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## **Tropes of Blood, Body And The Ground of The Law: Becoming, Being And Beyond Wife On The Early Modern Stage**

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TROPES OF BLOOD, BODY AND THE GROUND OF THE LAW: BECOMING, BEING  
AND BEYOND WIFE ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

For my parents, Wanda and Darrell Murray.

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## ABSTRACT

This project focuses on the representation of women on the early modern stage in three exemplary texts: the anonymous domestic tragedy *Arden of Faversham*, and two city comedies, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*. Whether playing the role of adulterous wife, performing the role socially striving wife, or resisting the role of laboring wife, these female characters were on stage not only for entertainment, but also for examination and scrutiny by an early modern audience. Playwrights used characterizations of women and wives and their relationships to the economy as vehicles through which to discuss concerns regarding autonomous behavior within and outside of marriage. I read alongside these representations other social fictions including conduct manuals and law that defined and shaped the boundaries for appropriate behavior for women. In each play, female characters' behaviors in and toward marriage negotiate the strict legal and social order. The stage representations offer a space where women gain autonomy while offering new representations for the role of wife to a consuming audience. I am interested in how these characters work to redefine the work of 'wife' as part of this larger shifting economy.

Chapter one examines the relationship between women's work, the institution of marriage and the ways these two intersect with the instability of the protocapitalist economy of early modern England. Chapter two examines the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* as Alice challenges her role as protector of blood-law and creates space for

discourse about female autonomy. Chapter three looks at Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and examines wifely social striving and the reimagining of the role of wife. Chapter four contrasts Moll's autonomy outside of marriage against the autonomy of the shopkeepers' wives within marriage in *The Roaring Girl*, and argues that women influence and hold economic power outside the grasp of male authority. I conclude that women's central occupation is that of wife and we see, set against the shifting social and economic background that women participated in reshaping the definition and understanding of the role and expectations of wife in the larger context of the political economy.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING MARRIAGE AS LABOR

*Tropes of Blood, Body & the Ground of The Law: Becoming, Being and Beyond 'Wife' on the Early Modern Stage* focuses on female characters in domestic tragedies and city comedies of England from the 1590s through the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, I critique three early modern plays—*Arden of Faversham*, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, and Dekker's collaboration with Thomas Middleton in *The Roaring Girl*—presenting each in chronological order of performance and in the context of the historical events that inspired and informed the artistic representations offered by the playwrights. Each play focuses on the middling sort in London, and is grounded in an historical figure or location. This grounding contributes to solidifying the foundation of an English national identity; but more specifically, shows the intersection of shifting social roles and its relationship to the economy that helps to shape that identity. Against the backdrop of an evolving economy (shifting away from its feudal foundations and toward a proto-capitalist system), I examine the instability of social class boundaries and the changing nature of women's work.<sup>2</sup> In turn, these processes illuminate the

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<sup>1</sup> Play texts referenced in this dissertation are taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, edited by David Bevington (New York: Norton, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of this shift, see Rodney Hilton's edited collection, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1976). This collection records an early debate concerning this economic transition addressing the parameters and definition of feudalism and looks at why capitalism developed out of this earlier precursor. For a thorough discussion and analysis of social and economic changes related to the shift toward capitalism, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973).

performative nature of class and the ideological structures of femininity and female social roles.<sup>3</sup> Through exploring the mutually constitutive nature of gender and class identity during the period, I argue that women—as portrayed on the early modern stage—remain unpaid workers in the service of the social reproduction of patriarchy and the nascent capitalist economy.

Each chapter is organized into three sections that closely examine the aesthetic and performative relationships between heterosexual couples shaped by the political economy of the institution of marriage. The spine of each chapter follows the production of gender from: (1) the space of ancestral social assignment and patriarchal inheritance (the production of ‘the wife’); (2) to the space of marital negotiation and wifely labor, including reproductive, domestic and sexual labor; and (3) to the rendering of ‘the wife’ as ideological figure, commodity and disciplinary cultural asset in the social imagination of early modern society via the stage.

The law, as an ideal mode of governing human identity and expressions of status, is routinely foregrounded for both the purposes of subversion of patriarchal marriage conventions, as well as the affirmation of hegemonic gender roles on the early modern stage in the plays examined herein.<sup>4</sup> There is a long history of theorizing on the

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Whigham’s chapter “Tropes of Social Hierarchy: Gentle and Base” examines the nature of class in performance of social roles in *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Brooks’ study examines the relationship between law and other social and economic aspects of early modern society. The book investigates English law from 1485-1642 and “reintegrates the history of law, legal institutions and the legal professions with the general political and social history of the period” (1). See also M. Ingram’s *Church, Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) that focuses on church courts and matters handled within that jurisdiction and argues these course effectively worked to maintain social order. T. Stretton’s study is also useful in looking specifically how women navigated and interacted with the law in *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

relationship between gender representations and the law.<sup>5</sup> For example, marital law and property law shared much in the way of governing language. Indeed, the relationship between governance of women's bodies as property and the governance of land as property derive from the same linguistic fountain.<sup>6</sup> I look at governing bodies, physical bodies, performing bodies and working bodies as bodies defined and codified in terms of blood, not merely as bodily fluids but also as birthright and social class.<sup>7</sup> I analyze each play in the context of historical events and texts as a reflection of the relationship between the political economy of gender and the contemporaneous law within the context of marriage as represented on the early modern stage.<sup>8</sup>

During the course of close readings in the following chapters, I reference sumptuary law dating back to at least the early 14th century, which regulated, often in a harsh and punitive manner, the subject's ability to don costume in contravention of their customary assignment of social status. Dressing above or outside of one's gender or social class carried the punitive weight of social and legal condemnation. Performance of

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<sup>5</sup> For a very useful overview of this historiography, see *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama* by Subha Mukherji, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Current scholarship on this relationship is deeply obligated to the seminal work of Page du Bois, see *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), as well as ground-breaking theorists such as Shoshana Felman in her analysis *The Juridical Unconscious* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), a feminist critique of contemporary historicizing of legal reasoning.

<sup>7</sup> See significant theoretical work on the topic of corporeality by Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1993), for a broader understanding of the psychosocial context within which women's blood is signified upon by legal and theatrical authorities.

<sup>8</sup> For a solid critical review of marriage and mortality in the early modern period see the nicely summarized argument of David Cressy's *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997). An illuminating window into early 20th century conceptualizations of these dynamics can be seen in the influential study by Chilton Latham Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487-1653: A Study of Matrimony and Family Life in Theory and Practice as Revealed by the Literature, Law and History of the Period*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1917).

identity, and in particular the interlocking tangle of socioeconomic status and gender identity, was governed and regulated by sumptuary law precisely because the law at some level recognized the theatrical and slippery nature of these categories, and thus sought to solidify and enforce costumes and customs.

Clearly, the theatre's function as a site of contained and socially sanctioned transgression of sumptuary law bears on this analysis for several reasons. Firstly, the plays comment on the relationship between the forms of law regulating female identity, and the performance of such. Secondly, this dissertation is concerned with the sedimentary processes of a legal system that constructed gender roles and economic relationships through the policing of rank, status, or blood title. Lastly, the fiction of sumptuary law was rewritten, decomposed, and revised in the theater by subjects performing gender roles in a manner that undermines essentialist claims about blood, class and identity.<sup>9</sup>

Sumptuary law was simply one spoke in the wheel of oppressive fictions presented for examination on the stage of early modern England. Coverture law was also integral to the construction of women's social roles; coverture usurped women's ongoing status as legitimate political subjects with the theory that, before the law, women were unrecognizable beings except through representation by their husbands. In effect, coverture laws created the marriage contract as one that alienated the wife from the capacity for self-representation and recognition as human. In the plays read here, women's bodies, and hence their labors are named, recognized, and legislated by a dehumanizing law that relegated women to status of property through coverture; the

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed historical overview, see Alan Hunt's *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

theater then becomes a powerful location for expressing and questioning that ideology. The theater functions as a mode of persuasion to a consuming public and the law upholds this fiction through common law and case precedent. Those institutions conspire together intertextually to uphold a system that actively disallowed autonomy for women during the period while it simultaneously enabled the creation of social capital that invited those very same women to participate in the limitation of their own roles. Pierre Bourdieu introduces the idea of symbolic power to describe the idea that social domination through this power verifies one's place in the social hierarchy. Not only does one assert dominance, but the relationship requires that the subordinated accept their position as well. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as "the violence, which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity."<sup>10</sup> He later defines social agents as:

knowing agents who, even when they are subjected to determinisms, contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them. And it is almost always in the 'fit' between determinants and the categories of perception that constitutes them as such that the effect of domination arises.<sup>11</sup>

These "knowing agents" or female characters participate in and accept their own subordination and limitations for several reasons. In some instances, these limitations allow for female characters to seek agency from within the institution of marriage through appropriation and subversion. Other examples I explore in subsequent chapters include the perception that through acceptance of one's place in the social hierarchy, women may gain access to social or cultural capital that ultimately improves their status and autonomy. These social roles and places in society coincide with certain types of

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 167.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 168.

labor that female characters perform. In these cases, labor is not limited to physical work in exchange for a wage; rather it includes a broad range of activities, from the production of goods in the home to the consumerist roles of managerial housewives. In this way, women's work is more broadly defined to account for the ways in which women participated in the local economy.

The powerful consequences of the relationship between legal determinations of identity cannot be underestimated as having powerful consequences both on and off the stage. Indeed, the recursive and mutually reinforcing matrix of law and theatrical representations is described by Louis Montrose in his examination of the ways in which the monarchy exercised control through its own 'theater' of power, a power citizens and subjects of the state could then appropriate to gain or perform power as well.<sup>12</sup> This dissertation explores how the legal identities of women are represented on stage and determines what is at stake by looking at the regulation of property, at women as chattel, and at the regulation of labor, including reproductive labor, on the early modern stage. Further, this dissertation explores the extent to which female characters in the stage plays created or performed their own autonomy.

## I.

Scholarship on the history of the English theater necessarily grapples with the questions raised in English society by the presence of an unmarried female monarch. The eventual cultural solution to the conundrum of Elizabeth's problematic marital status is, of course, to name her 'virgin,' though anxiety around the issue of inheritance,

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<sup>12</sup> This idea of political pageantry and stylized behavior for monarchs is fleshed out in Montrose's essay "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary" in *ELH* 69.4 (Winter 2002) 907-946.

legitimacy, and marriage continued to ripple through the public sphere.<sup>13</sup> Enacted on stage, these social issues and political questions about blood status and political rights become sublimated into satire, romance, cynicism, comedy and general commentary on working-class life. Below, I review the literature on the broader field of the early modern stage, with special attention to the changes in economic production that contributed to the instability of gendered work assignments even as the cultural preoccupation with blood status and marital contracts remained entrenched in public discourse. This work helps explicate women's roles on stage within the context of the masculinization of labor traditionally performed by women once professionalization occurs.

Gayle Rubin reviews a social system that views women as “raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products.”<sup>14</sup> In this “sex/gender system,” she explains gender and sexuality as they relate to social organization. In her discussion of women's relationship to the economy, she references Marx to understand women's oppression. She states, “Capitalism is a set of social relations—forms of property and so forth—in which production takes the form of turning money, things, and people into capital.”<sup>15</sup> Capitalism is not necessarily tied to sexism, and certainly many non-capitalist cultures oppress women, but Rubin points to Marx's discussion of the reproduction of labor and

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Adrian Montrose discusses Elizabeth as a female monarch in a society that is determined by patriarchal values. He argues that she participates in the creation and performance of her public image but that this image is also shaped by the institutions and cultural practices of early modern England. He shows “she appropriated not only the suppressed cult of the Blessed Virgin but also the Tudor conception of the Ages of Woman. By fashioning herself into a singular combination of Maiden, Matron, and Mother, the Queen transformed the normal domestic life-cycle of an Elizabethan female into what was at once a social paradox and a religious mystery” in “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,” *Representations*, (Spring 1983) 80.

<sup>14</sup> Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna [Rapp] Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 158.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

specifically points to the subordination of women as necessarily tied to their social relationships.

What is particularly interesting is Rubin's discussion of the roles of women in what Levi-Straus calls "gift exchange," establishing alliances between men. These alliances not only bring together economic capital through new kinship bonds but also regulate access to women's bodies, social status and capital, and in the process oppress women as a product of this system of social relationships. Rubin explains, "If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being the conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it."<sup>16</sup> In the plays analyzed herein, I look at the ways women are exchanged in this gifting system as well as how women work to redefine their roles within marital exchange. Rubin posits, "the relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation."<sup>17</sup> While these plays do not represent the full realization of those benefits, I argue that through theatrical representation, female characters begin to *re-present* marriage so that these benefits may, to some extent, be realized. Furthermore, the stage allows a consuming audience to imagine tactics for gaining agency in shaping their own lives.

In the groundbreaking 1919 study *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, Alice Clark argues that women's contributions to the workforce were dynamic and important during the 17th century. Women exerted influence over social and religious guidance in the home as well as contributed to the production of material goods.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 174.



Women's work, she argues, changed considerably during the period because of the economic shift towards capitalism. While she acknowledges (re) production, she focuses on types of work impacting women's lives such as "domestic industry," work done inside the home for the home; "family industry," where she sees the family as the collective producers of goods for public exchange and "industrialism," or work for a wage. She describes a shift from a completely self-sufficient home to a wage labor culture and sees this shift as having a negative impact on female subjectivity. Cultural expectations for women shifted toward isolating women in the home and portraying women as more ornamental than productive.<sup>18</sup> With a growing urban London, work often performed by women and reserved for the household moved to city shops, and also became appropriated by male professionals.<sup>19</sup> The spaces for women became simultaneously more public and more private: the former because women were participating in the consumer culture of the city, and the latter because the growing cultural capital for women meant limited participation in the larger economic culture as producers of goods. Social history shows an overarching movement from the home as a center for economic production to women's work taking on a more nurturing role.

Though Clark argues that 16th century English women worked alongside their husbands in guilds and family trades, as England moved towards a capitalist economy,

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<sup>18</sup> Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

<sup>19</sup> Historians continue to debate specific dates for the large-scale shift of household work toward a male centered professional trade. International trade, organization of agricultural labor, capitalism and later industrialization shape this conversation. Sarah Mendelson's chapter "Women and Work" in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) argues that there were growing options for women of the middling sort during the early modern period: "While medicine as a female career was in decline, other vocations like the teaching profession, literature and the arts and the urban service industries offered profitable, new occupational roles" (74-75).

the home became more of a space associated with consuming goods rather than producing them. Though we will turn toward more contemporary scholarship that questions Clark's premise that women's public roles decreased, and that they became more isolated in the transition to proto-capitalism, Clark represents a valuable early voice on the subject of women's work. Subsequently, scholarship has questioned and complicated Clark's depiction of women's status by focusing on the ways in which nascent urban capitalist economies featured the proliferation of spaces that were accommodating of women's independent financial lives, i.e. shops, markets and their general engaging in bourgeois business ventures.

One such work is Susan Cahn's study, *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660*. Later in the chapter abstracts, the periodization forwarded by Cahn becomes significant for my tracking of the social transition between blood-law and contract-law and the contemporaneous transformation of the British public sphere. She sees economic development and the growing modernization of 17th century England as having had a negative impact on early modern women's work. She analyzes material culture as well as ideological change and determines that women's cultural roles were shifting. The growing acceptance of motherhood as a profession and a vocation, and the simultaneous specialization of domestic work requiring special knowledge and skill delimited women's power. Women's lack of access to formal education as well as the increasing social import of attending to children and the home influences larger cultural conversations about the significance of skilled labor. Cahn asks why women entered into the new era of credentialism, the idea that skills previously viewed as 'women's work' now required

specialized education. Because of women's lack of access to formal education, they no longer participated in the types of work they once controlled. I show that they participated in the process of their own exclusion because women sought to gain status, appreciation and authenticity for their newly defined "vocations" that ultimately vocation isolated them from public economy.<sup>20</sup>

In "Renaissance Women and the Question of Class," Constance Jordan classifies women as "the unfree worker." Jordan explores the social and economic status of women, noting that social attitudes towards women were rooted in the culture's biology because their inferiority (as imperfect men) was partly based on the female body. Women were to be trained in household and religious matters only so that they would understand their place in obeying their husbands despite their education or social rank and not becoming ambitious to leave the home. For example, William Gouge advises men not to marry above their station so as not to taint familial lines or disrupt the balance of power and money.<sup>21</sup> Exploring how rank and bloodlines are associated with legitimacy and appropriate forms of labor, Jordan examines the perceived value of women's work as compared to men's.<sup>22</sup> Most men during this period express misogynistic views surrounding women's domestic duties and worth. As a separate economic class of

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<sup>20</sup> Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> William Gouge's treatise gives biblical justification for male and female roles and describes the specific responsibilities for each. The full title reads *Of domesticall duties eight treatises. I. An exposition of that part of Scripture out of which domesticall duties are raised. II. 1. A right Conjunction of Man and Wife. 2. Common mutuall Duties betwixt Man and Wife. III. Particular Duties of Wives. IV. Particular Duties of Husbands. V. Duties of Children. VI. Duties of Parents. VII. Duties of Servants. VIII. Duties of masters* (1622).

<sup>22</sup> Constance Jordan, "Renaissance Women and the Question of Class," *In Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, edited by James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993) 90-106.

“unfree workers,” early modern women had very few ways to escape the male power asserted over them.

Fiona McNeill explores the ways in which poor women appear in early modern drama in her book *Poor Women in Shakespeare*. She describes the representation of these women on stage as one “with whom one is intimately connected.”<sup>23</sup> Members of an early modern audience could identify with particular characters rather than view them as outsiders to their own realms of experience. McNeil suggests that women’s identities were continuously moving and “shifting” within early modern society, and that these identities were not freely chosen but were formed through women’s navigation of limitations for women in the period.<sup>24</sup> McNeil argues that “plays provide a living document of the changing economic conditions” and “the process of early industrialism began with the expulsion of poor women from the household, guild and convent.”<sup>25</sup> I look at the ways the plays show these changing economic conditions and their relationship to women’s working roles within the institution of marriage, specifically with women’s elevation in cultural capital combined with dismissal by husbands or entrapment in the private sphere.

Michelle Dowd also explores types of women’s work and their representations on stage in her book *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. Using feminist, new historicist as well as formalist lenses, Dowd moves the emphasis away from female sexuality as a marker of identity and argues that work is a legitimate way to

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<sup>23</sup> Fiona McNeil, *Poor Women in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 47.

understand how female identity is constructed. She analyzes the ways in which narrative has authority to shape and influence social structures outside the realm of theater and performance.<sup>26</sup> In *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, Tom Rutter focuses on the conflicting notions of the stage as a place of professional work and a place of entertainment. He discusses the reputation of idleness as sinful, as determined by religious influence, but also its association with the upper classes and leisure. He looks at how work is represented on stage, particularly in Shakespeare's histories, and explores the ways the theater works to convey the changing meanings of 'work' in the larger culture.<sup>27</sup>

In her monograph *Labor's Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage*, Natasha Korda argues that the stage not only consists of male actors and playwrights but also encompasses dynamic system of commerce that includes women's work. She argues "at stake in the representation of working women on the early modern stage was the status and legitimacy of playing itself as a profession."<sup>28</sup> Her earlier work argues that women are not simply commodities for men to exchange, but have an important role taking care of household goods.

Although women's social roles were changing, these roles were not always limiting.<sup>29</sup> These scholars discuss women's work on the stage and in the theater as well as

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<sup>26</sup> Michelle Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Tom Rutter, *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Natasha Korda, *Labor's Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 1.

<sup>29</sup> In *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), Wendy Wall looks how women's domestic labor shapes a larger national identity in England.

in the home or as related to one's economic status but none focus on the intimate relationship between women's reproductive role and labor, or more specifically, reproduction *as* labor. In this dissertation, I explore the representations of women on stage and analyze their relationship to the economy as necessarily tied to the (re)producing body. The regulation and control of the body and patrilineal purity saturates the texts. I show how, despite the overwhelming need to impose order to preserve blood law, women play a role in transforming marital negotiations through a new mode of exchange validated in contract law.

## II.

Throughout this project I employ the terms “blood-law” and “contract-law” to distinguish between conventional economic and social relationships and to express the changes and shifts in the economy and in marriage that were being represented on stage. Blood-law privileges inheritance, kinship-bond and preserving and protecting class distinctions based on those boundaries. Blood law provides legitimacy to one's name and one's access to property and capital. Gayle Rubin points out that these systems do not merely use women as gifts in exchange but that the exchange carries cultural weight and power when she explains, “Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage named and ancestors rights and people—men women, and children—in concrete systems of social relationships.”<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu also describes women as objects in marital exchange and discusses their bodies in terms of symbolic value. He explains, “men are the subjects of matrimonial strategies

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<sup>30</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” 177.

through which they work to maintain or increase their symbolic capital, women are always treated as objects of these exchanges in which they circulate as symbols fit for striking alliances.”<sup>31</sup> Similar to Rubin’s point, Bourdieu shows how women remain objects of exchange rather than subjects exercising agency in the transfer of capital. He states,

Being thus invested with a symbolic function, women are forced continually to work to preserve their symbolic value by conforming to the male ideal of feminine virtue defined as chastity and candor and by endowing themselves with all the bodily and cosmetic attributes liable to increase their physical value and attractiveness.”<sup>32</sup>

While female characters in the plays do not overcome the work to preserve the “male ideal of feminine virtue,” they do seek autonomy through these symbolic performances. I employ the term contract law to discuss the ways in which women work to challenge traditional markers of blood law. Contract-law differs from ‘blood law’ in that family bloodlines no longer carry weight but rather act as pre-contracted agreements between two individuals separate from class or tradition. Contract-law dissolves the rigid class structure allowing citizens, and particularly women, to participate in the marriage negotiations or increase economic capital across those class lines. Contract law makes social mobility possible.

This project’s scope of interest straddles generic classifications such as citizen comedy and city comedy, and indeed argues against prioritizing strong generic borders in of the early modern period wherein female characters were the focus of analysis. Whether the generic focus is the city or the citizen, female characters remain under-theorized in

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<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, *Reflexive Sociology*, 173.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 173.

the drama of the period. City comedy, a genre where plays are set in London and offer a realistic and familiar setting for the audience, is often concerned with social class and social mobility. Love plots are usually foiled by patriarchal figures of different classes.<sup>33</sup> Tension between court and city, gentleman and artisans became material for comedic satire. The genre uses satire to draw attention to the middling sort in order to critique their behaviors and ambitions. Simultaneously the plays criticize the upper classes and the performative qualities of their status.<sup>34</sup> I am interested in these plays specifically because they are grounded in English historical figures.

*Arden of Faversham*, an anonymous play published in 1592, is perhaps the first domestic tragedy to be based on real historical events in English history. The series of events was recorded in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, and described in great detail the attempted murder of Arden and the demise of his wife, Alice.<sup>35</sup> *The Shoemaker's Holiday* was inspired by Thomas Deloney's prose text, *The Gentle Craft*, published in 1597, just three years before the first staging of Dekker's play.<sup>36</sup> Both texts were based on an historical figure, Simon Eyre, who was Lord Mayor of London 1445-46. Thomas Deloney, a silk worker who moved to London in the 1580s,

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<sup>33</sup> For more information on types of characters in city comedy, see Theodore B. Leinwand's new historicist approach in *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Leggatt's *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) argues the format of citizen comedy is based in New Comedy where the senex stands in the way of young lovers whereas Brian Gibbons' earlier study *Jacobean City Comedy* (London: Hart-Davis, 1968) focuses on satirical elements.

<sup>35</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Ed. Vernon F. Snow (New York: AMS, 1965).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Deloney. "The Gentle Craft (the First Part)." In *The Works of Thomas Deloney*, edited by F.O. Mann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912, 1967).



tells a fictional tale of London shoemakers. Although the text is a romanticized and idealized account of London shoemakers, it also provides a glimpse of London life and city locales. Finally, in *The Roaring Girl*, the main character, Moll, is based on a notorious historical figure, Mary Frith, who cross-dressed and defied boundaries of feminine space. Her infamy was solidified in early modern English history with the publication of *The Life of Mrs. Mary Frith* (1662), a mostly fictitious, exaggerated account of Frith's life published three years after her death.<sup>37</sup> Much of what we know about Mary Frith is recorded because of her frequent brushes with the law. She was charged with crimes of theft in 1600 and burglary in 1608, and later accusations of prostitution and arrests for indecent dress. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes:

On 7 August that year Frith made what may have been her début in print in The Madde Prankes of Mery Mall of the Bankside. Logged in the stationers' register by its author, the playwright John Day, the jest biography has since been lost, but it depicted her going about in man's apparel and playing the lute without a license in taverns and in the streets.<sup>38</sup>

She moved among all social strata, helping courtiers retrieve stolen property as well as “mixing with lewd company.” The real Moll was married for a brief time, although the play represents her as single. Despite her rebellious nature, the fictionalized Moll reinforces cultural values of chastity and honesty that will be further examined in this project.

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<sup>37</sup> Judith Petterson Clark, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith, Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse (1662): An Annotated Facsimile* (Oxford: Miami University, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Mary Frith in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

These types of plays seem to reinforce an English identity that is less interested in preserving aristocracy than in drawing attention to the social fictions that uphold class boundaries. City comedy lends itself to the analysis of body, blood, ground and law, more readily than other genres because it questions the sanctity of classical precedent and prioritizes the historical moment. Moreover, the layers of representation through theater draw attention to the theater itself as a place of market exchange—production and consumption—that allows the audience to engage with and think about social climbing and opportunities presented on stage even if they are not realized in the culture. The power that the stage has in that representation is important for reflecting and participating in these economic and social shifts.

### III.

This dissertation offers close readings alongside careful historical contextualization based on primary and secondary source material. I provide an interpretation of the theatrical representation of human behavior in social, political and legal institutions using contemporary theory in analyzing three early modern plays. In particular, my method is chronological, reading *Arden of Faversham*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, and *The Roaring Girl* as snapshots of gender representation between 1590 and 1611.

The use of historical sources allows me to illuminate the types of cultural fictions that provide context and intertexts for playwrights. A cultural fiction convinces its audience of its authenticity and its identity as natural. Various narratives that we see shaping individual habits and ideals also create cultural fictions. These narratives move

from micro expressions (manuals, family habits) to macro manifestations, such as law and monarchy. In this recursive process, social construction is fictional in as much as suspended disbelief is required. Layers of mimetic representations of reality expressed through language shy away from admitting their own fictive nature; i.e. the further away from the stage one moves, the more strongly cultural narratives will be present as natural phenomenon. I read the plays against a number of primary historical sources, including legal cases and conduct manuals that circulated in the public imagination and discourse contemporaneously with the publication and first productions of these plays.<sup>39</sup> In this dissertation, I will show how conduct literature amongst other contemporaneous texts interacted with the shifting ideas of production and consumption enacted on the stage. Drawing from several representative conduct manuals, for example, I show that the shift in the prescribed social roles for women enacted on stage were also present in public discourse in the form of gender prescriptions.<sup>40</sup>

Prescriptive cultural fictions of the period include texts that were aimed at literate girls, women and their families. These texts reshaped the cultural fictions that constituted the category “woman” from an economic identity primarily rooted in the ideal of blood,

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<sup>39</sup> *Holinshed's Chronicles* records the history of the title characters and informs the plays *Arden of Faversham* and *Roaring Girl*. *Shoemaker's Holiday* is based on *The Gentle Craft* by Thomas Deloney and is based on an historical person.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret R. McCarney's 1995 dissertation, *Renaissance Courtesy Theory and the Development of English Drama* begins with a historical analysis of courtesy theory and explores how it shaped the way people perceived themselves during the Renaissance. She looks at comedy and tragedy and explores the relationship of the external performance of manners and “internal reform.” Robin Luana Bott's 1998 dissertation, *"The Makers of Manners": Politeness, Power, and the Instability of Social Relationships in Renaissance Drama*, also examines drama as conduct literature. She points out that inherent contradictions within courtesy books attempt to stabilize social hierarchies just as it challenges it. She argues that the drama of the period reveals the instability of prescribed codes of behavior. According to Bott, “Not only does the drama contribute to the anxiety about the permeability of social boundaries, but it also questions the efficacy of codes designed to create difference and stability by showing that those codes are subject to manipulation.”

symbolic capital, and essential forms of legal recognition; to women's labor being inclusive of ideological acts generative of cultural capital. This shift was intimately connected to changes in the economy and the exchange of material goods specifically associated with women's work.

In the transactional permutations of capital, we see that they are all commutative, that is, they are open to conversion from one form to another. Women produced most of the household goods and participated in trade and bartering in their own communities. As England became more involved in a global market, these goods and services were produced outside of the home. In becoming products of wage labor instead of domestic labor, the perception of women's work shifted toward a managerial role within the home. The producers of goods and services now became consumers in a global economy. Women accepted this new role because they were removed from the manual laboring aspects of home production and pushed toward a less labor-intensive leadership role in the home. Like early modern theater, conduct manuals not only show a response to this cultural change, but also participate in creating it.

Literacy remained largely the province of the upper classes, and was certainly not for working class women. How would the lower and middling sorts get the information on how members of their social class ought to behave? Certainly the Church would have functioned in this capacity, but also the stage. It seems that the dissemination of manners was transformed through the theater and made available to a wider audience than the literate elite who would have been reading conduct manuals. Frank Whigham explains that conduct manuals are a response to the anxiety of the elite toward the increasing social mobility of the lower classes. Not only do the manuals attempt to

preserve or prescribe certain roles for the men and women of the upper class, the manuals also attempt to define (and keep separate) the elite class from the lower classes.<sup>41</sup>

Castiglione's *The Courtier* was originally created to maintain upper class distinction and isolation. With the increase in print culture and a growing literacy rate, these manuals became available to the lower classes. Whigham points out that the devices used to maintain social privilege and power have become commodities for the middling sorts and could be appropriated by the lower classes. The manuals reveal modes of behavior that can be replicated by an increasingly literate and consumerist public to learn the performance of courtly behavior and further blur the social boundaries.

Women's work during the early modern period was often associated with domestic duties that took place primarily within the private sphere of the home. These "ideal" female social roles were represented in conduct manuals from the period. For example, Juan Luis Vives argued in his conduct manual, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, that women should remain obedient and in the home. For Renaissance women, he claims, "If she be good, it were better to be at home within and unknown to other folks, and in company to hold her tongue demurely, and let few see her, and none at all hear her."<sup>42</sup> A humanist and friend of Catherine of Aragon, and originally from Spain, Vives wrote this educational and conduct manual for the instruction of Mary Tudor. As Joan Larsen Klein notes in her introduction to *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England*, "[Vives'] English translation went

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<sup>41</sup> Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth Century Manual*, ed. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 102.

through nine editions from 1523 to 1592 and was probably the most influential Renaissance treatise on the education of women in England and perhaps in Europe.”<sup>43</sup> The popularity of Vives’ manual illustrates the hegemonic ideology embedded in English culture during the Renaissance. Klein shows how a woman’s identity and individuality dissolved into that of her husband’s: “[i]t is clear throughout that Vives sees a wife as the physical, social and religious extension of her husband, inferior and subject to him in all things.”<sup>44</sup> Vives’ manual embodied the notion of the ideal woman in that a woman’s identity remained dependent on a male figure, be it her father or her husband.

Valerie Wayne explains, however, that the reality of female behavior was quite different from the conduct manuals’ ideal woman, and the conduct manuals may serve as evidence for those differences. In “Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs,” Wayne recognizes, “The contradictory nature of the texts and those who wrote them reminds one that the conduct books are sites of social dispute within a culture, where different positions on doctrine and behavior are tested, negotiated, and suppressed.”<sup>45</sup> The ideal woman, written into existence by male authors, does not present an accurate overview of the diversity of women’s roles and behaviors during the period. Similar to conduct manuals, early modern drama does not present an accurate depiction of early modern life. Both the manuals and the plays are fictions that question and offer an interpretation of social, cultural and political problems. The representations of “ideal women” and working class women in these texts have an effect on how people behaved

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<sup>43</sup> Joan Larsen Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men About Women and Marriage in England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), xii.

<sup>44</sup> Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Valerie Wayne, “Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs,” *Women in Literature in Britain: 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 71.

within early modern culture.

Inasmuch as gender and the legal status of ‘wife’ are always implicated in labor market routines and the identity of the ‘worker,’ the category ‘wife’ is understood as a reading of relations between Capital and Labor writ small in the micro context of domestic disputes. My readings are informed by Bourdieu’s “Forms of Capital” where he explains three types of capital and their relationship to one another:

capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility.<sup>46</sup>

Bourdieu makes an important and utilitarian distinction between ‘symbolic capital’ and ‘cultural capital.’<sup>47</sup> Symbolic capital is a resource inherited through blood-lines, family prestige, patrimony and right of ‘place,’ i.e., ancestral land-rights and the logic of the great chain of being. Cultural capital is a resource generated through performative enactments in the space of profitable social interactions and depends on audience reception and perception—an artifact of persuasive demonstrations of alliance, affinity, and identification with hegemonic power. Finally cultural capital refers to one’s education or material goods and can be changed into economic capital. Bourdieu also refers to cultural capital as “long lasting dispositions of mind and body.” Social capital refers to one’s connections and title, the place one occupies in society. According to Bourdieu, social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are

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<sup>46</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital” in J.G. Richardson’s *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (1986) 243.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 243.

linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”<sup>48</sup> These relationships have social value but one’s relationship to economic capital can fluctuate.

The performative aspects of cultural capital that promote social mobility and the relationship to physical assets or economic capital mean that when a woman aligns herself with someone with more cultural capital, her own capital increases, but distancing herself from cultural capital causes her own to decrease. The social values symbolic of the stage and the value of cultural capital are only intelligible when read as imbedded in a specific set of historical signifiers, even as these signifiers are sliding and slippery. My primary interest is how female characters are gaining and losing capital and how this affects their roles in marriage. The work of being a wife (which is, ultimately, reproduction) and the anxiety around class shifting and regulation of bodies is directly related to that work. For Bourdieu, reality is a social concept. Everyone defines reality and themselves by noting the differences between “observed phenomenon.” How does the stage create or offer new realities? And, within the world of the play, how do women’s experiences offer new realities?

Critical insights incorporated into my close readings include not only Bourdieu but also Michel de Certeau. I employ each theorist’s vocabulary to facilitate an argument about or close reading of one primary text to help answer the questions explored above. Rather than attempting to weave together complex threads of theoretical thinking on labor, identity and language, I’ve selectively appropriated vocabulary that is valuable for sensitively addressing the questions that arise from each play. The tactical and careful

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 248.



selection of theoretical lenses for close readings enables each primary text to answer questions about the nature of power and performance in shaping gender identity, and in particular, in shaping the role of women at the turn of the 17th century during the transition between Elizabethan England and the reign of James I. For example, de Certeau's thinking about the divergent and differential flows of power occurring in what he terms 'place' and 'space' appear in Chapter 4, as the chapter reads *The Roaring Girl*, a city comedy ripe with concern over the usages and potential abuses of space by female characters whose identities are bleeding over their assigned socially appropriate boundaries.

De Certeau shows that individuals are not passive receivers of culture. Although the dominant culture is presented as what he calls "strategy," what is more important is how people interpret and therefore produce their own meaning and use for it. He is interested in how dominant culture is appropriated and used and how the consumer becomes a producer of space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau defines "strategy" as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power can be isolated from an 'environment.'"<sup>49</sup> Strategy refers to institutions, power structures, defined environments and the city as a whole. Strategy is a static, institutional location that can be explained as a subject that creates order for society but exists separate from that society. In the context of this dissertation, strategies manifest in social values, traditions and norms. Religion, government, tradition and what I have been describing as blood-law coalesce and perpetuate institutions and patriarchal social structures. For example, marriage traditions upheld by the senex, Alexander

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<sup>49</sup> Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).xix.

Wengrave in *The Roaring Girl*, preserve the kinship and social class boundaries that protect one's access to capital.

Tactics refers to the ability to move throughout the city without being wholly determined by these previously described institutions. De Certeau's definition is "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor this on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other."<sup>50</sup> Daily practices attempt to change or influence strategy. In "Walking in the City," the street is described as a location away from the central power. Whatever is happening at the street level is working to challenge or redefine strategies. For example, women female characters and the way they create social relationships and move about the city function as tactics working to manipulate the larger patriarchal power structure. These women female characters must adapt to the environments created by strategy but they also, by defining space through movement and interaction, they disrupt this power hierarchy. Tactics make everyday activities political in that they are in opposition to rather than subordinate to strategy. Mary, the shopkeeper's wives, and Moll in *The Roaring Girl* all embody the 'ways of operating' that allow them to function opportunistically to oppose the strategies that define the places they inhabit. We may not see an overarching transformation in the 20 years from the first printing of *Arden* in 1592 to *The Roaring Girl* in 1611, but we do see changing patterns in early modern culture. The stage is writing what is happening and simultaneously creating ideology for its consumers.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, xix.

#### IV.

As described earlier, each chapter is divided into three sections reflective of the identity markers experienced by women over the course of their lives; pre-marriage, marriage, and outside the boundaries of marriage. Though these markers are inadequate in properly representing early modern women's experiences, they are useful to demonstrate women's changing roles in the economy as connected to their role in marriage.

Chapter Two argues that the trope of blood indicates an opportunity for the audience to consider how life chances and status are hereditary in assignment yet also fluid in language. This chapter argues that legal codes governing property, whether wife or land, as represented on the Elizabethan stage, are underpinned, propped-up by and positioned against deeper cultural notions about essential biological rules that ought to govern society.<sup>51</sup> While *Arden* is about the crime of mariticide and its consequences, which are represented in discrete moments wherein the characters persevere upon legal codes governing identity and property, the stains of blood, heredity, family title, and class and gender expectations are necessarily omnipresent in the logic of the character's choices. Under the costuming of romance, domestic tragedy, sexual intrigue, accusations of witchcraft, and the various libidinal plots, is the evidence of a collective social imaginary that takes very seriously the necessity that women remain unpaid workers in the service of the social reproduction of patriarchy, and women's navigation of the nascent cosmopolitan capitalism of early modern London. The persistence, the resilience, and abjection of women's sexuality in language is a foundational precedent in

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<sup>51</sup> The tension between 16<sup>th</sup> century legal ideals of rational consensual contract, a move away from absolute inviolable hereditary roles for the individual is explicated in later close readings.

Anglophone jurisprudence and the law as manifest in our shared aesthetics and practice of signification.

In this chapter, I offer three close readings from *Arden* that illuminate and amplify the social tension and possibility for agency created in the space between the old law and the new wherein the female characters dare to imagine themselves capable of performing novel social identities. In the first section, we turn toward Alice of Faversham's use of her would-be sister-in-law and commoner Susan as a human payment for murder. Alice's offering of Susan's body as payment for her husband's assassination appropriates the very features of patriarchy and blood-law marriage negotiations that Alice herself so desperately attempts to subvert. Becoming a wife for Susan is figured as Alice's escape hatch from the constraints of her own marriage, and also exemplifies of marriage as chattel slavery. In the second section, we turn toward a close reading of the relationship between Alice and Arden and the meaning of being a wife under the terms of contract law. In the third section, we examine the scene of Alice's escape from marriage by way of death. Her efforts to move beyond the identity of wife are, in the end, only accomplished in the ancient rite of execution by immolation at the stake, a punishment reserved exclusively for women contemptuous of the law.

In Chapter Three, I examine how *The Shoemaker's Holiday* creates a fantasy world where social mobility is possible and brings mirth to characters despite social class. Here, "bloud" has shed the weight of familial power and inheritance that is associated with social class distinction. Blood is personified, no longer protecting aristocratic kinship but recognizing interclass union. However, this comedic narrative also clarifies aristocratic fears of blurring class boundaries in contrast to a desire for collapsing class

distinction for the middling sort. The play illuminates these tensions and furthermore provides a public voice and performative act that challenges the dominant culture. The desire for social mobility, the redefining of the marriage contract toward earning status rather than birthright inheritance, and women's new role as the consumer are all introduced as emerging modes of production. This play questions traditional markers of class based on birthright. Marriage is no longer arranged along class lines and workers are not destined to the vocation to which they were born. The love plot between Rose and Lacy portrays class tensions, and whilst allowing interclass marriage, it also emphasizes the commodification of women in marriage contract. The ship's cargo and the profit from it allow for Margery's social mobility. Newly gained money affords Margery the ability to purchase commodities that allow her to perform upper class roles. Her shifting role from producer in a shoemaker's guild to consumer of material goods shows the emergence of a new kind of cultural capital yet simultaneously reinforces the status quo. Gaining upper class status remains desirable and that desire reinforces the legitimacy of class boundaries.

In Chapter Four, female characters move across different spaces and places in the city, participating in the local economies, from marriage to market. This chapter looks at women's relationship to marriage status and shows how they navigate the political economy of marriage as well as the physical space in the city. Sebastian, the son of nobleman Sir Alexander Wengrave, plans to marry Mary Fitzallard. Sebastian's beloved, Mary, is on the market as a potential wife and commodity in marital exchange, though her dowry is too modest for a noble family. Sebastian exclaims in the above-mentioned quotation that his father claims she would be the cause of the family losing blood or

status, and thus losing significance associated with social standing. The union decreases the value of Sebastian's family blood. Mary's role in becoming wife creates space for interclass marriage. Shopkeepers' wives represent new notions about the middling sort in *Roaring Girl* in that women were initially producing things in the home and a shift toward a burgeoning consumer role creates new cultural capital. This role (established in the previous chapter) is more desirable because it designates leisure or upper class behavior, but ultimately reinforces the status quo—citizens desiring to be like the upper class reinforces that it is better to be upper class. However, women were not only consumers but were also working in their husband's public shops. As such, they are producers of goods in a public space and participate in reshaping their social role; they are taking back authority over traditionally female work that men appropriated (male authored conduct manuals provide examples of this appropriation). In the play, domestic work has been brought to the public space of the city, and female shopkeepers gain financial (and sexual) agency. By employing de Certeau's discussion of space and place, my analysis of the role of Mary, the citizen's wives, and Moll in *Roaring Girl*, proves that women were able to become successful in the marketplace even though they are constantly criticized. Moll embodies the role beyond marriage because she exists in a space outside of the political economy of marriage. She informs Sebastian, "I have the head now of myself and am man enough for a woman. Marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head and has a worse i'th'place" (2.2.43-46). Moll's cross-dressing expresses her challenge to normative female behaviors, but simultaneously upholds traditional ideas of honesty and chastity. She internalizes masculinist values and appropriates patriarchal behaviors for her own advantage in contradiction to the premise

of those values. By violating conventions, she upholds traditional conventions of male power. Moll is out of place in that she uses “place” inappropriately. The way Moll practices space redefines and reshapes city spaces challenging hegemonic expectations. Authority and power can regulate life through infrastructure, but in *The Roaring Girl*, female characters redefine city spaces, and although there is incongruity between ideals and behavior with female characters (especially Moll), their actions show the struggle to carve out subjective roles in the larger culture and economy.

Women’s humanity is represented through the fiction of the law that determines women’s status as property. The law upholds a system that disallows freedom, and this regulation of property and labor is enacted on the stage. Since female bodies are property, we see the ways property—bodies and land—were changing, disputed and questioned. This is directly connected to the idea that women were not only working in the home or in the market but women’s primary occupation was that of wife. Being wife can be read as occupation because we see the relationship between the political economy of gender and the law within the context of marriage represented on stage. As Frederic Jameson notes, literature cannot be created in isolation from a larger political context.<sup>52</sup> Thus by close reading these texts, we see how economic changes influence the way work and market exchange were practiced. I want to look at how these changes were grappled with on the early modern stage, specifically through an analysis of these boundary violators whether Alice, Margery, or Moll. For early modern women, work and their participation in a changing market economy cannot be discussed outside the institution of marriage regardless of marital status. One’s relationship to marriage shaped, defined, and

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<sup>52</sup> I will reference this more fully in my chapter analysis, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981).

controlled women's lives and identities. Although women characters challenge and disrupt boundaries, audience attitudes were still entrenched in patriarchal discourse. I look at the ways women characters gain social and economic capital even from within a system that attempts to erase their identity. Men increase economic and social capital in more passive ways—ships come in, papers are handed over—women, however, have to take a more active role in navigating the systems that keep them in their places. How is the role of wife—the primary laboring occupation—being reimagined on stage? Perhaps by attempting to shed the weight of blood, as in the case of Alice, or as a move toward a consumer role as in the case of Margery. The female characters analyzed fail to some extent in their performing of their roles and culturally assigned identities, but through their work, they recreate spaces for autonomy on the stage. Upon marriage, women suffer a kind of political death: their identities dissolve into their husbands. In that death, women's identities are reborn through their labor. Autonomy is gained, if briefly, through their relationship to their work.



## CHAPTER II

### “THE BLOOD CLEAVETH TO THE GROUND” : THE STAINS OF STATUS IN *ARDEN* *OF FAVERSHAM*

“Who will not commend honorable Wedlock, a thing of great excellency...virtue is maintained, vice is eschewed, houses are replenished, cities are inhabited, the ground is tilled, sciences are practiced, kingdomes flourish, amity is preserved, the public weal is defended, natural succession continued, good arts are taught, honest order is kept, Christendome is enlarged, God’s work is promoted, the conscience is quieted, lewd life is avoided and the glory of god is highly advanced.”

—Thomas Pritchard’s *The Schoole of Honest and Vertuous Lyfe*, 1579

In the anonymous play, *Arden of Faversham*, first performed around 1592, Alice Arden is burned at the stake for murdering her husband, Thomas Arden. The turn-of-the-century London audience would have been familiar with the infamous background story of blood retribution enacted just 50 years earlier, wherein a young highborn lady was ritually executed for the crime of mariticide. The purifying social ritual, or spectacle, of punishment reenacted on stage remembered Alice Arden’s execution as the inescapable necessity of justice, yet repression of women’s resistance against patriarchal confines is always haunted by the memory generated in the witnessing audience – remembering creates the possibility of re-enactment and re-interpretation that runs against the grain of hegemonic conventions.<sup>53</sup> Richard Helgerson has noted the sensational and innovative

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<sup>53</sup>Social discipline and the consolidation of hegemony through public displays of power were critical tools employed by capital, tools that frequently featured women’s bodies as educational props. For more, see Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression* (New York:

aspects of the play: “It is both the earliest true crime story in the English dramatic repertory and the earliest domestic drama...It is also one of the earliest English plays to make a woman its most prominent and powerful character.”<sup>54</sup> And though these details make the event perfect for theatrical representation as spectacle, the most intriguing aspect is “the everyday ordinariness of it all. This horrible crime happened in a place we can easily find on a map and visit, and it happened to people not so very much unlike the people who would have read it or watched it as a play.”<sup>55</sup> The intimate setting draws attention to the blurring of the lines between public and private spheres by presenting matters of a recognizable early modern home on stage, and Helgerson argues that these boundaries are not fixed but are shifting and being renegotiated in relation to the power of the state.<sup>56</sup>

In this chapter, I review the layers of historical representations and perform close readings of the play to illustrate the role of women as workers in an economy that only afforded them the opportunity to work as a wife, with slim alternative options. First, I show how Alice finds autonomy through her extramarital relationship with Mosby and how her social capital affords her the opportunity to appropriate patriarchal behaviors in an attempt to gain control of economic capital. Second, the instability of Arden’s title to land parallel’s the insecurity of his marital claim to Alice. I analyze Arden and his title to land and property as it relates to Alice’s challenge to the marriage institution as she

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Cambridge UP, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> Richard Helgerson, “Murder in Faversham,” *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 6.

destabilizes Arden's access to social capital. The instability of Arden's social capital and embodied cultural capital forces him to rely on Alice's social capital, which puts him at a disadvantage and underscores his anxiety regarding his legitimate social identity. We see a similar and parallel fear in Mosby's potential for social mobility through his relationship with Alice. Third, I discuss the parallelism of the home and the state in cultural constructions of women's identity as wives, specifically as it relates to the historical and cultural figure of Alice Arden. This chapter offers a new historicist reading of *Arden* based on the cultural milieu that shaped and was reshaped by women's participation public discourses with regard to life-cycle rituals of marriage, status and land ownership.<sup>57</sup>

An overarching theme in this chapter is the argument that both the historical person and the cultural representation of Alice can be profitably read as tragic heroines whose resistances to patriarchy are rebuked with deadly force by the State. Her efforts to use both blood-law and contract-law to circumvent the constraints of her husband's control are clearly violent; yet, violence is often the last resort of individuals pressed into circumstances wherein no non-violent remedy through legal means is afforded them. The characters persevere upon these stains of heredity, family title, and class and gender expectations, and these stains are never quite beyond the gaze of a consuming audience. Under the costuming of romance, domestic tragedy, sexual intrigue, accusations of witchcraft, and libidinal plots, is the evidence of a collective social imaginary that takes very seriously the necessity that women remain unpaid workers in the service of the

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<sup>57</sup> I mention New Historicism to point to what Jonathan Dollimore calls "a perspective concerned generally with the interaction in the period between State power and cultural forms and, more specifically, with those genre and practices where State and culture most visibly merge..." in the first chapter "Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism" *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 3.

social reproduction of patriarchy and nascent capitalist economy.

In the above epigraph the benefits of marriage for society are set forth and attributed to marriage's identity as part of a transcendent natural order. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century order of English society, governance by those naturally imbued with authority was parallel and dependent upon domestic order, thus the role of women as wives in the home was limited and prescribed. Parallelism between the social order and domestic order, which mirrored one another in the language of 16<sup>th</sup> century England, was being revised by the historical transition between blood-law and contract-law definitions of wife and role of women in society. The shift toward contractual agreements based on money and wealth instead of reliance on blood as the credential for securing and legitimizing authority maps, though unevenly, onto the Protestant Reformation. The governing trope of blood, and derivative categories of husband, wife, father, mother, child, and heir, that one can see acted out on the stage in early modern England were being reworked in the transition brought about during Reformation. The symbolic alignment between blood and Catholicism rested in the concept of familial piety displayed through loyalty to the Pope—spiritual father of the church-family. Protestantism, on the other hand, questioned the legitimacy of the citizen, or subject's informal contract with the Church, and hence heightened the social anxieties around the patriarchy's potential instability. This anxiety manifested in real historical acts of retribution against women's bodies, as historical chronicles documented the risk of women's treason against their husbands and cultural productions on the stage dramatized the role of wife as the site of potential uprising against patriarchy. Yet, the dramatization of the concern over women's fidelity to their husbands was not entirely new; this concern has deep Classical roots in theater. *Arden's*

inception and performance on the early modern stage would have resonated with the audience in reference to the indisputably new economic and social conditions brought about by the Reformation.

## I.

The grounds of land-ownership and identity are rooted in essential ties of inalienable blood relations between individuals and the locations (both social and geographic) that they inhabit. The juxtaposition between what this chapter calls blood-law and contract-law is evidenced in the efforts of Alice to claim authority based on her heredity while also struggling against the blood-law marriage to Arden, the social climber, in her ultimate goal of marriage to the commoner Mosby. She simultaneously benefits from her higher social rank while calling into question the foundations that afford her privilege. Alice's goal is to create a third option, one that would allow her the benefits of both blood-law and contract-law, yet as we will see, there is no stable opening into a space free from patriarchal constraints for any of the female characters whose bodies are controlled by men. Whether figured as commodities in contract law, objects of honorific exchange and tribute in blood-law, or ultimately as the site of theatrical display of state power in the form of ritual execution, *Arden's* audience learns that, when it comes to regulation of relations between land, bodies, and blood, female characters can circumvent neither old laws nor the new laws without meeting their death.

The finale of the play shares the death scene where Arden was murdered, drawing attention to the relationship of "his body's print" and the ground that he illegitimately claims from the dispossessed commoner Dick Reede. The end of the play states:

Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground  
Which he by force and violence held from Reede,  
And in the grass his body's print was seen  
Two years and more after the deed was done. (18.10-13)

Arden's imprint on the ground can be read as more evidence that in *Arden* a natural law operates to underpin social relationships between land and people.<sup>58</sup> The narrating voice of Franklin, a character that summarizes the end of the play, places the tragic conflict between Arden's ambition for gaining abbey lands and improving his social as well as economic standing in the community, at odds with supernatural forces made evident in the text – the ground bears the stains of Arden's inauthentic blood status. According to Franklin, Arden is justly punished for violating a religious as well as patriarchal hierarchy of power, a system that was in great flux during the early modern period. Franklin claims this higher order can be discerned in the return of Arden's lifeless body to the plot of ground he had legally acquired, but this acquisition goes against the natural order of blood law.

In the plot of *Arden*, as well as in the backstory disclosed in the *Chronicles*, Reede, former tenant and entitled renter under common law, curses Arden and warns him of the eventual retribution he will face under the blood-law. Arden's violation of blood-law occurs in his avaricious efforts to assume a higher status than traditional blood-law would have assigned him. Here, as in the line spoken by Susan opening this chapter, one can see that the ground or the land determines the identity and social status of individuals

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<sup>58</sup> Notions about owning land and what that represents is contested and challenged in *Arden*. Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. argues in "Arden Lay Murdered in that Plot of Ground: Surveying, Land and *Arden of Faversham*" that land is understood as not only as property but is connected to social responsibility. This idea that the landowner assumes responsibility for others is grounded in feudal ideology. Overall, there is a move away from traditional feudal ideology and this larger cultural shift is embodied in Alice Arden. Her rebellion against marriage and her role as property in that marriage parallels more general social anger towards the privatization of other types of properties (land). *The Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations on the Early Modern Stage* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).

even as some attempt to co-opt land in the effort to prop-up claims their to social status. In both, Susan's notice to Alice that "the blood cleaveth to the ground," and Arden's barrister Franklin's observation that "in that plot of ground....[Arden's] body's print was seen," we find that the changing historical conventions of assigning status through contract instead of through patrimony are incomplete and ineffectual as antidotes to the older justice-based on blood-rites.<sup>59</sup> Of course, neither contract law nor blood law offers Alice and other female characters freedom: women's wombs and the regulation of marriage remain delimited under both theories.<sup>60</sup>

From a modern feminist perspective Alice's actions are not outside the bounds of sympathy. Given that 16<sup>th</sup> century England locked wives into what can fairly be construed as life-long indentured sexual and social servitude through coverture laws, violent objections to the institution were rational. Coverture laws denied women legal recognition and recourse, binding them in a non-consensual relationship of domestic and reproductive labor—or one where a single act of consent presupposes all others. At all moments in the timeline of representation produced about the historical woman memorialized by *Arden of Faversham*, her voice and motivation was and is appropriated and configured without her consent. Naturally, no one is able to fully participate in consensual representation posthumously, which is why this chapter reflects upon the

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<sup>59</sup> Reede's curse against Arden is very much consistent with ritual death-vows and promises of retributive justice appearing in both Classical and Elizabethan theatre.

<sup>60</sup> Anthropologist Mary Douglas has explored the deep psychological web of connotations between death-rites and justice. In her readings of one cultural group, she notes, "Any particular death is treated as unnecessary, due to a wicked crime on the part of a depraved anti-social human being. Just as the focus of all pollution symbolism is the body, the final problem to which the perspective of pollution leads is bodily disintegration. Death presents a challenge to any metaphysical system, but the challenge need not be squarely met" in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002) 213. In *Arden*, the metaphysics of natural law over-determine the outcomes for both Alice and Arden. Their bodies are, in dying and death, reclaimed as objects governed by the metaphysics of blood-law and its form of justice.

power of the theater to represent the dead, a power that carries significant responsibility.

## II.

Critical reception of *Arden of Faversham* has focused considerable attention on the character of the husband and the details of the murder's representation as it relates to its historical antecedent. Here, the focus shifts toward an explication of the mutually constitutive and co-dependent social identities of wife and husband as constructed by blood-law and contract-law. Both social identities then are analyzed in relation to the legitimate transmission of land through the contract of marriage, and particular attention is given to the ways in which attaining land and understanding social identities are in flux both on and off the stage. In the opening epigraph, one can see the intersections between social constructions of woman as wife and the belief that regulation of the marriage contract is essential for the stability of the political economy. At the same time, the title quote of this chapter, spoken by Susan in her lament to Alice, demonstrates that contract law governing marriage is underpinned by an older logic of land ownership and identity—a logic that inheres in nature itself. She specifically exclaims that “blood cleaveth to the ground,” not only in that blood was spilled in the murder of Arden, but more intimately connected is the idea that family blood, social significance, and economic prosperity are all directly tied to property and land.

As Frances E. Dolan points out in “The Subordinate('s) Plot: Petty Treason and the Forms of Domestic Rebellion,” Alice's attempt on her husband's life was not only an attempt at defining marriage on her own terms, but was interpreted as “an egregious assault on social and political order” making a threat to one's husband analogous to a



threat to the power of the state and deserving of a more violent punishment.<sup>61</sup> The phenomenon of mariticide in England was infrequent enough, yet when it did occur, it warranted the most gruesome and theatrical sorts of legal vengeance that the State could enact upon the body of a subject, especially if one was a woman. Dolan explains,

Until 1790, the punishments for petty treason were different than those for murder and drew attention to the crime as a particularly egregious assault on social and political order. Men convicted of petty treason were drawn to the place of execution on a hurdle, then hanged. This punishment emphasized the shameful display of the disciplined body but was not as heinous as the notorious executions for high treason, which involved mutilation, disembowelment, and decapitation. Women convicted of petty treason, however, were sentenced to the same punishment as those convicted of high treason: they were burned at the stake.<sup>62</sup>

This idea draws attention to the inequality in punishment for men and women for crimes of treason and the level of severity on which it is based. The crime of mariticide was classified as treasonous behavior—a lesser form of betrayal than regicide certainly, yet still a crime with the potential to spill over into larger social disorder if allowed to contaminate the moral sensibilities of society. Mariticide might be considered as one of a type of “contagious crime,” where the foundations of cultural order seem to be directly threatened. The murder of a husband comes to metaphorically represent in a patriarchal society the murder of the King, the father, the master. Similarly, on a religious level, mariticide coupled with adultery calls into question the entire spiritual universe, with its profanation of the marriage vow and the inversion of the subservient role of the wife.

D.E. Underdown explains in “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England” that this obsession with women acting

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<sup>61</sup> Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) 119.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid 22.

outside of traditional patriarchal borders is seen not only fictionally in plays but also in historical record of the time. He argues that the preoccupation with transgressive female behaviors and witchcraft peaked during the same time as the plays in discussion throughout this dissertation.<sup>63</sup> His review offers an historical counterpart providing foundation from court records for the stage representation of cultural anxieties about women's behavior and looks at the way they were addressed and punished.

Scholars have also addressed the phenomenon of mariticide in early modern England with some writers interpreting Alice's actions and motives as a violent reaction to oppression and a move toward liberation and freedom. Others argue she is limited and defeated by religious and patriarchal ideology. Peter Lake argues that patriarchy no longer wielded control over women's bodies and sexuality and this loss of power threatened household stability, leading to portrayals of women as seductresses that lured men into sinful behaviors.<sup>64</sup>

Other critics take up the issue of household stability and collapsing patriarchal power in the home that informs the reading of *Arden*. Lena Cowen Orlin argues in "Man's House as His Castle in *Arden of Faversham*" that the murder of Arden in the end of the play "satisf[ies] our instinct for justice" and thus "accomplish[es] a restitution of order."<sup>65</sup> For Orlin, Arden's tragedy is that he is removed from the home. The only safe-

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<sup>63</sup> D.E. Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England." *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 116-136.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Lake, "Deeds Against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism, and Murder in Early Seventeenth-Century England" in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 263-65.

<sup>65</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin shows Alice as head of the house in Arden's absence in "Man's House as His Castle in *Arden of Faversham*" (*Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 2, 1985) 81.

guarding of land and women's labor as wife is through physical presence, and Arden jeopardizes the security of succession because he immediately goes to London and leaves his wife behind at the beginning of the play. The marriage contract is insecure, as Alice demonstrates through her own infidelity, and this challenges his role as head of the household; Orlin's argument shows how the theater props up the traditional idea that a threat to his status in the home results in Alice's punishment and public spectacle for audience control. Similarly, Betty Travitsky argues, "the imbalance in the portrayals of the female, as opposed to the male villain" in the male-authored Arden sustains "the hierarchical values which subordinated Renaissance Englishwomen."<sup>66</sup> Lisa Jardine posits that the theater reinforced patriarchal norms and provided a dramatic representation for audiences as a means of disseminating cultural values, and reinforcing that "no woman of his will ever get thus out of hand."<sup>67</sup> Alison Findlay argues that, as a genre, domestic tragedy was "intrinsically subversive because it undermines the image of individual patriarchal power, exposing it as an illusion (or delusion) suffered by the master."<sup>68</sup> Overall, these critics show how domestic tragedy destabilized patriarchal foundations in early modern English culture and gave Alice power in the agency she gains, despite its limitations.

Other critics focus on marginalized characters and attempt to amplify the marginalized voices of the persecuted and silenced, thus seeming to portray the theater as

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<sup>66</sup> Betty Travitsky, in "Husband-Murder and Petty Treason in English Renaissance Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama*, 21 (1990) 179.

<sup>67</sup> Lisa Jardine. *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983) 94, 97.

<sup>68</sup> Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) 129.

giving power to those voices. “Alice Arden’s Crime” by Catherine Belsey shows that the public scandal of Alice’s domestic crime “lies in Alice’s challenge to the institution of marriage, itself publicly in crisis in the period.”<sup>69</sup> Alice “rejects the metaphysics of presence which guarantees the social enforcement of permanent monogamy, in favor of a free sexuality” and that lack of awareness and defiance impedes her social death through marriage confronting the way gender roles are mapped onto her as subject and her husband as master.<sup>70</sup>

Not only does Alice overturn marital obligation; she also illuminates the notion of contract law—a law that allows her to be a participating agent rather than the property in exchanges between male negotiators. Furthermore, Belsey posits, “the event is primarily an instance of the breakdown of order—the rape of women and property—which follows when exchange of contracts in a market economy supplant old loyalties, old obligations, old hierarchies.”<sup>71</sup> Belsey illuminates the intersection of marriage, body, ground and the economy in the text; ultimately, Belsey centers her argument on marriage and the changing ideas surrounding marriage in the period.<sup>72</sup> Belsey argues, “Marriage becomes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the site of a paradoxical struggle to create a

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<sup>69</sup> Catherine Belsey’s “Alice Arden’s Crime” appears in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* by David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991). This notion of “crisis” has been researched in depth in Lawrence Stone’s *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) in his volume of works detailing social change during the period including the decreasing importance of kinship and blood law and the blurring of class distinctions.

<sup>70</sup> Belsey, “Alice Arden’s Crime,” 84.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>72</sup> See also David Atwell’s “Property, Status and the Subject in a Middle Class Tragedy: *Arden of Faversham*” that is similar to but limits Belsey’s argument in *English Literary Renaissance*, 21.3 (1991) 328-48.

private realm and to take control of it in the interests of the public good.”<sup>73</sup> The main problem is that Alice challenges traditional marriage expectations and this, as a real life event, is placed in the public arena rather than remaining in the private sphere. The challenge to the institution of marriage speaks to a larger institutional crisis of the monarchy.<sup>74</sup> Belsey reviews many interpretations and retellings of the murder and explores its relationship to the meaning of marriage.<sup>75</sup>

*Arden* foregrounds the position of a female character as a powerful agent struggling with and against competing patriarchal theories of law in her efforts to move beyond the status of wife as defined by either blood or contract.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, Alice moves beyond her role of wife by way of death, and thus the playwright reinforces blood law as the natural law, a position that is supported and confirmed by the curse inflicted on Arden as a result of his usurpation of land from the commoner. Alice’s dramatized body becomes a site upon which to enact both blood law and contract law in this stage performance. Both Alice and Arden are punished for their threats to the established order of the family and the social hierarchy.

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<sup>73</sup> Belsey, “Alice Arden’s Crime,” 133-34.

<sup>74</sup> With Elizabeth I on the throne, the collective consciousness of England experienced anxiety surrounding Elizabeth’s singular rule and lack of an heir to the throne. Furthermore, the monarch’s role becomes increasingly limited and more symbolic over time eventually climaxing with the Civil War and execution of Charles I.

<sup>75</sup> Belsey’s earlier work expands the discussion of socially constructed identities. She looks at tragedy as a literary genre that exposes conflicts surrounding the formation of subjectivity. Competing discourses about identity collide within theatrical texts in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>76</sup> For more on women’s roles in light of economic and religious change in the period, see Lena Cowen Orlin, “Family Transgressions, Societal Transition on the Elizabethan Stage.” *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*. Ed. Carole Levin and Karen Robertson. (Lewiston: The Edwin Melon P, 1991) 27-56.

The previously discussed scholars focus on the roles of marriage, blood law and Alice's threat to classifications of order, but they rarely note Alice's participation in the exchange of commodity and economy in the play. We clearly see how the male characters, specifically Mosby and Arden, stand to profit from Alice's social capital, but less attention is paid to Alice's ability to navigate and profit from an economy of exchange. After all, she does not plan to kill Arden herself. She negotiates with various coconspirators and plays into the desires of the other characters to achieve her goals. For example, she promises Susan to Michael in exchange for the murder, although Susan is not her "property" to exchange. Michael not only promises to murder his master for Alice, but also claims he will murder his elder brother to gain land and wealth, and Alice capitalizes on this desire. Michael's legitimacy cannot be through blood or contract, but the importance of gaining social as well as economic capital leads him to agree to murder. "Who would not venture upon house and land/ When he may have it for a right-down blow?" (1.175-76). The word venture implies taking risks, specifically financial risks or going somewhere unknown, but it also connotes mobility, courage, adventure and opportunity and has a positive relationship to masculinity. Michael accepts the risk of committing murder to be assured marriage to Susan. He seeks risk for "house and land" belonging to his older brother and attempts to establish access to "good blood" by taking the properties to which his elder brother is entitled. He trivializes the imagined murder valuing the commodity of properties over kinship and demonstrates the deterioration of the old social order that privileges familial inheritance and name. Furthermore, Alice has access to economic capital and is able to offer money to Black Will and Shakebag in exchange for the murder of her husband. She is portrayed as powerful and threatening

because she is an efficient and organized manager of money and time. She coordinates and bargains with several men in the play to carry out the murder, and uses language of commodity and exchange to control the situations around her.

### III.

*Arden of Faversham* is the first domestic tragedy and is based on real historical events in English history.<sup>77</sup> The series of events is recorded in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, describing in great detail the attempted murder of Arden and the demise of his wife, Alice.<sup>78</sup> Arden is described as a “gentleman” and is “matched in marriage” to Alice, but she is having an affair with a man of lower social station, Mosby, who is the lowest sort of tailor—a botcher. It is important to note that Arden discusses his “blood” and his “gentleman” status to draw attention to the social capital he has in relation to lower status characters such as Michael or Mosby. Arden’s emphasis on his superior status reveals insecurity regarding the stability of his social standing, a position propped up by his wife’s social capital. Holinshed depicts a socially striving man seeking profit from his marriage to a higher status woman—a man so motivated by economic and social gain that he is willing to sacrifice his reputation by accepting his status as cuckold. Although Arden is emasculated by Alice’s sexual infidelity, Arden feared losing access to her valuable social connections:

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<sup>77</sup> Domestic tragedy looks at the middle and lower sort rather than aristocratic affairs as classical tragedy did. However, themes of patrilineal exchange and property permeate the text. See Kirk Ormand’s *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> The text was published in 2 editions, 1577 and 1587. I reference the 1587 edition. Another historical account appears in *The Wardmote Book of Faversham: The Account of Thomas Arden's Murder*, App. III ed. M.L. Wine (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1976); also Stow’s *Annals of England* (London: 1631) as well as a printed ballad form in 1633.

And although [...] Arden perceiued right well their mutuall familiaritie to be much greater than their honestie, yet because he would not offend hir, and so loose the benefit which he hoped to gaine at some of hir f [...]éends hands in bearing with hir lewdnesse, which he might haue lost if he should haue fallen out with hir<sup>79</sup>

Arden is willing to tolerate her infidelity for access to her “friends.” The *Chronicles* here sheds light on the advantage Alice has in the marriage and reinforces the idea that Alice’s social capital is more profitable than Arden’s. In the play, Greene specifically makes note of her benefit to Arden when he states, “Respects he not your birth,/ Your honorable friends, nor what you brought [to the marriage]?/ Why, all Kent knows your parentage, and what you are” (1.490-493). Alice’s advantageous position allows her to challenge the boundaries and patriarchal constraints of marriage.

Similarly, with respect to his Arden’s landholdings, the *Chronicles* portrays Arden, as does the play, as an opportunistic landowner taking possession of once-common properties; the play highlights the tensions between landholder and tenant that were evident in the culture.<sup>80</sup> The historical account of Arden points to his attempt to profit from his newly acquired land. The *Chronicles* also note that a local fair that historically took place on these properties was now privatized and enclosed for Arden’s individual profit:

Arden for his owne priuat lucre & couetous gaine had this present yeare procured it to be wholie kept within the abbeie ground which he had purchased; & so reaping all the gaines to himselfe, and bereauing the towne of that portion which was woont to come to the inhabitants, got manie a bitter curse.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Ed. Vernon F. Snow (New York: AMS, 1965).

<sup>80</sup> During 1540s England, the agricultural situation was in a state of crisis. Wealthy people put up fences and used lands for their own profit while the rural citizens wanted to maintain the old system where they could graze their animals on common lands. For further information, see Mark Overton’s *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>81</sup> Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles*.



He used his procured abbey lands to earn money for himself, and by doing so, alienated the citizens of the town. He purchased the lands and is described in the historical account as a greedy social climber. This is not the only occasion Arden was cursed by the townspeople. Arden was murdered in a field behind the abbey,

Which field he had (as some haue reported) most cruellie taken from a woman, [...]for they had long inioied it by a lease, which they had of it for manie yeares, not then expired: neuerthelesse, he got it from them” resulting in the woman “cursed him most bitterlie euen to his face, wishing manie a vengeance to light vpon him.<sup>82</sup>

Arden’s buying the property and not honoring the lease reveals him as the new landowner that disrupts a sense of religious as well as economic and social order, an order that on a larger scale is disrupted by the break from the Catholic Church and dissolution of the monasteries.<sup>83</sup> The religious disruption occurs as a focus on community is replaced by Protestant individualism. Arden as the landowner is no longer obliged to maintain the tenants of the property. The economic and social shift, while opening opportunities for social climbing for Arden, also demonstrate the lack of social acceptance for his pursuit of financial gain through his property. This historical moment is punctuated by the tension in blood and contract law. Blood-law here refers to traditional owner/tenant relationship based in protection, loyalty and service wherein ownership of the land was tied to family, kinship and social class ties. Under this conventional system, a master or

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<sup>82</sup> Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles*. The woman represents the popular mindset as many rebellions took place around the idea of enclosure. The largest, Kett’s Rebellion, exemplifies the upheaval and the economic instability. See Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch’s *Tudor Rebellions*, 5th edition, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> James R. Siemon, “Landlord Not King: Agrarian Change and Interarticulation” analyzes literary texts and argues that characters interact as part of the changing social hierarchies and create a voice in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, edited by Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994).

king maintained communal lands for public use. Contract law refers to the means by which Arden acquired his property, or the idea that one can purchase land, hold title and increase profit separate from family lineage or social status. Arden claims access by means of contract whilst blood law (maintaining a common area for a larger community that is associated with old law) pushes back against new ideas of economy and commodity exchange. This tension and instability surrounding property rights extends to women's bodies, as we will see later in the close reading of his wife, Alice.

This analysis doesn't so much contribute to the large historiographical questions about the *Chronicles* themselves as it illustrates the importance of the intertext between historical events, documentation of these events in the form of books like *The Chronicles*, and the eventual fictional representations in texts such as *Arden*. In this chapter's exploration of the tropes of blood and law in *Arden*, we can begin with this speculation about the influence of the *Chronicles* on the choice of subject for a playwright in selecting to depict and represent the petite nobility and small gentry instead of the traditional choice of major aristocratic houses. Inter-textual linkages between the historical event, the chronicling of the event, and the theatrical representation, evidence the growing interest by early modern playwrights and audiences in the lives and conditions of women as wives, and in women as workers inside the domestic economy of sexual reproduction as well as the domestic economy of the state.

This chapter uses the *Chronicles* as a point of reference for understanding the development of gendered tropes on the early modern stage, especially as they relate to social capital, the shifting economy and its relationship to violence toward women's bodies. This analysis begins the work of bringing these three texts, (1) the historical

event, (2) the documenting of the event, (3) theatrical representation of the event, into conversation about how social conventions and cultural ideals about women's sexuality and status were regulated. In the first moment of representation, Alice Arden's actual public execution and burning flesh served as the blood sacrament that cleansed society of the threat of women's sexuality and agency, and reinstated traditions of order.<sup>84</sup> In the second text, so to speak, the chronicling of this ritual burning laid precedent for capital punishment, and in the third, rendered by the anonymous playwright, a larger audience opening onto even future readers and audiences served to warn of the futility of women's resistance to their husbands. Yet, this third moment of representation also has opened the interpretive floodgates of cultural criticism. For example, this chapter asks: How did tensions of early modern society play themselves out in the theater and what role did women, in particular the bodies of women, have in the divergent tensions and shifting principles of blood, and contract? Turning to *Arden of Faversham*, this chapter looks at the tropes of blood and wife in relation to the coverture laws that the character of Alice unsuccessfully sought to challenge. As the analysis in this chapter progresses, the mythological figure of Clytemnestra haunts my social understandings of marriage and murder.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> In the 17th and 18th centuries, *Newgate Calendar* tells the sensationalized version of the murder of Thomas Arden. The publicity and entertainment of public execution prevalent in the enactment of 16th century justice comes to stand in stark contrast to later European theories of justice unhinged from older forms of retribution and blood law. See for example Foucault's description in *Discipline and Punish* of 19th century norms, "A utopia of judicial reticence: take away life, but prevent the patient from feeling it; deprive the prisoner of all rights, but do not inflict pain; impose penalties free of all pain." ('The Body of the Condemned,' New York: Random House, 1977).

<sup>85</sup> In-line with feminist scholars reading representations of femininity against the dictates of patriarchal power, I invoke the figure of Clytemnestra at the opening of this chapter to point my reader towards the deep intellectual ancestry of conversations on marriage and blood law in the Western tradition. This chapter attempts to do its small part to illuminate the dynamics with which women still wrestle in regard to justice, marriage and freedom. See Kathleen L. Kmar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra: Revenge or Reconciliation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

#### IV.

Ancestral social assignment and patriarchal inheritance is an integral part to becoming a wife. In *Arden of Faversham*, this involves negotiation and property exchange. Alice brings social capital to her marriage with Arden, but compromises that capital through her illicit affair with Mosby. She challenges social rules first, by maintaining this extramarital affair and second, by playing the part of patriarchal authority in her marriage negotiations on behalf of Susan. Alice creates disorder through assuming male authority in her offering and negotiating of Susan's potential marriage. This disruption of patriarchal order is central to the play; Alice derives power by speaking in the name of her father or husband. She has status and a platform from which to speak and negotiate because she is already wife. She gains credibility with her audience (Michael, Clark, Greene) because of the access to property she has through her husband. This recognized patriarchal status authorizes Alice to imagine herself as a sovereign human capable of making decisions, even though those decisions are in direct contrast to the institution from which she garners power. Julie R. Schutzman foregrounds Alice's autonomy and argues the play challenges patriarchal social order from within that same order. This articulates the failure of the metaphor of the home and of the domestic space as a "little commonwealth" created to control unruly wives.<sup>86</sup> She claims the play, "suggests that the logic that seeks to govern these [domestic] spaces may actually enable,

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<sup>86</sup> Gouge, *Of Domestical*, 17. This idea of the home functioning as a "little commonwealth" was common during the period. William Vaughan's *The Golden Grove, A Worke Very necessary for all such as would know How to Govern themselves their houses or their country*, (1600) in the context of religious and moral advice brings together political and individual values to establish and maintain order. Richard Braithwaite's *The English Gentleman* (1631) makes the comparison of the family to the larger political hierarchy. This period saw an increase in conduct manual publication and this idea was rooted in the Bible: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23).

rather than prevent, the murderous plans of a freedom-seeking wife.”<sup>87</sup> Alice acts against the private family space within which she is ensconced.

Alice participates in the social reproduction of patriarchy in that her attempts to challenge it—by having an affair with Mosby and by plotting to murder her husband in order to marry for love—are fueled by her reinforcement of using women, particularly Susan, as a means to gain her own freedom. Susan’s silence in the play reinforces the common idea that women should remain chaste, silent and obedient. Susan’s passivity and silence contrasts with Alice’s agency. Susan is in the process of ‘becoming’ wife, that is, functioning as a commodity that men vie for. Alice promises Susan to Michael in exchange for the murder of Arden. She also promises Susan to Clarke, the painter, in exchange for a painting that will destroy those who look upon it (another murder attempt of her husband). Susan is useful to Alice in that she allows her to enact authority and manipulate the marriage market to her advantage. Ultimately, through her use of Susan, Alice is able to procure an assistant in the murder of her husband, thus freeing her to marry on her own terms. Her effort to escape the marriage that controls her is undermined by her reinforcing the social structures for her own self-interest. Catherine Belsey examines the fractures in the foundational institution of marriage as a locus for political control. She posits, “the scandal lies in Alice Arden’s challenge to the institution of marriage itself publically in crisis in the period.”<sup>88</sup> Marriage as an institution was in crisis because marriage and the home were microcosms of the state, an image of hierarchy and

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<sup>87</sup> Julie R. Schutzman, “Alice Arden’s Freedom and the Suspended Moment of Arden of Faversham” *SEL* 36 (1996): 298-314. See also Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters Public Culture in Post Reformation England*. (Ithaca: Cornell, UP, 1994) 289.

<sup>88</sup> Belsey, “Alice Arden’s Crime,” 133.

order of the King. Marriage also joined powerful families, made political alliances, and preserved wealth of wellborn families.<sup>89</sup> Alice undermines the goals of marriage through her affair with Mosby. Thus, her domestic threat to undermine the power of her husband maps onto a threat to the larger political authority.

Alice champions love in her intimate relationship with Mosby, but more importantly argues that his title is superior to her husband's because Mosby expresses his love for her. Reflecting on her marriage to Arden, she imagines, "oh that some airy spirit/ Would in the shape and likeness of a horse/ Gallop with Arden' cross the ocean/ And throw him from his back into the waves!" (1.94-97). She follows this soliloquy with the explanation that, "Sweet Mosby is the man that hath my heart,/ And he usurps it having not but this;/ That I am tied to him by marriage./ Love is a god, and marriage is but words./ And therefore, Mosby's title is the best" (1.97-101). For Alice, love has energy and power beyond earthly pleasure and is to be worshipped and respected. She compares marriage, however to words. She implies words are empty, fleeting, and hold no power or emotion. The word "title" draws attention to the treatment of women as property. Both men claim ownership of her, but Alice rejects law and marriage in preferring Mosby's claim of love to win over Arden's. Alice shows that marriage is a social construct and a transaction among men that preserves titles and money.<sup>90</sup> She champions Mosby's title because it ignores these constructs and allows for personal choice and subjectivity. This

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<sup>89</sup> For further information on the significance and ritual of marriage alliances, see David Cressy. *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. (London: Oxford UP, 1997).

<sup>90</sup> For a more detailed account of women's roles in marriage, see Keith Wrightson's *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1982).

choice and subjectivity go against the laws of society, considering women's status as property in the marriage arrangement. The appearance of Alice's subjectivity is tempered by the fact that she has no interlocutor to hear and validate her desire. The audience, for example, is not privileged to Alice's initiation of the romantic affair and her reasoning in selecting Mosby, details and information that would assist the audience in believing Alice's reasoning and decisions in the course of plotting the murder of her husband. Yet, the audience does enjoy insight to Alice's retrospective account of her decisions to commit mariticide and betray her blood-contract.

While Alice may be read as disobedient to law and custom, one may also see her as testing the boundary of power in social capital—the same behavior that Arden takes part in by being a cuckold. Schutzman describes “Alice's desire for Mosby as a rebellion against a privatized, restrictive notion of family.”<sup>91</sup> Alice seeks freedom from the commodity exchange to which she is subject through the marital exchange.

However, she takes a utilitarian approach in that her rejection of patriarchy is also premised in her efforts on patriarchy. Alice uses Susan as a bargaining piece to manipulate Michael. Susan is talked about, but plays no active role in the negotiation of her marital contract; she is voiceless and powerless because she has yet to gain the identity of wife, which would enable her a place from which to speak, as her lower social standing does not allow her to speak from a position of inherited wealth or family name. We hear about her, we know others' plans for her, we hear arguments over who has rights and access to her body, but she does not appear or speak until the end of the play. Alice plays into a bartering-for-women tradition to get what she wants first with Michael and

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<sup>91</sup> Schutzman, “Alice Arden's Freedom,” 293.

then with Clarke, the painter—but in doing so she is participating in and reproducing an oppressive system to gain and challenge the same system for herself. She employs the tenets of patriarchy to subvert patriarchal norms for marriage. We finally hear Susan's voice when she is helping Alice wash away the blood of her recently murdered husband.

Alice: And, Susan, fetch water and wash away this blood.

Susan: The blood cleaveth to the ground and will not out.

Alice: But with my nails I'll scrape away the blood.

The more I strive, the more the blood appears.

Susan: What's the reason, mistress, can you tell?

Alice: Because I blush not at my husband's death. (14.255-260)

Washing away the blood attempts to hide the crime Alice just committed, but washing is also an act of cleaning and purifying. She is washing away the past relationship with her husband and the 'words' of her marital contract, which ultimately represents a renewed life for her, one without her husband. She may want to wash away the blood to remove the 'stains' of status that accompany her and her husband's social station and the limitations therein, but they "will not out." The blood represents ancestral ties to family and the significance of kinship and the washing removes familial ties to make room for autonomy. She solicits the help of Susan, a character she has pawned off earlier in the play for her own personal gain, but in whom she now seeks an ally. Susan notes the blood staining the ground that will not wash away. The familial bonds and social status the blood represents, while an imaginary construct, holds power and will not release its influence on Alice or the culture she inhabits. The reason the blood cleaves to the ground is because she does not blush at the murder of her husband. To blush is to become red in the face from modesty or embarrassment, but Alice does not care about modesty—she disregards decency in behavior according to the cultural norms that define those accepted behaviors. The historical accounts of the crime allude to her extramarital affair and her



lack of secrecy in the relationship. She does not feel shame for her husband's death—it is a death she has pursued the whole play. It is a death that releases her from the bond of body and blood. The status of becoming wife exemplifies a site of contest and struggle for legitimacy and autonomy. The role of women's bodies is specifically articulated in the institution of marriage.<sup>92</sup>

The previous quotation echoes the biblical reference to Genesis 2:24: “Wherefore a man shall forsake [his] father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be twain in one flesh [and two shall be in one flesh]” and the idea is repeated in Matthew, Mark and Ephesians.<sup>93</sup> This biblical instruction of cleaving or attaching oneself is specifically physical. The bodies will become one “flesh.” The man's identity, in the act of coming together, consumes the female identity. The OED defines ‘cleave’ as “to cling or hold fast *to*; to adhere or cling *to* (a person, party, principle, practice, etc.); to remain attached, devoted, or faithful *to*.” This definition reinforces the coming together under a marital bond and connotes sexual coupling. Alice breaks the biblical law of cleaving to her husband—she has taken a lover, Mosby. Arden, too, has broken the law. Cleave has a simultaneous and opposite meaning of “To separate or sever by dividing or splitting,” as reminiscent of Alice and her emotional as well as physical separation from her husband. Although he is aware that leaving town, and thus leaving his wife behind, “abhors from reason” (1.54), he follows his friend Franklin's advice: “As securely, presently take horse/ And lie with me at London all this [law] term” (1.50-51). By leaving town, he is

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<sup>92</sup> Laura Gowing points out, “the system of morality in which gender, sex and marriage had meaning was more complex than a simple scale of sexual culpability, in which logic demanded women be judged more severely than men,” in *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 4.

<sup>93</sup> Scripture comes from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1599 Edition with Undated Sternhold & Hopkins Psalms* (Pleasant Hope, MO: L.L. Brown Pub, 1993).

leaving open claim to his wife's body as well as his properties.<sup>94</sup> Cleaving, in this opposite sense divides the marriage.

We also see Alice appropriating and internalizing patriarchal traditions in the way she views Mosby's social status. Alice's insults of Mosby are often internalized patriarchal criticisms of women. She equates his behavior to female transgressions and projects feminine stereotypes of weakness onto him, using her superior social station to insult and belittle him. She expresses her love and desire for Mosby putting aside station until he rejects her. She collapses the hierarchy when speaking of her love for him, but reestablishes the social boundaries when he rejects her.

Before I saw that falsehood look of thine,  
Fore I was tangled with thy 'ticing speech,  
Arden to me was dearer than my soul—  
And shall be still. Base peasant, get thee gone,  
And boast not of thy conquest over me,  
Gotten by witchcraft and mere sorcery.  
For what hast thou to countenance my love,  
Being descended of a noble house,  
And matched already with a gentleman  
Whose servant thou mayst be? And so farewell. (1.196- 205)

She accuses him of luring her in and deceiving her with "looks" and using his speech to trap and confuse her. She speaks of his speech as one would a woman's during this period because of the dangers of female speech and their linguistic expressions leading to sinfulness.<sup>95</sup> She again refers to Mosby's 'base' status, establishing her authority through her higher social standing. By referring to him as a peasant, she emasculates and weakens him by depriving him of the traditional male role. She instructs him to "boast not of thy

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<sup>94</sup> David Atwell. "Property, Status and the Subject in a Middle Class Tragedy: *Arden of Faversham*." *ELR* 21 (1992), 328-48.

<sup>95</sup> William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) is a conduct manual of the period written to instruct women of their household duties and acceptable public behaviors. He emphasizes the subordinate role of the wife to the husband and equates the husband to the 'king' of the home.

conquest” as he is not authorized to have access to her embodied or material capital. She does not allow him to feel pride in subjugating her—she explains she is ‘matched already with a gentleman’ and this, along with his inferior status keeps him from claiming access to her. She contrasts her “noble” blood and match to Arden, a “gentleman” with his lower “servant” status. Alice enacts masculinity based on her status as a legitimate wife whose ancestry, and good blood, allow for the valid transmission of social capital through marriage.

We see that Alice not only challenges her marriage through her affair with Mosby, but also challenges her assigned social role. The institution of marriage follows the law of coverture, making Alice’s identity legally subsumed by that of her husband’s. She questions Arden’s right to “govern me that am to rule myself” (10.84). The word “govern” draws attention to the power to rule oneself as equated with the power of the state. The OED defines govern as “to rule with authority, especially the authority of a sovereign; to direct and control with the authority of a superior (the members of a household).”<sup>96</sup> As previously discussed, the idea of the husband as the ruler of the house and the wife as subservient was common during the period, and Alice’s call to govern upends that hierarchy and threatens the social order. She asserts her own agency and argues for autonomy, but does so only to replace Arden with another man. She does not seek to escape the institution of marriage, but rather to control her role within it. This idea of challenging power runs throughout the play and is especially important for female characters. Alice’s actions are unnatural and represent of disorder. At this moment in the play, Alice not only cuckolds her husband, but also through her affair with Mosby

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<sup>96</sup> “govern.” OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/> (accessed October 27, 2015).

challenges the notion of marriage as a financial transaction and as a way to preserve familial ties through her affair with man of lower status and no land or material wealth.

Alice embodies a leading character that is neither passive nor accepting of the constraints placed upon her. This play offers a female character that tests the boundaries of patriarchy while developing agency within those same bounds. She is a character that takes control of her own body and sexuality against the rules of coverture and property exchange all while undermining the stereotype of the emotional and irrational woman. Through Alice, the audience sees reenacted the social and political restructuring of power toward a contract law divorced from the restriction of the traditional rules of kinship grounded in blood.

## V.

Ideology guides a society's overarching cultural and social behavior, particularly with respect to women and marriage, and is magnified by the mirroring representations of a growing contract economy. This section looks at Alice's role of being a wife and its relationship to economic and social gain for Arden. Alice herself is an object useful for the transmission of money between families, and Arden seeks to benefit from her station and profit from her social capital. In "Forms of Capital" Bourdieu describes various kinds of capital including economic, social and cultural capital.<sup>97</sup> As previously discussed, economic capital refers to one's access to money and property. For example, Arden increases his economic capital by acquiring the title to the abbey lands as well as Alice's dowry. As Bourdieu describes, social capital is, "the sum of the resources, actual or

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<sup>97</sup> "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu, P. (1986) 241-258.

virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”<sup>98</sup> Alice’s social capital is manifested in her social position and family title, both of which her husband covets and accesses through marriage. Arden’s greed for social capital consumes him, and he sees other male characters like Mosby and Green as threatening his access to that capital. Throughout the play, Arden draws attention to the social climbing of others as a threat to his own capital, undermining his claim to property and revealing his anxiety of legitimate social identity. Arden possesses economic capital—the abbey lands he has acquired—but symbolic appropriation fails because he is unsuccessful in appropriating Alice’s embodied capital.

Part of being an early modern wife was to have one’s identity consumed and shaped by the husband. The public and legal identity of women was erased in marriage, thus signifying the idea of the wife as an object, a static identity vulnerable to destruction.<sup>99</sup> Identity is socially constructed—no one is born a wife. Nonetheless, social constructions are shaped and constrained by corporeality, or material conditions, including physical embodiment. Thus, social construction and materiality are in a recursive relationship. The work of wife is the task of guaranteeing legitimate blood transmission of patriarchal title, but in Alice’s actions, the audience can see that being a wife is a state of potential treason, instability, and transgression. Through a close reading of Arden’s relationship to and understanding of lands and property, we see that Alice’s

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<sup>98</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 119.

<sup>99</sup> Suzanne Hull discusses women’s status as chattel and coverture law in *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women* (Walnut Creek: Alta-Mira Press, 1996).

challenge to the marriage institution destabilizes Arden's access to social capital and thus creates anxiety surrounding identity and social influence. In the context of scholarship on marriage, economy, and identity; I show moving beyond marital constructs results in Alice's death as a necessity to reinforce blood law as a marker of identity.

The legitimate transmission of capital is in the form of land in the context of this play. Lands are inherited and divided within familial lines to preserve social status and wealth. Blood is directly connected and associated with lineage determined by sanctioned marital unions. The purity of one's blood, that is, the legitimacy of one's birth, determines social status and cultural significance. Alice's ability to rule herself in her relationship with Mosby is founded on this idea—her family is a more prestigious family than his. Blood and ground reify, reinforce and legitimate each other. Legitimacy of birth gains one access to land, and land ownership signals status and legitimacy. However, blood and ground can only be connected through women's reproductive labor (in the production of a legitimate heir); yet, women were alienated from this means of production. That is, through marriage, women no longer had autonomy over their bodies, and blood could only be legitimized through patriarchally sanctioned institutions. In *Arden of Faversham*, anxiety about one's blood status and right to property show the conflict between traditional ideas of family as a model for hegemonic relationship and emerging modes of economic exchange. Alice participates in the commodification of status as currency to purchase, for example, power over Mosby. Disputed claims and a disputed sense of entitlement to property dominate the text; Alice's body becomes a site of this dispute when Arden's marital rights are threatened by Mosby's interference with and Alice's breach of her marital vows. The problem of unclear title to properties

parallels marital relationships later in the play, as titles that were once writ in blood became contractually dissociated from traditional familial structures.

Franklin, Arden's friend, opens the play by stating the abbey lands belong to Arden by order of the King. Historically, the Duke of Somerset (protector of Edward VI) confiscated the property of the Catholic Church during the Reformation and in the context of the play, has given lands to Thomas Arden.<sup>100</sup> Since he came into these lands by gift rather than by inheritance, we already see a precarious position for Arden. His rights to these lands are explicitly called into question. Mosby asks,

Master Arden, being at London yesternight,  
The abbey lands whereof you are now possessed  
Were offered me on some occasion  
By Greene, one of Sire Antony Ager's men.  
I pray you, sir, tell me, are not the lands yours?  
Hath any other interest herein? (1.393-398)

Mosby directly challenges Arden's claim to the properties in question and wants to determine if he has access to the property. Later, around line 460, we find that Greene is upset with Arden for taking his lands.

The opening scene sets up Arden's anxieties about his two types of properties: his lands got by gift and his wife. The play uses the same language to talk about both land and women as property. Arden's proof of claim to the land comes "By letters patents from His Majesty" (1.302). His legitimacy is determined not through birth, blood, or inheritance, but through contracts and letters. He has been appointed a legitimate title, but it is through language and words, not blood-law, that he seeks legitimacy. Arden employs

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<sup>100</sup> Refers to King Henry VIII and the dissolution of the monasteries by which he gained all assets and ownership. The Act of Supremacy in 1534 made him head of the Church of England. See, John Guy's historical text, *Tudor England*. The parallel tension here is the idea of the divine right of kings conflicting with the power of the Catholic Church. See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* for more on the political body versus the natural body and the relationship to access power. James R. Keller "Arden's Land Acquisitions and the dissolution of the Monasteries." *English Language Notes*, 30.4 (1993).

similar language with respect to his marital rights when confronting Mosby. He states, "But I must have a mandate for my wife;/ They say you seek to rob me of her love./ Villian, what makes thou in her company?/ She's no companion for so base a groom" (1.299-306).

Arden is invested in the power of letters patents and mandates that legitimize his access to properties and thus improves economic capital. He is confident of obtaining the monastery lands through such letters, but he sarcastically tells Mosby that he needs a "mandate" for his wife as well, since the claim does not seem clear to Mosby. Arden reminds Mosby that he does not have legitimate title to possess Alice. Wives are property, analogous to land, and both land and women are had by contracts agreed upon and upheld by a law that can be called into question. This law is artifice inasmuch as it is unstable and in need of continual audience approval.

Arden expresses his sadness that his wife loves Mosby, but his preoccupation is more with Mosby's social standing than Alice's sexual infidelity.<sup>101</sup> He does not understand how his wife, Alice, could love "a botcher," which is footnoted in the text as a tailor, although the OED specifies a difference between a more skilled tailor and a less notable botcher. To botch also means to "ruin through clumsiness," so the reference not only refers to Mosby's low station but also his lack of skill. Mosby serves a nobleman and has climbed the social ladder to Arden's dismay.<sup>102</sup> Arden explains that Mosby was

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<sup>101</sup> Mark Breitenberg, "Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England." *Feminist Studies* 19.2 (1993), 377-98. Breitenberg argues that this anxiety "is both a negative effect that leads us to patriarchy's own internal discord but also an instrument (once properly contained, appropriated or returned) of its perpetuation (2).

<sup>102</sup> Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (Hartford: Yale University Press, 2002). Also William Harrison's *The Description of England The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Life* (1577) discusses artisans and laborers as "the middling sort," and looks at the expanding population and its relationship to estate management and shifting social class boundaries—a



born a tailor, but “by base brokerage getting some small stock/ Crept into service of a nobleman/, And by his servile flattery and fawning/ Is now become the steward of his house” (1.26-29). While pointing to Mosby’s social climbing from “botcher” to “steward,” Arden projects his fear and anxiety of the legitimacy of his own social status and mobility through his acquisition of monastic lands. Through his hatred of Mosby’s low social station and desire for social mobility, he seeks to legitimize his own. Arden states, “Yes, the Lord Clifford, he that loves not me./ But through his favor let not him grow proud,/ For were he by the Lord Protector backed, he should not make me to be pointed at” (1.32-36). Arden argues that no matter how much favor Mosby receives or money he gains, he cannot reach Arden’s level of success. He fears Mosby can “by letters patents” gain access to property or wealth. However, Arden distinguishes that he is “by birth a gentleman of blood”—a status that Mosby can never reach. The ‘blood’ here is the only thing that Arden can use to distinguish himself from Mosby, and by calling attention to this blood law, he also exposes it as a cultural fiction.

Arden’s hatred for Mosby stems from his affection for Arden’s wife, but his concern is more about Mosby’s social standing than his wife’s infidelity. Arden states: “Ay, but to dote on such a one as he/ Is monstrous, Franklin, and intolerable” (1.22-23). The “monstrous” behavior he observes in his wife, to love someone of a lower station, challenges or even invalidates his concept of his identity and his entitlement. Franklin draws attention to the performative aspects of class by reassuring Arden “No nobleman will countenance such a peasant.” (1.31). Here countenance means to support, showing that no one will support Mosby’s greed and ambition. Countenance also refers to one’s

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shift that benefited some while leaving others in poverty. Mosby is representative of this unstable economic space.

face, meaning that those of noble blood will be able to look at Mosby and know his station. Arden imagines a violent destruction of Mosby's body for violating Arden's wife's chastity. He employs violent rhetoric: "Shall on the bed which he thinks to defile/  
See his dissevered joints and sinews torn,/ Whilst on the planchers pants his weary body,/ Smeared in the channels of his lustful blood" (1.41-43). The "lustful blood" Arden describes reflects Mosby's sexual desire for Alice as well as his desire for her social status—a lust that could likewise be attributed to Arden, himself. Ironically, it is Arden's blood that is "smeared" as he is murdered in the end of the play.

Mosby attempts to improve his social standing through his relationship with Alice, but since she is married, his identity is also destabilized. His anxiety centers on fear of losing social capital he has acquired. Mosby states,

My golden time was when I had no gold;  
Though then I wanted, yet I slept secure;  
My daily toil begat me night's repose;  
My night's repose made my daylight fresh to me.  
But since I climbed the top bough of the tree,  
And sought to build my nest among the clouds,  
Each gentle starry gale doth shake my bed  
And makes me dread my downfall to earth. (8.11-18)

The best time for him was when he was poor because securing material possession increased his anxiety about his social legitimacy and access to those commodities. He did not have material possessions before fostering a relationship and gaining assignment as steward with Lord Clifford, but also did not worry about protecting possessions or giving weight and significance to material objects. His work afforded him rest, but now his social advancement causes him stress and fear, keeping him from resting at night. He is critical of upper classes—although he is among the "stars," he fears losing newly gained possessions because they demonstrate increased cultural capital in Faversham. He

juxtaposes calm, idealized, pastoral imagery of trees and clouds with the tension he feels about social advancement. His fears are grounded in his lack of authority over Alice. He illuminates the vulnerability of the marriage contract in his ‘marriage’ to Alice.

Yet Mistress Arden lives; but she’s myself,  
And holy church rites makes us two but one.  
But what for that? I may not trust you , Alice;  
You have supplanted Arden for my sake,  
And will extirpen me to plant another.  
‘Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent’s bed,  
And I will cleanly rid my hands of her. (37-43)

Mosby articulates his mistrust in Alice as well as in marriage to secure his claim to her. He calls into question the “church rites” that bring them together because the same church rites were violated in her marriage to Arden. Mosby echoes the legal status of wife as property through coverture laws noting that she (Alice) is “myself.” He lays claim to her as property, but simultaneously notes that Alice’s actions destabilize his claims. This fear is expressed in terms of the ground and the earth. He is not firmly rooted in the relationship and Alice has the power to “extirpen” or extract him as one would remove a plant from the earth. Her ability to “extirpen” him gives her autonomy over her body and relationship and leaves him powerless in controlling his claim to her. He is fearful because her behavior emasculates him. The “serpent’s bed” recalls the image of Satan in the garden of Eden and Eve’s fall, as he draws a parallel between Alice and Eve’s transgression. The “holy church rites” or contractual agreement between Alice and Mosby is unstable because it has no foundation in blood law. This speech reveals his insecurity in the institution of marriage as well as his lack of trust in Alice.

## VI.

The final analysis of this chapter further explores the way in which spectacles of blood in the early modern English theater facilitated a significant parallel between stability within the home and justice within the state. The parallelism between justice and stability in the home and in the state was evidenced in English law as early as 1351 with the passage of the Treason Act under Edward III, which made mariticide analogous to regicide. Moving forward in time, this reasoning remained an important cultural subtext in theorizing about the role of women, the importance of maintaining the natural order of power, and the severe mortal consequences of betrayal within the marriage contract.

Though the Protestant Reformation drew on this historical precedent in legal reasoning and was embedded in the cultural logic of English society, the Protestant Reformation also imposed a new juridical rhetoric of patriarchy in the home and state. Just as it imposed a new rhetorical version of the marriage sacrament on women and men, it emphasized the sanctity of contractual vows, which eschewed allegiance to the Catholic Church and prioritized fidelity to the emergent English state. Marriage vows and the gravity of those promises aligned with the vows of citizenship and national identity that subjects of the Crown were beginning to develop as markers of English identity.

Against the background of upheaval associated with the transition between the Catholic oligarchy and the instantiation of the Church of England, theatrical representations of marriage and land rights offer significant commentary on the importance of women's transitional social status under older blood laws to newer forms of identity made available by proto-capitalist contract law.<sup>103</sup> Women's bodies outside of

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<sup>103</sup> Douglas explains the cross-cultural obsession with demarcations between laws governing the sacred and profane thusly, "We have seen how the idea of contagion is at work in religion and society. We have seen

appropriate contexts (as specified by the ruling law) are a type abhorrent social contagion, a form of political and religious pollution that is intolerable to the State.<sup>104</sup> This is especially the case given the State's ambitions to divide and coordinate partitions in land once held in common under traditional blood-law. This process is often referred to as the enclosure of the Commons, and is construed in the secondary literature as an event that heralded new forms of governance and hierarchy, which deprived women of traditional economic resources available in community life. This is not to imply a romantic or nostalgic utopia once blossoming in the Commons of medieval England, but rather to assert that historical changes in the shape of economic activity challenged and called on women to create new identities congruent with the ever shifting regulatory apparatus of the State, including the regulations related to marriage.

The language of early modern dramatists, including the anonymous playwright responsible for *Arden*, represented these tropes of 'wife,' blood, and natural order as dependent on social mobility, contract law and the guarantee of marriage as the method to ensure legitimate inheritance of capital. Clearly, women's bodies in this configuration were central to the transmission of capital, and were the objects of intense scrutiny as the possible site of infidelity to the state, in addition to being the source of legitimate claims on land through blood status. To dramatize the importance of women's marital labor,

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that powers are attributed to any structure of ideas, and that rules of avoidance make a visible public recognition of its boundaries. But this is not to say that the sacred is unclean. Each culture must have its own notions of dirt and defilement, which are contrasted with its notions of the positive structure, which must not be negated. To talk about a confused blending of the Sacred and the Unclean is outright nonsense. But it still remains true that religions often sacralise the very unclean things which have been rejected with abhorrence. We must, therefore, ask how dirt, which is normally destructive, sometimes becomes creative." In Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London: Routledge, 1966) 197.

<sup>104</sup> In *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) Gail Kern Paster looks at physical bodies and their relationship to social bodies. She describes women's bodies as "leaky vessels" that must be controlled and contained.

reproductive labor, and blood identity in relation to England as a whole, the author of *Arden* makes clear that Alice's indiscretions—her treason, her infidelity, her very desires—will ultimately be met with deadly violence against her person.

At the same time, however, we see in the sacrificial blood of Alice, her husband Arden, Susan, Mosby, and Green—collateral victims in the play—leave an ineradicable stain on the land that is the substantial, if not the central, final element of the theatrical poetics of blood-law. In the final depiction of violence and suffering, the audience learns that Arden's "body print" is inscribed on the ground through the haunting of an unjust use of blood to claim the land. In this discussion of ground, the plot of dirt registered for the burial of Arden's murdered body serves as an interesting example at the end of the play. Alice's burial goes unrecorded – her remains post immolation are not interred for Christian burial. After Arden's murder, Alice is ultimately destroyed in her attempt to express autonomy, and her physical body becomes the canvas for the State's display of authority. Yet, her dramatized body also serves as the canvas for counter-hegemonic feminist readings of mariticide as the sign of resistance by women in early modern England to the role of wife.

Conversely, her murdered husband's body is interred in the ground that Arden usurped through his avaricious social climbing. Arden's body remains imprinted in the ground years beyond his murder and burial. The play ends with Arden's friend, Franklin narrating the events after Arden's death:

Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground  
which he by force and violence held from Reede,  
And in the grass his body's print was seen  
Two years and more after the deed was done. (18.10-13)

This moment attempts to represent both the sanctified and blasphemous, only to amplify the strain between competing ideas about land acquisition and identity as articulated through the embodiment of Thomas Arden. Blood-law and contract law govern both life and death, neither of which is entirely a remedy for the social anxieties over status, and the relationship between capital and social mobility foregrounded in the dramatic priorities of *Arden*.

Alice is wounded by her marriage, for example, inasmuch as she goes unfulfilled in her ambitions to enjoy a romantic relationship of her own choosing; yet adulterous wives like Alice are stained by their violation of blood-law until they were bathed in the redemptive violence of the state. Alice's execution for betraying her husband's right to her body and bloodline is the very medium that binds the home's microcosmic relationship to the nation. At the same time, blood threatens its inhabitants, it is the trope that signifies order. For example, Arden in reference to Mosby, exclaims

That injurious ribald that attempts  
To violate my dear wife's chastity--  
For dear I hold her love, as dear as heaven—  
Shall in the bed which he thinks to defile  
See his dissevered joints and sinews torn,  
Whilst on the planchers pants his weary body. (1.37-43).

In this example of Renaissance marriage and domestic tragedy where violence is the crux of domestic regulation, the audience is schooled in the logic of blood-law. We see Arden threaten violence to restore order to his home and family. Arden previously stated that he was “by birth a gentleman of blood” and sees Mosby as the ultimate threat, not only to his bloodline but also to authenticity of the social climbing in which they both participate.

There are three points of tension in the representation of marriage in *Arden of Faversham*. First is the growing middling sort and the acquisition of economic capital.

Second, the potential for social climbing and gaining social capital and finally, the intersection of social mobility and its relationship to the home in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The representation of the home on stage presented opposite and competing ideas on the notion of marriage for love rather than for the bringing together of similarly classed houses with their financial assets and the potential for self fashioning: within marriage negotiation comes the tension of class boundaries and social striving; with marriage comes the threat of adultery; with transgression comes the reassertion of state order. As this model of contract law emerged as part of the new Protestant English home, it did so in a history and framework of blood law. This tension may not have existed in reality, but on stage we see how blood not only represents social status and familial connection, but is also intimately connected to the power of the state.

The idea of home as a place of order, governance, and production is threatened by violence and adultery. We find a bloody example of this when Alice first attempts the murder of her husband. What should be an advantageous marriage for Arden ultimately becomes the cause of his undoing as we see early in the play when Clarke provides Alice with poison for Arden's broth.

Alice: Husband, why pause ye? Why eat you not?  
Arden: I am not well. There's something in this broth  
That is not wholesome. Didst thou make it, Alice?  
Alice: I did, and that's the cause it likes not you.  
There's nothing I can do to please your taste. (1.365-369)

Arden's reacts that he is "not well," and although he chooses to disregard the "not wholesome" breakfast as accidental, the audience is reminded that his acquisition of monastic lands comes with multiple threats against his own life as well. Indeed, his social climbing—as evidenced by their marriage—also threatens social order and contributes to



the ultimate tragedy. However this common, everyday event of having breakfast points to the instability of what a modern audience would regard as a comfortable and safe space. As Wendy Wall notes, Arden's breakfast scene epitomizes the characteristically "bizarre and disquieting" world of domestic labor, a type of manual labor, which was both "a reassuringly 'common' sphere in which people immersed themselves in familiar rhythms, and as a profoundly alienating site that could never be fully inhabited or comprehended."<sup>105</sup> Wall supports a view of Renaissance domesticity that included violence and blood as much as cooking, and other domestic duties.

Domestic tragedy created a public stage where private issues of the home could be scrutinized by a captive audience. Lena Cowen Orlin points to the transparency of the home now portrayed on stage,

The plays materialize the house in all its associations: first, as the primary social and economic unit of early modern culture; second, as a construction delimiting a world-in-little and accommodating its occupants' most basic physical needs for shelter and sustenance as well as their psychological needs for beauty and perdurability; and, finally, as an ideological construct receptive to the superimposition of political models and moral regulations.<sup>106</sup>

An integral part of early modern theater's representation of the family is adhering to the notion of the family as analogous to the commonwealth, and thus, *Arden of Faversham* portrays two conflicting models for the family. One, advocated by Alice and Mosby, resembles the emerging middle-class home represented by Alice's desire to marry for love and the ability to gain status by merit and through marriage rather than by familial ties alone. The second, tragically championed by Arden, views noble blood as the primary element of family hierarchy; although he claims familial connection, his actions

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<sup>105</sup> Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters, Public Culture*, 9.

reproduce Mosby's, in that they are both lower class males attempting to secure social capital and status through marriage. Arden's overwhelming anxiety throughout the play hinges on this fear that he is not profiting legitimately and is afraid "no nobleman will countenance such a peasant," a remark Franklin makes of Mosby in response to Arden's anger (1.31). He violently accuses Mosby of threatening the order and stability of family, not because he is sleeping with Alice but because he is "a botcher" (1.25), while simultaneously reproducing the same action himself by being of a lower station than his wife and marrying for status. From Arden's vantage, anyone who is not "a gentleman of blood" is not able to participate in gaining financial or social capital, although being of the gentry status himself and gaining lands by contract from the King, he participates in the same model of family he denies.

*Arden of Faversham* satirizes Arden's fear of tainting their blood. Ultimately, however, the previous example obscures the latter in the audience's sympathies. By the end, Alice's vanity and power are destroyed, and Mosby's and Michael's idealism for gaining property and status are extinguished, but there is little doubt that these characters introduce an emerging notion of social mobility and marital exchange different from Arden's idea of pure blood. The contrast illuminates the variance between blood and contract views about women and their relationship to the economy. As we can see in this play, English drama was moving towards conventions of the family that focused on an emerging contract law, where rather than inheritance and primogeniture, relationships were sealed through bond and legal agreement—marriage, land negotiation, and control of women's bodies. Although the approval of the audience lies elsewhere, the state

authority ultimately authorizes a sort of household defined solely by an unadulterated, patriarchal bloodline.

## VII.

As previously noted, London dramatists and particularly those of domestic tragedy as well as of city comedy analyzed later in this dissertation, obtained a rich inspiration and contrast for their plays rooted in English history and religious upheaval. Cultural shifts toward the role of wife as an ideological figure were tied to this historical shift as well. The wife as a commodity and disciplined cultural asset in the social imaginary of post-Reformation are disrupted because of Alice's marital disobedience. What roles did women play in the tensions and shifts of ideas about property ownership? The role of women's bodies was specifically articulated in the institution of marriage, and bodies were bought, sold, bartered, and exchanged. The trope of blood transmits class, properties, titles and types of economic and social capital. Alice's service to patriarchy and capitalism is compromised, as is that of her body, and her body is ultimately destroyed.<sup>107</sup> Alice's execution embodies the enforcement of blood law, as patriarchy attempts to regulate bodies for transmission of capital. Burning at the stake is a spectacle wherein women's bodies serve as props in the patriarchal theater of the state, and the law reinstates the power of patriarchal language through this social display of power. The destruction of Alice's body reinforces patriarchal governance by illustration of the bloody spectacle.

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<sup>107</sup> Henry Hitch Adams. *English Domestic, or Homiletic Tragedy 1575 to 1642: Being an Account of the Development of the Tragedy of the Common Man Showing its Great Dependence on Religious Morality, Illustrated with Striking Examples of the Interposition of Providence for the Amendment of Men's Manners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) discusses *Arden* as focusing on family relationships and exemplary of "warning literature" to women.

Though Alice seeks a place beyond marriage in her relationship with Mosby as a companionate union grounded in love, she is ultimately unable to break free from the cultural hold of patriarchal ideology—one that she had to briefly appropriate to gain agency. Alice's efforts to gain space beyond wife and to move beyond blood-law through contract are not successful, unless the audience counts death as a kind of freedom. Alice's desire to move beyond being a wife through contractual obligation can be framed as her best attempt to move beyond definitions that are legal and socially sanctioned while still preserving her social and cultural capital. In the play, one can see that there is no space beyond the role of wife in that Alice's eventual burning at the stake is the only exit and that the outcome only relieves her indentured servitude inasmuch as she is dead, a radically inadequate solution. Her methods for exercising autonomy outside the bounds of wife include the use of art and the status of wife is a type of artifice. The play comments on the artifice of gender identity. Mosby tells Alice of a painter he met and his ability to use art to kill:

I happened on a painter yesternight,  
the only cunning many of Christendom,  
For he can temper poison with his oil  
That whoso looks upon the work he draws  
shall, with the beams that issue from his sight,  
Suck venom to his breast and slay himself.  
Sweet Alice, he shall draw thy counterfeit,  
That Arden may by gazing on it perish. (228-235)

The eyes shine forth to draw venom out of the painting as the body participates in its own demise. The body and art have a relationship where an image or painting, an artifice, possesses power to destroy. This scene functions as a metaphor for a larger aesthetic—the theater. The playhouse as an artistic location possesses power to destroy dominant patriarchal blood law as related to property and marriage.

Through the analysis of body and tropes of blood we find in becoming a wife, voice is lost and body is used in the exchange of capital, as in the example of Susan. Alice, in the transitional space of potentially becoming Mosby's wife, uses and reproduces patriarchy in her attempts to escape it—she is only afforded this privilege because of her status as already being wife. In being a wife, Alice actively perpetuates a system that describes women as one type of capital in the transmission of other types such as land, property and status. Blood law matters in marriage—Alice is well born, which brings connections to Arden, connections so important that the historical account even says he is willing to overlook her secret (public) lover. He can use his own self-worth through marriage to her to purchase entitlement to properties. The problem here is his social status and title to land are in flux. Blood and ground can only be connected through women's reproductive labor, a labor that Alice compromises and that brings about her death. In the exploration of the space beyond or outside of the role of wife, the public spectacle of Alice's execution draws attention the power of artifice and the role of theater to perform as well as subvert the power of the state.

Dramatic conventions that created catharsis for the 16<sup>th</sup> century audience of *Arden*, including the ritual blood sacrifice of the transgressor of social norms, worked to instill a sense of patriarchal stability. Chief among these dramatic conventions was the use of violent retributive deaths to mark the beginning, end, and possibilities for the legitimacy of alternative social statuses for women other than that of faithful wife. Even when deaths such as Alice's included the antecedents of betrayal and treason as possibilities in the performance of women as wives, they still beg the question of whether the sacrifice props up patriarchy inasmuch as the death supplies the audience with the

emotional catharsis of collective ritual violence committed in the name of the State. The theatrical violence inherent to the sight of blood, I suggest, cannot be separated from the dangers women faced in a culture that erased or denied their legal existence under coverture laws. Alice's uprising against her husband is, if not justified, at least understandable. The anonymous playwright of *Arden* understands Alice's choices to embody the outcome of tensions and social contests that create the conditions for deadly departures from patriarchal stability.

In conclusion, and as suggested earlier, the early modern stage in England frequently portrayed the tension between the tradition of blood law and the advent of contract law, as well as the distinction between the private and the public functions of the wifely role as a function of larger religious conflicts between Protestantism and Catholicism. In this chapter, I have analyzed the rhetorical function of *Arden* for a society ripe with anxieties over women's role in the economy. This chapter has also reflected on the intratextual scope of the character of Alice's confrontation with patriarchy, and the representation of this character as symbolic of women's efforts to subvert patriarchy through the use of social capital. Today, the reception of Alice's character remains important from the perspective of contemporary feminist criticism. Alice's actions and the representation of her actions over the last several hundred years are fertile ground for discussing the ways in which the trope of blood continues to stain women's status in society, despite modern social contracts that reify the individual's entitlement to sovereign consideration before the law. Clearly, the marital status of women, and our economic opportunities continue to be constrained and shaped in the shadow of the expectation that each woman will become a wife at some point in the course of their

lives. In sum, Alice's dilemma, and *Arden of Faversham's* dramatization of her travails continues to resonate with the contemporary audience.

### CHAPTER III

“DOST THOU NOT KNOW THAT LOVE RESPECTS NO BLOOD, CARES NOT FOR  
DIFFERENCE OF BIRTH OR STATE?”: SOCIAL TRAVEL AND WIFELY STRIVING IN

#### *THE SHOEMAKER’S HOLIDAY*

The duty is comprehended in these points; First that she reverence her husband. Secondly, that she submit herself and be obedient unto him. And lastly that she do not wear gorgeous apparel, beyond her degree and place, but that her attire be comely and sober, according to her calling.”

John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government*, 1603

In Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, we see the impact of a changing economy as society begins to loosen its historical constraints of blood, patriarchal power, and inheritance associated with social class distinction. Although blood-law certainly remains influential, this play questions and satirizes traditional markers of class based on birthright, which were generally regulated by sumptuary law. The plot lines enacted by women characters such as Rose, Margery, and Jane, represent women’s potential ability to gain greater decision-making authority in their roles as wives. Whether by use of social, cultural, or economic capital, each female character negotiates some of the terms of her marriage contract, which in essence is her employment contract, within the still grim constraints imposed under both contract-law and blood-law. *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* manifests upper class concerns that the erosion of blood-law will collapse advantageous claims on social and cultural capital ensured through heredity. It also sub-



textually celebrates this erosion. In the play's depiction of London's 16<sup>th</sup> century political economy, the nascent social mobility and redefinition of the marriage contract witnessed in these women's relationships elevate earning status rather than birthright. Rapid changes in the cultural understanding of social class and shifts in economic structure blurred lines of social distinction. This play, however, reinforces the power of hierarchical social structure because the characters strive to improve their social standing through monetary gain rather than undermining the power of the nobility. However, the substitution of economic capital for social class also subverts the traditional hierarchy because it ignores social class structures grounded in blood-law and informed by social and cultural capital.

In the quotation in the chapter title above—taken from the speech given by the King near the end of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*—one can see that the dramatic conflict of marriage and comedy is fraught with implications of legal authority. Paired with the epigraph from *A Godly Form of Household Government*, outlining the duties of wives in early modern England, both show the emergence of the complex relationship between the arenas of law and theater. Frances Dolan makes a similar point:

In early modern England, a radically visionary model of marriage as a loving partnership between equals flourished in part because of the Protestant Reformation. While this ideal was not wholly new, it first found stable institutionalization, full articulation, and broad dissemination in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its promise remains unfulfilled because it never replaces a model of marriage as a hierarchy in which the husband must take the lead and the wife must obey.... The emergent model of marriage as a contract seems to correspond to and ensure a partnership between equals; yet, as we will see, it did not escape or resole presumptions about unequal status of the parties to the marriage contract.<sup>108</sup>

Blood is a prerequisite to legitimate marriage in the relationships of Dekker's characters,

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<sup>108</sup> Dolan, *Marriage and Violence*, 2.

yet it no longer entirely protects the social class structure. In the end, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* evidences the mutually constitutive power of blood-law and contract-law in this moment of patriarchal governance over women's bodies. Although being in the public eye was often equated with having questionable morals, shifting economic structures in London allowed more women to move about in the city as consumers.

Consumerism was also tied to an emergent leisure class—and through consumerism, class boundaries were becoming less visible because one could purchase material class markers. This disruption to class boundaries caused cultural anxiety in relation to social and economic change. By examining the language of commodification and social striving that weaves throughout early modern drama, I will show the limitations women experienced concerning social mobility and show that while women were becoming consumers, they were also seen as commodities themselves. Through a dramatic lens, we see theatrical portrayals of the ways women shaped their own social roles and carved out space for autonomy regarding marriage. First, I examine the daughter of the Lord Mayor, Rose Oatley, who, in her pursuit of a marriage to Rowland Lacy, defies patriarchal authority to negotiate the terms of her marriage contract. In the parallel plot of the shoemaker's guild, Jane's finds autonomy in the absence of her husband, Ralph, who is off at war. In his absence, Jane resists the courtship of Hammon whose language suggest a commodification of women's bodies. However, she rejects this commodification and is able to do so on the grounds of her marriage—privileging her companionate marriage of choice over the potential of economic gain offered by Hammon. A final analysis contrasts Margery's evolving role as worker and wife, as she embraces and assumes higher social status through her husband's social climbing.

Margery as consumer demonstrates her ideological role of wife in contrast to Jane's more productive role.

I.

*The Shoemaker's Holiday* is often discussed in terms of labor and breaking down barriers of social class — allowing social mobility not only through marriage but also through work and economic gain. As Keith Wrightson points out, in the early modern period, Britain sees an emerging market economy becoming increasingly capitalistic, and thereby altering the power dynamic and social behavior of the time. Simon Eyre, the play's central character, rises from a lowly shoemaker to Lord Mayor by the end of the play. A shoemaker eventually becoming Lord Mayor was not realistic, but the play is centered on ideas of improving status of the middling sort and representing details of the historical moment through drama.<sup>109</sup> Simon Eyre claims throughout the play that he is noble: "Prince am I none, yet I am princely born," a refrain he repeats throughout the play. He is drawing attention to the notion that nobility is not associated with birth. As he rises in status, he uplifts the status of shoemaker, and this his social ambition is presented as an asset to the community. His wife Margery, however, performs her new role embodying the negative qualities of social mobility. She is concerned with her physical appearance and the materiality of her new status.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Brian Walsh, "Performing Historicity in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *SEL* 46.2 (Spring 2006), 323-348. Walsh looks closely at the notion of improving status in the context of Simon Eyre's social advancement. He shifts the focus away from the popular love plot and toward Eyre's rise in historical significance and financial gain as representing the middling sort.

<sup>110</sup> C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982) This is an interesting text to point to here in the discussion of Margery's consumerism. She is able to purchase commodities and the exchange of commodity sheds any familial relationship or friendship associated with exchanging gifts. For

The tension between social classes is further exemplified through the love plot of Rowland Lacy, a gentleman courtier who squanders his fortune but retains social power through inherited status and Rose Oatley, the daughter of a Lord Mayor, a citizen representative of the middling sort. Their love for each other functions as a symbolic act allowing Lacy's pardon by the King for avoiding the war. "Love's desire" functions as the romance element allowing real world contradictions of social class norms and values to be overturned within the shape of the narrative, subverting the dominant system of class structure. Northope Frye explains in *The Anatomy of Criticism* the concept of the "green world" where characters retreat to a natural space, and the social norms and power hierarchies are collapsed. In his analysis of Shakespearean comedy, he explains, "Shakespeare's type of romantic comedy...[is] the drama of the green world, its plot being assimilated to the ritual theme of the triumph of life and love over the wasteland...there is the...rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again."<sup>111</sup> For this play, the world that allows overturning of social structure is the world of the theater. Within the space of the play, reality is suspended for consuming audiences. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* creates a fantasy world where social mobility is possible and brings mirth to all. The play illuminates these tensions and furthermore provides a public voice and performative act that challenges the dominant culture. The desire for social mobility, redefining the marriage contract toward earning status rather than birthright, and merchant culture are all introduced as emerging contract law.

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commodity exchange the personal and emotional response is no longer present. The commodities are traded in relation to one another and highlight her ability to participate in this exchange with her newfound status.

<sup>111</sup> Northope Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 182.

The struggles of the female characters to establish some ground for self-affirming negotiations regarding their roles as wives and identities as individuals reveal that these two over-lapping yet divergent theories of marriage (blood-law and contract-law) undermine and contradict each other even as they prop-up and support the overarching ideal of patriarchal power. Maria Carrion has argued that marriage, law, and blood ritual are routine tropes on the early modern Spanish stage. This is true of the early modern English stage as well, and this commonality points to older traditions in Christendom more broadly. Carrion notes:

Theatres...produced a number of comic scenes of marriage. For the most part, these scenes ended a life of dramatic conflict and pretended to bring restoration to the social order. But the stages of theatre were not the only ones where the perils and pleasures of transcendental human unions were represented: legal codes, courthouses, and bureaucracy are a few other arenas where the sign of matrimony was invoked as well.<sup>112</sup>

For example, the play ends with the sign of matrimony being validated through the verdict of the King: the young maid, Rose, validated in her pursuit of a her lover Lacy despite their class differences once the King's verdict comes down, "The maid is young, well-born, fair, virtuous,/ A worthy bride for any gentleman" (21.108-9). Prior to the King's declaration of approval, Rose's hope of working as a wife in the home of Roland Lacy was dubious because he is higher-born; their relationship is not sanctioned by the tradition of blood-law. Yet, the only cause that justifies the King's language as affirmative contract-law sanctioning the marriage of Rose and Lacy before Sir Hugh Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, is the King's blood or inherited authority granting him the patriarchal capacity of cleansing the union of impropriety.

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<sup>112</sup> Maria Carrion, *Subject Stages: Marriage, Theater, and the Law in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 9.

This chapter illuminates the tensions between blood-law and contract-law that bind women into the occupation of wife, and furthermore examines how these characters represent a public voice and performative act that challenges the culturally proscribed role of the chaste, silent, obedient wife for female characters on stage. In description of the relationship between theatrical representations of marriage and the law, Carrion argues,

From its beginnings as a legal and theatrical institution, marriage brought together a number of signs that through the ages theorized, catalogued, and accepted as opposites: man and woman, public and private, heaven and hell, and so on. Students of theatre and the law know that unions of opposites (and, especially if these become contraries) need the mediation of theatrical and legal codes to channel such unions in some kind of constructive or, at least, not totally destructive manner. Such unions of opposites are also the greatest raw material for the plotting, development, and resolution of conflict, without which there are neither dramas nor lawsuits. It makes perfect sense, then, that marriage evolved in close correspondence with theatre and the law.<sup>113</sup>

Female characters are represented as workers and wives in the service of patriarchy, but are not destined to the vocation to which they were born. Instead, they create roles that challenge the common narrative about women's lives at that time. The love plot between Rose Oatley and Rowland Lacy, for example, emphasizing class tensions whilst countenancing interclass marriage, also foregrounds the exchange value of marriage inasmuch as Rose's dowry and economic capital are exchanged for Lacy's title and cultural capital—an old and familiar bargain common among plots involving marriage negotiations. In later close readings of the tensions raised by the prospective marriage of Rose and Lacy, the status of each character as a commodity becomes evident in the discourse of the patriarchs thrashing out the marriage contract. Nonetheless, Rose participates in redefining her marriage contract from one disallowed under blood-law to

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<sup>113</sup> Carrion, *Subject Stages*, 5.

one that is accepted under contract-law. Rose exchanges real and cultural capital to strike terms in her employment contract as wife that are radically advantageous from the point of view of an audience inclined toward marriages based on choice and love.

This chapter examines *Shoemaker's* thematic contradictions and tensions concerning the ambition of female characters, their social mobility, and their participation in marriage negotiations in early modern culture as represented on the stage. The women of this play offer varied depictions of the role of wife, each of which struggles for autonomy from within the patriarchal order that constrains them. Female characters do have choices, but those choices are still are constrained to the occupational category of wife. Despite whomever one is employed by in the occupation of wife, female characters on the early modern stage share in the social expectations and cultural imperative that they become and remain employed for the benefit of patriarchal order. While admittedly not the feminist ideal, this dissertation does stake out a claim that female characters can and do wield leverage in negotiating the terms of their employment in order to maximize the likelihood of greater access to power

From the perspective of a contemporary feminist audience, the social climbing of women characters, or their facilitation of said climbing, is laudable given that any agency enacted by women characters is empowering. By either pushing back against traditional conventions of blood-law or using contract-law to their advantage, Rose, Margery and Jane strike occupational contracts as wives that are contradictory to the goals of the patriarchy, even if in very small measures. Rose's pursuit of her lover is disruptive to the patriarchy though she does prevail in securing the position that she seeks. Margery undermines patriarchy by foregrounding the fact that there is no 'natural' blood status

that hails any one body as superior to another—an ideal upon which patriarchy depends. Her gendered-class performances inadvertently call out the unnaturalness of highborn masculinity by demonstrating that these categories can be performed. Jane succeeds in co-opting patriarchal notions about fidelity and chastity in order to pursue her own agenda, which is antithetical to the stereotypes of women as immobilized and passive objects for sexual purchase—she refuses the financial offers of sexual and marital employment by an unwanted suitor, relocates to London by herself and continues to provide for herself in the absence of her husband.

Working women with limited means to improve their station sought mobility through marriage or gained status alongside their husbands, as in the case of Margery.<sup>114</sup> Ambition represented on the stage illuminates cultural debates and has the potential to create ideology.<sup>115</sup> For example, Margery's ambitions seem misplaced as she is ridiculed throughout the play while, in contrast, her husband's rise culminates in revelry and celebration in the final scenes. Social mobility gains favor with the audience because the ideas about the power of kinship and aristocratic birth were shifting toward a more merit based system.<sup>116</sup> It was becoming possible, if you were male, to change your station by deeds alone, as we see in characters like Eyre. England's economic structure was moving away from a family based form of production so it was easier to change one's trade. For

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<sup>114</sup> Cressy's *Birth, Marriage and Death* explores the ceremony and ritual in marriage and women's roles in relation to that institution. He looks at women's role and work in that role as their duty and explains the expectations and consequences of breaking tradition or ceremony in each aspect of early modern life cycle.

<sup>115</sup> *An Apology for Actors* (1612) by Thomas Heywood argues that there is moral value to stage acting and through representation and imitation audiences can be positively influenced or reformed from vices.

<sup>116</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen looks at the ways gender and class as two separate hierarchical systems come in contact and conflict with each other in early modern society. She shows how relationships were more complex than simply understanding women as chattel in marriage and gives examples of relationships that challenge the stereotype that women were always subservient to men. See *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988).



women, however, the law of coverture limited women's ability to gain status outside of marriage. For Margery, her upward climb is the result of her husband's ship coming in, his acquisition of economic capital and along with it, social capital. She struggles, however, in both her understanding of and her ability to perform her new role. Although she ultimately manages a household, works within the guild, and maintains authority over subordinates, her husband's constant insults downplay her role in the shoemaker's guild and in her marriage.

I am interested in looking at how legitimacy is defined, how social class is designated, and the ways in which the characters perform, challenge, reinforce and create tension in class performance. The female characters are of the middling sort, without high status, but with the desire for social climbing and for performing upper class-ness within a play that celebrates the collapse of social class boundaries while ultimately reinforcing them by valuing and striving for higher positions in society. I seek to understand the work that women perform both physically and ideologically and how that work informs social identity. The main economic role and only viable economic space for women is as a wife. It is value for patriarchy that women will faithfully serve as "blood conduits" for transmission of blood law legitimate heir, and the stage reproduces this hegemony for social identity while simultaneously creating a space to challenge it.

The theatrical stage production of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is inspired by Thomas Deloney's prose text, *The Gentle Craft*, published in 1597, just three years before the first staging of Dekker's play. Both texts are based on an historical figure, Simon Eyre, who was Lord Mayor of London 1445-46. Thomas Deloney, a silk worker who moved to London in the 1580s, tells a fictional tale of London shoemakers.

Although the text is a romanticized and idealized account of London shoemakers, it also provides a glimpse of London life and city locales. As Simon Barker notes, “a significant governing theme is the belief in the essential nobility of the shoemaker...In history he proves an individual of high moral integrity and work, yet also canny and capable of the occasional sleight of hand in his ambitious social and business dealings.”<sup>117</sup> An effect of moving the narrative from prose text to theatrical setting exposes the layers of representation, not only of shoemakers but more largely of changes in social class structure and in the way these changes affect marriage in its move away from blood law tradition.

This play was written and performed in the wake of apprentice rioting that occurred throughout the period. The 1595 apprentice riots resulted in the creation of laws that were specifically aimed at keeping apprentices indoors, and transgression could be punishable by death.<sup>118</sup> Ian Archer notes that the lack of historical record of Shrove Tuesday riots should not indicate a lack of such riots, as Shrove Tuesday was historically associated with disorder.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Simon Barker, ed. for *The Gentle Craft* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007) viii, ix.

<sup>118</sup> Caroline M. Barron, “Eyre, Simon (c.1395–1458)” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) Online edition ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Simon Eyre (1395-1458) was historically an apprentice to Peter Smert, an upholder, Master of the Drapers and later, sheriff. In 1445, he was elected mayor of London. The entry says his will “bears witness to Eyre’s forcefull and dominating personality” but in the later retellings by Deloney and Dekker, “he came to be seen in a different, mellower light.”

<sup>119</sup> Ian W. Archer. *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). Archer develops the historical debate of the move toward capitalism during this period and the rising conflict between workers and overseers. He states, “Mayoral precepts requiring that apprentices be kept indoors and watched doubled suggest that Shrove Tuesday, like May Day, had long been associated with disorder” (3).

## II.

*The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* invite comparison because they each follow the typical structure of a city comedy in that the to-be-married female characters challenge traditional gender roles and social class boundaries with respect to arranged marriage—seeking to marry for love rather than uphold blood law traditions that preserve and transfer money and title within and between households. Both *Shoemaker's* Rose and *Chaste Maid's* Moll resist the marital limitations set on them by their respective families. In both plays, the parents' social striving is demonstrated through the negotiation of arranged marriages over the objection of their rebellious daughters. In this struggle, the parents seek to uphold and take advantage of traditional rules of blood law by securing a marriage that increases social or economic capital for the family. In contrast, their daughters attempt to breakdown these traditional class boundaries by choosing companionate spouses outside of their respective social and economic class, thus threatening the upper class exclusivity to money, title, and property.

In *The Shoemaker's Holiday* for example, the families of both Rose and Lacy reject a proposed union between the two even though it would afford Rose higher title and status, and Lacy would profit from her family's wealth—having squandered his own money traveling abroad. Oatley objects to protect his family's economic capital, their wealth, while Lincoln objects to protect his family's social capital, or their noble title. In *Chaste Maid*, on the other hand, Moll's family arranges marriages for both her daughter and son with their only concern being financial gain. Their son is promised to what they believe to be a wealthy bride, but is in fact a prostitute, and Moll is betrothed to Walter Whorehound, a wealthy man but notorious philanderer with many mistresses. In both

cases, the families base their decisions on a controlling desire for economic or social gain. Both plays illustrate the complexities surrounding the exchange of economic and social capital in marital negotiations.

This section will consider both the ideological and economic tensions as they affect the love relationships and the women characters in particular. I will begin with an examination of the language describing citizens and gentleman and the ways these characterizations are used to block the love plots. I will also look at the ways Rose and Moll create space for personal autonomy and agency within the negotiation of the marriage alliance and how both women undermine patriarchal power in emerging contract law negotiations. As represented in these two plays, the process of becoming a wife, which was the primary employment for women during the period, involves negotiations. These negotiations bifurcate two levels between blood law and contract law. One can see that negotiations conducted on behalf of the women by their patriarch and their soon to be future husbands/ employers hinge on first, concerns of blood, and second, the closely related category of class. These two plays fit together in examining representations of women experiencing the process of becoming wife in that neither ends up in the marrying the man the patriarch originally intended.

Women entering the labor market had few choices; they could be wives, prostitutes, or seek some marginal opportunities in legitimate paid positions of service. Maneuverability, class mobility, and indeed the option to negotiate terms of employment—including the position of wife—were severely delimited by the law. Amy Smith argues that:

By placing a clandestine wedding as one of a series of weddings and remarriages in the play, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* reveals that marriage allows for and

perhaps even catalyzes a remarkable amount of maneuverability. Rose works against her father's demands, against class endogamy, and toward a choice that provides her with economic and emotional benefits—all within the bounds of a perfectly legal marriage. If anything, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* emphasizes the competing interests at work in defining marriage, allowing Rose to capitalize on the confusion and thus marry the man of her choice.<sup>120</sup>

Early in the play, Rose's father, Oatley, voices a general condemnation for marriage outside of one's station. The orthodox and traditional precedent will not allow a marriage between Rose and Lacy. We see competing principles about status and wealth in the conversations of the patriarchs, as Oatley explains: "Too mean is my poor girl for his high birth; /Poor citizens must not with courtiers wed,/ Who will in silks and gay apparel spend/More in one year then I am worth, by far" (1.1.11-14). He at once acknowledges the higher station of Lincoln while simultaneously criticizing him. He emphasizes their low station while implying that although they are citizens, they are also more reasonable because they do not frivolously spend money on clothing and other material status markers. Oatley values economic capital over the cultural capital that denotes higher status in society. Although Lincoln acknowledges the reckless spending of his nephew, he flaunts Lacy's international travel and the ability to fund his frivolous spending. In the text we see that Oatley perceives Lincoln's subtlety as confirmation of his criticism. In fact, he admits later to Lacy that he "Doth hate the mixture of his blood with thine" (1.1.79). Although Lincoln agrees the marriage is unsuitable, he cites different reasons. After Oatley leaves, Lincoln tells Lacy: "I would not have you cast an amorous eye /Upon so mean a project as the love of a gay, wanton, painted citizen" (1.1.75-77). Lincoln describes Rose as inferior, ordinary and common. Using the word 'paint' as a

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<sup>120</sup> Amy L. Smith, "Performing Cross Class Clandestine Marriage in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 45.2 (2005) 47.

pejorative, he describes her as inauthentic and amoral—qualities which pose threats to social order.

Marriage epitomizes the preservation of economic capital and the protection of female virtue. In this exchange, we see the senex protecting and upholding cultural norms to reinforce blood law that binds families of similar wealth and class. As Northop Frye explains,

New Comedy normally presents an erotic intrigue between a young man and a young woman which is blocked by some kind of opposition, usually paternal, and resolved by a twist in the plot . . . At the beginning of the play the forces thwarting the hero are in control of the play's society, but after a discovery in which the hero becomes wealthy or the heroine respectable, a new society crystallizes on the stage around the hero and his bride.”<sup>121</sup>

Simon Eyre later reinforces this paternal opposition to the courtship between Rose and Lacy. He encourages Rose to find a more appropriate suitor and characterizes Lacy as irresponsible and superficial when he says to Rose, “A courtier? Wash, go by! Stand not upon pishery-pashery. Those silken fellows are but painted images: outsides, outsides, Rose. Their inner linings are torn. No, my fine mouse, marry me with a Gentleman Grocer like my Lord Mayor your father. A grocer is a sweet trade” (11.41-43). Eyre contends citizens are of a superior character and criticizes courtiers for their preoccupation with superficial concerns of class markers.

Sybil’s description of Lacy draws attention to the cultural capital and extravagant spending of the upper classes. She, like Oatley, interprets his “monstrous” behavior as exaggerated and excessive. While Lacy professes love for Rose, he has ignored Rose’s maid, Sybil, in London. She sees him in London but he does not acknowledge her. She calls him proud, and upon seeing him, remarks,

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<sup>121</sup>Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 44.

By my troth, I scant knew him!  
here a wore a scarf, and her a scarf, her a bunch of  
feathers, and here precious stones and jewels and a pair of  
garters—O monstrous! (2.25-28).

Although his love for Rose seems to transcend social class, his treatment of Rose's maid draws attention to and reinforces those social boundaries.

In these excerpts we see the patriarchs describing the danger of art and artifice as both point to the clothing and cosmetics as “paint” that can mislead. Whether describing courtier or citizen, the performance is unwholesome and debased. This language provides a form of meta-commentary about the stage itself. After all, the characters reading these lines are bringing this disciplinary patriarchal message to the audience through the medium of painted performance, providing self-awareness and self-reflexive commentary on the art of the theater. Costuming is the artifice of looking noble in clothing that indeed doesn't include any lining; it is a mere appearance. Derogatory and belittling dialogue about the farce of identity on the stage cannot be but self-referential. Even if the playwright's intention is to convey the righteousness of the patriarchs' positions, the very fact of it being delivered on the stage pushes against the message being taken at face value.

Rose rejects her father's choice of suitor and creates space for agency through her disobedience. Oatley tries to unite Rose with Hammon, a gentleman suitor that he sees as a closer match in class and social values than Lacy. Oatley describes him as “a proper gentleman/ A citizen by birth, fairly allied” (6.59-60). In her father's attempt to unite Rose in marriage, Rose's rejects Hammon and defies her father when she states, “I mean to live a maid” rather than marry with Hammon. She divulges the previous vows she made to Lacy and upholds them stating, “Say, sir, I cannot [marry]. I have made a vow; /

Whoever be my husband, 'tis not you" (9.36-7). As Oatley tries to reinstate his patriarchal authority, he tells Hammon, "If you will have her, I'll make her agree," but Hammon releases her by stating "Enforced love is worse than hate to me" (9.49-50). Here we see the residual notions of blood-law using Rose as an object of exchange, but Rose redefines the marriage contract by asserting control over her own body and claiming status of "maid" until she secures the marriage she wants. Oatley threatens Rose by telling her "I'll keep you strait enough" or narrowly confined so she may not seek Lacy since she has undermined his authority to secure her in a proper and advantageous marriage in accordance with the rules of social class stratification.

The love plot in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* follows a similar arc, with Moll rebelling against her family's efforts to arrange an economically advantageous marriage. The play opens with a conversation between Maudlin and her daughter, and finds Maudlin giving advice and "telling ...M[oll] of her errors" (1.1.24-24). Maudlin states,

Yes, you are a dull maid alate, methinks you had need have somewhat to quicken your green sickness; do you weep? A husband. Had not such a piece of flesh been ordained, what had us wives been good for? To make salads, or else cried up and down for samphire. To see the difference of these seasons! When I was of your youth, I was lightsome, and quick, two years before I was married. You fit for a knight's bed--drowsy-browed, dull-eyed, drossy-spirited! I hold my life you have forgot your dancing: when was the dancer with you? (1.1.4-14)

She says Moll needs a husband and she is going about winning one in the wrong manner. Glossed as to "revive your anemia," the word 'quicken' also archaically refers to the point at which a woman can feel the movement of her baby during pregnancy. In addition to being an iron deficiency, anemia was also thought to be a disorder suffered by unmarried women, the cure to which was to marry and become pregnant; her mother is advising that her error is her lack of sexual desire and lack of interest in her suitors. She



insinuates that women are only good for being wives and bearing children. The anthology note clarifies that “cried up and down for samphire” means to “be proclaimed for sale in the market as samphire,” which is a type of seaweed served as a relish for meat and believed “to induce urinating and menstruation.”<sup>122</sup> This note shows the intersection of the market (where women would be if women were not sexually engaged with men) and the danger of an unregulated female body. As Ian Maclean reminds us, “all women are understood either married, or to be married,” and because Moll’s “drowsy-browed, dull-eyed, drossy spirit” goes against the prescribed behavior for marriageable maids during the period, she makes herself less desirable and creates anxiety for her mother, Maudlin, who views her daughter’s marriage as a means to personal financial and social security.<sup>123</sup> The parents believe this union will bring financial stability, social status, and property to the whole family. Lacking title and property through inheritance, Moll’s family seeks to secure a higher social station through the negotiating of an advantageous marital contract. However, Moll’s action (or lack thereof) undermines her mother’s efforts to pair her with Whorehound. Maudlin continues,

When I was of your bord, he missed me not a night, I was kept at it; I took delight to learn, and he to teach me, pretty brown gentleman, he took pleasure in my company; but you are dull, nothing comes nimbly from you, you dance like a plumber's daughter, and deserve two thousand pounds in lead to your marriage, and not in goldsmith's ware. (1.1.18-21)

She explains that Moll’s role is to flirt, entertain, and sexually satisfy her suitors. Maudlin draws attention to her own sexual desire and ability to become pregnant or “quick” in her

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<sup>122</sup> Lars Engle, Katharine Maus and Eric Rasmussen, *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York: Norton, 2002) 1459.

<sup>123</sup> Ian MacLean, *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance: The Case of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

youth as symbolic capital within the union. Maudlin draws a direct parallel between her daughter's sexual desire and the dowry that goes along with her. Moll's refusal to "dance" directly relates to her worth in the marriage. She does not reflect the value of gold but rather the inferior lead.

When Whorehound arrives later in the scene, Maudlin's introduction of Moll demonstrates the tension between the necessary public portrayal of virtuous chastity and the private performance of sexuality discussed above.

Why, daughter; faith, the baggage,  
A bashful girl, sir; these young things are shamefast.  
Besides, you have a presence, sweet Sir Walter,  
Able to daunt a maid brought up i' the city;  
A brave court spirit makes our virgins quiver,  
And kiss with trembling thighs. Yet see, she comes, sir. (1.1.125-129)

This exchange points to Moll's shyness and her deference to Whorehound when he enters a room. In public, she is to perform for men a coyness and chastity, but in the private conversation, her mother is telling her to be more sexual. From the conversation with Maudlin, we learn of the cultural logic and sexual underpinnings that place Moll in a difficult situation, as she must be pawned off properly for her reproductive labor. The imperative for the mother is a demand for returns of *her* work, her maternal labor, showing the evidence of accrued capital, and in the logic of the labor market, her daughter must hold her value through legitimate reproduction.

Like Rose in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Moll undercuts her family's patriarchal authority over the terms of her marriage and confounds their efforts by attempting to elope with her suitor of choice, Touchwood Junior. She says "you must dispatch with all the speed you can /for I shall be missed straight. I made hard shift/for this small time I have" (3.2.14-16). However, her father finds her and exclaims, "Was this the politic

fetch, you mystical baggage,/ Thou disobedient strumpet? (3.2.23-24). Both Rose and Moll take vows outside the traditional marriage institution to reinforce the companionate unions they seek, and both attempts are initially thwarted and rejected by their respective families, only to be revived and legitimized in the end. Rose's marriage to Lacy is officially sanctioned by the King, while Moll's marriage to Touchwood Junior is restored when the two fake their own deaths at the end of the play.

Despite the barriers created by social class status, Rose and Moll participate in the negotiation and arrangement of their own marriages—challenging class boundaries and traditional patriarchal authority and participating in the restructuring and redefining the marriage contract. In the pursuit of choice and the ideal of romantic love, women must, however adhere to conventions that disallow for economic or legal recognition. Each female character pursues a strategy of defiance that has alternative and over-lapping consequences. Yet, a feminist reading of the actions and choices of the characters gives rise to the thematic truth demonstrated in the plot entire, which is: the only escape from being bound, either by love or social contract, is through their refusal to participate unless on their own terms, thus achieving a level of agency.

### III.

This chapter has argued that the tensions between blood-law and contract-law are reworked as the opportunity for each female character to capitalize on an instability within the patriarchal regime. In the close reading to follow, I look at the commodification of the female body in overall attitudes toward marriageable women as well as within the marriage bond. I also consider how Jane uses profitable methods to

improve her mobility—methods that depend on the absence of her husband in the wake of his military conscription. His absence allows her to escape the social expectation of reproduction and gives her the ability to generate her own economic capital.

Early in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, we find Jane working as an employee in Simon Eyre's workshop. Jane is recently married to Ralph, who has been conscripted into military service in France. The prospect of her new husband's extended absence challenges the notion that once married, she should be primarily employed by her husband to perform wifely work duties. In *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford point out that "An obsession with the control of female sexuality, with women's dependent and submissive self-presentation as the outward sign of sexual subjection, also seemed to crop up."<sup>124</sup> In a conversation amongst Jane and the other shoemakers, we find expression of the social expectation of her wifely role—primarily sexual availability and reproduction—as Firk laments: "Ay, truly, she shall be laid at one side like a pair of old shoes else, and be occupied for no use." (1.145-146). Firk's comparison says that with her husband gone, she will not be "occupied" or sexually available and producing children. His comparison emphasizes the idea that women's social value was dependent on and validated by a husband. Moreover, Firk states, "If you take her husband away from her a-night, you undo her—she may beg in the day time—for he's a good a workman at a prick and an awl as an is in our trade" (1.140-144). He argues that Ralph provides economic capital to support her, and that her financial security will be compromised in his absence. Jane echoes this fear that she will be financially "undone" without access to his economic capital. Ironically enough, it

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<sup>124</sup> Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 4.

is through Ralph's absence that Jane is able to obtain some level of autonomy and agency by escaping the reproductive expectations of marriage and generating economic capital through her own, non-reproductive, abilities.

Jane embodies the virtuous ideals of industry and hard work. She manages, in the absence of her husband and with no other recourse, to support and sustain herself in a comfortable and socially respectable station. An important caveat for the purpose of this chapter is to point out that Jane's ability to cultivate a career and maintain her social independence is premised on the fact that she is married and thus has license to operate as if she were being supervised. The absence of her husband while he is at war, however, means that her supervisor is away and that she is in fact her own master, governing her own actions and making her own financial and occupational choices under the cover of marriage. Jane is able to translate her status as a wife into a social passport of sorts, a passport that sanctions her residential relocation and change of occupations within working class London.

Jane's newly acquired autonomy as wife to Ralph is superior to that of a widow because through her marriage, she has the power to deny access to would-be suitors. However, this autonomy and status is threatened by the persistence of the would-be suitor, Hammon, who interprets her husband's absence as license to pursue her—eventually securing her agreement to marry through deception and coercion. The language of this pursuit is expressed in terms of commodity, as though she were available for purchase. In this set of negotiations, Jane rejects his advances and maintains her independence by reference to her status as already contracted for wifely service to another man. Even when she is presented the opportunity to marry Hammon and advance

into a higher social class, she chooses to wait for Ralph to return. Hammon's rhetoric in wooing is in terms of trade and commodity.

The interaction between Jane and Hammon draws attention to the commodification of women as means of wealth transfer through dowry, but more significantly foregrounds the alternative occupation to marriage for women in early modern London: employment as a sex worker. For example, Hammon uses language of commodity to persuade Jane to marry him. He asks, "How sell you then this hand" referring to her as an object that can be bought or sold (12.32). Although she states, "My hands are not to be sold" and continues to refuse his advances, Hammon argues "All this, I hope, is but a woman's fray, / That means 'Come to me!' when she cries 'Away!'" suggesting Jane has no ability to make decisions on her own, and that her lack of interest in him is merely a game to encourage his pursuit (12.33, 46-7). He thus claims access to her body by suggesting that marriage is the only honest and proper place for Jane to exist.

Linda Charnes offers an enlightening perspective regarding the commodification and gifting of women's sexual and reproductive labor both within and outside of the marriage contract at this moment in early modern England. Charnes notes that:

As the notion of the market was shifting from that of place to that of process, of movable, fluid activity, there arose with the transition from a land-based to a money-based economy a pervasive and uneasy sense that all social relations were becoming market relations (not just those which had long explicitly been so, such as the property exchange effected through kinship and marriage; and not just those necessarily recognized as such under the notion of financial "gain."<sup>125</sup>

The audience witnesses the raw market relations regulating women's movement within the labor market in the exchange between Jane and Hammon as he attempts to procure her first by purchasing her sex-work without a legitimate contract (as a prostitute), and

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<sup>125</sup> Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Harvard UP, 1993) 6.

then by offering her employment inclusive of a legitimate employment contract (as a wife). In scene 12, Jane tells him, “I cannot live by keeping holiday” (31). Hammon replies, “I’ll pay you for the time which shall be lost” (32). To persuade her, he offers to pay her so she will not have a financial loss by spending time with him. Jane responds, telling him “With me you shall not be at so much cost,” because she earns very little (12.34). Hammon tries to get Jane to leave her work and “play,” but she tells him,

Good sir, I do believe you love me well;  
For ’tis a silly conquest, silly pride,  
For one like you (I mean, a gentleman)  
To boast that by his love tricks he hath brought  
Such and such women to his amorous lure.  
I think you do not so; yet may do,  
And make it even a very trade to woo.  
I could be coy, as many women be,  
Feed you with sunshine smiles and wanton looks;  
But I detest witchcraft. Say that I  
Do constantly believe you constant have— (12. 58-68)

She acknowledges his professed love but does not trust his motives. She tells him since he is of gentleman status, he would not brag about the women he has deceived. Hammon is referred to as a “citizen by birth, fairly allied” (6.60). He is not a gentleman by birth but has risen in status through his connections and his clever uses of social capital. She draws attention to the idea that gentlemen do not work to earn a living, so the work gentlemen perform is that of wooing women and having questionable morals. This idle behavior she describes as “tricks” connotes deceptive but harmless behavior. However, she describes women’s role in the courtship as expressive of false modesty and lechery. Jane describes the performance of sexual availability as “witchcraft” which connoting sinful, dangerous behavior that is punishable by death, and in doing so, reinforces the misogynist stereotype that women’s sexual expression was threatening to patriarchal

power.<sup>126</sup> She denies his advances and expresses her own virtues in contrast to his, but eventually relents when Hammon produces a letter purporting to record her husband's death.

Here's a letter sent  
From France to me, from a dear friend of mine,  
A gentleman of place. Here he doth write  
Their names that have been slain in every fight, (13.83-86)

Hammon's letter seemingly confirms Ralph's death, leading Jane to accept Hammon's proposal. On the wedding day, however, Jane discovers her husband is not dead and immediately returns to him:

Whom should I choose?  
Whom should my thoughts Affect  
But him whom heaven hath made to be my love?  
To Ralph Thou art my husband, and these humble weeds  
Makes thee more beautiful than all his wealth.  
Therefore I will but put off his attire,  
Returning it into the owner's hand,  
And after ever be thy constant wife. (18.61-68)

Jane claims their love is authenticated by heaven. She does not focus on the necessity to marry for survival or the tradition of marrying within one's class, which are more realistic reasons for marriage. Jane marries for love. She says her husband's "humble weeds" are more attractive than Hammon's wealth, drawing attention to social class as something that can be put on or taken off. By "put[ting] off his attire" she not only removes clothing but also the money that Hammon represents. Jane celebrates love over wealth, but through marriage itself, participates in her own devaluation and subjugation. Although the play seems to challenge ideas of marriage, the female characters are denied subjectivity because of marriage.

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<sup>126</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons – The idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997).



Following Jane and Ralph's reunion, Hammon tries again to purchase Jane, offering: "Good fellows, hear me speak; and honest Ralph,/ Whom I have injured most in loving Jane,/ Mark what I offer thee. [Laying down money] Here in fair gold/ Is twenty pound. I'll give it for thy Jane./ If this content thee not, thou shalt have more" (18. 81-85). From an anthropological perspective rather than that of literary criticism, one could understand this scene as exemplifying a dynamic described thusly:

The classic example of a gift is a daughter given in marriage: One's daughter remains one's daughter, even as she becomes the wife of another, so an organic link is developed between otherwise separate family groups. Hence, a gift implies an intention to develop or maintain a social relationship between parties to the exchange. In contrast, commodities are exchanged strictly in relation to other commodities without any implied residual obligations or relationships between the people involved.<sup>127</sup>

Continuing to think about the wife as worker and as commodity in Jane's relationship with Ralph, the character Hodge says to Ralph "Sell not thy wife, Ralph; make her not a whore" (18.86). The shoemakers rally around exclaiming, "No, do not, Ralph! (18.90). To which he replies, "Sirrah, Hammon, Hammon, dost thou think a shoemaker is so base to be a bawd to his own wife for commodity? Take thy gold; choke with it! Were I not lame I would make thee eat thy words" (18.90-94). Note here the address "sirrah" is reserved for social inferiors as Ralph insults Hammon. In light of Ralph's refusal to sell his wife, one is tempted to valorize Ralph's indignant response to such an indecent proposal. Although Ralph's rejection of Hammon's offer is entirely consistent with traditional values of blood-law and the husband's exclusive right to his wife, Ralph and Jane appear to be in a consensual companionate marriage. The cultural values that

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<sup>127</sup> C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982).

underpin blood-law are further upset because of their lower social status and consensual marriage agreement.

#### IV.

*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* offers a contrasting example of an early modern city comedy featuring women as commodity and men as potential sellers of their wives—a satirical version wherein Master Allwit, the cuckolded husband, revels in the financial benefits of his wife’s sexual infidelity with Walter Whorehound. In this play, Middleton portrays marriage as a potential means to procure social and economic capital for striving classes. He portrays Allwit’s relationships as miserably inadequate, lamentable and ridiculous, taking every opportunity to make fun of the notion of the stability of blood law, a practice steeped in preserving class boundaries and community order. In scene two, Allwit is aware of the financial benefits he receives from Whorehound—referring to him as “the founder” (1.2.15) and celebrating his own status as cuckold because he is relieved from the financial responsibility of supporting his wife. Allwit receives economic capital in that Whorehound provides money and commodities to him, his mistress, and her children:

I thank him, h’as maintained my house this ten years,  
Not only keeps my wife, but ’a keeps me,  
And all my family; I am at his table,  
He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse,  
Monthly, or weekly, puts me to nothing,  
Rent, nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger:  
The happiest state that ever man was born to (1.2.16-22).

The contrast between Ralph’s and Allwit’s responses to the prospect of selling their respective wives could not be starker. Ralph is indignant and gripped by anger at the

implication that he would transgress against traditions of blood-law by selling his own wife, while Allwit is content to take advantage of his contractual relationship with his wife and to essentially outsource her sex work to the character Whorehound. For the purpose of this chapter, comparisons between the characters in *Shoemaker's* and the characters in *Chaste Maid* afford the reader a broader perspective on early modern representations of women as commodities, gifts and objects of exchange, along with representations of women as co-workers in companionate marriages and employees in domestic servitude.

Moreover, introducing *Chaste Maid* as a comparative intertext for reading *Shoemaker's* extends the reader's insight into what is remarkably absent from representation in the plays examined so far in this dissertation—that is, the central occupational duty and obligation of wife as reproductive workers in marriages governed under both blood-law and contract-law in early modern England—the obligation to labor and birth a legitimate male heir to the master of the house. This obligation constituted the central occupational duty and was definitional of occupational success for women employed as wives in the homes of working-class, middle-class and aristocratic homes. For women of any class, laboring as a reproductive worker was an occupational hazard defined by high rates of maternal death and post-partum morbidity, but here we see Allwit's preoccupation with the trappings Whorehound provided for her lying in scene. He observes:

When she lies in,  
As now she's even upon the point of grunting,  
A lady lies not in like her; there's her embossings,  
Embroiderings, spanglings, and I know not what,  
As if she lay with all the gaudy shops  
In Gresham's Burse about her; then her restoratives,

Able to set up a young 'pothecary,  
And richly stock the foreman of a drug shop;  
Her sugar by whole loaves, her wines by rundlets. (1.2.30-38)

He itemizes the material goods that surround her in the lying-in chamber, and his attention to these goods satirizes the preoccupation with increasing his economic capital at the expense of his social or cultural capital. The offering of his wife's body in exchange for financial gain draws attention to the ways emerging contract law undermines older traditions of blood law. This scene in particular shows how women's sexual fidelity, once protected and regulated, is now another commodity to be sold on the market.

The section to follow shifts from contrasting representations of men's perception of women as commodities to contrasting Margery's performance of wife against that of Jane—exploring their competing attitudes regarding marriage, commodity and material wealth. We see this difference specifically reflected in Jane's self-reliance in the absence of her husband, as well as her disinterest in material wealth and status, contrasted against Margery's preoccupation with social climbing and objectified cultural capital. To understand the dynamic that Dekker presents in the following dialogue, we must look first at the presence of working-class consciousness that is evidenced in the exchange between Hodge and Ralph. In *Shoemaker's*, upon the return of Jane's husband Ralph, the audience learns he has been wounded and rendered lame in battle. Greeted by his now former social peers, the shoemaker Hodge and Margery, Ralph seeks help in locating Jane and laments her absence. Given his disabilities, Ralph fears he will be unemployed and impoverished,—and moreover unable to support his wife—but Hodge assuages that fear by reassuring Ralph that he is still capable of plying his trade as a shoemaker. The

following conversation excerpted at length illustrates the social power dynamics at play here:

Hodge: What, fellow Ralph? Mistress, look here: Jane's husband! Why, how now, lame? Hans, make much of him; he's a brother of our trade, a good workman, and a tall soldier.

Lacy (as Hans): You be welcome, broder.

Margery: Perdie, I knew him not.—How dost thou, good Ralph? I am glad to see thee well.

Ralph: I would God you saw me, dame, as well as when I went from London into France.

Margery: Trust me, I am sorry, Raph, to see thee impotent. Lord, how the wars have made him sunburnt! The left leg is not well. Twas a fair gift of God that infirmity took not hold a little higher, considering thou camest from France—but let that pass.

Ralph: I am glad to see you well, and I rejoice To hear that God hath blessed my master so since my departure.

Margery: Yea, truly, Ralph, I thank my maker—but let that pass.

Hodge: And sirrah, Ralph, what news, what news in France?

Ralph: Tell me, good Roger, first, what news in England? How does my Jane? When did thou see my wife? Where lives my poor heart? She'll be poor indeed Now I want limbs to get whereon to feed.

Hodge: Limbs? Hast thou not hands, man? Thou shalt never see a shoemaker want bread, though he have but three fingers on hand.

Ralph: Yet all this while I hear not of my Jane.

Margery: Oh, Ralph, your wife, perdie, we know not what become of her. She was here a while, and because she was married grew more stately than become her. I checked her, and so forth. Away she flung, never returned, nor said bye or bah. And Ralph, you know: "ka me, ka thee." And so I tell ye—Roger, is not Firk come yet?

Hodge: No, forsooth.

Margery: And so, indeed, we heard not of her; but I hear she lives in London—but let that pass. If she had wanted, she might have opened her case to me or my husband, or to any of my me; I am sure there's not any of them, perdie, but would have done her good to his power. Hans, look if Firk be come. [Ralph weeps.] (10.62-101)

Hodge addresses Ralph as "brother," and treats him with respect, and in turn, Ralph clearly is comfortable being honest and vulnerable within his community of affiliation. In contrast, Margery's presentation and disposition toward Ralph is incredibly disrespectful and alienating. She declines him recognition, and instead jibes him about the prospect

that he has potentially become sexually impotent through his injury.

The contrast between Hodge and Ralph's relationship and Margery and Jane's relationship foregrounds working-class men's consciousness and solidarity as conceivable, while also demonstrating the utter absence of working-class women's gender-based identifications with each other. Margery's descriptions of Jane and her motivations are also written in such a manner that the audience for *The Shoemaker's Holiday* could not help but to note her class pretensions. Take her repeated use of the word, 'perdie' in the dialogue; this is a word of Latin and French derivation meaning 'by God,' or 'Indeed,'—a declarative contrivance that smacks of greater authority than Margery actually owns in her position as a shoemaker's wife. Her voice has changed insofar as she is now distancing herself from the social class of the shoemakers, which she sees as necessary to maintain her higher social status. She is not interested in her newfound wealth collapsing social boundaries, but would rather maintain those boundaries to distinguish her increase in social and economic capital.

Margery's attempts are worthy of some acknowledgment and recognition as demonstrative of female empowerment on the stage. Despite the way the play evidently mocks her pretense to a class identity that she isn't afforded by blood, Margery's very efforts to expand and exert authority are at least evidence that a 16<sup>th</sup> century audience understood women to have the capacity for manufacturing social authority within the extremely limiting occupational landscape they faced. This is not to say that Margery is an example of an ideal feminism—clearly she gains her advantage over the men in this dialogue by casting aspersions on Jane and questioning her social and sexual propriety. Margery criticizes Jane for acting out of her proscribed station, a fault Margery has

exhibited throughout the play. Margery projects her own insecurities regarding her social climbing/capital onto Jane. She claims that through her marriage, Jane became too “stately,” or acted outside of her station, a claim that can effectively be applied to Margery herself. Margery’s husband’s new fortune affords her the ability to move throughout spaces once off limits and to fashion a new identity. Only through Simon Eyre’s mobility is Margery allowed to interact across class lines. After Margery gains social ground, she wants to protect it and attempts to isolate Jane.

Margery’s shaming of Jane’s alleged behavior draws attention to the larger cultural fear of the performative nature of social class. Power can be performed and thus manifest through simple costuming rather than some biological category of blood that determines the quality of the individual. Margery chooses to police the habits and inclinations of fellow women on behalf of hegemony and the masculinist status quo of Elizabethan society—anchoring her own legitimacy as one who is entitled. Margery “grow[s] more stately” in part by disparaging and discouraging women’s agency outside the bounds of masculinist expectations of female loyalty toward the institution of marriage. She does not ally herself to Jane, and her alienation of Jane points to the ways in which she appropriates patriarchal power dynamics to exclude her from the shoemaker’s guild.

These two women represent opposing ideas about what it means to be wife, that is to say, Margery exemplifies the increasingly fluid social class demarcations as her role in the labor force shifts. As a wife, she benefits from her husband’s social mobility and increase in capital. The type of work she represents is more consumerist and ideological. Her central focus is on individual gain. As Natasha Korda points out,

Although...the formal economy regulated by the guilds...placed increasing restrictions on women's work in the early modern period, these restrictions did not result in wholesale exclusion of women from the labor force; rather they helped institute a gendered division of labor...<sup>128</sup>

In the case of Jane and Margery, each character is standing on one side of this widening division between women in the labor force as paid producers and women working in the home as wives and consumers. Jane works as seamstress, a skilled-laborer in the guilds, and cares for herself independently. Margery is interested in expanding her occupational domain as a wife and consumer in-line with the gendered division of labor that Korda describes as a movement that grew stronger over the course of the early modern period. Despite Korda's description of the developments in the labor market and the guilds, it is also fair to say that women like Margery's character gained and negotiated a return on their newly formed occupational status as consumers by manufacturing social capital in conspicuous displays of consumption and class-identity performances, all of which would have previously broken sumptuary laws. For example, Margery's husband returns to their shop bearing goods to demarcate her new social status. He says, "See here my Maggy, a chain, a gold chain for Simon Eyre. I shall make thee a lady. Here's a French hood for thee. On with it, on with it. Dress thy brows with this flap of a shoulder of mutton, to make thee look lovely" (11.148). This scene shows that Simon believes economic capital is immediately interchangeable with embodied cultural capital. He demonstrates his lack of awareness of the nuance of class performance. His expectation that she perform the identity of a woman of a higher class than that to which she was born is its own occupational hazard, as can be seen in Margery becoming the object of ridicule from the

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<sup>128</sup> Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 5.



perspective of the audience.

Margery's preoccupation with fashion is not only a response to her change in social station, but also a reflection of her longing for higher status. Her unconscious projection of larger cultural values regarding social climbing onto Jane shows her reinforcing dominant cultural values while simultaneously participating in the restructuring of those values through stage narrative. She reinforces a set of values for women's behavior and judges Jane based on a set of criteria established by the hegemonic culture, not recognizing that she behaves in the same manner she criticizes.

Margery embodies a shifting set of expectations for the role of wife. Her husband's increasing social and economic capital compels Margery to participate in the performance of a higher social class. As Simon Eyre climbs the social ladder, Margery is ridiculed for her attention to material items and changing behaviors based on her rising social class. Her duty as the wife of the Lord Mayor shifts from participating in the shoemaking shop and caring for the home to a more ornamental role. There is tension in the play because while Margery is being ridiculed for her social mobility, her husband is applauded for his. No one derides the lowly shoemaker who rises to Lord Mayor. While, Margery's negative reception may be largely attributed to her comical failure to master and perform the rules and behaviors expected of her higher social status, she also embodies a larger cultural aversion to "growing more stately" than one should. This is a criticism Margery herself projects onto Jane, who in contrast to Margery, exemplifies traditional virtues like humility and class loyalty. These competing representations of female behavior regarding social class and mobility also elucidate larger cultural ideas about women's relationship to consumerism. On the one hand, Jane lacks any desire for

social advancement or monetary gain—opting for true love over the riches offered her by her suitor, Hammon. On the other hand, Margery obsesses over the material wealth and luxury afforded by her rise in social status.

Margery's role demonstrates conflicting cultural ideas of women's role in the workplace and social striving.<sup>129</sup> Margery's contributions as shop manager, worker and housewife are demonstrated throughout the play, but are largely unnoticed by the male characters. While “demonstrating both her familiarity with her husband's profession and the good housewife's diligent stewardship of household goods” as well as “show[ing] her almost single-minded dedication to productivity” in the guild, Margery also embodies a larger cultural struggle surrounding shifting ideas of what productivity means.<sup>130</sup> Ann Christensen focuses on the “negative aspects that burden” characters like Margery, but I propose that she invites this “devaluation” of her previous work and contributions—exchanging it for a different type of “productivity.” She gains fewer acknowledgements from her peers for her manual labor, but work for women did not create freedom or equality; rather, it was more of a marker of social class. Christensen explains:

These ‘representational limitations’ inform both versions of the story to make the tradesman's wife seem a desiring shopper when she is *also* a laboring producer. For example, though Deloney narrates the wife's almost total management of the bargain, having warmed her gradually to the idea of advancement, he also makes her ‘covetous.’<sup>131</sup>

Through the act of acquiring commodities, Margery is participating in a new adaptation of the wifely role. This production not only works to redefine women's roles within a

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<sup>129</sup> Ann C. Christensen, “Being Mistress Eyre in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*,” *Comparative Drama* 42.4 (Winter 2008/9), 451-480.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

larger culture, but also demonstrates a shift in the value of women in marriage. Her consumerism as well as her participation in deal-making throughout the play demonstrates her agency and is itself creating a different type of social identity.<sup>132</sup> She states, “Art thou acquainted with never a farthingale maker, nor a French hood maker? I must enlarge my bum. Ha, ha! How shall I look in a hood, I wonder? Perdie, oddly, I think” (10.37-40). She is aware that her performance of her new social role is inadequate. Simultaneously she questions Hodge’s acquaintance with the hoodmaker, drawing attention to the idea that upper class citizens work with them on a regular basis and highlighting his lack of need for a hood maker. Hodge immediately insults her in the next line but she already draws attention to the odd quality of her appearance because of how it artificially symbolizes a social class she is not used to performing. While acting as if her new role is natural, she also draws attention to the unnaturalness of her wearing the trappings of the upper class. In the middle of her verbalizing the desire for material goods and social acceptance, she refers to Isaiah 40:6: “Indeed, all flesh is grass” (10.42). This passage emphasizes the temporary status and weakness of humans compared to god. By referring to Isaiah, Margery shows wealth and accomplishments gained on earth are transitory or temporary, and while enjoying the benefits of elevated social standing, she illuminates the performative aspect and artificial nature of social hierarchy.

Margery refers to her relationship to the new fashions as a vocation. She states, “Fie upon it, how costly this world’s calling is! Perdie, but that it is one of the wonderful works of God, I would not deal with it” (10.52-54), and she refers to fashion in terms of work, vocation, and craft. Margery’s role can be interpreted by looking at the “secondary

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991).

production hidden in the process of its own utilization.”<sup>133</sup> It is not as important that she is appropriating behaviors of higher social status individuals, but rather that the way in which she appropriates these behaviors challenges the status quo and works to create an emerging class. Margery does not simply mirror upper class behavior—instead through her performance of it, she transforms it. She describes her new role in terms of vocation to emphasize the cultural value of the ideological work she is doing as compared to her material work of making shoes. Success means acquiring cultural capital and performing the habitus of the upper classes. Margery is aware of the materiality and behavioral norms of higher classes and is aware of her behavioral shift to perform those actions. She ultimately reinforces the social class hierarchy because she values the performance and materiality of the class she is entering. She becomes judgmental of those around her, including those from her same social circles in the guild.

## V.

This play undoubtedly merges work and marriage by its inclusion of marriageable women on the market, of wives negotiating the market, and of women attempting to move beyond their work assignment. In the play, the women have taken control of their bodies and of the commodification of those bodies. This dissertation looks at the ways female characters gain agency from within the institutions that constrain them. Women do not reject patriarchy, marriage or the laws that bind them but rather transform the institutions from within. As de Certeau states, “They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which

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<sup>133</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

they assimilated and which assimilated them externally” (32). This notion applies to these stage representations of early modern women because the characters represent the ways women subverted their constraining systems from within those very systems. Performed in 17<sup>th</sup> century London, the audience’s understanding about the meaning of wife and the category of women’s labor within marriage were still tied to ideals about blood-law and heredity that intersected with the schism between Catholicism and Protestantism.

As gender theorist Judith Butler suggests, gender is formed by performance, and the meaning of a play is formed much in the same manner, and therein maybe one of the very most important aspects of theater criticism from a feminist perspective: these two fields of vocabulary and conceptual equipment overlap in a convenient and crucial moment; each time an audience member conceives of the potential that the character of the woman might not commit to the role, but rather break from script and imply the possibility of other social options for women’s work besides that of wife.<sup>134</sup> Dolan has noted that marriage owes:

debts to one particular cultural tradition, ... we have inherited three models of marriage from early modern England (1550-1700): marriage as hierarchy, as fusion and as contract. These three models are incompatible and, to make matters worse, each is riddled with internal contradictions.<sup>135</sup>

Close reading the excerpts from scenes involving Jane, one can see that the models of marriage with which the characters in *Shoemaker’s* are struggling include all three, but in Jane’s case the primary internal contradiction is generated by the ideal of chastity born of blood-law and the simultaneous ideal of individual independence born of contract-law. Jane is able to operate as an independent contractor in the paid labor force because she

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<sup>134</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>135</sup> Dolan, *Marriage and Violence*, 4.

enjoys the benefits of having the title of wife without the presence and demands of service typically issued by a husband. In the case of the character Rose, the audience finds her engaged in covert efforts with her upper-class lover to contravene traditional class hierarchies and rules of blood-law regarding the legitimacy of inter-class marriage.

## CHAPTER IV

### “TO LOSE SO MUCH BLOOD COULD NOT GRIEVE HIM MORE”: WOMEN CHARACTERS COMPLICATING THE MARKETPLACE IN *THE ROARING GIRL*

In *The Roaring Girl*, the 1611 collaboration between Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, we find women characters moving across the variegated texture of city-spaces and city-places, participating in the local economy. The play's women characters have choices and enact agency from within a social context that exacts a high toll from women in terms of belonging and identity. From the unpaid labor in or on behalf of marriage and reproduction to the paid market participation of women, all the women characters make decisions on how best to navigate a difficult terrain—the cultural topography and the social spaces of turn-of-the-century London. The playwrights' choices evidence an intimate, satirical, and ambiguously transgressive reading of gender, codes of identity formation and the social terms of cultural capital.

This chapter close reads three types of women characters and how they employ tactics to gain autonomy in the context of their relationships to marriage. First, the play portrays Mary Fitzallard pre-marriage and explores the control she wields over her own marriage contract. Second, the shopkeepers' wives experience sexual sovereignty and redefine the city spaces they occupy. And finally, this chapter close reads Moll's autonomy against the institution of marriage and shows while she, to some extent, gains

freedom, she remains marginal to the larger cultural norm. In my reading of this play, I look at how the labels described in the Prologue define women characters as well as how women themselves negotiate and modify the boundaries of those categories. Finally, I will show that representations on the early modern stage divide women into separate groups and classifications, which are fluid and transactional. Social intersections allow women to challenge, defy and also sometimes strategically preserve traditional notions of femininity, but also to delimit new spaces as women audience members imagine their own self representations as reflected in and interpolated through the experiences of marriage, social death, and status hierarchies.

Middleton's prologue draws our attention to women in London and types of "roaring women" in particular, noting that, "For of that tribe are many" (Prologue). Here he categorizes many different types of "roaring girl" to generalize about unsettling and disobedient female behavior. There is the suburb roarer, "That roars at midnight in deep tavern bowls, That beats the watch, and constables controls; Another roars i' th' daytime, swears, stabs, gives braves, yet sells her soul to the lust of fools and slaves," juxtaposing the violent and lusty roarers against the honest and virtuous women (Prologue). The playwright describes another type of roaring girl as "A civil city roaring girl, whose pride, feasting, and riding, shakes her husband's state, and leaves him roaring through an iron grate" (Prologue). This roarer challenges her husband's authority while operating, not at the margins of society, but rather from within it. The shopkeepers' wives, Mrs. Tiltyard, Mrs. Prudence Gallipot and Mrs. Rosamond Openwork all represent "civil city roarers" who by shak[ing] her husband's state" redefines city space and carves out places for autonomy within marriage.



Although Moll is the central roaring girl to the play, this description can also refer to the shopkeepers' wives or Mary in her trickery and disguise. However, he makes a distinction for Moll:

None of these roaring girls is ours: she flies  
With wings more lofty. Thus her character lies;  
Yet what need characters, when to give a guess  
Is better than the person to express?  
But would you know who 'tis? Would you hear her name?  
She is call'd mad Moll; her life, our acts proclaim. (Prologue)

Moll is “more lofty” because she moves through spaces and redefines places throughout the city. Although she refuses to marry in the end, the tactics she employs are ultimately threatening to the institution of marriage albeit from a marginalized social position. Because she refuses to participate in the marriage market, she is excluded from representation of production in market exchange

As we see in the Prologue, Middleton and Dekker type and categorize women, according to the ways in which they contest and upset culturally defined appropriate behavior. This disturbance is not always negative. In her discussion of Moll, Jean Howard points out, “As a character, her representation is enmeshed in contradictions, a sure sign that it is doing the work of mediating complex social tensions.”<sup>136</sup> Close reading the women characters (specifically Mary, the shopkeepers' wives, and Moll) shows how *The Roaring Girl* provides a snapshot of the various types of people and social classes intermingling within the growing city of London. This focus on London theater highlights the working out of social relationships and the tension among the ever-shifting

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<sup>136</sup> Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 183.

social class structure. In this way, the stage, the audience, and the public forum participate in producing the city rather than simply reflecting the current social scene.

In this dissertation, I have used a common organizational scheme for discussing women's lives, one that looks at women's relationship to men and marriage and the work that is done within each of these categories. More specifically, women perform a role or certain type of labor within each category. While this system is useful in looking at customs and traditions of early modern culture, it is too simple and limiting in developing a discussion of women's experiences and how those experiences are represented on stage. This chapter uses the life-spectrum tropes for looking at women character's potential entrances to the turn-of-the century labor market in London. I argue that women's work and how that work is represented on the stage provides a more nuanced narrative of the conflicting roles women were navigating during the period. Furthermore, my definition of "work" is not only the material product one creates or produces in exchange for money but also the forms of capital and the varied methods of payment for wives' labor, whether ideological, physical or material labor. Scholars frequently discuss women in terms of "maid, wife, widow," which risks reducing women's experiences without taking into account the historical moment. In summary, this dissertation and chapter depart from generalizing or naturalizing the trajectory of "maid, wife, widow," and instead foreground the methods of social construction that make the term 'wife' central to women's potential identities and roles.

David Cressy investigates the historical and religious significance of life-cycle in his study *Birth, Marriage & Death* where he explores social rituals concerning the course of life in early modern England. Cressy shows that "[n]o marriage could go forward

without mutual consent, but consent could be developed by kinsmanlike council and fatherly approbation.”<sup>137</sup> Mutual consent did not necessarily imply that women shared power in the decision process of marriage. The severe limitations that were set in place by men to govern women’s activities within the culture prompted women to respond and thus created male anxiety that is evident, particularly in the close reading of Mary and Sebastian’s attempt to marry for love. Though there is mutual consent between them, the father ultimately stands in the way, protecting not only social class lines but also family money. This understanding of early modern England, and specifically women’s lives, is generic because it does not consider women’s experiences outside of one’s biology and social rituals. Although the study points to generic life events, it does not reveal nuanced experiences of individuals during the early modern period.

Merry Wiesner’s *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (1993) has three major sections that emphasize the ways in which women were regulated: Body, Mind and Spirit. Wiesner says an analysis of economic life in any period must include reproductive as well as productive activities; reproduction is defined not simply as childbearing, but as the care and nurturing of all family members which allowed them to take part in productive labor.”<sup>138</sup> Although this play does not feature explicit scenes of childbearing and child rearing, we see concerns about regulating women’s bodies and their reproductive roles.

A chaste body depended not only on the actions of women, but also on the silencing of their voices. Silence in public represented appropriate adherence to Christian

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<sup>137</sup> Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, Death*, 253.

<sup>138</sup> Mary Wiesner, *Women and Gender in early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 102.

values. Suzanne Hull reminds us that a woman in early modern England must “be chaste and silent, obedient to their husbands or other superiors, and to conform to appropriate religious training” to uphold a reputation as a “good” woman.<sup>139</sup> Despite these ideals for feminine behavior, women were talking and working within and outside of the private sphere, and we see this role specifically in the characters of the shopkeepers’ wives. They embody a contradictory position in that they are secured in marriage all the while moving through public places and spaces. The wives’ relationships with the city gallants challenge exactly what marriage seeks to protect: money and class boundary. Naomi Miller explains in her essay “Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period” that “The forms of women’s culture . . . simultaneously conformed to and challenged the masculine outsider view of their domestic roles.”<sup>140</sup> Women subverted the dominant, masculine power over women’s voices and bodies from within cultural constraints, and manipulated their social situations within and outside of the home to accommodate their needs despite the restrictions that men placed on their voices and bodies.

Historical research is important to my study because I want to understand representational practices used to construct early modern women’s lives and their work, but more importantly, I am interested in literary representations of women and the fictional narratives told by male authors and performed on stage by male actors, particularly in city comedies and domestic tragedy. These types of texts participate in

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<sup>139</sup> See Suzanne Hull’s *Chaste, Silent, Obedient: English Books for Women 1450-1640*. (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library) 103.

<sup>140</sup> Naomi Miller, “Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period” in *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*. Eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 14.

grounding the literary canon in England in the lives of ordinary people rather than kings or courtiers. This distinction is significant because it hold up and celebrates the people and culture of England outside of the wealthy classes. Although these representations do not mirror real life of English citizens, they show how the social tension and work that women perform is worked out and talked about on stage. My readings of these plays does not provide an overview of how women's work is portrayed on stage throughout the historical period, but rather shows the contradictions within the culture that these text grapple with.

Mary Beth Rose in "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*" situates *The Roaring Girl* and Dekker and Middleton's representation of Moll in a larger cultural debates about women in men's attire. She states "artistic representation and social commentary suggest a deep cultural ambivalence in the British Renaissance about female independence and equality between the sexes."<sup>141</sup> Reading early modern conduct manuals alongside the play, Rose examines the ways in which the play treats social class hierarchies.<sup>142</sup> She notes that Moll cross dresses not for disguise but as herself (rather than donning men's clothing for protection or for comedic plotlines).

Similarly, Jean Howard argues, "the polemics signal a sex gender system under pressure and that cross dressing...threatened normative social order based upon strict

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<sup>141</sup> Mary Beth Rose in "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in the *Roaring Girl*" *English Literary Renaissance* 14.3 (1984) 367.

<sup>142</sup> Rose examines *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man Woman* and *Haec-Vir: OR, The Womanish Man* in her reading of *The Roaring Girl*. These pamphlets published a few years later in 1620 emphasize and reinforce the overwhelming cultural preoccupation with apparel, social class markers and fluidity of gender representation.

principles of hierarchy and subordination.”<sup>143</sup> She continues to point toward the differences of cross-dressing in England and cross-dressing on the early modern stage. In conduct manuals of the period, women are often described as imperfect versions of men but simultaneously anti-theatrical pamphlets take the position that this relationship is unnatural. However, Howard points out that male cross-dressing carried cultural weight of sexual perversion and subordination while women cross-dressing was equated with prostitution and thus threatened the stability of the patriarchy. Howard makes a distinction between plays that use cross-dressing as a comedic form of the narrative, where characters are not themselves and wear a different identity, versus plays like *The Roaring Girl* that comment on the implications of cross-dressing women in London. These women are not in disguise, but cross-dress as a part of their own identity expression. For the character Moll, her apparel affords her freedom, although this freedom places her in the sexual market. Although several characters see her in the public space and assume her sexual availability, Moll upholds the virtue of chastity, seemingly reinforcing the status quo, but ultimately she envisions a need for “social reform” (438). Howard explains,

The public theatre was not a ritual space, but a commercial venture. Citizens' wives who went to this theatre might, at one extreme, be invited by its fictions to take up positions of chastity, silence, and obedience, but at another extreme by its commercial practices they were positioned as consumers, critics, spectators, and spectacles. The theatre as a social institution signified change.<sup>144</sup>

In contrast, Stephen Orgel’s “The Subtexts of *The Roaring Girl*” presents Moll as upholding patriarchy and reinforcing social order. Her ability to move from place to place

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<sup>143</sup> Jean Howard, “Cross dressing, the Theatre and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988).

<sup>144</sup> Howard, *Crossdressing*, 440.

does not necessarily transform the space she inhabits but props up conventional ideas for female behavior.<sup>145</sup> Building on this conversation, I argue that even though the play to some extent props up conventional ideas, the women characters not only redefine spaces as practiced places that allow for transformation of the places they inhabit, but also work to transform how their roles are defined.

## I.

In previous chapters, this dissertation has covered characters nicely categorized as lovers, or potential lovers, whose everyday choices were steered by the gendered expectations of social status hierarchies they inhabited. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau describes the difference between these hierarchies informed by the terms “place” and “space.” He explains that “a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence”; a place is thus “an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.”<sup>146</sup> Within the text of the play, the city of London, for example, is a place with fixed streets and buildings and homes one can navigate. The city is organized into different social hierarchies and marketplaces.

In contrast to place, de Certeau shows that “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements.”<sup>147</sup> For example, characters speaking and interacting within Sir Alexander’s house or customers moving through the shops on the London streets.

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<sup>145</sup> Stephen Orgel. *The Subtexts of the Roaring Girl Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>146</sup> De Certeau. *Everyday Life*, xix.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

Although the shops are designed as places for market exchange, that is not always what happens there. By existing or working within places, characters transform places into different types of spaces. I am thinking about not only the place of the theater as a place in early modern culture that is transformed into a space by theatergoers during the period, but also places within the context of the play to be navigated by characters and analyzed as a layer of spaces created within the literary text itself. The places available for women characters to reform into spaces are represented in *The Roaring Girl* as porous and vulnerable to women's appropriations. The spaces are reflective of their strategies for coping with the universal expectation of marriage and service to one's husband. Spaces that women characters help to create by those everyday actions that shape malleable social contexts (walking, spending, dressing, fighting, choosing, defending, etc.) are not (in neither theatrical representation nor London's early urban reality) safe spaces for women.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau discusses everyday activities and interactions and explores the social relations that are related to these activities. He defines "strategy" as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power can be isolated from an 'environment.'"<sup>148</sup> Strategy refers to institutions, power structures, defined environments and the city as a whole. Strategy is a static, institutional location that can be explained as a subject that creates order for society but is separate from that society. In the context of this chapter, strategies manifest in social values, traditions and norms. Religion, government, tradition and what I have been describing as "blood law" coalesce and perpetuate institutions and patriarchal

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, xix.



social structures. Marriage traditions upheld by Alexander Wengrave (preserving kinship and social class boundaries that protect one's access to capital) serve as an example.

Tactics refers to the ability to move throughout the city without being wholly determined by these previously described institutions. De Certeau's definition is "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor this on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other."<sup>149</sup> Daily practices attempt to change or influence strategy. In "Walking in the City," the street is described as a location away from the central power. Whatever is happening at the street level is working to challenge or redefine strategies. For example, women characters and the way they create social relationships and move about the city function as tactics working to manipulate the larger patriarchal power structure. These women characters must adapt to the environment created by strategy; but also, by defining space through movement and interaction, they disrupt this power hierarchy. Tactics make everyday activities political in that they are in opposition to rather than subordinate to strategy. Mary, the shopkeepers' wives, and Moll all embody the 'ways of operating' that allow them to function in an opportunistic way to oppose the strategies that define the places they inhabit.

As described and explained in the previous chapters use of the categories of blood-law and contract-law, the cultural logic of patriarchy is potentially always working against itself when these systems are at odds. The 'tactics' used by women characters — employing contract-law as they "developed and instituted themselves" into the

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<sup>149</sup> De Certeau, *Everyday Life*, xix.

mechanisms of blood law, with its ‘panoptic administration’ — are evident in the close reading of women characters and their redefining of these social relations. By employing de Certeau’s discussion of ‘space’ and ‘place,’ along with ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics,’ my analysis of Mary, the shopkeepers’ wives, and Moll moves forward the argument that women gain agency and freedom from within the confines of the societal institutions and expectations. By closely reading the relationship between (1) representations of women’s marital status and (2) how women characters navigate the political economy of gender and class identity in 17th century London, I show how women characters create ‘spaces’ in which they can optimize their agency within and against the constraints of the patriarchal expectation of marriage in turn-of-the-century Jacobean London.

## II.

English sumptuary law, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, codified certain societal expectations of gender and class identity. *Black’s Law Dictionary* defines sumptuary law as “a statute, ordinance or regulation that limits the expenditures that people can make for personal gratification or ostentatious display” and also states the law is “More broadly, any law whose purpose is to regulate conduct thought to be immoral such as prostitution gambling or drug abuse.”<sup>150</sup> Although the justification of these laws was grounded in religious and moral ideology, they also served as visual markers of gender and social class distinctions within society. Cross-dressing, especially for women, expressed a threat to social order because women were not only wearing the clothing of men, but also this activity implied that women could then access the privilege that accompanied masculine

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<sup>150</sup> *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Ed. Bryan A. Garner (St. Paul: West, 2004) 1477.

status in early modern society. Such anxiety is reflected in contemporaneous social commentaries and writings.

Phillip Stubbes, for example, presents in his *Anatomie of Abuses* the anxiety surrounding the shifting of gendered boundaries and the importance of one's clothing as an external marker of differentiation when he argues, "Our apparel was given us as a sign distinctive, to discern betwixt sexe and sexe and therefore one to wear the apparel of another sex is to participate with the same and to adulterate the verity of his own kind."<sup>151</sup> Clothing was a public marker of genitalia as well as social status. Confusing assigned clothing not only challenged gendered norms but also threatened the gendered power dynamic. By wearing men's clothing, women were assuming the advantages of male status in society. In *The Overthrow of Stage Plays*, Jon Rainoldes writes, "It is a commandment therefore of the moral law that women shall not attire themselves like men, neither men like women... Nay, it is a notorious and detestable evil."<sup>152</sup> In his attack on the stage, he points to the Biblical teaching in Deuteronomy that states, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the lord thy God."<sup>153</sup> Women representing themselves as men were less threatening than women 'putting on' the same legal status, social power and lack of subordination as gendered social and legal roles determined. Not only in published social commentary do we see concern surrounding

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<sup>151</sup> Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) in Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995) 74.

<sup>152</sup> Jon Rainoldes, *The Overthrow of Stage Plays* (1599) in Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995) 108.

<sup>153</sup> *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1599 Edition with Undated Sternhold & Hopkins Psalms* (Pleasant Hope, MO: L.L. Brown Pub, 1993).

women's clothing and public expression, but it is also evidenced in personal correspondence and letters.

John Chamberlain's letter to Sir Dudley Carlton on January 25, 1619, is an example of correspondence concerning the king's instruction to religious leaders to use sermons to reach the women of the nation as a means to control their clothing. He explains in the letter,

yesterday the Bishop of London called together all his clergy about this town and told them he had express commandment from the king to will them to inveigh vehemently and bitterly in their sermons against the insolency of our women, and their wearing of broad brimmed hats, pointed doublets, their hair cut short or shorn...adding withal that if pulpit admonitions will not reform them he would proceed by another course.<sup>154</sup>

Disseminating laws and commandments from the king through the church emphasizes the connection to moral ideology and paternalistic approach. To "proceed by another course" suggests a more punitive or aggressive approach to punishing women's public behaviors.

The conversations around statutes governing physical appearance were not new. In "Tudor Sumptuary Laws," Wilfrid Hooper describes the statutes and proclamations that were informed by earlier law and revised throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These laws seek to regulate and control the representation of one's social status in public and punish lower status offenders for attempting to present themselves in clothing that represented a higher station, offending their 'betters.' In 1510, Henry VIII passed a sumptuary law: *An Act against wearing of costly apparel* and in 1533, a revised *Act for Reformatycon of Excesse in Apparayle*. Hooper notes the law evolves to include women in response to the changes in women's fashion that challenged the current law:

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<sup>154</sup> John Chamberlain's letter to Sir Dudley Carlton on January 25, 1619 in Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995) 78.

In 1574 another proclamation appeared which was repeated with some variations in 1577, 1580, 1588, and 1597. Two schedules are appended, the first of which—noticeable for the omission, as a distinct class of gentleman as such—gives the gist of the statutory restrictions on men's apparel; while the second imposes analogous restrictions on the apparel of their wives. This extension to women indicates the growing license of feminine attire—<sup>155</sup>

Hooper shows through explaining the historical weight of the many revisions of sumptuary law that the issue was an ongoing societal conversation. The numerous revisions show that the hegemonic power struggled with maintaining control over subjects seeking to perform higher-class identities. At once, sumptuary law is both a representation of the attitudes of the ruling class and various controlling institutions such as the church and the monarchy but necessarily a reflection of the frequency with which people are crossing these boundaries. These boundary crossers pose a threat to the social order. Specifically, Moll epitomizes the role of the boundary crosser, not only in relation to sumptuary law (she dresses in men's clothing), but also in terms of traversing space and social class boundaries as well. By actively renegotiating these boundaries, Moll dismantles other boundaries as well. My close reading to follow will read a more nuanced understanding of women's roles and agency in redefining those boundaries as well.

### III.

Women as commodity for exchange in the marriage economy display a variety of features that distinguish them from women in conventional roles of wife, making them subversive characters. First, Mary has an incontestable character and seeks marriage on her own terms and not in the confines of financial negotiation; she challenges the financial obligation of transference of economic capital through kinship bonds in the

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<sup>155</sup> Wilfrid Hooper, "Tudor Sumptuary Laws," *The English Historical Review*, 30 (1915) 444.

cultural rituals required of women (namely, appropriate marriages). In an effort to determine her own marriage, she employs disguise, first as a sempster and later as a page, to move about the city and assist in securing marriage on her terms. With the help of Moll, she ultimately marries Sebastian. Nancy Bunker notes, “*Roaring Girl’s* Moll Cutpurse inserts herself into the traditional patriarchal marriage scheme when she acts upon her friendship with Sebastian Wengrave and displaces his father as marriage maker.”<sup>156</sup> In this way, women exercise power over the negotiations of their ‘employment’ and future. Although marriage can be compared to prostitution in that the economic value for women is in their sexual labor (albeit to produce heirs for the transmission of familial wealth), Moll’s role removes her from the contract and Mary’s role, though still one ultimately of property and subordination, hints at companionate marriage and space for female agency.

Also, women like Mary were a common trope in city comedy (as we have seen previously in the analysis of Rose in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and Moll from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.) These women characters, like Mary, represent single women of the period attempting to seek agency by using tactics and challenging the traditionally acceptable role for women as ‘silent’ and ‘obedient’ as they seek advantageous unions.

As the play opens, Mary, the would-be wife of the son of a more prestigious family than her own ‘blood-line,’ is creating a space of greater freedom by dressing in disguise to gain access to Sebastian at Sir Alexander’s home. Mary is ‘on the market’ as a potential wife and a commodity in marital exchange, though for a noble family, her dowry is too modest. The lovers are warned against fraternizing by Sebastian’s father as

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<sup>156</sup> Nancy Bunker, *Marriage and Land Law*, 128.

evidenced in this chapter's title quotation, which the chapter will turn toward shortly in a discussion of the ongoing power of 'blood-law,' even as it is appropriated by the discourse of emerging proto capitalism. In speaking with him, she describes their mutual love and agreement to marry in terms of contract, referring to "a bond fast sealed..."subscribed unto...delivered as your deed in sight of heaven" when she asks him, "Is this bond canceled?" (1.1.57-60). This "bond," that the "fathers did agree on" is now broken and challenged by blood law (1.1.77). Her language calls attention to contract law, an emerging notion of marriage that Mary herself represents.

As a character with a small dowry, her marriage does not hinge on kinship bonds and preserving social class boundaries. Her marriage negotiation was agreed upon outside of those traditional terms, although the father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, has changed his mind. Sebastian explains to Mary,

when the knight your father  
Was from mine parted, storms began to sit  
Upon my covetous father's brow, which fell  
From them on me. He reckon'd up what gold  
This marriage would draw from him, at which he swore  
To lose so much blood could not grieve him more.  
He then dissuades me from thee, call'd thee not fair,  
And ask'd what is she but a beggar's heir?  
He scorn'd thy dowry of five thousand marks.

The title quotation appears in the opening scene wherein Sebastian explains to Mary, that his father, after reflecting on the marriage agreement, decides that her dowry is insufficient. We receive the father's words secondhand from Sebastian as he describes his father's "covetous brow," emphasizing the father's central concern for financial gain through the marriage arrangement, which contrasts to Sebastian's attitude toward the marriage dowry. Sebastian explains: "He reckoned up what gold this marriage would

draw from him, at which he swore, to lose so much blood could not grieve him more” (1.1.84-86). He not only anticipates the loss of economic capital but also weighs the loss of social and cultural capital that a disadvantageous marriage would bring. Not only is her dowry insufficient but also he sees the union as drawing “gold” as well as “blood” from him. To “lose so much blood” for Sir Wengrave is to lose social standing as well as money that allows him to maintain material wealth that signifies that standing. He points to Mary’s lack of not only economic capital, but also her social capital, as her lower status would contaminate Sebastian and his family. Mary’s success at securing her marriage despite Sir Wengrave’s authority is one example of how women in this play are complicating the (marriage) marketplace in an effort to increase their own social and economic capital.

Sebastian’s solution is to convince his father he loves Moll Cutpurse, the roaring girl, and by comparison, Mary Fitzallard will seem like the better option. He states, “There’s a wench Call’d Moll, mad Moll or merry Moll, a creature so strange in quality a whole city takes note of her name and person. All that affection I owe to thee on her in counterfeit passion I spend to mad my father: (1.1.79-114). She is “strange in quality” because her character and disposition do not follow socially acceptable rules for feminine behavior. Her notorious reputation would cause Sir Wengrave to “lose so much blood” or contaminate his family line with a person like Moll who represents not only a lower class but also a monstrous representation of femininity. Sebastian plans to feign love for the notorious Moll as a way to manipulate his father into approving of the previously planned marriage.



Contrasted to Moll, the opening scene we see Mary in disguise to gain access to Sebastian, yet no one questions her disguise or motivation for changing her appearance because her motives are in the service of patriarchy by securing herself in marriage, albeit a marriage that intermingles social class. She is given the benefit of the doubt by the other characters as well as a viewing audience that her “cross dressing” is honestly motivated. Sebastian’s plan ultimately works, and the end of the play sees Mary seen as more valuable in “her honor and modest fame” by comparison to Moll (5.2.189-90). The comparison of reputation is not the only motivation for Wengrave’s “covetous brow”--he ultimately sanctions the marriage because the contract with Sir Guy Fitzallard was renegotiated to include his whole estate.

In the realm of the play, the plot moves forward because the notion of a woman having agency in determining her marriage and choosing her partner is outside the realm of possibilities. Furthermore, Moll’s role in negotiating the marriage demonstrates ways women navigated within patriarchal boundaries to gain power. As Bunker points out, “both conventional patriarchs in *Roaring Girl* must accept the unconventional Moll’s power as a marriage enabler” (129). Mary and Sebastian together employ the tactic of deception by using Moll as a point of comparison to improve Mary’s position in the eyes of Sir Wengrave. Another way she uses the tactic of deception is through the disguise that she uses to redefine spaces and gain access to Sebastian. Mary is not the only character engaging tactics to seize opportunity for autonomy. The following section looks at the place of marriage and spaces wives create within it for agency.

#### IV.

In Jacobean London, men questioned women's virtue and chastity if they were occupying the spaces of material production in the London market. Although women's work occurred through the patriarchal power structure, with its many limitations, it nonetheless is a clear site of women's agency and sexual negotiations. Women challenged the privatization and segregation that rejected women's employ in other occupations beyond marriage and continued to have an integral role in economic (re)production as wives, moving themselves into urban spaces and challenging notions of female limitations to the home, particularly read through the characters of the shopkeepers' wives. Women characters moved within and throughout private and public spaces participating in and contributing to the larger market economy. Though the theatrical representation of gender roles and potential multiplicity do not map squarely onto the historical and cultural landscape of the audience, the theatre does serve as a location for the reproduction of themes, tropes and priorities present in turn-of-the-century London.

In the play, the wives work alongside their husbands in the shops of London. Mrs. Tiltyard, whose name, according to the OED, references "a yard or enclosed space for tilts and tournaments," works as a feather seller. The footnote to the text points out that men wore and decorated themselves in many feathers to attend these types of tournaments. Mrs. Rosamond Openwork is a sempster, sewing and working as a tailor. Her name suggests her sexual availability in the town despite having a husband. Finally Prudence Gallipot works in an apothecary. According to the OED, the definition of prudence refers to "the ability to recognize and follow the most suitable or sensible

course of action; good sense in practical or financial affairs; discretion, circumspection, caution. In early use: the wisdom to see what is virtuous, seen as one of the four cardinal virtues.” However, Mrs. Gallipot’s lack of discretion is evident within the play. The shopkeeper’s wives are often analyzed as representative of a loose moral code because of their existence in the public sphere. In addition to the wives participation in the marketplace exchanging commodities, their bodies and sexual labor become interpreted as available for exchange and manipulation of the traditional feminine spaces.

While these working wives can be read as breaking customary expectations for feminine behavior (i.e., transgressive), one may also consider the shop as transformed spaces where wives too “wear the pants,” thereby gaining personal and sexual agency. Unlike Moll, analyzed in the next section, these women characters create an illusion of order. They are secured in the institution of marriage and wear appropriate clothing as required for their gender. They produce offspring—Gallipot exclaims “I married her, have lain with her, and got two children on her body” (3.2.250-1). The shopkeepers wives pose a more dangerous threat to the weight of blood law because their behaviors can potentially contaminate from within the institutions in place that attempt to regulate and control their bodies. However, these characters talk, interact, sell goods, and exercise authority over and within the space of the city shops. Although, as we have seen, early modern conduct manuals prescribe the proper married woman to remain in the home and limit speaking. Samuel Rowland’s text *The Bride* advises

At public plays she never will be known  
And to be tavern guest she ever hates,  
She scons to be a street wife (idle one)  
Or field wife ranging with her walking mates:  
She knows how wise men censure of such dame,

And how with blots they blemish their good names...<sup>157</sup>

He emphasizes that a good ‘bride’ will be limited in her movement throughout the city; whether it be a ‘play’ a ‘tavern’ or a ‘street,’ a wife must limit her physical movement in the city and interaction in an effort to protect and preserve her chaste reputation. For a wife to be in public was commonly equated with sexual promiscuity and as discussed earlier in this chapter, that freedom threatened the social hierarchy. In contrast to the expectation of how women must behave in public, Mrs. Gallipot and the working wives have created a space in which they can not only work as shopkeepers, but also maintain extramarital relationships with city gallants.

Mrs. Gallipot, a shopkeeper’s wife, engages in an extramarital affair with Laxton. Although the sexual relationship is less explicit than the financial one, her familiarity with him is clear. In an aside to Laxton, she says, “be not forgetful; respect my credit; seem strange. Art and wit makes a fool of suspicion; pray be wary” (2.1.55-57). Using the language of money and exchange, she commodifies her reputation by referring to it as ‘credit.’ She tells him not to seem too familiar so their affair remains unnoticed in public. In this exchange, Mrs. Gallipot is able to command Laxton’s behavior. Later, Laxton reveals he is only using Ms. Gallipot for her husband’s money:

I put her off with opportunity still. By this light, I hate her, but for means to keep me in fashion with gallants; for what I take from her I spend upon other wenches, bear her in hand still. She has wit enough to rob her husband, and I ways enough to consume the money. (2.1.87-91)

Laxton reveals the potential of an extramarital sexual relationship is what keeps Mrs. Gallipot in a financial exchange with him. He uses her for money, but notes the “wit” she

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<sup>157</sup> Samuel Rowland, *The Bride* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1617) in in Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995) 84.

uses to “rob” her husband. That same ‘wit’ reveals Mrs. Gallipot’s upper hand in the relationship not only with her husband and her ability to control and access his money, but also with Laxton and her ability to gain from him in financial exchange. The nature of the exchange here is one that contradicts the social norms in that the two are engaging in a transaction where each party receives what they set out to receive: For Mrs. Gallipot, trading money for attention, companionship and potential sexual agency in a commercial transaction. Laxton is selling companionship and receiving compensation and Gallipot is buying it—rather than being controlled by the social norms or preordained sex and gender roles, their actions are governed by economic preferences. Gallipot serves as ‘employer’ to Laxton’s role as ‘employee.’

When her ‘employee’ attempts to extort money from her, she considers selling her “childbed linen” to solve the problem but fears how her actions will be received in terms of her economic capital. Laxton writes to request thirty pounds from Mrs. Gallipot and in response to Laxton’s request, she says,

How shall I raise the money? Thirty pound? ‘  
Tis thirty, sure a three before an O;  
I know his threes too well. My childbed linen?  
Shall I pawn that for him Then if my mark  
be known, I am undone! It may be thought  
my husband’s bankrupt. Which way shall I turn?  
Laxton, what with my own fears and thy wants,  
I’m as a needle ‘twixt two adamants. (3.2.68-75)

Dependent on her relationship with her husband and to the shop, she imagines how to escape her financial dependence to pay off the man who has framed her. She imagines pawning her personal belongings but fears for her husband’s potential “bleeding” reputation. She is not concerned with her sexual reputation or cuckolding her husband,

but rather what others will think of their financial standing. Being “bankrupt” is more troublesome than sexual infidelity.

The figure of the husband is ridiculed in the character of Mr. Gallipot, Mrs. Gallipot’s cuckolded husband. Though he is the dupe of an affair, and co-victim of a predator extortionist’s financial and potentially sexual violence against Mrs. Gallipot, Mr. Gallipot, upon learning of his wife’s initial folly, says to the would be extortionist in rebuke of his predation upon Mrs. Gallipot, “I married her, have lain with her, and got two children on her body: think but on that. Have you so beggarly an appetite, when I upon dainty dish have fed, To dine upon my scraps, my leavings? ha, sir? Do I come near you now, sir?” (3.2.25.255). Pointing again to this reference to having children is significant because not only does it point to her work as wife as reproduction, clearly, the tone of the husband is one of a property holder rebuking an indigent would be squatter. Mr. Gallipot’s ability to mock Laxton, as indicated by the multiple uses of ‘sir’ to reference Laxton, derive from his ability to represent the body and reproductive labor of Mrs. Gallipot as property.

Indeed, Dekker and Middleton make substantial use of the dramatic theme underlying Gallipot’s challenge to Laxton, that of a middling citizen of urban turn-of-the century London judging another by the calculus of whether or not the subject had adequately performed heteronormative masculinity. ‘Laxton,’ in his behavior and name, represents a failure of performance, such as the failure in the figure of the husband. A radical and insecure masculinity thus appears to be a dramatic theme throughout the play. The lack she references is not only in terms of commodity and goods, but also sexual virility and prowess. In scene 2, Sir Alexander offers Laxton a chair, mistakenly calling it

a stone, “Furnish Master Laxton with what he wants: a stone. —A stool, I would say, a stool,” thereby drawing attention to a name that suggests he lacks testicles as well as land (1.2.55-57). This malapropism is important to highlight the foundation of blood law and masculinity and its relationship to power and land ownership. Goshawk points this out when he states, “He’s perfection itself, full of manners, but not an acre of ground belonging to ‘em” (2.1.68-70). His observation illuminates the relationship between Laxton’s lack of property and thus his lack of masculinity. The characters are making a distinction between the appearance of a gentleman and the blood law that gives it power.

## V.

Women working in the city as paid and also unpaid workers transverse the “multiplicity and change” occurring in their public sphere. Mrs. Gallipot and the other wives reclaim their labor and occupy public space in a new way that allows for economic and sexual agency. The shopkeeper wives, Tiltyard, Openwork, and Gallipot, are secured in marriage—this is contrasted with Moll’s bad reputation and masculine attire. Moll’s cross-dressing expresses her challenge to normative female behaviors, but simultaneously, she upholds traditional ideas of honesty and chastity. She internalizes masculine values and appropriates patriarchal behaviors for her own advantage in contradiction to the premise of those values. Moll’s tactics allow her to exist ‘beyond’ the containment of marriage because she exists in a space outside of the political economy of marriage. Moll is out of ‘place’ in that she uses ‘space’ inappropriately when cross-dressing and traveling across the city-space. The way Moll practices space redefines and reshapes the public sphere, challenging hegemonic expectation. As de Certeau notes,

authority and power can regulate life through infrastructure, but in *The Roaring Girl*, women characters redefine city spaces. And, although there is incongruity between ideals and behavior with female characters, especially Moll, their actions show the struggle to carve out subjective roles in the larger culture and economy as opposed to being reduced to the status of object for exchange.

In Act I of *The Roaring Girl*, the protagonist Moll is a conspirator in the plot of Mary and Sebastian to extort concession of marriage from Sir Alexander Wengrave. Moll agrees to collaborate in Sebastian's plan to secure acquiescence from Wengrave for Sebastian's engagement to Mary. Moll's assistance amounts to her playing the role of Sebastian's lover for the audience of his horrified father. The possibility of Moll, a cross-dressing figure of disrepute, entering the Wengrave family as Sebastian's bride, promises to be a more shocking and loathsome option for Wengrave than the other would-be daughter-in-law, Mary. Wengrave tells his son a story about a man with a fortunate life except for his troublesome son. He claims the son "could vex his father" by his love of a "monstrous" woman. Here we see the play draw attention to the layers of narrative as Wengrave's story tells of his own current situation with his son and Moll. He describes her as follows:

A scurvy woman,  
On whom the passionate old man swore he doted;  
A creature, saith he, nature hath brought forth  
To mock the sex of woman. It is a thing  
One knows not how to name; her birth began  
Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,  
Man more than woman, and, which to none can hap,  
The sun gives her two shadows to one shape;  
Nay, more, let this strange thing walk, stand or sit,  
No blazing star draws more eyes after it. (1.2.126-134)



Wengrave is preoccupied with her physical appearance and ‘shape’ and the threat of the ‘strange thing’ she represents by conflating outward gender appearance. Often in comedic representation, female cross dressing allows women a vehicle into disallowed spaces, but as Nancy Bunker notes, “Not a disguise but her choice, Moll’s male apparel gives rise to the greatest social alarm, for it is the least accepted and most feared among her atypical behaviors.”<sup>158</sup> This fear she describes is not only representing the threat to social class hierarchy and dissolving visible class markers, but also the potential to usurp patriarchal power by wearing men’s clothes and thus, men’s power. Moll’s movement through the city allows her to manipulate social practices and structures to serve her own purposes and goals. Moll’s body becomes a site of conflict and tension. The play is continually preoccupied with categorizing and labeling women, but because “one knows not how to name,” this anxiety of defining her identity is exaggerated. Bunker points out, “Moll’s association with merchants, gallants, pickpockets and aristocrats speak to her fluid social position—an aspect of her urbanity, since she is very much a creature of the city—and she proves a formidable force in eliminating the barriers Sir Alexander establishes.”<sup>159</sup> Even Laxton takes note of her social fluidity when he says “She slips from one company to another like a fat eel between a Dutchman’s fingers” (2.1.213-15). Through her use of tactics, she redefines the spaces she inhabits and in that work redefines the hierarchy that seeks to contain her. We also see Wengrave working to reinstate and reestablish his authority through his threats to destroy her, though we see he is unsuccessful in doing so.

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<sup>158</sup> Bunker, *Marriage and Land Law*, 128.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 128.

Moll postures as Sebastian's love-interest and intended betrothed in order to move Sebastian's father toward acceptance of Mary as the lesser of two evils. But instead of sanctioning the marriage to Mary, Wengrave seeks to destroy Moll by employing Trapdoor to set her up. The idea of Moll marrying his son is so disturbing that he is prepared to pay Trapdoor "to ensnare her very life" as he instructs him to "suck her heart-blood if thou canst; twist thou but cords to catch her, I'll find law to hang her up" (1.2.237-39). He sees Moll as a threat to his own cultural capital and though the plot is not carried out, he suggests killing her, echoing Arden's response to threats against his authority and lineage from chapter two. Even Trapdoor is startled at the violent response when he questions "her life?" (1.2.36). Though comedic convention allows Moll to prevail, the language of the narrative in the play reveals a violent undercurrent that threatens Moll's very existence in the effort to reestablish order. The premise of this plotline has Moll engaged in tactically selecting when and where to perform her sexual and gender identity as available in the marriage market. According to Valerie Forman, "She [Moll] is the play's property and its constitutive force. Moves—action—make Moll, but Moll makes the play and the play's London. *The Roaring Girl* exposes the way social practices work with and against regulated space. Moll achieves success by maneuvering through London's spaces and by taking advantage of normative social practices."<sup>160</sup> Moll's application of tactics in the city space enables her to "take advantage of normative social practices" that operate to her advantage, and she also "achieves success" by challenging those same practices that do not serve her.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Kelly J. Stage, *Producing Early Modern London: City, Theater and Space*, 139.

<sup>161</sup> Valerie Foreman, *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern Stage*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Moll shows how being outside those patriarchal constraints gives her power, a power with which the larger culture was uneasy, thus creating legal as well as social ramifications for transgression. Moll, after revealing the trick to Wengrave, points out, “He was in fear his son would marry me, but never dreamt that I would ne’er agree” (5.2.218-19). Also, I think, the larger viewing audience would find Moll’s statement shocking and unrealistic as the audience would not consider that she would have a response of her own. The refusal of a woman to obey her father or husband carried heavy consequences. Here, Moll presents an interesting paradox in that she is portrayed as both transgressive of feminine gender requirements—she cross-dresses for the convenience of being able to move through urban spaces—and grounded in ideals of bodily integrity and the ‘blood law’-associated codes of sexual chastity. The discursive field of Jacobean England was one that drew attention to the instability of marriage and imagined analogies between the fragility of marriage and the security of the state, as previously analyzed in this dissertation. The marital house as a microcosm of the larger body politic is a familiar idea in the scholarship covering this historical moment, and Moll’s threat to that structure is what Wengrave fears. While Wengrave’s claims access to Moll’s body in that he wants to prevent marriage into his family, Laxton’s assumption is that her body is in the public space as commodity.

The city gallant, Laxton, assumes he has access to her body—access because he thinks it can be purchased. When Moll enters the scene at the semster’s shop, Laxton “would give but too much money to be nibbling with that wench” (2.1.93,4). He invites her go out of town “to Brentford, Staines or Ware to be merry and lie together” (2.1.285, 286, 289). He continues to press her for meeting him, stating: “appoint the place then.

[He offers money.] There's ten angels in fair gold, Moll. You see I do not trifle with you. Do but say thou wilt meet me, and I'll have a coach ready for thee" (2.1.296-8). Laxton gives Moll money and plans to meet her at 3:00 p.m. thinking he has purchased sex with her, but in response to him, she draws her sword and explains that her goal in meeting was,

To teach thy base thoughts manners Thou'rt one of those that thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore.... How many of our sex by such as thou have their good thoughts paid with a blasted name that never deserved loosely or did trip in path of whoredom beyond cup and lip? (3.1.73-4, 82-5).

Moll accuses him of being the type of man who misleads women and ruins their reputations. The play's textual note points out that this reference 'beyond cup and lip' is understood as "beyond toasting a man with a cup of wine or kissing him" and can be read as a betrothal. In this speech, she defends the honor of women 'fallen' to whoring by explaining men and "all their golden witchcrafts with which they entangle the poor spirits of fools, distressed needlewomen and trade fall'n wives. Fish that must needs bite or themselves be bitten" (3.1.94-97). She is sympathetic toward women who are beguiled or 'trade fall'n' explaining that these women must do whatever is necessary to survive the mistreatment from men like Laxton. Though cross-dressing doesn't protect Moll from being harassed, it does demonstrate that women characters on the Jacobean stage could radically alter the shape of social space through everyday habits and practices such as choice of dress. Although Moll in many ways challenges patriarchal norms—for example, denying Laxton access to her body and physically defending herself against his advances—the code by which she lives is entwined with and influenced by some of those same norms.

In each of these examples, Moll demonstrates a level of agency and autonomy over her body that conflicts with social rules that are informed by religious ideology wherein women's bodies were understood as threatening, and needing containment. Whereas men were associated with reason and intelligence, women's emotional and sexual bodies required surveillance and regulation. Gail Kern Paster calls the "early modern English culture's articulation of gender – the weaker vessel as leaky vessel . . . The issue is women's bodily self-control or, more precisely, the representation of a particular kind of uncontrol as a function of gender."<sup>162</sup> Therefore, "Early modern culture... increasingly sought to regulate and regularize a subject's experience of his/her own body and relations with the bodies of others."<sup>163</sup> Women's bodies within the play, however, defy this regulation whether in Mary's case of participating in her own marriage negotiations and moving through the city in disguise or Moll's fluidity through the social class strata.

Although three categories of women or 'roarers' are distinguished in this chapter, all women characters show how women negotiate social performance and identity in their relationship to marriage. Mary, the 'maid' often depicted as a pawn in financial exchange and solidifying kinship bonds, is represented as challenging those bonds and through moments of assertiveness and disguise, interpreted as playing an active role in confirming her marriage to Sebastian. Although Mary is ultimately secured in a marriage—an institution that erases her legal identity and transfers monies between her father and

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<sup>162</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1993) 25.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 164.

would be husband—Mary participates in securing the marriage contract she desires and employs Moll as a replacement to her father as matchmaker.

The shopkeepers' wives represent another type of 'roarer'—married women in public spaces. Instead of remaining secure in the home, as many conduct and religious manuals proscribe, the shopkeeper's wives work to transform the public shop space, and their relationships and exchanges with the 'city gallants' show the extent to which representations of early modern women evinced participation in the ever-changing economy. In addition to selling goods, we see how women's bodies are part of this market exchange and that the institution of marriage, in fact, does not protect hereditary claims. Although the wives are performing the work of marriage—producing offspring—they express sexual as well as financial agency in their extramarital relationships.

Moll, the cross dressing single woman of the play, exists on the margin of marriage and threatens order by moving in and out of space and place, but the shopkeepers' wives threaten this order from within marriage. Finally, Moll, as an outsider to the 'work' of marriage, validates the patriarchal norms at the same time she challenges them through demanding social justice before entering into contractual obligations with men. She shapes her own identity outside of marriage, a feat more challenging though not impossible for the shopkeepers' wives. Unlike the wives, she does not entertain the notion of placing sexuality in the marketplace, but rather upholds chastity as a virtue. She challenges the idea that traversing public spaces is synonymous with sexual availability. In the end, Moll is allowed agency though remains marginalized in the context of the play.

While *The Roaring Girl* revels in the satirical representations of gender identity and sexual propriety (e.g., it celebrates the idea of women ‘roaring’ as is the case with Moll), the text also reinscribes notions about essentialist ‘blood’ based identity. In the ending of the opening epistle of *The Roaring Girl*, written by Dekker and Middleton, the audience is left with the statement:

Though some obscene fellow that cares not what he writes about others, yet keeps a mystical body house himself and entertains drunkards to make use of their pockets, and vent his private bottle ale at midnight -- though such a one would have ripped up the most nasty vice ever hell belched forth and presented it to a modest assembly, yet we rather wish in such discoveries, where reputation lies bleeding a slackness of truth than fullness of slander (Prologue).

For the authors here, the ‘social-self’ can potentially be mortally wounded through the exercise of representations. The epistle hails the figure of the bloody victim in its reference to a reputation that ‘lies bleeding,’ and clearly the playwrights as cultural workers are contesting the aesthetics of gender orthodoxy and social conventions.

If a critical priority is to read literature on the micro and macro levels of women’s lives, it requires that the reader of *The Roaring Girl* locate play’s extra-textual referents within the economic structure of the historical moment. When explicating the relationship between labor, blood, and contract in the construction of women characters, subjectivity was being written in public representations of those women. The preoccupation of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama (gender identity, blood-laws, and family inheritances transmitted through legally recognized legitimate marriage) is revelatory of cultural themes that end up resonating throughout the next several centuries. From the informed current position of a reader familiar with the reinforcing discourses of ‘Other’ as potential contaminators of the national body, to the ‘family body’ sharing in an essential blood-based identity, the temptation to read the women character’s in *The Roaring Girl* as icons

of resistance is powerful. Though the women characters in *The Roaring Girl* are, of course, constrained by economic circumstance and legal status as adjunctive, or partial, members of society, they are characters that nonetheless offer compelling representations of women's agency as laborers within marriage. This work and the historical discourses bound up in blood-law and contract-law travel across literary genres to include references relevant to an audience in 2015.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

“Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord; for the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church.”

--Ephesians 5:22-23

“What, Must they be in such Slavery? This is Harsh and Who can Endure It?”

--Matthew Griffith's *Bethel, or a Form for Families*

In this project, my aim has been to examine the role of women in three early modern English plays, specifically the role of women in marriage. When I began this project a few years ago, I set out to explore the ways that women's work was represented on the early modern stage and how women were participating in the larger market economy. In talking about work and identity, I kept returning to marriage as the central type of employment for women of the period. On the stage at this time, one couldn't understand women's work without thinking of women's bodies (e.g., sumptuary laws dictated what women wear wore, and coverture laws erased women's legal identity altogether after marriage). This dissertation focused on women's work in ways that differ from the work of other scholars of material production in the period. This is because, as I see it, the main employment of women at the time was connected back to the body (i.e., reproduction). But, interestingly, none of the plays examined in this dissertation are specifically about mothers and children. Instead, the plays are concerned with controlling, regulating,

commodifying, and satirizing women's bodies. Women's work in marriage reveals a relationship based on power negotiations that are much more multifaceted than simply being submissive. The plays examine the role of wife and how it is presented, as well as characterizations that show agency even in limiting circumstances. It is this very small terrain of decision-making by the women characters on which I have focused my analysis. I argue that these representations participate in and contribute to redefining the role and work of wife during the period.

Representations of marriage contested as well as reinforced class and gender hierarchies. In this dissertation, I have brought aspects of feminist theory and social theory together. I have grappled with their intersections throughout the project—how is marriage through the layers of stage performance similar to real women's experience of marriage? How can we understand early modern drama through the lens of social theory? An element that is of the utmost importance in understanding these works is that they are theatrical works based on representations of historical events. The plays in this study continue to be interpreted by audiences, and modern reception is as interesting as those of the audiences whose initial anticipated reception no doubt framed the intention of the playwrights, actors and directors in early modern England. This dissertation makes two interpretive moves, (1) examining the plays as cultural artifacts of the stage that represent the historical events of the time, and (2) critically analyzing the plays through the prism of contemporary social and feminist theory.

In analyzing these plays from the early modern theater and seeking to explicate the roles of women as workers within marriage, it is necessary to leave behind the notion that a close reading will suffice, or that new historicism will suffice, or that situating the

play or character within the secondary scholarship will allow for a final analysis. Naturally, all of these strategies help the reader understand how representations of women are tied to ideas about blood, contract, marriage, law and ultimately death. Domestic tragedy foregrounds death as punishment for seeking agency and reinforces blood law by revealing the instability of burgeoning notions of economic exchange. City comedy captivates its audiences by contributing to the cultural move away from blood law. This dissertation looked at comedy in general and more specifically, the ways in which family and kinship are being replaced by individual desire and a new code of market exchange. The intersection of bodies, blood, and material goods within these plays are intimately connected to the institution of marriage. As I explored the details of the text, I was led to larger questions about the ways in which women gain agency in a system that routinely seeks to erase their experiences. As I see it, the unstable shift of the larger economy created tensions in the ways the audience understood women's roles in marriage and work and thus created space for maneuverability for women and thus allowed women to participate in the restructuring of those institutions.

In my Introduction and Chapter One, I explained how that redefining is beginning to take place by first setting up the shifting economy in the backdrop of these plays wherein early modern England was moving away from a feudal model. In this dissertation, I refer to this older traditional system as "blood law." Blood law describes the relationship of families to property and strict social distinctions. In this system, women were used as vehicles to transfer resources and allegiance between families. Women were the objects of exchange and functioned in the capacity to protect social and financial assets. During the period and as evidenced in the plays, we see throughout the

language of the market and commodity used to talk about relationships of people to land and women in marriage. In my project, I have referred to this new approach as contract law. Under this system merit or work is privileged over family and inheritance. Social mobility allows people to work in trades outside the work they were born into. I have not claimed this happens in the span of the plays discussed herein, but the plays show that this is a point of tension during the period and it is within this point of tension that female characters to some extent, exercise authority.

This idea of blood law and contract law is related to the role of wife because female characters are shown to take advantage of this instability to carve out space for autonomy and agency. We see fathers attempt to follow the rules of blood law, that is, to block the crossing of class boundaries and determine suitable husbands. Female characters, however, begin to set the boundaries and negotiate the terms of their own marriages. Female characters are redefining the role and work of wife by determining and negotiating their own roles in securing marriage as well as within marriage, and in so doing, offering a critique of the social hierarchies presented. In doing so, they often contest gender and class boundaries, without completely overturning them.

I have chosen these particular plays because they are grounded in real moments of English history. Alice Arden was executed about 50 years before the play's performance. Moll's arrest records speak to her rebellious behaviors. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* refers to a 1445 Lord Mayor in a more distant past that comes through Deloney's prose narrative, *The Gentle Craft*. All three historical narratives, in their many retellings, have a sensationalist element that lives in the imagination of England long after the historical event and these stage performances. These plays more clearly connect the stage to society

and not only reflect the culture's concerns and values but also through these historical reflections participate in rebranding and recasting these figures in a more sympathetic and celebrated light. The city comedies provide a lens for understanding the contradictory nature of social mobility. Comedy at once celebrates social mobility while simultaneously reinforces older notions of blood law. I included *Arden*, the domestic tragedy, alongside these comedies because it fits into the domestic conversation about the changing role of wife in relation to that mobility. Both city comedies and domestic tragedies are genres whose dramatic priorities are concerned with representations of women in marriage as well as groups the selected plays for their depiction of urban life and the middling sort.

In this analysis, I used Bourdieu's forms of capital and looked at the ways economic, social and cultural capital are traded, spent and exchanged. Economic capital refers to one's access to money and property rights. Social capital is described as the connections one has that benefits their position in society, and cultural capital refers to one's education. These forms are important inasmuch as they offer categories in which to describe and understand the aesthetics of domestic life. It contributes to my argument because they illustrate the breakdown of blood law and provide a vocabulary to discuss and illustrate transactions that are a result of the emergence of contract law. In addition to forms of capital, I have made use of Bourdieu's ideas about symbolic power. Social determination produced by symbolic power verifies one's place in the social hierarchy through what he calls symbolic violence. Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as violence exercised upon a social agent with her complicity.

In Chapter Two, I examined *Arden of Faversham*, a domestic tragedy in which Alice uses patriarchal conventions to exercise power, and embodies a type of symbolic violence. She at once usurps patriarchal authority of blood law while simultaneously introduces the idea of companionate love over capital gain. This chapter uncovers the weaknesses of contract law in the close reading of *Arden*—he is insecure in his claim to properties and because she has a higher status, he is insecure in his claim to her. This chapter's three close readings foreground the amplified social tensions and possibility for agency created in the space between the old law and the new, wherein the women characters dare to imagine themselves capable of performing novel social identities. Alice of Faversham uses her would-be sister-in-law Susan and commoner as a human payment for murder. Alice's offering of Susan's body as payment for her husband's assassination appropriates the very features of patriarchy and blood-law. These marriage negotiations rehearse the unequal power relations that Alice herself so desperately attempts to subvert. Becoming a wife for Susan is figured as Alice's escape hatch from the constraints of her own marriage, and is also exemplary of marriage as indentured servitude inasmuch as no woman has legal claim to their own body under coverture law.

I close read the relationship between Alice and Arden and the meaning of being a wife under the terms of contract law and analyzed the scene of Alice's escape from marriage by way of death, construing Alice's death as the only place beyond marriage available. Of course, Alice has attempted to move beyond her marriage to Arden by conspiring to kill him, become a widow, and open her prospects for potential remarriage according to the *Chronicles* and *Arden*. Her efforts to move beyond the identity of wife are complicated by her relationship with Mosby. Her relationship with Mosby represents

her brief autonomy in the play and her ability to make decisions about romantic relationships outside the bounds of marital negotiation. Pursuing this space of individual freedom by overturning the family unit, in the end, only accomplished resulted in the ancient rite of execution by immolation at the stake reserved exclusively for women contemptuous of the patriarchal law writ large.

In the staging of *Arden* one witnesses a step in the process of story-telling about the legal and sacred role of the wife *vis-a-vis* society. Narratives inherited through Catholicism and still present in the Protestant Reformation about the sacred role of the ‘wife’ for the sake of social stability appear in the *Chronicles* as well as in the dramatic retelling of Alice Arden’s breaking of the social covenant. The narrativization of history— the imposition of story elements such as betrayal, treason, infidelity, and retribution — inherently involves moral and political motives on the part of the playwright and the audience. In each iteration of the story of Alice’s crime, the playwrights, actors, and audience members have the opportunity to interpret and apply the story elements to real political life.

In Chapter Three, I examined *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* to see what theatrical representation shows audiences about women's work in marriage, and the way the culture thinks of women in a public marketplace — not only in relation to sexuality and virtue, but also in relation to attitudes toward social climbers. The notion of social climbing and concurrent connotation of avarice analyzed in the previous chapter’s discussion of Thomas Arden is worth recalling as this chapter delves into the representation of social climbing presented in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. In the seam between domestic tragedy and city comedy one sees that social climbing becomes the basis for a new life just as *The*

*Shoemaker's Holiday* ends with the comedic plot of the King sanctioning the social climber's efforts as legitimate. Dekker's play portrays his characters less as self-indulgent threats to social order and community, and more as bumbling fools to be ridiculed by a theater audience.

While marriage is arranged along traditional class-lines in the implied context of the play (the King delineates whose marriage is legitimate or not in the end of the play), these specific women characters challenge the tradition of blood-law, seek terms of employment as wives that include transgressive companionate union in the case of Rose, greater autonomy and prospective leverage in financial decisions in the case of Margery, as well as the capacity to migrate in the paid workforce as in the example of Jane's movement from the shoemaker's guild to the London seamstress guild – a move that wouldn't have been possible without her strategic use of her status as already exclusively employed by a husband whose absence enables her to travel without fear of retribution from rejected suitors.

My analysis of marriage and wifely status in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* demonstrates that social mobility affords Margery Eyre the ability to purchase commodities and to perform upper class roles. The shift in her role from a producer laboring in a shoemaker's guild to consumer of material goods laboring in a marriage represents the emergence of a new kind of social capital available in Elizabethan England. By being a consumer of commodities, and through fulfilling the expectation that she purchase commodities that improve the outward appearance of her household, Margery's position as a wife departs from the traditional role wherein a wife would *produce*—most importantly produce a legitimate blood-heir for the master of the house.



Margery produces the appearance of middle-class identity through her consumerism, thereby propelling her husband's career forward and therefore securing herself greater social capital. Read alongside *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, we see the satirizing of this kind of social striving.

In Chapter Four, I analyzed *The Roaring Girl* to show the tactics female characters use to carve out space for autonomy in the cityscape. Shopkeepers' wives represent new notions about the middling sort in *The Roaring Girl* in that women were initially producing things in the home and a shift toward a burgeoning consumer role creates new cultural capital.<sup>164</sup> This role is more desirable because it designates leisure (or upper class behavior), but ultimately reinforces the status quo— and perpetuates hegemony. However, women were not only consumers at the turn of the 17th century, but were also working now in their husband's public shops, a place in the public sphere previously only accessible by men, and now an appropriated space by women. In Jacobean London, women were producers of goods in a public space and participated in reshaping their social role. I have employed the terms tactics and strategy from De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* to discuss the ways female characters reshape social roles through navigating the city terrain. Strategy describes the institutions that represent the dominant culture and is expressed in the culture's social values and traditions. Tactics allows women to move throughout the culture without being controlled by those institutions. By employing tactics, women characters transform these institutional places into lived spaces.

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<sup>164</sup> Wright, L.B. *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1958.

The characters in *Roaring Girl* that this chapter examined, figures such as Mary, Prudence Gallipot,” (however satirically named by Dekker and Middleton), as well as Mad Moll, create their authority in negotiations with traditionally female work. Work that once exported from the home and installed in the public sphere became coded as men’s work as exemplified in the shopkeepers’ roles. Moll, too, traverses city places reserved for men. Mario Digangi states, “Curiously...Moll neither works as a domestic servant nor engages in any recognizable form of steady labor that would allow her to support herself while maintaining her chastity, as the play insists she does. How, then, does the play account for Moll’s financial solvency and personal freedom as a chaste single woman?”<sup>165</sup> Natasha Korda explores potential answers to this question, explaining “her quite unexceptional status as a worker within the networks of commerce surrounding early modern London's public theaters.”<sup>166</sup> Korda, shows Frith’s participation in the market as an underground network where she may not have necessarily participated in legitimate market exchange as a means of supporting herself outside of marriage. I argue her role beyond marriage offers a consuming audience the opportunity to see a character use tactics to redefine city spaces, allowing for theatrical representation of a woman outside of the binds of traditional marriage. The theater and stage served as spaces for cultural and social experimentation, and we see how the play complicates this proscription of blood law values and offers another outlet for representing larger shifts in ideals surrounding the work of women in marriage.

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<sup>165</sup> Mario Digangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2011) 156.

<sup>166</sup> Natasha Korda, “The Case of Moll Frith: Women's Work and the ‘All-Male Stage’” *Early Modern Culture* (2004) 1,2.

The three plays examined here represent a wide picture of women's lives in early modern England. Whether wellborn like Alice, a working class shoemaker like Margery or a marginalized Moll, we see the ways women are held to a strict expectation of behavior in society and these characters offer ways to navigate their seemingly limited roles.

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