all social strata acted as the "deputies of their deceased husbands" and therefore fit into "a public and independent place within the patriarchal society" (17). Although Froide's frequent characterization of the widow as a "deputy husband" might be something of an overstatement, her analysis nonetheless provides an important perspective on the legal and social identity of widows in early modern England.[138] In a summary of her historical research for *Shakespeare's Widows*, Dorothea Kehler makes a similar proposal in more measured language: "Bearing in mind that law is a major player in the construction of social reality, widows

resonate with some audience members since, while very rich widows were often unwilling to remarry and very poor ones were unable to find willing second husbands, Brodsky tells us that "records point to the existence of an active remarriage market, particularly for the widows of city craftsmen and tradesmen. Such women appear to have remarried quickly and to have often married single men younger than themselves" (123). Brodsky's work also reveals a more complicated picture for poor and middling women, but her analysis largely seeks to modify, not deny, "the commonly held view that widowhood afforded unique opportunities for independence, economic self-sufficiency and a 'social freedom' absent from the lives of both single and married women" (123).

138. Froide repeatedly uses some version of the compelling phrase, "deputy husband" (17, 25, 33, 42), in order to describe a woman's authority in the household after marriage, whether or not her husband has died yet. The phrasing also catches Kehler's attention, who repeats it (30).

enjoyed a legal status, if not equal to men's, still far superior to that of maids and wives" (33). Widows usually became the head of their household, the executor of a husband's will, and the manager of his business. The transition from wife to widow thus afforded a unique opportunity for women to slip into familial, legal, and fiscal roles that were otherwise only occupied by men. One might even argue, then, that widowhood actually had a great deal in common with the kind of female-to-male cross-dressing that gives Marcia the freedom to travel on her own disguised as Ansaldo, or that gives *Twelfth Night*'s Viola the ability to speak freely as Cesario. Or, at the very least, Middleton seems interested in making this argument.

The widow Valeria does not take the stage until the beginning of her play's second act, demanding of a servant that a recent suitor whose face she finds "fearfully painted" (2.1.6) with cosmetics not be admitted to her presence again. Her rejection of this apparent dandy, a "spiced coxcomb" (2.1.4) clad in a "nutmeg-coloured band" (2.1.3), also prompts Valeria to launch into an extended soliloquy in which she professes her abhorrence for those who would use clothes and makeup to alter the perfect creations of God and nature: "Yet I praise heaven I never had th'ambition / To go about to mend a better workman" (2.1.12-3). This proto-Swiftian sentiment also guides Valeria's refusal to embellish her own appearance, as well as a related insistence to only accept a suitor who appreciates her in an unaltered, unadorned state, "as heaven made me" (2.1.15). Indeed,

Valeria's firm stance against cosmetics turns out to be a minor manifestation of the far more significant principle guiding her selection of a partner for remarriage: "A wise man likes that best that is itself, / Not that which only seems, though it look fairer. Heaven send me one that loves me, and I'm happy" (2.1.15).[139] Valeria, that is, insists upon being loved for some essential self, not her outward appearance, which is presumably appealing even without makeup, nor the cultural stereotype of wealthy-and-available widowhood that, quite frankly, she embodies. Except, of course, the painful irony here is that a boy actor, cross-dressed and painted with makeup, speaks these lines as he plays Valeria's part, a fact made especially conspicuous by the over-the-top metatheatrics in the immediately preceding scene. This female impersonator's rejection of his/her "fearfully painted" suitor (who never even appears on stage) might even function as metatheatric self-deprecation, uttered by a boy actor who "only seems."[140] To return to the fiction of the play, however, Valeria is neither cross-dressed nor painted; it is only her status as wealthy widow that interferes with being loved for her true self, and she flat out tells Ricardo as much: "Pish! I would have one that loves me for myself, sir, / Not for my wealth" (2.1.70-1). Yet while Valeria can

139. In some ways, the insistence on essence over performance might even begin to sound like the period's well-known antitheatrical tracts, which were often concerned with the theater's cross-dressed, boy actors. In her introductory chapter to *Men in Women's Clothing*, Laura Levine provides a detailed discussion of antitheatricality's connection to a "growing anxiety about whether there was such a thing as an essential self" (18).

140. This stance against cosmetics also echoes the the fifth satire from Middleton's early poem, *Microcynicon*, in which the narrator warns his readers to "trust not a painted poppet as I have done" (94) after his (possibly physical) encounter with an alluring urban transvestite.

eschew adornments such as makeup or clothing, her highly attractive identity as wealthy widow cannot be wiped off or removed.

Just after the role-playing meltdown in which he assaults Francisco because he confuses him with his generic "widow," Ricardo lays out a plan to marry the widowed woman who he claims to love "not for her wealth, but for her person too" (1.2.162). This depleted widow-hunter who brags about having loved a thousand women, half of them married, then explains to Francisco and Attilio how he will win his true love:

> I'll place you two (I can do it handsomely,
> I know the house so well) to hear the conference
> 'Twixt her and I. She's a most affable one;
> Her words will give advantage, and I'll urge 'em
> To the kind proof, to catch her in a contract.
> Then shall you both step in as witnesses
> And take her in the snare.
>
> (1.2.154-9)

Not only is the plan patently ridiculous, but since it is also only made possible through Valeria's affability and Ricardo's familiarity with her house, it feels like a sendup of the period's anxieties about talkative women, their penetrable orifices, and an associated need for patriarchal surveillance of the home's threshold.[141]

141. See Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories" in *Staging the Renaissance.*

Nevertheless, Ricardo does indeed succeed at goading Valeria into uttering "my hand and faith" (2.1.74) as the two clasp hands, and he declares it "a match!" (2.1.76) as his accomplices/witnesses spring from their hiding place and announce their willingness to "be deposed on't" (2.1.80). Valeria, unsurprisingly, "renounce[s] it utterly" (2.1.85), but the widow and her disturbingly aggressive young suitor spend the remainder of the play locked in a legal battle over the validity of this contract.

In her legal suit refuting Ricardo's suit for her hand, Valeria receives the backing of one of her two older, wealthy suitors, but another suitor, displeased by the widow's allegiance to his competitor, rushes to support Ricardo. Because Valeria's legal claim ultimately hinges on the question of whether her utterance or her intent constitutes a legitimate contract, however, the legal case also runs parallel to questions implicitly posed throughout the play about finding stable ground in the midst of so much acting, cross-dressing, forgery, and disguise. In short, both the play and this lawsuit ask if reality is constituted through some unobservable essence or the outward spectacle of performance. But Valeria's eventual victory over Ricardo in court (5.1.274) does not quite settle the question, and the widow who so vehemently rejects what "only seems" tests her suitors by signing her fortune over to Brandino. Surprisingly, considering his earlier embrace of the depleted widow-hunter's stereotypical identity, Ricardo turns out to be the only man still interested in Valeria without her wealth, but the widow

herself "only seems" penniless because she has "bobbed" both her suitors and her brother by passing off a mere "deed in trust" as a "deed of gift" (5.1.379-81). Much like the suits, lawsuits, and suitors that appear throughout the play, then, neither Valeria nor her written deed can be trusted to indicate any essential truth. Even *The Widow*'s widow herself turns out to be "that which only seems."

Conclusion: And Wife Again . . .
"Great Mischiefs Masque in Expected Pleasures":
Remarriage and Print Culture in *Women Beware Women*

For though some have used a double sale of their labors, first to the stage and after to the press,
For my own part I here proclaim myself ever faithful in the first, and never guilty of the last.
--Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece.*

Each of the three preceding chapters has focused on a Middletonian woman identified by her sexual and social relations to men, and this conclusion begins in a similar fashion by considering the figure of the remarried woman. As we have seen, Middleton's plays and poetry very often work to problematize the symbolic categories of maid, wife, and widow. But because any "wyfe agayne" (as Vives once called Catherine of Aragon) returns to an earlier point in an expected progression through a series of female life stages, this reprised identity is *necessarily* complicated—or at least it is from the perspective of certain male writers concerned with safeguarding the symbolic order of patriarchy. Indeed, Elizabeth Foyster has found that remarriage in early modern England "was subject to suspicion and disapproval" and that there is "a wealth of English literary material, ranging from advice books to ballads, plays and medical tracts, which condemn widows and widowers who remarry" (109). Yet Foyster and others have also determined that this body of literature opposing remarriage is both based upon and propagates nothing more than a set of "male fictions about remarriage" (113).[142] This concluding chapter proposes that the idea of remarriage

142. Amy Louise Erickson also notes a similar disconnect between the forceful opinions expressed in such literature and what can be gleaned from the historical record: "Although it was men who remarried most often, and the evil stepmother occurs occasionally in literature, it was the thought of women's remarriage that provoked antagonism among certain prominent men. In Sir Walter Raleigh's words, 'if she love again, let her not enjoy her second love in

proved so troubling to these male writers because the remarried woman goes off the script, so to speak—because her progress from maid to wife to widow and then back to wife again (and possibly over and over again) demonstrates that these symbolic identities do not correspond to any stable or substantive meaning.

At first blush, it might seem to make more sense to conclude with that other categorized woman who appears far more frequently in Middleton's works: the whore, or "punk" as Lucio from *Measure for Measure* describes her (5.1.178). But this study has intentionally focused on women who, whether intentionally or not, expose the insubstantiality of the categorical identities prescribed for them by patriarchal authority, and a woman labeled "whore" cannot really challenge or complicate this system because she is categorically excluded from it.[143] Furthermore, as Laura Gowing has shown, the term "whore" does "not necessarily carry the financial implications of prostitution" in the period so much as it describes a woman who, in some way, threatens or subverts "the vision of the ordered household which was set out so specifically by prescriptive literature" (3,

---

the same bed wherein she loved thee.' Such utterances may be best described as individual obsessions, rather than as evidence of widespread societal antipathy towards women's remarriage" (198).

143. Of course, the Middleton canon does hold more than a few confirmed prostitutes and courtesans who, much like a remarried woman, manage to reenter this system as upstanding wives despite their previous sexual experience, such as Bellafront from *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore.* Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter One, Middleton's plays and poetry sometimes even suggest that a sexually experienced woman can regain her maidenhood, as in Witgood's assessment of his courtesan, Jane, when she marries at the conclusion of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*: "excepting but myself, / I dare swear she's a virgin" (5.2.159-60). But even the dramatic conversions of Bellafront and Jane do far more to challenge presumptions about what kind of woman and female body can properly occupy the social role of "wife," leaving little doubt about what makes a woman merit the label of whore.

13).[144] Thus, although the whore transgresses or resists this vision of symbolic order that early modern patriarchal consciousness superimposes upon the household and the family, not to mention the wider world, she also helps to define or shore up that order through her difference from it. The remarried woman, on the other hand, exposes this fixed, familial order and its codes of sexual conduct as nothing more than a set of insubstantial ideals—a set of ideals, that is, which are easily and clearly prescribed in symbols and language but which do not always correspond to the comparatively messy business of real life. In *Women Beware Women*, as we shall soon see, Middleton explicitly links his most prominent and sustained consideration of remarriage and a "wyfe again" to this gap or discordance between the virtual world of written language and the far more disordered state of reality.

My consideration of remarriage in *Women Beware Women* therefore leads directly to a discussion of Middleton's intimate knowledge of print technologies as well as an awareness that his work would appear in print. Indeed, in *Women Beware Women* and throughout the Middleton canon, I detect signs of cultural uncertainty in the period about a growing dependence on written symbols and language resulting from the dissemination of literacy and print, and each of my preceding chapters has touched on this in some way. In *The Changeling*, for instance, Alsemero's Glass M fails to effectively diagnosis female virginity, and

144. Similarly, Linda Woodbridge has argued that the whore's transgressive "crime was so heinous because it disrupted the schematic order of the world" (84).

its supposed alchemical powers are also associated with those of written numerals, a new technology regarded with suspicion in the period. By the end of *The Ghost of Lucrece*, the ghost herself has usurped the composing poet's pen—"This knife, my pen, / This blood, my ink" (563-64)—and throughout the poem, her overflowing deluges of blood and milk threaten to burst the written lines of verse which strain to contain them. And finally, one of *The Widow*'s many complex devices for suggesting the slippery and arbitrary nature of prescribed identity turns up when Francisco supplies Martino with the name "Astilio" (1.1.74) to write on a blank warrant; the name is dangerously close to that of Francisco's friend, Attilio, a part played by an actor who likely (re)doubles as Francisco's future husband/wife, the crossdressed Ansaldo/Marcia. In order to bring all of these threads together, then, both this final chapter and this study will conclude with a discussion of the cognitive and cultural effects of the momentous shift from manuscript to print culture in early modern Europe.

"Why Sure, This Plot's Drawn False": Remarriage and Expected Pleasures

While I do not wish to indulge too deeply in biographical criticism, I will nonetheless begin by demonstrating the important, and perhaps formative, role that remarriage played in the life of *Women Beware Women*'s playwright, as it surely did for many of the men and women in his intended audiences. When Thomas Middleton's parents, William and Anne, married in 1574, it was a second

trip to the altar for the groom, whose first marriage lasted nearly a decade. While this earlier union appears to have been childless, Anne bore William Middleton two healthy children: Thomas and his younger sister Avis. But when the children were only five and three years old, their father suddenly died, perhaps, as Gary Taylor has speculated, in an accident related to his lucrative position as a Warden of London's Worshipful Company of Tilers and Bricklayers. Whatever the circumstances, William's untimely death left Anne Middleton a relatively wealthy widow, and she was therefore an attractive target for potential suitors, just like so many widows who would later appear in her son's plays. Indeed, much like those fictional widows, the forty-eight year old Anne soon contracted a second marriage with a much younger man named Thomas Harvey, a grocer, merchant, and seaman who had recently returned from a year and a half spent as merchant to Sir Walter Raleigh's colony at Roanoke Island. We cannot, of course, know Thomas and Anne's exact reasons for marrying, but because so many surviving documents indicate that "remarriage for widows was generally disapproved of" (Panek *Widows* 8), it is likely that at least some of their neighbors viewed the union with skepticism.[145] For that matter, Anne herself appears to have been somewhat skeptical of her new husband's motivations, and when Harvey attempted to seize

145. As do the opening paragraphs of this conclusion, Panek's work complicates this statement which summarizes the "prevailing scholarly opinion" (*Widows* 8) of recent decades. Nonetheless, these surviving expressions of disapproval must reflect the attitudes of many inhabitants of early modern England, however unrealistic and intolerant they may have been. In any case, it quite certainly reflects the opinion of those who *wrote* about remarriage. Foyster again tells us that the "authors of conduct book literature all assumed that the motivation behind remarriage was either material gain or to satisfy sexual appetite" (109).

control of the money bequeathed to Thomas and Avis, their mother was prepared with an effective, and rather ingenious, legal strategy. Anne, as Taylor explains, "had herself arrested for defaulting on her financial commitment to the children; Harvey, as husband, was responsible for *her* debts, and so was forced to pay the Lord Mayor's Court, in cash, a sum equal to both bequests" ("Lives and Afterlives" 31). As the marriage between Anne and Thomas Harvey dragged on for the next two decades, similar legal and financial squabbles occurred regularly and frequently. And at a time when people resorted to "wife sales" because legally recognized divorce did not exist, the Middleton-Harvey family's contentious, and likely volatile, situation could not have been uncommon.[146]

While Thomas Middleton surely grew up with firsthand experience of remarriage turned ugly, what effect this experience might have had on both his psyche and his literary output is a matter of pure speculation. Regardless, most critics still infer that Middleton's depiction of the dysfunctional marriage between Castiza and her second husband in *The Phoenix* amounts to something of an "autobiographical episode" (Heineman 68) in which "the Captain is apparently a caricature of the playwright's troublesome stepfather" (Panek *Widows* 137).[147] But

146. The details on Middleton's childhood and family found throughout this paragraph are drawn from Gary Taylor's thoroughly researched biographical sketch of Middleton, "Lives and Afterlives," in the Oxford *Collected Works* (25-58, especially 29-31). For an earlier and exhaustive biography of Middleton, see Eccles. For a more recent overview largely based on Eccles and informed by more recent scholarship, see William Carroll's brief essay on "Middleton's Life." My mention of "wife sales" refers to an extended discussion that appears in my introduction.
147. In their introduction to the text that appears in the *Collected Works*, Danson and Kamps are a touch more circumspect, but nonetheless make the same inference through the proxy of other critics: "it has even been claimed—plausibly enough—that this remarkable character is drawn from life" (92).

whether or not Middleton based this episode on what he witnessed in his own mother's troubled remarriage, the spectacularly awful relationship between Castiza and the Captain remains one of only a very few examples of life *after* remarriage to appear in his work, despite the fact that he very often depicts widows who intend, or are pursued for, remarriage. In fact, Middleton's only other sustained depictions of women who have been remarried occur in his 1621 masterpiece, *Women Beware Women.*[148] Bianca's second marriage, to the Duke of Florence, actually takes place at some point during the play, and although an audience sees only the wedding procession (4.3) and the nuptial masque (5.1) Bianca is definitely a "wife again" for the duration of Act Five. Furthermore, both of Bianca's marital relationships are closely associated with other previously married women: the widowed mother of her first husband, Leantio, and the married, remarried, and twice widowed Lady Livia, who procures the sexual liaison which leads directly to Bianca's second marriage with the Duke (not to mention the end of her first).[149] Widowhood, remarriage, and the relative mutability of a woman's social identity thus appear to be thematic concerns in

148. Such absolute claims of absence always feel uncomfortable and tenuous, but I can find no other *sustained* depictions of remarriage in the Middleton canon (despite some passing mentions) with one marginally possible exception. In *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's,* that is, Lady Goldenfleece *believes* that she is remarried and the text twice labels her the "new-married widow" (8.153, 9.22 *s.d.*), but her "remarriage" to the crossdressed Kate Low-Water is doubly nullified by Kate's existing marriage (to Master Low-Water) and her female gender, which she eventually reveals. For a catalog of Middleton's remarry*ing* widows, see my previous chapter.
149. Livia explains her marital history when she says that she has "buried my two husbands in good fashion, / and never mean more to marry" (1.2.50-51).

Women Beware Women, and these two widowed women—the Mother and Livia—take center stage, quite literally, in one of the play's best known scenes.

Livia orchestrates the Duke of Florence's seduction of Bianca—a rape, really, as Anthony Dawson has urged us to see it—while she distracts the young wife's mother-in-law through a game of chess that mirrors the sexual assault taking place on the balcony above. But while the Duke's uninhibited and predatory sexuality is typical in Middleton, the nearly perfect correspondence between the virtual world on the chessboard and the sexual aggression taking place on the upper stage might suggest something that seems markedly un-Middletonian: that reality is as predictable, manipulable, and ordered as a game of chess.[150] Then again, the scene does open with Guardiano relating the Duke's sudden "rapture" (2.2.9) and his uncontrollable "appetite" (2.2.15) brought on by the briefest glimpse of Bianca at a window. But when Guardiano next appeals to Livia for her assistance in procuring the young wife for the Duke, his language reveals the pair's utter confidence in their ability to contain, even harness, such primal impulses:

150. Of course, shortly after writing *Women Beware Women*, Middleton used chess as a controlling, allegorical device in the aptly named *A Game at Chess*. But while the 1624 smash hit unquestionably represents the courts of James I and Phillip IV as white and black chess pieces, respectively, the allegory does not suggest that the world is manipulable and predictable—at least not to the extent that Livia's confident and choreographed moves against the Mother (on the chess board) and Bianca (on the balcony) do. Aside from perhaps the playwright himself, that is, there is no controlling player in *A Game at Chess*. For that matter, the play often suggests that the order available in written language and symbols does not always line up with reality. For instance, when the Fat Bishop of Spalato, the Black Knight Gondomar, and the Black Knight's Pawn search throughout a copy of "*Taxa Pœnitentiaria*" (4.2.82) for the appropriate penance in order to absolve the Black Knight's Pawn of the crime of castrating another man, they find nothing. The Bishop's solution: "Were you to kill him, I'd pardon you. / There's precedent for that; and price set down; / But none for gelding" (4.2.128-30). To my mind, the dark joke also reflects cynical skepticism about the period's growing dependence on the logic of writing and print.

> ’Tis beyond your apprehension
> How strangely that one look has catched his heart.
> ’Twould prove but too much worth in wealth and favour
> To those should work his peace.
>
> (2.2.20-23)

Livia, of course, agrees to help Guardiano satisfy the Duke’s passions, or to “work his peace,” but the obvious wordplay in which Bianca is both Livia’s manipulable, or workable, *piece* and the source of the Duke’s *peace* will only become clear later in the scene, when the chess game and rape take place simultaneously. Variations on this particular pun nonetheless echo throughout the play. Long before Guardiano sets out the chessboard (2.2.176 *s.d.*), for example, Leantio proclaims Bianca his “masterpiece” (1.1.41) and that their elopement his “best piece of theft” (1.1.43), with both statements anticipating Bianca’s impending role as a sexual pawn (or piece). Later, when Leantio is cuckolded and abandoned, he reconsiders exactly what kind of piece he would rather possess: “What a peace has he / That never marries!” (3.1.280-81).[151] And, of course, throughout Livia’s game of chess with the Mother, similar verbal and gestural double entendres blur the distinction between chess piece and living person: “Did I not say my duke

151. Jowett’s annotation for the Oxford text notes that “*peace* is a key word for Bianca” (5.1.107 n.), but both *peace* and *piece* appear to be key words for the *entire* play, appearing far more often than the four instances associated with Bianca that the editor lists in his note.

[rook] would fetch you over, widow?" (2.2.387).[152] Furthermore, when these two widowed players send one of Livia's servants to fetch Bianca for them (2.2.206-41), they move the young woman—whose given name, of course, means "white"—from place to place in what surely resembles a move on the chess board. Leantio's "masterpiece" has become a pawn in a game of courtly intrigue, and, for now at least, the precise, artificial order of the chessboard—laid out in the clear, binary opposition of black and white—seemingly extends to the wider world.[153]

But characteristically Middletonian interruptions of disorder and randomness—what T. S. Eliot once described as "sudden reality"—soon take hold of this play, disrupting the best laid plots and machinations of its characters. After seducing Bianca and taking her as his mistress, the Duke eventually arranges for Leantio to be killed and begins making plans to marry his (soon-to-be-widowed) mistress, something that will technically fulfill his recent oath to no longer keep her as a mistress "unlawfully" (4.2.256). The Lady Livia, however, had recently taken Leantio as her lover, and his wrongful death prompts her to conspire, once more, with Guardiano to enact vengeful "mischiefs" under the cover of a masque

152. Throughout the scene, as here, Livia only refers to her neighbor in terms that categorize the older woman along social, sexual, marital, and economic lines: she addresses Leantio's mother as either "widow" or "wench" sixteen times over the course of only about two hundred and fifty lines.

153. In their careful examination of "Middleton's Chess Strategies in *Women Beware Women*," Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey discuss the rigid order on the chessboard: "The world of the chess pieces is hierarchical, with pawns at the bottom and kings at the top. […] The warriors are simply black or white, and intelligible only in terms of possession, exchange, liquidation" (344). It therefore strikes me as odd when Taylor and Loughrey, a few paragraphs later, propose that "chess is like life, and Middleton certainly seems to stress the analogy" (345). In my reading, to the contrary, Middleton's works stress that the ordered and predictable world of chess is, in fact, nothing like life.

that they will put on "at the Duke's hasty nuptials" (4.2.163-65). But the performance of this nuptial masque, which dominates the play's fifth and final act, certainly does not go according to Livia and Guardiano's carefully scripted plan. And, as John Jowett has also noted, Act 5 thus provides something of a counterpoint to, if not an utter refutation of, the chess/rape scene's earlier suggestion that the disordered appetites of living beings can be contained within human artifice, that a superimposed universe of language and symbols can rule over an archaic world of disordered appetites and flesh.[154] The action in the famous masque scene is decidedly *not* contained by symbols and language.

Just before the masque begins, Livia's brother, Fabritio, presents the Duke with a written summary of the plot: "Marry, my lord, the model, / Of what's presented" (5.1.67-8). After reading every line of this "pretty, pleasing argument" (5.1.82) aloud, the Duke then identifies the sound of offstage music as a conventional sign that the play is about to begin. Sure enough, three masquers take the stage, dance briefly, and recite short speeches as they present cups to Bianca, the Duke, and the Lord Cardinal and bid them drink. Referring back to

154. Jowett agrees with my reading of the interaction between the scenes, while noting further parallels: "But equally, the final scene, in its use of the upper acting space […], its division into separate stage groupings, and its emblematic qualities recalls the game of chess in 2.2. Livia's control over the action of 2.2 is echoed in her control of the chess game. In 5.2 she presides over the masque, suspended from the heavens in the ironic role of Juno the marriage goddess; but by this time no character is able to take an overview of what is going on, much less control it. If both scenes work through high artifice, by the time of the final masque there is effectively no artificer (unless it be a vengeful God) for the plotters are many" (1492). As a side note, Jowett apparently wrote his introduction before making the decision to remove a scene division between lines 37 and 38 of the single-scene Act 5 he settled on. The Oxford text, that is, does not have a 5.2.

the sheet of paper in his hands, however, the Duke notices something troubling about the masque so far:

> But soft: here's no such persons in the argument
> As these three, Hymen, Hebe, Ganymede.
> The actors that this model here discovers
> Are only four, Juno, a nymph, two lovers.
>
> (5.1.102-5)

Bianca immediately suggests that the performance to this point must be "some antemasque, belike, my lord, / To entertain time" (5.1.106), but Hymen, Hebe, and Ganymede do not appear in the "model" of the masque because Bianca herself has amended this supposed "antemasque" in order to deliver poison to the Lord Cardinal. And while the appearance of Bianca's three assassins diverges from the written argument the Duke has been consulting, her murderous prologue suffers its own interruption of "sudden reality" when the drunken actor/assassin playing Ganymede mixes up the cups and accidentally poisons the Duke instead of the Lord Cardinal (5.2.98-99).

Not knowing that he has been poisoned, the Duke continues to notice more and more discrepancies between the written summary in his hands and the actions taking place on stage. At one point, for instance, Livia, playing the goddess Juno, actually kills Isabella by throwing "flaming gold" (5.1.154 *s.d.*) down upon her, and the Duke checks the model given to him by Fabritio only to

find that this spectacular action "swerves a little from the argument" (5.1.160), asking his fellow spectators to see for themselves: "Look you, my lords" (5.1.161).[155] When Guardiano suddenly drops to his death through a trapdoor that he had intended for Hippolito, the Duke looks at the text in frustration yet again: "Why, sure this plot's drawn false; here's no such thing" (5.1.167). As Livia succumbs to the poisoned incense that floats up to her from Isabella's censer, the pages playing Juno's Cupids follow Guardiano's instructions and fire a volley of poisoned arrows at Hippolito, who immediately understands that he has been poisoned and calls for the arrest of the Cupids. At this, finally, the Duke concedes defeat in making sense of the written model and the reality of what is unfolding before him on the stage: "I have lost myself in this quite" (5.1.180). Indeed, only the dying Hippolito has found his way in this, and he announces the overlapping treacheries of the masque to those who still live: "My great lords, we are all confounded" (5.1.181)

Criticism of *Women Beware Women* routinely discusses this chaotic masque, noting that it "goes over the top (almost literally)" (Wilcox 122); that it is a "radical reinterpretation of the symbolic court ceremonies that Middleton relentlessly deconstructs" (Tricomi 72); that it combines "the ordinary with the

155. In his introduction to the New Mermaids edition of *Women Beware Women*, William Carroll has pointed out that the famous "flaming gold" stage direction, which can be traced to an annotation in the Yale copy of the 1657 octavo, can also be inferred from Livia's lines (as Juno) in the masque: "Our brother / Never denies us of his burning treasure / T'express bounty" (5.1.154-56). "What is being represented here is yet another rape – one of the most famous rapes of antiquity" and Guardiano's masque explicitly refers to Jove's rape of Danae in the form of a golden shower (xxv).

horrible" (Ewbank 69); and even that it is merely "rather silly" (Stafford-Clark, qtd. in Jowett 1492). Such varied remarks all agree on the masque's indulgence in excess, but I would like to point out that this excess strains what Martin Brückner and Kristen Poole have recently described as the period's "emergent reading and viewing practices" (637). Indeed, the play not only demonstrates the Duke's insistence on agreement between his reading of the written word and what he can see unfolding directly in front of him, but it also points to early modernity's rising rate of literacy as a result of secular education and the proliferation of print. Leantio's working-class mother—who is the "Sunday-dinner" and "Thursday-supper woman" (2.2.3-4) at Livia's house—cites some kind of written literature (perhaps conduct manuals or advice books) when she admonishes herself for not anticipating problems between mother and daughter-in-law: "When read I of any / That agreed long together?" (3.1.9-10). And, although literacy had long been the tool of the privileged elite, this Jacobean play's coarse and spoiled Ward dismisses it as plebeian drudgery: "I am not so base to learn to write and read; / I was born to better fortunes in my cradle" (1.2.128-29).[156] For Brückner and Poole, *Women Beware Women* also provides evidence for the possibility that spectators really did read from such "plots" *during* theatrical performances, thereby suggesting the extent to which written language and symbols were beginning to shape human experience of the world. But, as is certainly the case with the "plot," "model," or

156. In *Hengist, King of Kent*, Simon the Tanner expresses a similar disdain: "I scorn to read, / I keep a clerk to do these jobs for need" (4.1.7-8).

"argument" that Fabritio passes to the Duke before the start of the nuptial masque, this conceptual technology might not always have always felt reliable or trustworthy. Or, as Brückner and Poole put it, "late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century authors and their public, even while exhibiting a profound fascination with new structural ways of organizing their world, were acutely aware of the fallibility and fragility of such modes of conceptual organization" (644).[157] The collaborating scholars therefore arrive at roughly the same conclusion as this study of Middleton, but I find that this pairing of fascination and awareness turns up throughout his canon with the emphasis reversed. Middleton, in other words, appears profoundly fascinated with *exposing* the "fallibility and fragility" of symbolic systems for structuring reality, with playing on or emphasizing the very cultural awareness that Brückner and Poole point out. With the masque scene in *Women Beware Women*, Middleton takes this fascination to a nearly farcical extreme.

Indeed, upon first realizing that he has just witnessed the actual deaths of four courtiers, Middleton's Duke of Florence appears to be far more concerned

157. Although I do not have space or time to explore it in depth here, Brückner and Poole begin by examining the origins of the theatrical or narrative term "plot" in the geodetic sense—a plot of land—that is still in use today. In either sense, these terms work to categorize, organize, and shape reality, and the authors assert that, "in the late 1500s, writers began borrowing from the language of surveying manuals in order to express textual structures" (635). Furthermore, while Brückner and Poole arrive at the statement cited just above based upon their inquiry into these two different kinds of "plot" in the period, their conclusion is almost exactly what I have arrived at in this study by examining the period's conceptual apparatus for categorizing women, at least as it appears in Middleton's plays and poetry.

with the failure of the expected form of the masque and the nuptial celebration than he is with the deaths themselves:

> Upon the first night of our nuptial honours,
> Destruction play her triumph, and great mischiefs
> Masque in expected pleasures! 'Tis prodigious;
> They're things most fearfully ominous; I like 'em not
> Remove these ruined bodies from our eyes. (5.1.208-10)

The "things" that the Duke finds "most fearfully ominous" are not the corpses he orders taken away but rather the "great mischiefs" lurking where cultural convention, dramatic form, and the written language of the plot have indicated only "honours" and "pleasures." For the Duke, these mischiefs therefore suggest, or portend, the possibility that the symbolic apparatus underpinning both his new marriage and even his patriarchal power might be built on similarly shaky foundations. Corinee Guy, like others, sees the masque functioning as a purgative resolution to the lustful excesses depicted throughout the play: "Since marriage cannot contain male passion and female appetite in *Women Beware Women*, society must purge to create a holier state" (159). But, at least in this scene, it is the written language and dramatic form of the masque itself, not merely marriage, that fails to contain the disordered appetites running rampant in the Florentine court.

"My Great Lords, We are All Confounded": Literacy and Print Culture in Middleton's Works

Women Beware Women specifically associates *remarriage* nuptials—even the masque itself had been originally intended for "the first marriage of the Duke" (4.2.204)—with the fallibility and fragility of the precise order that is available in written language, including the plot of a play as well as the period's prescriptive literature, which clearly defined a woman's linear progress through the life stages of maid, wife, and widow. But while the Duke's futile attempt to sort out what is taking place in front of him by reading and rereading the plot illustrates the potential failure of written language to truly describe, much less structure, reality, the scene also presents a satirical depiction of the period's growing dependence on writing and symbols to do just that. Throughout early modern Europe, that is, both literacy and print culture were expanding and developing, thereby granting new stability and potency to the universe of symbols and language that human culture and consciousness superimpose upon the external world. Yet faith in print culture's reifications of the abstract must have been at least somewhat tenuous, not least because Middleton's plays and poetry, as we have seen, so often doubt, disrupt, or dismantle such symbolic constructs. Indeed, all of the readings conducted throughout this study might even be said to argue that Thomas Middleton consistently expected his audiences to be intrigued by the possibility that "great mischiefs" might lurk in the precisely ordered and

"expected" world that was first proposed by the written word and then made stable and ubiquitous by print.

Middleton was unquestionably knowledgeable about the burgeoning print technologies of his time. Citing both his freelance relationship with various theater companies and his activity as a pamphleteer, Jonathan Hope has argued that Middleton possessed an understanding of print culture surpassing that of some better-known contemporaries:

> More than Shakespeare and Jonson, he was required at times to find audiences and markets beyond the theatre-yard. More than them, he was a writer of works *for* the printing press–works commissioned by publishers rather than theatres, whose initial reception would be in the visual form of the printed page" (247)[158]

Indeed, signs of this professional experience can be found throughout the Middleton canon, and three of his works intended specifically "*for* the printing press" actually demonstrate something of a meta-textual self-awareness, an understanding of themselves as printed objects. For instance, in 1603's *The Black Book*—a remarkable "sequel" to Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* in which Lucifer

158. Although I fully agree with Hope's assessment of Middleton's relationship with print, it is certainly complicated by what Sonai Massai calls Middleton's "bibliographical invisibility" (319) due to the fact that he "never displayed a proactive interest in the transmission of his commercial plays into print" (320-1). Yet, as Massai concedes, scholarly opinion varies considerably on the matter (323 n. 5). Indeed, some scholars, such as Cyndia Susan Clegg, argue that "the association of Middleton with particular publishers and printers [. . .] points to significant author involvement in publishing" (Clegg 251). Likewise, Gary Taylor contends that Middleton only shared Heywood's negative opinion of playwrights who make a "double sale" of their work (see my epigraph) up until 1611, when Middleton's "squeamishness [about printing] vanished ("Lives and Afterlives" 43). See also my brief discussion of printed plays in *Hengist*, *King of Kent*, just below.

actually answers Pierce's plea for patronage—the book refers to its own black cover when it asks its reader, "Am I black enough, think you, dressed up in a lasting suit of ink? Do I deserve my dark and pitchy title?" (824-26). In a similar vein, Middleton's 1604 pamphlet, *Father Hubburd's Tales*, begins with an angry, satirical dedication to the miserly "Sir Christopher Clutch-Fist," cautioning him about those "line-sharkers" (17) who have been known to "rail against you in bookseller's shops very dreadfully that you have used them most unknightly in offering to take their books and would never return so much as would pay for the covers" (28-31). Finally, an entry in *The Owl's Almanac* suggests that, in 1618 at least, English printing history was common knowledge: "Some almanacs talk that printing hath been in England not above 156 years, but I find in an old worm-eaten cabalistical author that sheets have been printed in this kingdom above 1000 years before that time" (312-17).[159] This typically Middletonian pun, which conflates the recent advent of the early modern printing shop's "sheets" with the far older "sheets" of the coital bedchamber, even suggests a contemporary sense of print as the defining technology of the age.

Not only in these works that were intended to go directly into print, but also in those intended for performance in the theater, Middleton frequently displays his familiarity with the technical processes and vocabulary of the printing

159. Technically, "*not above* 156 years" is correct, although in 1618 the precise number of years would be 142. For an extended discussion of "Dating the First Books Printed in English," including William Caxton's relocation from Bruges to Westminster, see Chapter Six of N. F. Blake's *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*.

house. Perhaps the best, and most sustained, example of such knowledge turns up in *The Nice Valour*'s comic subplot, which follows the submissive Lepet and his efforts to publish a book entitled *The Uprising of the Kick and the Downfall of the Duello* (327-28).[160] Lepet—who, at one point, is simply *told* that his name "is 'Le Fart' / after the English letter" (4.1.276-77)—tells his assistant to take the "corrected" (4.1.233) proofs of his book back to the printer, specifying where he wishes to see "pica Roman" (4.1.237) and where there should be "*italica*" (4.1.240, 241, 317, 5.3.28). Moreover, Lepet grumbles about the fact that the printer he has hired uses cheap "pot-paper […] / Which had been proper for some drunken pamphlet" (4.1.245-46). And once his book is published, Lepet even expresses authorial frustration about missing out on the financial rewards for his efforts; upon learning that "*Kick* sells gallantly" (5.3.7), Lepet's assistant remarks with palpable cynicism that "'tis the bookseller / That has the money for 'em" (5.3.9-10) and Lepet concurs that his manifesto on how to take a beating will "much enrich the Company of Stationers" (5.3.11). Capitalist culture, to be sure, has long exploited its artists and thinkers.

The fact that a writer like Middleton (or his character, Lepet) was familiar with the early modern book trade should not be too surprising, but a significant number of printing tropes scattered throughout the Middleton canon further

160. *The Nice Valour* had long been attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher based upon its inclusion in a 1647 folio of the collaborators' comedies, but as Gary Taylor explains in his essay on the *Valour*'s inclusion in the Middleton canon, "the history of twentieth-century scholarship on the play's attribution is a history of increasing confidence in Middleton's authorship" (*Companion* 423).

suggests that the playwright expected his audiences would also be familiar with the language and processes of print culture. In *A Mad World, My Masters,* for instance, Penitent Brothel uses "in octavo" (5.1.20) as a synonym for "briefly." Of course, Penitent's metaphor need only reflect the common knowledge of print consumers, but when a character in *Anything for a Quiet Life* declares that he will "turn over a new leaf and hang up the page" (5.2.31) he clearly evokes the methods of print production. Likewise, upon hearing the mention of an old, simmering feud in *The Spanish Gypsy*, Francisco quips that "The volume of those quarrels is too large / And too wide printed in our memory" (3.2.15-16). And when Alonzo de Piracquo dismisses his brother's well-founded misgivings about his impending marriage to Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, he employs an analogy that is firmly rooted in print culture: "If lovers should mark everything a fault, / Affection would be like an ill-set book, / Whose faults might prove as big as half the volume" (2.1.110-12). Finally, in *Hengist, King Of Kent*, a clerk named Aminadab chases off a band of thieves who distract their marks with "a printed play or two they bought at Canterbury / last week for sixpence" (5.1.361-62). And by suggesting the indignities that a printed play could be subjected to—perhaps compared to a theater company's manuscripts divided into parts—Aminadab's disparaging remark helps to shed some light on Middleton's puzzling but apparent

"squeamishness" (Taylor "Lives and Afterlives" 43) about publishing his plays prior to 1611.[161]

The swindling thieves in *Hengist* who perform their plays from cheap texts are nonetheless *literate* swindling thieves, and Linda Woodbridge has noted that literacy was widespread enough in early modern England that period writers usually find "nothing surprising" about "chambermaids, shepherdesses, and harlots who know how to read" ("Add Context" 22). To be sure, the vast majority of the English population remained illiterate (Cressy *Literacy*), but in a Protestant nation with an established secular educational system there was apparently nothing remarkable about people from almost all walks of life who were capable of reading. And the fact that such a diverse cross section of the population—including people as varied as, say, Lady Livia and Leantio's mother—was to some extent literate must have played a pivotal part in shaping the cultural and ideological landscape of the time.

Indeed, many recent theorists and scholars have proposed that literacy alters culture, even cognition itself, in profound ways. "More than any other single invention," as Walter Ong confidently declares in his influential *Orality and Literacy*, "writing has transformed human consciousness" (77). Medievalist Michael Clancy concurs, observing that "literacy is unique among technologies in

161. I might note here that *Hengist*'s list of "Persons of the Play" as reproduced in Oxford's *Collected Works* apparently misspells the clerk's name as "Aminabab" (1451) but then spells the name "Aminadab" throughout the remainder of the text.

penetrating and structuring the intellect itself" (187). Writing, as most versions of this argument go, detaches language from its phenomenological presence in the world, making words, even thoughts, into lasting things that can exist on their own, in artificial independence from the temporal biology of living speakers and listeners. Literacy, that is, makes language, symbols, and abstractions into tangible entities that can even "speak" to us on their own, much like Middleton's *Black Book* commenting on its own inky cover. As the classicist Eric Havelock—who first proposed such theories in the early 1960s—explains, "the alphabet converted the Greek spoken tongue into an artifact, thereby separating it from the speaker and making it into a 'language,' that is, an object available for inspection, reflection, analysis" (*Literate Revolution* 7-8).[162] Havelock's understanding of this objectifying power of the phonetic alphabet might also help to distinguish these theories on literacy from the cruder linguistic relativism proposed by Benjamin Lee Whorf. While literacy does not necessarily create cognitive processes, that is, it does reify abstractions that are otherwise insubstantial, ethereal, and impossible to hold. Only the pen, as Shakespeare's Duke Theseus puts it in *A Midsummer*

162. In this paragraph and the next, I survey a theoretical field concerned with manuscript and print culture that can safely be said to begin with Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963). The brief survey in my main text touches on some of the most prominent names in the field: Havelock, Ong, Clancy, McLuhan, Eisenstein, and Chartier. Other significant contributors to this field include David Olson—who has argued that "we live not in the world so much as in the world as it is represented to us in [literate] artifacts" (xiii)—and the social anthropologist Jack Goody, who, like Ong and Clancy, sees the acquisition of writing as "transforming the nature of cognitive processes" (18). There are, of course, many others, and for another overview of the field, including some thoughtful objections, see Linda Woodbridge's "Add Context and Stir, or, the Sadness of Grendel: Thoughts on Early Modern Orality and Literacy," particularly 23-25.

Night's Dream, "gives to aery nothing / A local habitation and a name" (5.1.16-17).

While the chisel, brush, stylus, and pen had been performing such metaphysical conjuring for many millennia by the time that Shakespeare and Middleton were born, chirographic forms of literacy remained the specialized tool of the aristocratic and monastic elite up until Johannes Gutenberg's famous invention of movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century. The printing press thus broke open a longstanding coterie of the literate, and by fostering "print culture" it further asserted the logic of symbols and language in the world, even for those who remained illiterate. As Roger Chartier has argued, the growing ubiquity of printed language "modified practices of devotion, of entertainment, of information, and of knowledge, and redefined men's and women's relations with the sacred, with power, and with their community" (1). Furthermore, the rapid, plentiful, and precise reproduction of print granted writing and language a degree of permanence and stability that had never been possible with handwritten manuscripts. "The mechanization of the scribal art," as Marshall McLuhan puts it, "made possible a product that was uniform and as repeatable as a scientific experiment" (153).

Yet there is something of a paradox to this simile from McLuhan's foundational *Gutenberg Galaxy,* in that the term of comparison, "a scientific experiment," is itself only possible through the fixity of language and symbols put

into print. As Elizabeth Eisenstein proposes in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*—the definitive volume on early modern print culture—print made the modern scientific method possible by stabilizing and preserving language and symbols. In early modern Europe, says Eisenstein,

> A new confidence in the accuracy of mathematical constructions, figures, and numbers was predicated on a method of duplication that transcended older limits imposed by time and space and that presented identical data in identical form to men who were otherwise divided by cultural and geographical frontiers. (699)[163]

Print was *the* transformative technology of the early modern era, and it brought about a new level of confidence in constructs forged of language and symbols.[164]

For Middleton and other early modern writers, the permanence and durability that print technologies and culture granted language and symbols also enabled, or at least reinforced, a poetic *conceit* in which writing and print could

163. Elsewhere, Eisenstein engages in a fascinating discussion of just how print bestows this greater permanence on language and symbols through free distribution as opposed to tight security. Citing Thomas Jefferson's understanding of "the preservative powers of print" (115), Eisenstein explains that, in the eighteenth century, people were just beginning to grasp "the notion that valuable data could be preserved best by being made public, rather than by being kept secret," an idea that "ran counter to tradition, led to clashes with new censors, and was central both to early-modern science and to Enlightenment thought" (116). To my mind, this particular moment in Eisenstein's study provides the most vivid illustration of the kind of subtle but profound cultural and ideological changes that print, like other new technologies, can bring about.

164. The shift from manuscript to print culture in the early modern period also closely parallels the aesthetic shift from grotesque to classical imagery which Mikhail Bakhtin has identified. Manuscript characters, that is, are necessarily varied, imperfect, and blended into their surroundings; printed characters, on the other hand, rarely exhibit such qualities and instead grant language and symbols the same static, standardized, and distinct appearance as the chiseled, classical body image. Therefore, in printed literature of the Renaissance, both the subject depicted *and* the visible medium of language itself itself became more defined, individuated, and aligned with "the aesthetics of the ready made and the completed" (Bakhtin 25). One might also note that the technology of print separates the written word from the body, from biology, and from the ecological—no traces remain of the living hands that, for millennia, had been required to reproduce writing.

offer a male version of *conception* to rival the mysterious biological powers of the maternal womb. The notion turns up throughout Shakespeare's "procreation sonnets," which often blur the productive capacities of the printing press and the male writer's pen with those of the female womb. In the final couplet of sonnet 11, for instance, the processes of printing and regeneration metaphorically blend into one another when, to combat "age and cold decay" (6), the speaker urges the young man to "print more, not let that copy die" (14). And although the speaker begins to depart from his procreative theme with the well-known sonnet 18, he nonetheless claims that the young man will be preserved by the "eternal lines" (12) of the printed sonnet itself: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (13-14).[165] In its claim for the life-giving power of language as well as its metapoetic depiction of the poet's writing, sonnet 18 also echoes the first sonnet in Sir Philip Sidney's earlier sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*. In this poem, while "biting [his] truant pen" (13), Sidney's speaker graphically compares his writing to childbirth: "Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes" (12).

And, as we have seen in Chapter Two, Thomas Middleton makes a similar claim about his poetic conception of *The Ghost of Lucrece*'s "infant lines" (9) while actively fashioning himself a writer in the shadow of his forbears. Likewise,

165. The "lines," of course, could have been intended to circulate in manuscript, but in Helen Vendler's marvelously close reading of the *Sonnets*, she detects an eye rhyme in these lines that (if intentional) reveals Shakespeare's dazzling anticipation of this sonnet's appearance in print: "in the Quarto spelling, *lines* and *liues* differ only by the turning upside-down of one letter" (122).

Women Beware Women contains an exchange between the two primary playwrights-within-the-play, Livia and Guardiano, which alludes to the connections between biological, cognitive, and literary conception. When Guardiano proposes the masque's "mischiefs acted / Under the privilege of a marriage-triumph" (4.2.163-64), Livia responds, "I *conceive* you, sir, / Even to a longing for performance on't. / And here behold some *fruits*" (4.2.167-69, emphasis added).[166] Perhaps Middleton's most stunning use of the conception conceit, however, occurs in the earlier *Trick to Catch The Old One,* when Witgood conceives the trick in which Jane will perform the part of the wealthy Widow Meddler and declares, "What trick is not an embryo at first, / Until a perfect shape come over it?" (1.1.57-58). Witgood's figuring of his male mind's invention as an "embryo" pushes the period conceit to a corporeal extreme, and Jane, his courtesan and co-conspirator, runs with it: "Though you beget, 'tis I must help to breed. / Speak what is't? I'd fain conceive it" (1.1.61-62).[167] But while Jane's reply picks up on and continues Witgood's rather unsubtle metaphor, it also

166. Here, as elsewhere, the play seems focused on the multiple senses of "conceive." The Ward, for instance, later echoes Livia's exact phrasing when Guardiano directs him on the performance of the plan to murder Hippolito in the masque: "Now I conceive you, guardianer" (5.1.23). Earlier, the play similarly associates "conception" with pregnancy and deception or mischiefs when Leantio learns that the Duke has seen Bianca at the window and declares, "Oh there quickened / The mischief of this hour!" (3.1.233-34). Having already been raped by the Duke, Bianca responds to her husband with an obvious pun: "If you call't mischief; / It is a thing I fear I am conceived with"(3.1.234-35).

167. According to *OED, "*embryo," noun 2a ("fig. A thing [material or immaterial] in its most basic or rudimentary form, showing potential to develop"), the earliest known use of embryo in this figurative sense appears in Thomas Draxe's *Churches Securitie* from 1608. While *Trick* was also *published* in 1608, it was surely composed and performed prior to its publication, and Taylor's Oxford edition proposes 1605 as the date of composition. Considering both Middleton's greater literary and historical stature compared to Draxe and the near certainty that Witgood's line was penned before 1608, I have submitted the citation and supporting commentary to the editors of *OED.*

underscores the simple fact that male writing or thoughts can only "beget" or "conceive" within a patriarchal universe of language and symbols. While the rising technology and culture of print might have made such double entendres *feel* like reality in the early modern period, in the tangible and indispensable world of nature and the flesh women must always "help to breed."

Jane also provides one final example of Middleton's obsession with the arbitrary and constructed nature of female social identities. In *Trick*, that is, Witgood paradoxically—although not ironically—labels his female co-conspirator both a "whore" (5.2.12, 111) and a "virgin" (5.2.160), and Jane herself feigns the identity of a "rich country widow" (1.1.64) in order to attract a marriage proposal from Witgood's uncle, Walkadine Hoard. But when the play concludes, Jane resolves to perform the role of wife in earnest, and "Mistress Jane Hoard" (4.4.82-83) vows to never return to her unmarried, disreputable past (5.2.164-85). Such Middletonian deconstructions of female social identity have been firmly at the core of this dissertation, and I hope my work will contribute to further considerations of similarly repressive and restrictive cultural identities and constructions—whether in early modernity, in times since, or in times to come. Moreover, I intend to continue developing my view of the modern human being's ongoing conceptual alienation from the indispensable and enveloping world of nature and the flesh. As my analysis of Middleton and print culture in this conclusion demonstrates, this ideological separation can be traced back to a

moment of great intensification (though not origin) rooted in the technological developments of early modern Europe. Philosopher and ecologist David Abram agrees, noting that "the printing press, and the dissemination of uniformly printed texts that it made possible, ushered in the Enlightenment and the profoundly detached view of 'nature' that was to prevail in the modern period" (138). And today, in what might be the final moments of modernity, we are witnessing a shift from print to digital culture that mirrors the early modern transition from manuscript to print.[168] At our present historical moment, then, symbols and language are once again becoming a more enduring, prominent, and integral part of everyday life. I hope my analysis of Thomas Middleton's disruptions of symbolic order through his consistent portrayals of "disordered appetites" therefore proves fresh and relevant today and that it will continue to do so well into the future.

168. Ong's *Orality and Literacy* once again proves useful here, noting that "the technological inventions of writings, print, and electronic verbalization, in their historical effects, are connected with and have helped bring about a certain kind of alienation within the human lifeworld" (17)

APPENDIX
On the Slippage of Symbolic Identity in Catherine of Aragon's Tudor Marriages

Although it took place about a half-century before the birth of Thomas Middleton, Henry VIII's "divorce" from Catherine of Aragon surely engages with, and contributes to, the same cultural forces and anxieties that I consider throughout this study of Middleton and early modern culture. Indeed, J.J. Scarisbrick links the "great matter" to the print technologies and humanist ideologies developing at the outset of the sixteenth century: "[The divorce] was the sort of competition in scriptural exegesis which the printing press and the recent renewal of Greek and Hebrew studies made easy, and to some, highly congenial" (164). Because the arguments for and against the split centered on what, exactly, made a woman into a wife, the debate brought questions about the substantiality and stability of this female identity to the forefront of English political and ecclesiastical affairs. Decades before the congenial competition, Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon required a papal dispensation because Catherine had already been the wife of Arthur Tudor, but the elder prince died only months after that wedding. Pope Julius II granted the dispensation, specifically lifting the impediment to this new marriage between the teenage widow and her dead husband's brother. In a few decades, though, frustrated with Catherine's inability to produce a healthy male heir and enamored with a young

Anne Boleyn, Henry determined to break free from his marriage to Catherine. In a world without divorce, the only possible way to do so was by arguing that the second marriage was invalid because of the first, and that Julius's dispensation somehow failed to remove an impediment imposed by God. As G.W. Bernard recounts, the central, enduring question turned out to be "whether marriage contracted and solemnised in lawful age per verba de presenti (by the words of those present) and without carnal copulation be marriage before god or not" (22). Was the marital knot tied verbally, or corporeally? Had Catherine "really" been the wife of Henry's brother?

From the start of the matter, the royal couple themselves prompted these questions with their public claims. As Geoffrey Elton puts it, "the queen made a deep impression by her impassioned pleas and steadfast bearing; Henry endeavoured to prove that her marriage to Arthur had been consummated, which she denied" (119). Non-consummation, both sides reasoned, would mean that conclusive marital affinity was never quite achieved in the first marriage, and therefore the second, completed marriage was perfectly valid under both natural and positive, ecclesiastical law. On the other hand, if consummated, the first marriage was not only completed, but Henry had been distastefully enjoying himself with the female flesh that his brother had already known. Although Catherine's claim of virgin widowhood could seem farfetched, and the papal dispensation addressed a consummated union with Arthur, disagreeing with the

queen about what happened to her own body in dark bedchambers nearly thirty years earlier still proved difficult. But Henry's advisors soon glimpsed an opportunity to turn Catherine's method of resistance against her and concocted a canon law argument actually based on the non-consummation of the first marriage. Cardinal Wolsey, with a keen understanding of canon law, realized that the marriage between Henry and Catherine could be declared invalid by *conceding* that the first marriage was unconsummated. In that case, the papal dispensation issued in 1503 failed to specifically dispense with the symbolic, legal arrangements that occurred in Arthur and Catherine's official betrothal and marriage contract. Scarisbrick explains:

> Lacking full grasp of canon law, Catherine has unwittingly exposed herself to a terrible threat. If there had been no *capula carnis*, as she asserted, there had been no affinity; but there had been the diriment impediment of public honesty, with which the bull does not seem to have dealt. (194)[169]

The proposed tactic, despite its basis in abstract, complicated canon law, presented a credible challenge to the validity of Henry's marriage. Henry, however, took little interest in this legal technicality. In Scarisbrick's view, the

169. To explain further, the 1503 dispensation permitted Henry and Catherine to marry despite the affinity created by physically consummating the marriage to Arthur. Normally, such dispensations would be presumed to remove both the impediment of affinity and the impediment of public honesty, which would be created by the betrothal, contract, and verbal consent leading up to that consummation. Wolsey saw that incorrectly dispensing with affinity in an *unconsummated* marriage would *not* include the impediment of public honesty. Scarisbrick devotes an entire chapter to the complex subtleties of canon law in the matter (163-97).

argument that Wolsey supplied for Henry was “a better case than the ones he actually presented,” but Henry simply “did not grasp it” (183). Perhaps, though, Henry deserves far more credit than the historian gives him, at least for understanding his public image and cultural environment.

Rather than proposing that Pope Julius failed to file the correct paperwork, as Wolsey recommended, Henry wanted to secure a more convincing and less debatable claim of invalidity with observable effects in the physical, corporeal world. For the king, the steady stream of stillborn and short-lived infants that came from Catherine’s womb provided all the necessary, tangible, and very public proof that the marriage was unnatural, forbidden. Everyone could see that the couple suffered divine punishment according to the Levitical warning that “if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless” (Lev. 20:21). Of course, the healthy princess Mary presented an unmistakable exception to this rule, so Henry had to engage in some hermeneutic sleight of hand and read “childless” as “sonless.” Yet doing so, and sticking to the claim that the marriage violated the natural and divine law revealed in Leviticus still appeared a far more desirable and powerful option than taking issue with technicalities of the papal dispensation. According to Elton, the king preferred this course because “he was convinced in his conscience that his marriage to Catherine had been a great sin,” and when he “told the cardinal, the pope, and the world that his conscience was violently troubled by the

illegality of his marriage, he was not being hypocritical" (101). Perhaps Henry did genuinely believe what he told the world, but he also understood that this world had only tentative faith in symbolic abstractions expunged from the material world.[170] In order to be secure, in order to guard against any future legal arguments as deft as Wolsey's, Henry's case for the annulment needed verification in material reality.

Then again, as Henry's argument developed, it also began to assert the dominance of spoken or written language over that archaic, maternal world of the flesh. The squabble over Catherine and Arthur's bedroom activities, complicated by the fact the Henry had previously "said that Catherine had came to him a virgin" (Scarisbrick 188), still proved messy and unwinnable. And so, the Henrician court did eventually grant Catherine's claim that her marriage to Arthur was never consummated, but it did not take up Wolsey's proposal that only the impediment of public honesty—created solely by the written language and utterances of the betrothal and marriage contract—endured. Instead, the English now argued that the exact same language and symbols which created the impediment of public honesty *also* created the impediment of affinity, a relation

170. That is, I see the printing press as technology that moved human life somewhat further into symbolic, abstract reality than ever before, and Henry felt compelled to make a case that wasn't entirely in that reality. A few other examples, outside the period and more concrete, of such reluctance to give up outmoded ways of life might help explain. For one, I am most powerfully reminded of the habit lingering, in the nineteenth-century, of equipping steamships with unneeded sails. Much more recently, I think of the twentieth-first-century homeowners reluctant to give up on "land lines," which they never use because of mobile devices. In all three cases, I think, moving forward with new technology feels unsafe.

that the rest of the world mistakenly believed to result only from physical consummation. G.W. Bernard describes Henry's new tack:

> In September 1531 Edward Foxe returned from Paris where he had worked as hard as possible to persuade the university that, even if Prince Arthur had not consummated his marriage to the queen, the pope could still not issue a dispensation allowing the second marriage, on the grounds that it was verbal consent, and not consummation, that made a marriage. The king had sent Foxe to secure such a determination, accepting that Catherine was indeed a virgin when he married her. (22)[171]

Or, as Eric Josef Carlson sums it up, Henry now contended that "affinity was created not by coitus but by marriage contract" (68). In this new theory of marriage, *words* create permanent affinity that could make a marriage as sinful and as generatively problematic as consanguinity, and, clearly, this was the case for Catherine and Henry. Since, according to Henry, language and symbols effectively impact and reshape the archaic world of flesh, Catherine's decades-old vows to a dead brother could snuff out the lives of his unborn and infant sons.[172] In Henry's view, then, the world of words creates or commands the world of things.

---

171. 'This matrimony contracted per verba de presenti is perfect matrimony before god' Cranmer pronounced" (22).
172. Henry's assertions about human biological reproduction seem charmingly at odds with our own twenty-first scientific and medical knowledge . . . until we recall U.S. Representative Todd Akin's comments in August of 2012: "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." (John Elgion and Michael Schwritz. "Senate Candidate Provokes Ire With 'Legitimate Rape' Comment." *The New York Times.* 19 August 2012. www.nytimes.com. Accessed 3 March 2013.)

Works Cited

Abel, Lionel. *Metatheatre; A New View of Dramatic Form*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1963. Print.

Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997. Print.

Amster, Mara. "Frances Howard and Middeton and Rowley's *The Changeling*: Trials, Tests, and the Legibility of the Virgin Body." *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*. Eds. Laurel Amtower and Dorothy Kehler. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies: 2003. 211-32. Print.

Aydemir, Cumhur, Mustafa Basaran, and Deniz Usal. "Hymen Sparing Surgery for Imperforate Hymen: Case Reports and Review of Literature." *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Aynecology* 22 (2009): 61-4. Print.

Bachofen, Johann Jakob. *An English Translation of Bachofen's Mutterrecht (Mother Right)*. Trans. David Partenheimer. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005. Print.

Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.

Balter, Michael. *The Goddess and the Bull*. New York: Free Press, 2005. Print.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1970. Print.

Bawcutt, N.W. *The Changeling, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. Print.

Bellany, Alastair James. *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1666*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

Bellwood, Peter S. *The First Farmers: The Origins of Agricultural Societies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Print.

Belsey, Catherine. "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies." *Alternative Shakespeares.* Ed. John Drakakis. Routledge, 2002. 170-194. Print.

Berggren, Paula S. "'A Prodigious Thing': The Jacobean Heroine in Male Desire." *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Vol. 149.* Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau.Gale, 2008. 7-17. Print.

Berman, Morris. *The Reenchantment of the World*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981. Print.

Bernard, G. W. *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. Print.

Bicks, Caroline. *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. Print.

Blackwell, Bonnie. "Tristram Shandy and the Theater of the Mechanical Mother." *ELH* 68.1 (2001): 81-133. Print.

Blake, Norman F. *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. Rio Grande, OH: The Hambledon Press, 1991. Print.

Blank, Hanne. *Virgin: The Untouched History*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print.

Blank, Paula. *Shakespeare and the Mismeasure of Renaissance Man*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 2006. Print.

Blomkvist, Anna, et al. "The Experience and Responses of Swedish Health Professionals to Patients Requesting Virginity Restoration (Hymen Repair)." *Reproductive Health Matters* 18.35 (2010) 38. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.

Boehrer, Bruce. “Middleton and Ecological Change.” Taylor and Henley 571-87.

Bordo, Susan. *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. Albany: SUNY UP, 1987. Print.

Brandon, David. *Stand and Deliver! A History of Highway Robbery*. Briscombe: The History Press, 2001. Print.

Brayton, Daniel. *Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. Print.

Brodsky, Vivien. “Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientation.” *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure.* Eds. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard Smith, and Keith Wrightson. New York: Blackwell, 1986. Print.

Bromham, A. A., and Zara Bruzzi. *The Changeling and the Years of Crisis, 1619-1624: A Hieroglyph of Britain*. London: Pinter, 1990. Print.

Bromley, Laura G. "The Lost Lucrece: Middleton's the Ghost of Lucrece." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 21.3 (1985): 258-74. Print.

Brown, Richard Danson. "'A Talkatiue Wench (Whose Words a World Hath Delighted in)': Mistress Shore and Elizabethan Complaint." *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language.* 49.196 (1998): 395-415. Print.

Brückner, Martin, and Kristen Poole. "The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama, and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England." *ELH* 69.3 (2002): 617-48. Print.

Bryant, Levi. (2011, September 10). Wilderness Ontology: CUNY Talk [Web log post]. Retrieved from https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/

Bucknill, John Charles. *The Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare*. London: Longman & Co., 1860. Google Books. 2 April 2015.

Burks, Deborah G. "'I'll Want My Will Else': The Changeling and Women's Complicity with their Rapists." *ELH* 62.4 (1995): 759-90. Print.

Burt, Richard. “Thomas Middleton, Uncut: Castration, Censorship, and the Regulation of Dramatic Discourse in Early Modern England.” Taylor and Lavagnino *Companion* 182-94. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Calderwood, James L. *Shakespearean Metadrama;the Argument of the Play in Titus Andronicus, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Richard II*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971. Print.

Callaghan, Dympna. *Shakespeare without Women :Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Campana, Joseph. “Middleton as Poet.” Taylor and Henley 469-86.

Campbell, Gordon Lindsay, and Titus Lucretius Carus. *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De Rerum Natura, Book Five, Lines 772-1104*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. Print.

Carlson, Eric Josef. *Marriage and the English Reformation*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994. Print.

Carroll, William. "Middleton's Life." *Thomas Middleton: Four Plays*. By Middleton. Ed. William Carroll. London: Metheun Drama, 2012. Print.

---. Introduction. *Women Beware Women.* By Thomas Middleton. Ed. William Carroll. New York: W. W. Norton, 1994. Print.

---. "The Virgin Not: Language and Sexuality in Shakespeare." *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*. Eds. Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps. London: Verso, 1995. Print.

Cauvin, Jacques. *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture.* Trans. Trevor Watkins. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.

Cavallo, Sandra and Lyndan Warner. *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. New York: Pearson, 1999. Print.

Chakravorty, Swapan. *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Print.

Chartier, Roger. "General Introduction: Print Culture." *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Andrew F. G. Bourke, Roger Chartier, and Lydia G. Cochrane. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989. Print.

Clanchy, M. T. *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993. Print.

Clark, Ira. "The Widow Hunt on the Tudor-Stuart Stage." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41.2 (2001): 399-416. Print.

Clegg, Cyndia Susan. "'Twill Much Enrich the Company of Stationers': Thomas Middleton and the London Book Trade, 1580-1627." Taylor and Lavagnino *Companion* 247-59.

Crane, Mary Thomas. "Male Pregnancy and Cognitive Permeability in Measure for Measure." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.3 (1998): 269-92. Print.

Cressy, David. *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1980. Print.

---. *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Crosby, Alfred W. *The Measure of Reality :Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.

Daileader, Celia. "Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and the Masculine Grotesque." Taylor and Henley 452-468. Print.

---. "'Writing Rape, Raping Rites' Shakespeare's and Middleton's Lucrece Poems." *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England*. Ed. Joseph Ward. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 67-90. Print.

Danson, Lawrence and Ivo Kamps. Introduction. *The Phoenix*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 91-94.

Davis, Susan E. and Margo DeMello. *Stories Rabbits Tell*. New York: Lantern Books, 2003 (293). Print.

Dawson, Anthony B. "Women Beware Women and the Economy of Rape." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 27.2 (1987): 303-20. Print.

Desens, Marliss C. *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994. Print.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Print.

Donaldson, Ian. *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. Print.

Drayton, Michael. *The Works of Michael Drayton*. Ed. J. William Hebel. Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press by Blackwell, 1961. Print.

Dubrow, Heather. *A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamium*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990. Print.

Eccles, Mark. "Thomas Middleton a Poett." *Studies in Philology*. 54.4 (1957): 516-36. Print.

Eisenberg, Evan. *The Ecology of Eden*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998. Print.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1979. Print.

Eliot, T. S. *The Annotated Waste Land, with T.S. Eliot's Contemporary Prose*. Ed. Lawrence Rainey. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. Print.

---. "Thomas Middleton." *The Times Literary Supplement.* 30 June 1927: 445-46. Print.

Eller, Cynthia. *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000. Print.

Elton, G. R. *England Under the Tudors*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Engle, Lars. "Middleton and Mimetic Desire." Taylor and Henley 437-451.

Erickson, Amy Louise. *Women and Property in Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Ewbank, Inga-Stina. "Realism and Morality in Women Beware Women." *Essays and Studies* 22 (1969): 57-70. Print.

Feldmann, Doris and Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador. "Lost Plays: A Brief Account." Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 328-33.

Ferguson, Margaret W., Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers. *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Print.

Fink, Bruce. *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Ecrits Closely*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Print.

---. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2013. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Print.

Foyster, Elizabeth. "Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: The Male Perspective." Cavallo and Warner 108-24.

Freud, Sigmund. *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. Ed. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1970. Print.

Froide, Amy M. *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.

Frost, David L. *The School of Shakespeare: The Influence of Shakespeare on English Drama 1600-42*. London: Cambridge UP, 1968. Print.

---. Introduction. *The Selected Plays of Thomas Middleton.* By Middleton. Ed. David L. Frost. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. Print.

Fudge, Erica. *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern Culture*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000. Print.

Gaard, Greta, ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. Print.

Garber, Marjorie. "The Insincerity of Women." *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. Print.

---. *Symptoms of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.

---. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Gardner, Ross. Letter to the author. 21 April 2014.

Gimbutas, Marija. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007. Print.

---. *The Language of the Goddess :Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1989. Print.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.

Goody, Jack. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print.

Gossett, Suzanne. *Thomas Middleton in Context*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

Gowing, Laura. "Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London." *History Workshop* 35 (1993): 1-21. Print.

Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess :A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1948. Print.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.

Greenstadt, Amy. "'Read it in Me': The Author's Will in Lucrece." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.1 (2006): 45-70. Print.

Griffin, Susan. “Ecofeminism and Meaning.” Warren 213-226.

Griffiths, J. Gwyn. “Archeology and Hesiod’s Five Ages.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 17.1 (1956): 109-19. Print.

---. “Did Hesiod Invent the ‘Golden Age?’” *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 19.1 (1958): 91-93. Print.

Guy, Corinee. "Dekker and Middleton's Carnivalized Societies and the Sexually Grotesque in the Honest Whore, Part 1 and 2 and Women Beware Women." *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 127-61. Print.

Gwilliam, Tassie. "Female Fraud: Counterfeit Maidenheads in the Eighteenth Century." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6.4 (1996): 518-48. Print.

Haber, Judith. *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Harlan, Jack R. *Crops & Man*. 2nd ed. Madison, WI: American Society of Agronomy, 1992. Print.

Havelock, Eric Alfred. *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1982. Print.

---. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963. Print.

Hazlitt, William. "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth." *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*. Eds. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover. Vol. 5. New York: McClure, Phillips, & Co., 1902. Print.

Heinemann, Margot. *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1980. Print.

Helgerson, Richard. *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.

Heller, Herbert Jack. *Penitent Brothelers: Grace, Sexuality, and Genre in Middleton's City Comedies*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2000. Print.

Henderson, Katherine and Barbara F. McManus. *Half Humankind :Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print.

Hesiod. *Theogony and Works and Days*. Eds. Henry Weinfield and Catherine Schlegel. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. Print.

Heywood, Thomas. *The Rape of Lucrece*. London: I. Busby, 1608. Early English Books Online. Web. 10 October 2014.

Hillman, David. "Visceral Knowledge." *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*. Eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Höfele, Andreas. *Stage, Stake, and Scaffold: Humans and Animals in Shakespeare's Theatre*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

Holmes, David M. *The Art of Thomas Middleton: A Critical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970. Print.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Translated Out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared &

Revised, King James Version. New York, N.Y.: American Bible Society, 2010. Print.

Hope, Jonathan. “Middletonian Stylistics.” Taylor and Henley 247-63.

Hopkins, Lisa. "Beguiling the Master of the Mystery: Form and Power in The Changeling." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*. Ed. John Pitcher. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997. Print.

Hornby, Richard. *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*. Bucknell UP, 1986. Print.

Howard, Jean E. *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Hutchings, Mark. “Thomas Middleton, Chronologer of his Time.” Gossett 17-27.

Irigaray, Luce. *The Irigaray Reader*. Ed. Margaret. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Print.

---. *This Sex which is Not One*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985. Print.

Jacobs, Kathryn. *Marriage Contracts from Chaucer to the Renaissance Stage*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. Print.

Jaggar, Alison and Susan Bordo, eds. *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989. Print.

Jardine, Lisa. “Boy Actors, Female Roles, and Elizabethan Eroticism.” Kastan and Stallybrass 57-67.

---. “Twins and Travesties: Gender, Dependency, and Sexual Availability in *Twelfth Night*.” Zimmerman 27-38.

Jed, Stephanie H.. *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.

Jellerson, Donald. "Haunted History and the Birth of the Republic in Middleton's Ghost of Lucrece." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 53.1 (2011): 53-82. Print.

Johnston, Patricia. *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age: A Study of the Georgics.* Leyden: Brill, 1980. Print.

Jonson, Ben. *Four Comedies*. Ed. Helen Ostovich. New York: Longman, 1997. Print.

Joubert, Laurent. *The Second Part of the Popular Errors*. Trans. Gregory de Rocher. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995. Print.

Jowett, John. Introduction. *Women Beware Women*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1488-92.

Karim-Cooper, Farah. "Disguise and Identity in the Plays of Middleton." Gossett 279-86.

Kastan, David Scott and Peter Stallybrass, eds. *Staging The Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Kehler, Dorothea. *Shakespeare's Widows*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Keller, Eve. *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England*. University of Washington Press, 2007. Print.

Kelly, Kathleen Coyne. *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Kerrigan, John, ed. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the 'Female Complaint*.' New York: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

King, Ynestra. "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism." Jaggar and Bordo 115-41.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980. Print.

---. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. Print.

Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Ed. Phillip Edwards. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002. Print.

---. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.

Lake, David. *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays: Internal Evidence for the Major Problems of Authorship*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1975.

Laqueur, Thomas Walter. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

---. "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology." *Representations* 14 (1986): 1-41. Print.

Levine, Laura. *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.

Levine, Robert Trager. *A Critical Edition of Thomas Middleton's the Widow*. Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1975. Print.

Lewis-Williams, J. David, and David Pearce. *Inside the Neolithic Mind: Consciousness, Cosmos and the Realm of the Gods*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005. Print.

Lindley, David. *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Linthicum, M. Channing. *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963. Print.

Little, Arthur L. "'Transshaped' Women: Virginity and Hysteria in the Changeling." *Madness in Drama.* Ed. James Redmond. Cambridge UP, 1993. 19-42. Print.

Livy, and Valerie M. Warrior. *The History of Rome, Books 1-5*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006. Print.

Loughlin, Marie H. *Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1997. Print.

Luttfring, Sara. “Bodily Narratives and the Politics of Virginity in *The Changeling* and the Essex Divorce.” *Renaissance Drama*. 39 (2011): 97-128. Print.

Malcolmson, Cristina. “‘As Tame as the Ladies’: Politics and Gender in *The Changeling.” Revenge Tragedy*. Ed. Stevie Simkin. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 142-62. Print.

Marlowe, Christopher. *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. London: Cambridge UP, 1973. Print.

Massai, Sonia. “Invisible Middleton and the Bibliographical Context.” Gossett 317-24.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto UP, 1962. Print.

Mehl, Dieter. *Elizabethan Dumb Show; the History of a Dramatic Convention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966. Print.

Menefee, Samuel Pyeatt. *Wives for Sale*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981. Print.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980. Print.

Middleton, Thomas. *The Black Book.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 204-218.

---. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 905-58.

---. *Father Hubburd's Tales.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 164-82.

---. *A Game at Chess.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1831-85.

---. *The Ghost of Lucrece.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1985-98.

---. *Hengist, King of Kent.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1448-87.

---. *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 779-832.

---. *The Owl's Almanac.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1271-1302.

---. *The Phoenix.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 91-127.

---. *The Puritan Widow.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 509-42.

---. *A Mad World, My Masters.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 414-51.

---. *More Dissemblers Besides Women.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1034-73.

---. *Michaelmas Term.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 334-72.

---. *Microcynicon.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1970-84.

---. *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 543-93.

---. *A Trick to Catch the Old One.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 373-413.

---. *The Widow.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1074-1123.

---. *The Witch.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1124-64.

---. *Women Beware Women.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1488-1542.

--- and Thomas Dekker. *The Roaring Girl.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 721-78.

--- and Thomas Dekker. *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 280-327.

--- and William Rowley. *The Changeling.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1632-78.

--- and William Rowley. *A Fair Quarrel.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1209-50.

--- and William Rowley. *Wit at Several Weapons.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 980-1026.

--- and John Webster. *Anything for a Quiet Life.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1593-1631.

---, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and John Webster. *The Spanish Gypsy.* Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1723-65.

Montrose, Louis Adrian. *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Print.

---. "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." *Representations* 2 (1983): 61-94. Print.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010. Print.

Munro, Lucy. “Middleton and Caroline Theatre.” Taylor and Henley 164-80.

Neill, Michael. "'Hidden Malady': Death, Discovery, and Indistinction in *The Changeling*." *Renaissance Drama* 22 (1991): 95-121. Print.

Newton, Stella Mary. *Renaissance Theatre Costume and the Sense of the Historic Past*. London: Rapp & Whiting, 1975. Print.

O’Connor, Marion. Introduction. *The Witch*. By Middleton. Eds. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1124-28.

Olson, David R. *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. Print.

---. "Nobody's Perfect: Or, Why did the English Stage Take Boys for Men?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.1 (1989): 7-29. Print.

---. "The Subtexts of the *Roaring Girl*." Zimmerman 12-26.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010. Print.

---. *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Ed. Madeleine Forey. Trans. Arthur Golding. Baltimore.: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002. Print.

Panek, Jennifer. *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

---. "Women's Life Stages: Maid, Wife, Widow (Whore)." Gossett 271-78.

Parker, Patricia. "Cassio, Cash, and the 'Infidel O': Arithmetic, Double-Entry Bookkeeping, and Othello's Unfaithful Accounts." *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion.* Ed. Jyotsna G. Singh.Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 223-241. Print.

Paster, Gail Kern. *The Body Embarrassed :Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993. Print.

Patterson, Annabel. Introduction. *The Changeling*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1632-36.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Rackin, Phyllis. "Shakespeare's Crossdressing Comedies." *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, The Comedies*. Eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. 114-36. Print.

Randall, Dale B. J. “The Rank and Earthy Background of Certain Physical Symbols in ‘The Duchess of Malfi.’” *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 177-203. Print.

---. "Some Observations on the Theme of Chastity in *The Changeling*." *English Literary Renaissance* 14.3 (1984): 347-66. Print.

Reynolds, John. *The Triumphs of God’s Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Wilful and Premeditated Murther.* London: C. Griffin, 1704. Google Books. Web. 2 April 2015.

Ricks, Christopher. "The Moral and Poetical Structure of *The Changeling*." *Essays in Criticism* 10 (1960): 290-306. Print.

Rieger, Gabriel. *Sex and Satiric Tragedy in Early Modern England*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. Print.

Ringer, Mark. *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. Print.

Rose, Mary Beth. "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*." *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Volume 149.* Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Gale, 2008. 17-28. Print.

Rotman, B. *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. Print.

Rountree, Kathryn. "Archaeologists and Goddess Feminists at Çatalhöyük: An Experiment in Multivocality." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23.2 (2007): 7-26. Print.

Rowe, Katherine. *Dead Hands :Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999. Print.

Saccio, Peter. Introduction. *A Mad World, My Masters*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 414-17.

Scarisbrick, J. J. *Henry VIII*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. Print.

Schwarz, Kathryn. "The Wrong Question: Thinking through Virginity." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13.2 (2002): 1-34. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. 2nd ed. Eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. New York: Oxford, 2005. Print.

Shand, G. B. Introduction. *The Ghost of Lucrece*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1985-88.

Shannon, Laurie. "Poor, Bare, Forked: Animal Sovereignty, Human Negative Exceptionalism, and the Natural History of 'King Lear.'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.2 (2009): 168-96. Print.

Sidney, Philip.*The Major Works*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. Print. Oxford World's Classics. Print.

Simkins, Ronald. "Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth." *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*. Ed. Athalya Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. 32-52. Print.

Simmons, J. L. "Diabolical Realism in Middleton and Rowley's the Changeling." *Renaissance Drama* 11 (1980): 135-70. Print.

Smith, G. C. Moore, ed. *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia*. Stratford-Upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head, 1913. Print.

Spenser, Edmund, and A. C. Hamilton. *The Faerie Queene*. 3d ed. New York: Longman, 1977. Print.

Spraggs, Gillian. *Outlaws and Highwaymen*. London: Pimlico, 2001. Print.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." Ferguson, Quilligan, and Vickers 123-44. Print.

Stern, Tiffany. "Actors' Parts." *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*. Ed. Richard Dutton. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Suzuki, Mihoko. *Subordinate Subjects :Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. Print.

Taylor, A. B. *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.

Taylor, Gary. *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

---. *Cultural Selection*. New York: BasicBooks, 1996. Print.

---. "Lives and Afterlives." Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 25-58.

---. "Unintroduction." Taylor and Henley 47-63.

---. Introduction. *The Widow*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 1074-76.

--- and John Jowett. *Shakespeare, Reshaped: 1606-1623*. New York, Oxford UP, 1993. Print.

--- and John Lavagnino, eds. *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

--- and John Lavagnino, eds. *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

--- and Trish Thomas Henley, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

Taylor, Neil and Bryan Loughrey. "Middleton's Chess Strategies in Women Beware Women." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24.2 (1984): 341-54. Print.

Thompson, E.P. *Customs in Common*. New York: New Press, 1991. Print.

Tricomi, Albert H. "Middleton's Women Beware Women as Anticourt Drama." *Modern Language Studies* 19.2 (1989): 65-77. Print.

Underdown, David. *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1996. Print.

Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1997. Print.

Vesalius, Andreas, Daniel H. Garrison, and Malcolm Hast. *The Fabric of the Human Body: An Annotated Translation of the 1543 and 1555 Editions of "De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem."* Basel: S. Karger, 2014. Print.

Virgil. *Virgil's Georgics: A New Verse Translation*. Trans. Janet Lembke. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. Print.

Vives, Juan Luis. *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Print.

Warren, Karen, ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997. Print.

Wason, Margaret Ogilvie. *Class Struggles in Ancient Greece*. New York: H. Fertig, 1973. Print.

Watson, Robert. *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. Print.

Wayne, Valerie. Introduction. *A Trick to Catch the Old One*. By Middleton. Taylor and Lavagnino *Collected Works* 373-76. Print.

Whigham, Frank. "Reading Social Conflict in the Alimentary Tract: More on the Body in Renaissance Drama." *ELH* 55.2 (1988): 333-50. Print.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality; Selected Writings*. Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956.

Wiesner, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 3rd ed. New York: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.

Wilcox, Helen. "New Directions: *Women Beware Women* and the Arts of Looking and Listening." *Women Beware Women: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Andrew Hiscock. New York: Continuum International, 2011.

Woodbridge, Linda. "Add Context and Stir, or, the Sadness of Grendel: Thoughts on Early Modern Orality and Literacy." *The Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 25 (1995): 22-40. Print.

---. *Women and the English Renaissance :Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540 to 1620*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Print.

Yates, Frances Amelia. *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*. London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1975. Print.

Zimmerman, Susan. "Disruptive Desire: Artifice and Indeterminacy in Jacobean Comedy." Zimmerman 39-63.

---. *Erotic Politics: The Dynamics of Desire on the English Renaissance Stage*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.