'BY GIFT OF MY CHASTE BODY': WOMEN AS GIFTS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND AND ITS DRAMA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES (English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
DECEMBER 2008
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Abstract

This thesis explores various facets of women’s participation in the gift system of early modern England, such as giving, refusing, withholding, and rejecting. Using historical and dramatic examples, I argue that women were able to transform themselves into sexual gifts, thus becoming subject and object in the exchange and resisting their objectification by men. The agency this afforded them was paradoxical and disquieting in the male-dominated society; gifts were considered acceptable and yet the agency was transgressive because women were supposed to be obedient and retiring. Women’s gifts allowed them to make and reject marriage proposals, thus circumventing male authority and their own objectification in an age when women were often passed between men in marriage. The drama was one medium for working out the cultural conflicts associated with woman as gift, and in the process, genre was interrogated and sometimes transformed as plays which raised the issues and conflicts could not always fully contain them. Genre was, in turn, used to comment on the issue of woman as gift by the playwrights who sought to work through the issues of women’s gift-giving.
Table of Contents

Abstract...........................................................................................................i
Table of Contents.............................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements............................................................................................iii
Dedication...........................................................................................................iv

Chapter One: Female Giving: Reconsidering the Gift.................................1
  Notes to Introduction......................................................................................29
Chapter Two: “She is herself a dower”: Women’s Presence/Presents
  as Social Power............................................................................................34
  Notes to Chapter One..................................................................................67
Chapter Three: “The gift hath made me happy”: Redefining the Gift
  in The Merchant of Venice........................................................................79
  Notes to Chapter Two................................................................................110
Chapter Four: “Father as it please me”: Women’s Choosing and
  Refusing in All’s Well That Ends Well and ’Tis Pity She’s
  a Whore.......................................................................................................116
  Notes to Chapter Three.............................................................................164
Chapter Five: “Give him all...your excellent self”: Private negotiations
  on women’s terms in The Taming of the Shrew and Women
  Beware Women.........................................................................................174
  Notes to Chapter Four.............................................................................219
Conclusion: “As if the gifts we parted with procured/That violent
  destruction”: the complexity of women’s giving....................................225
  Notes to Conclusion..................................................................................230
Works Cited.......................................................................................................231
Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the unending support of my colleagues, friends, and family. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Anthony Dawson, for his endless patience and scholarly support throughout the writing of this dissertation, and for his encouragement throughout the project. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Patricia Badir and Elizabeth Hodgson, for their encouragement, generosity with resources, and many fruitful conversations about the project. Although the other scholars who have inspired me over the years are too numerous to mention, I am grateful to Katharine Patterson, who is a constant source of support. I owe a debt of gratitude to Peter Holland who first challenged my thinking about the gift; Martin Wiggins, who offered considerable wisdom, encouragement, and support in my MA; and Andrew Patenall, my undergraduate professor in early modern drama, who introduced me to so many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries and fostered my love of early modern drama.

I owe more than I can express here to my friends and family. To Bridget Donald who, over many cups of coffee, would listen to my ideas and help me clarify my thinking during many moments of mystification; to Katherine Willems Heisen for her support and willingness to respond to my thoughts and to my best friend, Susan Farmer, for her faith and love. Most of all, I thank my sister, Colleen, for her eternal belief and support. Her readiness to listen as I worked through problems, and often reworked the same material, was invaluable.

This dissertation could not have been completed without the Rick Hansen Fellowship and the Paetzold fellowship. I am grateful for the generosity of Mr. Hansen and Mrs. Paetzold, who enhanced my ability to conduct research.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late father, Bob Vandeyck. He was denied the opportunity for a higher education, but he always supported me in my quest for one and never doubted that I would achieve my goal. His love and support are gifts that remain with me.
Chapter One: Female Giving and the Gift Reconsidered

When Francis Drake returned from his global voyage in 1581, Elizabeth I sequestered his plunder. She was compelled to this action because of the tense relations between England and Spain and was cautious that she might be required to return the bounty to assure peace. The Queen nonetheless secretly allowed Drake to keep ten thousand pounds worth.\(^1\) Publicly, Elizabeth received Drake at court, listened with delight to his story, and later visited Deptford where she boarded his ship the *Golden Hind* and knighted him. At this critical juncture in English-Spanish relations, Elizabeth’s actions were impudent bravura, but they were also political art.\(^2\) For the Queen was well aware of the power gained by gift giving and used prestation (acts of giving that are implicitly obligatory\(^3\)) extensively to ensure her subjects’ loyalty at a time of international and domestic political instability. The bounty became Elizabeth’s gift to Drake, even though it was Drake’s material property since he had plundered it. The personal visits and attention from Elizabeth made Drake a beneficiary of an intangible gift that was Elizabeth’s alone to bestow, the gift of her bodily presence. It was a gift she used skilfully to manage her courtiers. What does Elizabeth’s use of the gift tell us about how gifts functioned in early modern England? How did status affect the gift? How did gender affect the gift? If the female body was considered a gift, how could it be bestowed? In the male-dominated society of early modern England, what agency did gift giving afford women? These questions raise issues that I will explore in this dissertation through historical examples and the drama of early modern England.

Elizabeth’s use of her body as a gift was not unique. Women in early modern England used their bodies as gifts when bestowing themselves in marriage and this practice was taken up in the drama. Fathers bestowing their daughters in marriage was the cultural standard, one
reinforced in both the period’s conduct literature and the drama. Historians have begun to revise this opinion, however, by demonstrating that few women were actually forced into unwanted marriages, but the impression persists, perhaps because of the vivid examples of Lady Penelope Devereux Rich and Frances Coke Villiers. Yet, even in the cases of unwanted marriages women often still retained a sense of self and agency in bestowing themselves in marriage. For instance, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* opens with Egeus appealing to Duke Theseus for justice because his daughter, Hermia, has been promised in marriage to Demetrius but has exchanged tokens with Lysander, thus making her own marital arrangements. Duke Theseus sides with Egeus and threatens Hermia with death or a cloistered convent if she does not comply with the proposed marriage to Demetrius. Theseus is trying to usurp Hermia’s power to deny her body and thus eliminate a suitor. Still, Hermia responds to the Duke,

So I will grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke
My soul consents not to yield sovereignty (1.1.79-82).

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, women in “primitive” societies are exchanged between men in marriage to affirm male bonds, a function women also fulfilled in early modern England. Yet in Shakespeare’s play, Hermia refuses to be such an object of exchange. What does this tell us about female agency in the period? Can refusing to be a gift passed between men be an expression of agency on par with, or even exceeding that of, giving a gift? In refusing to yield up her sovereignty, what claims is Hermia making for herself? She is surrounded by men, father, lord, lover, who claim her as property, (Egeus, “As she is mine, I may dispose of her” (1.1.42); Demetrius speaks of his right to her, etc.), but she stakes a property claim for herself and the privilege of giving, and refusing to give, herself.
Using anthropological models of gift exchange and providing connections between the
cultures of these studies and that of early modern England, I will consider how the dynamics of
gift exchange functioned in the drama of the period. Although work has been done in this area, my approach is different. In addition to looking at women’s use of gifts, I suggest that women in
the period were self-conscious gifts, that is, they deliberately fashioned themselves as gifts in
marriage, whether it was a marriage of their own making or one that was arranged for them.
Women’s use of their bodies as gifts also occurred throughout the subtle and nuanced marital
negotiations that transpired after the formal marriage ceremonies as couples sought to establish
and maintain personal relationships with one another.

Although the subject of my dissertation is historically specific, the question of woman as
gift has larger implications for discourse on the “traffic in women” and for feminism in general. Claude Lévi-Strauss argues in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* that women are the ultimate
form of the gift. Although he positioned women as an object of exchange, his contention about
woman as gift can be valid when women are both subject and object of the exchange, when they
consciously fashion themselves as gifts, and specifically, when they fashioned themselves as
erotic gifts in marriage in early modern England. My argument avoids the subject/object
dichotomy created by gift theory because women are both the subject and object in the exchange,
a formulation akin to Jan van Baal’s proposal that women are subjects acting as objects when
passed between men in marriage in some “primitive” societies. My argument also complicates
the gift/commodity dichotomy of gift theory because when women metamorphose themselves
into gifts, they are simultaneously a gift and a (self-negotiated) commodity. This metamorphosis
permits women to place an inherent value on themselves, as Hermia does. More importantly, it
opens up possibilities of agency that are free from the usual gift obligations Marcel Mauss identified.

In courtship, women are able to refuse gifts and to refuse reciprocation of gifts, even when expected or compelled to do so. This refusal is not just a refusal of a suitor, it is a refusal of an identity, namely the future identity of spouse and thus giver of future sexual gifts. The refusals are, simply, women's refusal of themselves as gifts. According to Mauss, the refusal to accept a gift and the refusal to give are tantamount to a declaration of war. Of course Mauss was analyzing gift exchange between groups and I am dealing with gift exchange between individuals, but the refusal of a gift is still a refusal of social relations and would, at the very least, result in tense relations. In courtship negotiations, refusals are certainly a refusal of a certain kind of social relation, the formation of marriage, but the refusal does not, necessarily, cause tense relations between those seeking to affirm bonds via the marriage and thus does not support Mauss's conclusion about obligatory facets of the gifts. My exploration of courtship gifts and women's refusals of courtship gifts (and thus to be made gifts) were, perhaps, more powerful expressions of female agency.

Gift Exchange: the work thus far

Marcel Mauss established the tenets of gift theory in his work *Essai sur le Don, Forme archaïque de l’échange*, translated as *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Studying what he termed "so-called primitive societies", Mauss shows that gift exchange both dominates and regulates social intercourse. These societies lack currency in the modern sense, i.e., there is no coined money, modern contracts, sales or capital. Gifts have economic significance, but also have legal, social, political, religious, and aesthetic significance. Gift exchange may appear voluntary, but is actually obligatory and there are three obligatory
facets to the gift system: the gift must be given, received, and reciprocated. Gifts take diverse forms, ranging from goods of value, to services, to women and children, which leads Mauss to locate the gift’s value in the mutually dependent social bonds it establishes and articulates. Gifts create and reinforce hierarchical relationships; until the gift is repaid, the recipient is in the giver’s debt, and if the giver’s gift exceeds the recipient’s ability to repay the gift, then a perpetual debt is established, thus garnering power for the gift giver until the gift is repaid. The gift is also a way of buying peace since to refuse any of the three obligatory facets of the gift is tantamount to a declaration of war. For example, the North Andaman pygmies believe the function of gift exchange is to produce friendly feelings between partners and therefore gifts cannot be refused. For this tribe and other “primitive societies,” to refuse a gift is essentially to declare war because friendship and social intercourse are being refused. Simultaneously, gift exchange can have hostile undertones. Rivalries may emerge as individuals attempt to surpass each other in lavishness. Moreover, gifts can be used as a power strategy since giving beyond the recipient’s ability to reciprocate causes humiliation. Arguing that each gift is endowed with a spiritual part of the bestower, Mauss locates the power of the bestower over the recipient in this mystic facet of the gift. Whether used to buy peace or garner power, the social function of gift exchange far exceeds material considerations. Mauss is analyzing cultures that are based entirely on the gift, and argues that the money economy saps the gift, though he also argues that the gift is a permanent feature of social life. To this end, he cites examples from contemporary 1920s France that reflect the obligatory facets of the gift and the rivalry of the potlatch. Subsequent studies of gift giving in Modern Western culture have been more critical of gift giving, but confirm that reciprocity remains a key facet of it.
The diversity of gift forms, the social ties, and the hierarchy created by gift relations until the gift is repaid can be seen in the patronage system of early modern England, where a variety of gifts, including children, were used to ingratiate people to patrons and to further suits with both potential patrons and established patrons at court. Divested of the spiritual qualities Mauss describes, prestation was effectively a power strategy in early modern English society. With reciprocation carefully calculated, prestation was a coercive and interested process. People seeking to further suits also used such gifts in an attempt to indebt the monarch. Consider Elizabeth I’s coronation in 1559, which was ripe with calculated gift exchange. Processing from London to Westminster, Elizabeth stopped at numerous points along the route to express her gratitude for the smooth transition to her reign. Using the vocabulary of exchange, she declared “herself no less thankfully to receive her people’s good will, than they lovingly offered it unto her.”16 Given a purse filled with a thousand marks of gold and a Bible by the people of London, the new Queen was told not to esteem the gifts’s value but rather the minds of the givers. Thus, the gifts were calculated to obligate Elizabeth to look after the material and spiritual welfare of the givers.17 The exchanges in the pageant helped secure her royal power as she faced a seriously disordered political scene that had lacked a strong personality as a centripetal force in the decade since her father’s death.18 Yet, fragility was inherent to Elizabeth I’s rule. The absence of a professional army and paid bureaucracy meant a lack of coercive power, necessitating political persuasion and the wooing of the body politic to maintain her power and retain political stability. As the ultimate giver and receiver of gifts, Elizabeth successfully used the cultural strategy of gift exchange throughout her reign. Needlework, jewellery, and books were given to quell resentments, placate enemies, and flatter foreign ambassadors.19 Domestically, Elizabeth followed the practice of her predecessors, distributing gifts of money,
political privilege, titles, and offices to subjects across the social ranks. In an age where political
dissension often manifested itself in violent resistance and uprisings, it was imperative to ensure
subjects’ loyalty. Thus, each gift was bestowed with the implied reciprocation of loyalty.²⁰

Building on Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss formulates marriage as a gift exchange between families and tribes. Analysing kinship systems, Lévi-Strauss concludes that kinship is based on men’s exchange of women and that marriage outweighed descent in kinship.²¹ He argues for a universal “incest taboo” that ensured one’s women had to be given to other men, thus assuring male alliances and relationships:

The prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister, or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift.²²

Giving women as gifts in marriage thus guards against endogamy. He goes on to position women as powerless, commodified objects passed between men in marriage:

The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place. This remains true even when the girl’s feelings are taken into consideration, as, moreover, is usually the case. In acquiescing to the proposed union, she precipitates or allows the exchange to take place; she cannot alter its nature.²³

For Lévi-Strauss, the sexual relations of marriage are assumed to be part of the package, reduced to “an aspect of the total prestations of which marriage provides both an example and the occasion.”²⁴

Feminist writers have responded to Lévi-Strauss by alleging that his formulation reduces women to objectified commodities and the resulting “traffic in women” discourse has been re-conceptualized and re-theorized by scholars in various disciplines. These theorists have attempted to problematize, in various ways, the model of women passed between men that
Mauss adopted without critique and Lévi-Strauss privileged when he proclaimed women the ultimate form of the gift without much regard for the effects this process has on women. Gayle Rubin argues that kinship in the anthropological model objectifies women and establishes male bonds:

If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchange—social organization.25

Rubin points out that the exchange of women functions as the basis of the social order in cultures whose organizational structure is based on kinship (in the absence of other governing institutions such as the law or the state). If woman is an object, she cannot be a conscious actor in the exchange transaction, according to Rubin. In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir conceptualizes the woman who is a gift as an “Other,” deprived of subjectivity because she is an erotic object through which man seeks himself.26 In other words, Lévi-Strauss is not wrong in his observations and conclusions, man is simply seeking himself through woman. Julia Kristeva also denies that women are the object of desire in Lévi-Strauss’s model, but for her, women are not an erotic object at all, merely a pseudo-centre “in which man seeks man and finds him”.27

Luce Irigaray, like Rubin, contends that the “traffic in women” discourse renders marriage a male homosocial relationship. In her criticism of Lévi-Strauss, women are objectified and commodified by men, unable to endow themselves with value because “[t]he law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men’s needs/desires, of exchanges among men” such that women “have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men.”28 Because value is not inherent but relative, a woman cannot endow herself with value, or insist on an inherent value; her value is dependent on male recognition of her in relation
to another female. These critiques attempt to explain why women are passed between men, but
do not deny that women are commodified in marriage. Each theorist shows how women are
removed from the exchange when objectified by it and thereby raised consciousness about the
“traffic in women” discourse, but each has focused on the effects of the exchange rather than
considering that women can insert themselves into the exchange.

Taking a somewhat different approach in his critique of Lévi-Strauss, Jan van Baal
attempts to put women back into the exchange by theorizing that women passed between men
willingly behave as objects and in doing so are put in a position of power. In this model women
are simultaneous subject and object. By marrying, a woman frees her brother to marry, and thus
he is indebted to her, owing her and her future children protection. This intervention cannot be
refused, since the husband is indebted to the brother for the gift of the wife, including her labour
in the marriage and the children she produces; as long as the wife remains productive in the
marriage, the brother is indebted to her while the husband is indebted to her brother.29 Van
Baal’s formulation, however, does not allow for the establishment of a marital relationship and
although it allows women agency it is not full agency, since women willingly become objects in
marriage because of the children they will produce. For van Baal, because a wife is positioned
between her husband and brother, she is in a position to manipulate. The assertion of female
agency is, however, undercut when van Baal asserts that all women are destined to be mothers
and that, when agreeing to the marriage trade, women identify with their offspring who are the
“raison d’être of the whole transaction.”30

Annette Weiner also looks at women in relation to the gift, building upon and revising the
theories of Branislaw Malinowski, but adding this gender dimension to it. She also looks
critically at the nature of giving and introduces the theory of inalienable possessions, making gift
exchange more politicized than her predecessors did. Her theory of "inalienable possessions" involves a "keeping-while-giving". Certain objects are given so that other inalienable objects, or possessions, those which are not traded or given away, can be preserved within families. In this form of gift exchange

participants remain aware of what is not being exchanged and their actions are directed not only to the immediate events but to these events in relation to the ownership of inalienable possessions and the power they differentiate. The seemingly linear aspects of reciprocal give and take are merely overt attempts to become part of, to participate in, or conversely, to snare, what is not part of that exchange. Difference denies the concept of a homogeneous circumstance in which the gift given merely elicits a reciprocal return without thought of an inalienable possession's radiating presence, its political energy, and the danger of irreversible loss.31

Additionally, she shows that women are part of this gift dynamic because they are the producers of highly valued cloth goods, many of which become inalienable possessions, and that women are also the producers of gifts in rituals of birth, marriage and death.32 She also criticizes Lévi-Strauss's marriage model, stating that it does not acknowledge how women's "sexuality became a source of their own strategy and manipulation through keeping rather than giving."33 She thus highlights women's participation in Lévi-Strauss's marriage model.

Like Weiner, Marshall Sahlins complicates gift theory and does so by including issues of status. Gift exchange between people of differing rank is often unequal, reciprocation is often delayed (until it is precipitated by need), and the material flow can be one-sided for quite some time.34 Sahlins also complicated the notion of reciprocity; rather than Mauss's model of gift and return, Sahlins views reciprocity as a spectrum. In Sahlins's continuum of forms, social distance is one of the key markers between the poles of reciprocity. The extent of social distance between those engaged in the exchange of gifts determines the manner of the exchange and kinship distance is of particular relevance to forms of reciprocity. In cases of close kinship, reciprocity is
generalized; in the middle, "balanced reciprocity" returns things of comparative value relatively quickly; and in the negative pole where there is little kinship, there is an effort to get something for nothing.35

A contra-distinction to all of these examples is the theory of Jacques Derrida. He removes the gift from the social by asserting that exchange nullifies the gift, making the gift impossible.36 In Derrida's conception of the gift, the gift is idealized, removed from circulation, and the gift can only be possible if there is

no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or differance.37

The very reciprocity that Mauss saw as an obligatory facet of the gift is what Derrida sees as annulling the gift. The gift must, therefore, disrupt the system of gift/countergift. For this disruption to be achieved the recipient cannot reciprocate or contract a debt and the donor cannot expect reciprocation. Neither should the gift be known as a gift to the donor, because when it is known to be such, the donor psychologically gives back to oneself, in the form of praise, gratification, or congratulations, and thus symbolically repays the value of that which is given. At the limit, the gift cannot appear as a gift to either the giver or the recipient, because the recognition of it as such annuls the gift.38

The question of reciprocity and how it affects the gift was one posed in the early modern period, albeit in religious terms. There were questions of whether one could reciprocate God's gifts, whether humans could obligate God, and what bearing this had on people's gifts to each other was part of the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century. The Catholic faith was built on reciprocity; saints were offered prayers, candles, and status, and in return they interceded with God for those who prayed to them. The laity gave material gifts of chalices, money, and
vestment to priests who reciprocated with prayers and intercession through the mass. Money for a private mass or anniversary mass was a customary gift rather than a purchase of services because the amounts given varied each time. Charity and alms to the poor were another form of gift. These took diverse forms, such as providing food or a poor girl's dowry, or sheets to a hospital for the sick. These gifts would, it was hoped, be reciprocated with prayers for the donor. Such gifts were, simultaneously, gifts to God and aimed at contributing to the donor's salvation.  For Catholics, “God rewarded good deeds done to other people rather than reciprocating gifts given to him.” Jean Calvin denounced the reciprocal notions of Catholicism, and attempted to dismantle the apparatus of gift and obligation. Instead, he recast, where he could, such reciprocal relations as gratuitousness. Where the Catholics referred to eternal life as wages, reward, or recompense, Calvin reinterpreted these as a free gift made to people by the Lord. This reinterpretation meant that salvation was not won by good works but something given to the elect by God. God was not obliged by anything; instead all gifts and decisions flowed from him. Within Protestant practice fewer things served as gifts; candles were, for example, expunged from the religious service. Charity still had an important role, but a refocused one; instead of an interested return, charity was to be given freely, without considering to whom it was given or obliging the recipient, and with the aim of helping as many people as possible. Calvin's arguments against Catholicism are akin to a restatement of the value of the original, singular salvation gift: “Christ died once for all” meant to him and to many Protestants that salvation-by-works was either a refusal of Christ's gift, or a suggestion that the gift was inefficacious. Both Calvin and Derrida attempt to free the gift from the obligation of reciprocity; Derrida by theorizing the ideal gift, free of the circulation and clearly distinct from a commodity
while Calvin places the gift in the realm of the divine, given freely by God at his choosing since He could not be obliged by human deeds.

**Gift and Commodity**

Derrida’s conception of the ideal gift is an attempt to draw a distinction between gift and commodity. Gift and market economies can exist simultaneously and gifts and commodities can interpenetrate. One such area where they often do is marriage, where women are both commodity and gift. Accordingly, theorists have attempted to distinguish between gift and contractual exchange, differences which can be summed up in the following table adapted from Jan van Baal.43

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts</th>
<th>Gift Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partners in the contract are functionally each others equals</td>
<td>Participants not always equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relations are weak and ended by the completed contact.</td>
<td>Strong social relations, which are strengthened by the completed exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims at the goods of the other.</td>
<td>Aims at the person of the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict, balanced reciprocity</td>
<td>Reciprocity not always balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No obligation to trade or to accept an offer</td>
<td>Obligations of the gift enforced (to give, receive and reciprocate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract protected by law</td>
<td>Gift exchange not protected by law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts and trade do not bind participants</td>
<td>Gifts bind participants, turning them into partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, in a marital exchange, there is a strong legal element, since it straddles both gift and commodity exchange in addition to involving a legal pledge. The contractual element complicates the gift because contracts enforce obligation where gifts often elide obligation and make reciprocation implicit by appearing voluntary. Gifts are, on the whole, an invitation to a social relationship, and as such cannot be refused without serious consequences, according to Mauss. A contract, however, does not carry with it a social relationship, only a temporary partnership that is dissolved once the terms of the contract are fulfilled and/or commodities
exchanged. A commodity can become a gift when purchased to be one, and the commodity and gift systems can exist simultaneously, as they did in early modern England with the flourishing patronage system. Contracts, commodities, sales, and the like, however, are transitory transactions that do not forge lasting bonds between those who engage in them. In a contractual exchange, one’s obligations under the contract and the form of repayment are stipulated in the contract. In gift exchange, the terms of reciprocation (when and how are gifts are repaid) are left to the recipient of the gift and are not enforceable by law if the terms of reciprocation prove unsatisfactory. To put it simply, gift exchange does not negotiate terms. One assumes that if a gift is given it will be reciprocated; paradoxically it is imperative that the assumption of reciprocation not be an expectation. Because an object can be a gift or commodity at different times, it is not the object that defines its status as one or the other. The situation in which the object is given will determine whether it is a gift (given) or commodity (sold or negotiated for trade via a contract). Since gift and commodity exchange are historically and culturally determined practices, these types of exchange do not follow universal rules. How both systems worked in early modern England, came into contact, and could be destabilized, will be topics throughout my thesis but particularly in my discussion of The Merchant of Venice.

The drama of early modern England, and the particular examples I explore, show that commodity, contract and gift overlapped and interpenetrated in the period. Whether something was a gift usually depended on the presentation and the motive behind the giving. For example, in The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio attempts to borrow money from Shylock with Antonio standing as surety for the bond. Shylock is a man who deals in contracts and precise terms. Yet, when he presents the bond to Antonio, Shylock implies a social dimension to the bond, and thus implies a gift, when he points out the many abuses Antonio has heaped upon him. Antonio states
that such abuse will continue and rejects, moreover, any social bond with Shylock by refusing
the gift and demanding a strict contract:

If thou wilt lend this money, lent it not
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?
But lend it rather to thine enemy,
Who if he break, thou mayst with better face
Exact the penalty. (1.3.130-135)

Shylock takes the cue of friendship and makes the gift explicit, mimicking Antonio’s practice of
collapsing business and gift practices. Deviating from prior practice, Shylock drops all claim to
interest on the loan and presents the bond purely as a gift:

I would be friends with you, and have your love,
Forget the shames that you have stained me with,
Supply your present wants, and take no doit
Of usance for my moneys; and you’ll not hear me.
This is kind I offer. (1.3.136-140)

Of course, the motive behind the gift is twofold. The first is to stop, or at least, temper that abuse
the Antonio regularly heaps upon Shylock. When it is clear that Antonio has no intention of
doing so, the gift then becomes vengeful with the entrapment in the flesh bond should Antonio
default on the bond. The flesh bond seems harmless, and indeed Antonio accepts it as such since
he is convinced both that he can repay the bond and that Shylock’s gift is harmless. Bassanio,
who understands the danger of forfeiture, is reluctant to have Antonio stand to such a bond and
questions the motives behind such a gift. Gift and contract are, therefore, distinguished by the
rhetoric surrounding them, but the two can overlap and interpenetrate as they do in this scene.

Similarly, contracts could be turned into gifts, as is shown in The Changeling. Beatrice
Joanna enters into what she believes to be a contract with the ugly and repugnant De Flores to
kill Alonzo, complete with the payment of gold. De Flores, however, is enamoured of Beatrice

15
Joanna, and seizes on the opportunity to his own ends. Beatrice Joanna thinks that she is merely using De Flores and can dispose of him once the contract ends, but he transforms the contract into a gift after the murder when he presents Beatrice Joanna with Alonzo’s finger as proof of the murder. Significantly, upon the finger is her first gift to him, a ring that she was forced to give as a love token. Returning the ring in this way signifies not only the end of one relationship, it declares De Flores’ intentions toward Beatrice Joanna. She attempts to buy De Flores off with increasing amounts of gold, but he demands her body in reciprocation for his gift of murder, which, if discovered, will cost his life. Beatrice Joanna then becomes a forced sexual gift to De Flores, who demands:

Come, kiss me with a zeal now...
I have eased you
Of your trouble, think on’t, I’m in pain
And must be eased of you; ’tis a charity.
Justice invites your blood to understand me. (3.4.92, 97-100)

Beatrice Joanna attempts to deny him, but finds that she has no choice but to give in to his demands because the contract has been transformed into a gift, for which De Flores will take no reciprocation other than her sexual self. She then becomes a forced gift to him. Thus, the lines between contract and gift were permeable and sometimes blurred.

Gifts create debt, and when dealing with woman as gift, the debt created is an emotional one. What is given are not just simply love tokens that can be rescinded and returned, as in the case of Ophelia’s return of gifts to Hamlet to call off their engagement, but women’s gifts of their physical, sexual bodies. The debt created is therefore an emotional one because what is offered is not a material object but rather an interpersonal relationship, and the most intimate relationship of all. In the early modern marriage ceremony, sex was pledged as part of the marriage ceremony, since both partners vowed “With my body I thee worship”, and sex was a
duty within the marriage as set out in I Corinthians. Yet, sex could not be forced, and thus it could be transformed into a gift within the context of the marriage, as my exploration of the drama will show throughout the dissertation. Sex straddled both gift and contract, mirroring the marriage ceremony which likewise straddled these two economies. Since it was a gift to be given, it could also be withheld, and such giving and withholding applied to both genders. Of course, other duties, such as obedience, could also be reformulated into gifts by the prestation, as my discussion of Taming of the Shrew will explore.

**Woman as gift**

In these anthropological models, women are usually the ones exchanged in marriages arranged by men, although mothers did have some say in the choice of spouse in some cultures. Both situations, women exchanged by men, and women arranging marriages for their children, are analogous to situations in early modern England, as examples in Chapter Two will show. Marriage was changing in early modern England, and although many people were making their own matches and then seeking parental blessing to the match, the perception remained that parents, that is fathers, had the right to bestow their daughters in marriage. Conduct literature admonished children to yield to parental advice and the drama is filled with examples of fathers giving their daughters in marriage, sometimes against their will for dramatic effect. This perception has remained with historians and critics, although it is being revised through more recent work. Marriage in early modern England was more than the transfer of property or the establishment of a new household; it was a mutual pledging of the spouses to each other. Gift giving marked the different stages of the courtship, culminating in the marriage, which was itself marked by the gift. William Gouge, in his popular conduct book, figures daughters as gifts to be given in marriage, as did the marriage ceremony itself. The marriage bond was a kind of gift in
that it was a mutual bestowing of selves and was expressed in the “Homily on the State of Matrimony”, which described marriage as a “perpetual friendly fellowship”. Whether bestowed by her family or through her own choice, across rank it was the woman who gave herself as a gift in marriage and left home with her possessions to enter the husband’s household in early modern England, and this is perhaps the strongest tie the period has to the anthropological studies. My interest lies in women as gifts in marriage, particularly in women as self-conscious gifts in marriage. I have found gaps in existing gift theory, and these gaps point to places where women’s agency existed and was asserted.

Lévi-Strauss based his formulations on the denial of female desire. When Lawrence Stone wrote his work on marriage in early modern England, he accepted Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological model and alluded to a gap in the existing work, but did not explore it. Instead, Stone reiterated that women were interchangeable, “one girl [was] as good as another, provided she [was] a good housekeeper, a breeder, and a willing sexual playmate”. After the public negotiations between men, the willingness (or lack of it) of the wife to be a sexual playmate opens a space for a woman to transform herself into a gift, specifically a sexual gift, which can be given or withheld. After the marriage ceremony, what did happen between the spouses now left alone together? Certainly there were domestic duties a woman was expected to fulfill as a wife, and she was expected to produce an heir for the family. Sexual duties were, however, ones that could be negotiated, as both my historical and dramatic examples will show. In the middling and lower ranks, women increasingly were making their own matches. Circa 1572, Alice Porter engaged an intermediary, Regenold Smith, to act on her behalf in negotiations with Regenold Aderyn, whom Smith knew. Alice promised to take Aderyn for her husband, and to bestow herself and her goods upon him in marriage. She urged her intermediary to relay her ‘promis and
contractes', urging that he should, in return, receive ‘all such promis, faith and trouth, and
contracts as he would make to him, in behalf of Alis Porter’. The formulation is significant.
She is giving both herself and her goods, (“promis and contract”) thus marking herself out as a
thing of value equal to the material goods, but one is a thing given by promise while the other is
a thing negotiated via contract. In giving herself in marriage, Alice was giving a gift, one that
she will keep on giving, potentially, in the form of labour and sex, both of which could be
withheld during the marriage. Her giving was also something she expected reciprocated,
immediately and with an increased pledge (‘promis, faith and trouth’).

In the upper ranks, where marriages were often arranged, sex could be restricted, but was
no less a gift. Anne Clifford records in her diary the date she lay with her first husband, the Earl
of Dorset, despite their marital disputes. Katherine Acheson has suggested that Anne knew when
she was likely to conceive and this knowledge accounts for the record. Such an explanation
seems plausible, but Anne still records on April 23 1617 that “this night my Lord shou’d have
layen with me in my Chamber, but he & I fell out about Mathew[].” It seems that even the
necessities of conceiving an heir were not immune to marital strife; one, or both, spouses could
always withhold sex. Nor are the records of the two sharing a bedroom restricted to the
conception of an heir, as Acheson suggests. Clifford records that Dorset also “lay in my
Chamber” on April 7th, just two weeks before the 23rd when he should, and did not, lie with her
again. Indeed, April 7th seems to have been a reconciliation, since on the 6th Anne had their
daughter, Margaret, brought to her father in Anne’s chamber. Marriages could also break up or
remain unconsummated. In the cases of early marriages, the spouses were married publicly and
then kept apart, as in the case of Frances Howard and the Earl of Essex, because early pregnancy
was risky. When Essex returned from a few years on the continent, he found his wife had no
interest in him sexually. They eventually sought an annulment. In the middling ranks, Anne Welles only spent one night with her husband, John Brewen, and then refused to even live with him until he got her a better house. In the cases of Anne Clifford and Anne Welles, there is a promise of future sexual fulfillment. But there is also a crucial withholding. Anne Clifford refused to sign away her rights to her inheritance, despite enormous pressure from her husband and prominent figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and King James. She thus retained her identity as a Clifford and heir to the earldom of Cumberland for herself and her successors. Anne Welles refused to fully give herself as a wife by refusing to take her husband’s name or place of residence.

Woman’s self-awareness as gift allows her to refuse gifts and to refuse to reciprocate gifts without the attendant problems that Mauss posited as the consequence of such actions. In rejecting a courtship token, a woman is not only rejecting a material object, she is rejecting an identity. In his work on the gift, Barry Schwartz asserts that the gift imposes an identity, both on the giver and the receiver of the gift, and thus “to reject a gift is to reject a definition of oneself.” This is especially true of courtship tokens, where to accept a gift is to accept the courtship and if the gift is a betrothal gift, the redefinition of oneself in social terms as part of a couple to be married. To reject the token is to reject the redefinition of oneself in these terms. In the specific terms of my thesis, for a woman in early modern England to reject a courtship token was to refuse to be defined as a gift, whether it was a gift that she would give in marriage or a gift to be passed from one man to another, as part of larger political or economic negotiations. In the latter case, her refusal is a refusal to be the means of reciprocity or to be the gift that will elicit reciprocity. In both cases, the refusal would have social ramifications, since women’s refusal to be a means of men affirming their bonds with each other could render those bonds
ambiguous and tenuous. In the middling and lower ranks, the redefinition was not necessarily of a woman being passed between men, since there was more freedom to make their own matches. In these matches, giving a gift signified consent, and, just as important, refusing a gift rejected unwanted suitors. For example, in 1574 Jane Salisbury rejected gifts from would-be suitor William Lloyd and returned those gifts he sent via his servant.\textsuperscript{61} In doing so, Jane rejected the ardent suitor but more important, she rejected the particular social relationship the suitor was trying to establish and the identity the suitors were attempting to form for her with the gifts. Rejection of a gift is, therefore, as important as an act of giving and, in the case of early modern England where female obedience was expected, rejection was probably more important than giving.

The refusal of a gift is a corollary to another aspect of courtship gifts: the refusal to reciprocate. Women could be pressured to give or to reciprocate an unwanted gift in early modern England, but they could also refuse to do so. Courtship gifts carried with them the implication of a woman’s acceptance of the courtship or betrothal and thus were binding. Similarly, a betrothal gift carried with it consent to the betrothal and acceptance of the identity as one betrothed to wed. Because such gifts articulated consent, they could be refused and reciprocation could be refused as a way of refusing the suitor. The ability to refuse reciprocation was particularly important in early modern England because of the existence of forced gifts, which men would force on women who would then either return or be barred from these gifts.\textsuperscript{62} Women’s non-reciprocation of gifts then became the means of ending the suit. By not reciprocating the gift, they did not replete the social relations and thus rejected the suitors. Non-reciprocation became another means of women expressing choice by eliminating unwanted suits.
Women giving themselves as gifts in marriage allows them to transgress the rigid gender conventions while remaining within conventional gendered behaviours of early modern England. If we accept, as Aafke Komter asserts, that “[g]ifts offer the precious symbolic nourishment which keeps interpersonal relationships alive” and that marriage is one of the most intimate interpersonal relationships, then recognizing women’s sexuality as gift in the male-dominated society of early modern England complicates gift exchange theory. Woman’s body as an erotic and sexual gift is a gift that is constantly in flux since it is subject to the negotiations and tribulations of the marriage. The female sexual body is a gift that can be constantly given, withheld and/or redirected when not appreciated or not recognized as a gift. Komter’s work on giving clarified that gifts are not always valued because they are not always recognized as gifts. In her study of gift-giving in the Netherlands, she asks about a variety of gifts given and received (including money, dinner, hospitality, and care/help) in a recent period. It is remarkable, she notes, “that everyone has the feeling of giving more that they receive.” Among the explanations for this phenomenon Komter offers the intriguing possibility that “some types of received care may be overlooked, because they are so ‘normal’.” A corollary problem of woman as gift is that their status as gift might not be recognized because a wife is, “normally”, expected to be a wife. With that may be the male expectation of a full sexual life, which may not be the expectation of the wife he has married, who may only expect to fulfill the public duties of her role. (Alternately, if she freely made the match herself, she may feel that her husband is indebted to her because she gave herself to him in marriage, along with her possessions.) My thesis will show that women’s gift of themselves is not always valued because they can easily be taken for granted, or they are not recognized as gifts. Women’s gifts are also problematic because the results of giving cannot be controlled and therefore it is not always beneficial for women to use
themselves as gifts or to enter into gift relations. The reciprocation and hierarchal power relations which Mauss posits as obligatory facets of the gift do not come into play if the gift is neither recognized as gift nor appreciated.

By becoming a gift, a woman becomes an agent in a transaction that could objectify her and rob her of agency. Stone alludes to this potential when he contends that women's capacity to give or withhold sexual favours was a potential lever for power for women within the household. Stone is obviously talking about sex as a weapon and means to power within the household. I am not arguing that the sexual self is used to gain a dominant position. Rather, in the male-dominated society of early modern England, I am arguing that gifts were a means of social power, and one that women could, paradoxically, access. In marriage, when duties and things taken for granted were transformed into gifts they could be used to negotiate the marital relationship that was in general skewed in favour of the husband. The inherent danger of women's gift of their sexual bodies is, as the drama shows, that husbands may not recognize the gift as a gift. When recognized as gift and able to wield agency as such, women could construct themselves as the ultimate form of the gift. In the male-dominated society that denied them legal and political enfranchisement, the gift allowed women considerable social agency, especially in marriage, where they could gain agency to bestow or refuse to bestow themselves on their husbands. Women's access to power through gift exchange was not, however, limitless. Gifts could be misrecognized, and the results of giving were not fully controllable. Giving was not, therefore, always beneficial.

**Drama and the Gift**

Early modern drama participated in both commodity and gift systems, straddling two worlds; that of the rising mercantile class and that of the court. Drama was a gift when it was an
offering to a guild, university, aristocratic patron, or the court, such as Gorboduc or The Masque of Queenes. Drama became a commodity with the rise of the public theatre, and it transformed into a commercial transaction between actor, theatre-owner, and playgoer. Dramas were flexible enough to be both gift and commodity, depending on the audience to whom they were presented, as plays often transferred from court to the public theatre. Dramatists were similarly transformed; servants of noblemen, at whose plays the audience was comprised of guests, they now took on additional roles as artisan-like entrepreneurs, where the audience was comprised of paying customers. Unlike the homogeneous audiences in the noble homes, the public theatre audiences were diverse in rank and occupation, and in their views, which prompted a variety of responses to the drama. Yet people in the public theatre audience were engaged in the same mercantile and gift discourses that were enacted in the drama and thus were aware of how these discourses were reflected, exploited, and manipulated in the drama. Many in the audience were women, of the emerging “middling sort” who would be engaging in many of the gifts behaviours enacted onstage. Drama was in a unique position to exploit the complexities and tensions between gift and commodity because it was itself embedded within those very discourses, straddling the world of the court (gift) and commercial (commodity) theatre.

Although the historical documents and drama are mutually illuminating, I focus on early modern drama because it is the most fruitful way to investigate these issues of women’s agency in marriage in the cultural nexus of early modern England. Marriage was itself understood in terms of exchange in the period; the exchange of property, selves, vows, rings, and female chastity. The drama of the period repeatedly returns to the subject of marriage and to women’s agency, or lack thereof, in marriage formation. Since courtship gifts permitted women the right of refusal, they thus enabled heightened dramatic possibilities. But in presenting a woman
refusing, as in the case of Evadne’s refusal to consummate her marriage to Amintor in The Maid’s Tragedy or Annabella’s refusal of Bergetto’s jewel in ’Tis Pity, the drama is taking part in the larger cultural issue of the phenomenon of women’s right to refuse in a society that expected female obedience. The drama thus puts the private negotiations I wish to investigate on public display for audiences comprised of people across rank. The conduct literature I draw upon was widely disseminated and while it cannot be known if the dramatists actually read it, they were sure to be familiar with the arguments of the marriage tracts frequently read out at church. They were also certainly aware of the conflicting demands placed on women in their culture. The drama offered a range of perspectives on women and exchange and offered its audience a variety of possibilities for social and sexual agency. I proceed in my reading of the plays on the assumption that the theatre is a sphere of influence in which dramatists and audiences attempt to work through contradictions and conflicts of their society. 68 I do not argue that dramatist held a “mirror up to nature” but rather that they took existing cultural phenomena and explore them in order to both work through the social anxiety and to enhance dramatic effect upon the stage.

By exploring questions of women’s gifts and women as gift, dramatic genre was opened up and transformed as the drama was frequently unable to answer the questions or contain the issues raised by woman as gift. Endings were left open, as in the case of The Merchant of Venice, which ends uneasily—Lorenzo and Jessica are married, but she is socially marginalized; Antonio remains unmarried and is bound to Portia and Bassanio in a kind of threesome through the gift entanglements. Endings are forced, as is the case with ’Tis Pity where Annabella and Giovanni die but she is the only repentant person in the play and the only one to find true salvation before her death. Or, forms were used ironically, as in Women Beware Women, where
the best relationship in the play, that of the Duke and Bianca, is simultaneously the most exploitative. For both 'Tis Pity and Women Beware Women the exact nature of the tragedy is indefinable. Playwrights used genre itself as a comment on the issue of women as gift. Drama thus participated in the cultural debate on gift exchange and found itself transformed by it.

By examining plays that reflect the cultural practices and paradoxes of a wife’s agency, I intend to show that women’s agency made marriage both a public and private giving, in which duties and mutual benefits were constantly negotiated between husband and wife. The agency that gift giving afforded added to anxieties about women in this male-dominated society, and many of these anxieties were played out on the public stage. Women’s participation in gift giving was paradoxical and unsettling because, while it was considered appropriate female behaviour, it was potentially subversive because it gained women social power. Specifically, I focus on dramatic representations of women using themselves as erotic gifts to resist their commodification by men and to create an exchange relationship with their husbands. Thus they establish marriage as a much more complex web of gift exchange than usually appreciated by scholars and historians.

Before discussing the drama itself, Chapter One contextualizes the function and limitations of women’s gift exchange, with examples of women across rank using themselves as gifts. It raises issues that the drama reflected upon and wrestled with and which I explore in the subsequent chapters, which are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. Chapter Two is an exploration of the gift in the Merchant of Venice, which sets out how the gift economy differs from the monied or contract exchange. In particular, this chapter considers different strategies of women giving themselves in marriage, with and without parental consent. The
question becomes “what is a gift, and “how do you know it is one?” Chapter Three is about women using the gift to gain the object of their transgressive desire. Helen in *All’s Well That Ends Well* makes herself into a gift to marry Bertram and thus transgress social and economic barriers. Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* refuses gifts, and in doing so, refuses to be her father’s gift to her many suitors so that she can give herself to her chosen suitor, her brother, Giovanni. The chapter questions whether giving and refusing are equal expressions of women’s agency and if, given the tenuous ending of *All’s Well*, and the moral puzzles of *'Tis Pity*, women’s giving is always a positive thing. Helen wins Bertram as her husband, but he is not the prize that she once envisioned him to be. Annabella is a heroine, but is also an incestuous adulterer. Chapter Four is about the negotiation of marriage in public and private terms as presented in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Women Beware Women*. These plays offers us insights into how matches are made, and how women insert themselves into the process by using gifts and offering themselves as gifts. Women’s complex and dynamic giving in both plays has mixed results; in *Shrew*, marital duties such as obedience and physical necessities such as sleep, are transformed into gifts in marital negotiations that remain ongoing beyond the play’s conclusion. In *Women Beware Women*, Bianca gives herself to a husband who hoards her instead of appreciating her gift and she redirects that gift to the Duke when he does appreciate the gift of her sexuality. The play questions if the gift of a woman’s sexual body may indeed be redirected if it is misrecognized, unappreciated and unreciprocated by a husband. Juxtaposing these two plays that explore the complex and contradictory nature of women’s participation in the gift system leads into my conclusion.

Women’s participation in the early modern gift system was a paradoxical and complex phenomenon; considered “appropriate” female behaviour, women’s gift giving was,
simultaneously, an issue of contention, contradiction, and anxiety. My reading of dramatic representations of women's use of themselves as gifts, and the agency that such giving won them, adds to the increasingly complex view of women's position in early modern England. The drama's negotiation of women's giving, moreover, suggests that gift giving may be more complex than currently theorized. I conclude, therefore, by hypothesizing that perhaps the interest in women's creation of themselves as gifts, both for early modern dramatists and my reading of them, lies not in concrete answers about women's agency, but in the questions raised vis-à-vis women's status, conceptions of acceptable behaviour, and male anxiety about women's agency in early modern England.
Chapter One Notes

2 Neale 39.
3 The term prestation is central to the anthropological works of gift exchange that are central to this thesis, such as Marcel Mauss’s The Gift and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s The Elementary Structures of Kinship and as such is often retained by translators of these texts even though it is obsolete in English. Keeping to Mauss’s analysis of gift exchange as dominating social intercourse, I use prestation to connotate acts of giving that are implicitly obligatory or coercive.

Lady Penelope Devereux was married to Lord Robert Rich in 1581 by her guardian, the Earl of Huntingdon. Devereux never consented to the match and even spoke in protest at the wedding, but faced with little alternative, went through with the ceremony. The marriage produced children, but Devereux did not develop affection for her husband, always calling him “Lord Rich” as though he was an acquaintance rather than the usual “my lord” or “my lord husband”. Sometime around 1590, Devereux began an open affair with Charles Blount that Rich tolerated until the death of Essex in 1601, when he separated from Devereux. See Michele Margett, “Stella Britannia: The early life (1536-1592) of Lady Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich (d. 1607),” diss., Yale University, 1992, esp. 195-201. Francis Coke was a pawn in a political game. Her father, Edward Coke was out of favour at court, and to regain both his seat on the Privy Council and King James’s favour, Coke promised his daughter in an alliance with Buckingham, the current favourite. The bridegroom, John Villiers (Buckingham’s brother) was physically and psychologically weak and when Coke’s wife refused to consent to the match, Coke forcibly abducted his daughter. Lady Coke regained custody by appealing to the Privy Council, a move James countered by ordering that Francis be surrendered to her father. The marriage was then expedited with the banns read on three consecutive days. On the second day, Coke was returned to his Privy Council and on the third, September 29, 1617, the couple married at Hampton Court (King James gave away the bride). Lady Coke could not prevent the marriage since she had been held at Sir William Craven’s during the ceremony. Afterward she did refuse all attempts to get her to contribute to the dowry. G.P.V. Akrigg, Jacobean Pageant: or The Court of King James I (Cambridge: Harvard: 1963) 216-18.

5 Louis Montrose argues that Hermia wants the limited privilege of giving herself. The source of her power, the ability to deny her body to men, is usurped by Theseus and his power to deny her the use of her body. “Her own words suggest that the female body is a supreme form of property and a locus for the contestation of authority. The self-possession of single blessedness is a form of power against which are opposed the marriage doctrines of Shakespeare’s culture and the very form of his comedy.” Louis Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,” Representations, No. 2. (Spring, 1983): 67-8.


9 I realize that Karen Newman writing in 1990 argued that the usefulness of the “traffic in women” paradigm had been exhausted as it was currently used in feminist analysis for several reasons. First because reading women as objects of male exchange constructed “a victim’s discourse that reinscribes the very sexual politics it ostensibly seeks to expose and change”. Second because “reading women as objects exchanged by desiring subjects partakes of a degraded positivism that relies on an outmoded, humanist view of identity characterized by a metaphysics of presence; it assumes an unproblematic subjectivity for ‘men’ as desiring subjects and concomitantly
assumes as directly accessible woman-as-object.” She goes on to call for a change, “It is as if there were two theoretical regimes, uneasily conjoined in feminist cultural analysis: one that recognizes and analyzes the fragmentary, non-unitary subject in certain critical contexts, the other, governed by the exchange paradigm, that assumes untroubled, unified subjects exchanging women/objects. We need to reconsider how contemporary theories of the subject and the subject/object problem have rendered the ‘traffic in women’ paradigm as it is currently used untenable.” See her essay, “Directing traffic, Subjects, Objects, and the Politics of Exchange,” differences 2:2 (1990): 47.


12 Mauss posits the relationship established in the Maori concept of hau, a mystic or spiritual power by which the donor gives a part of himself with the gift. The hau always wishes to return to its place of origin and can only do so through an object given in return for the original gift. Failure to reciprocate a gift, therefore, can have serious consequences; including death and thus it is the hau in the gift that forces reciprocation, according to Mauss, in what he terms “the spirit of the gift” (10). Consequently, what one gives is not just an object or person, but a part of oneself and therefore to accept a gift is to accept a part of that person’s spiritual essence. To retain that essence is dangerous because it against law and morality, but more importantly, that essence, those items, exert a magical hold over you. These items seek to return to the place of origin. (12-13). Mauss’s recourse to the hau has been criticized. Raymond Firth (1929) and Marshall Sahlins (1976) have shown that Mauss quoted his source out of context. Lévi-Strauss contended that the hau explained nothing; it was just a native theory for the binding force of the gift.

13 Mauss 13. Bronislaw Malinowski was a contemporary of Mauss and also wrote on the gift. Although he reached the same conclusions regarding the need for reciprocity, he was more an observationalist. His work includes the notion that all gift relationships are balanced, which they are not, and he included the category of “free gift” as the first category of gifts, one he had to withdraw in a later work.

14 Mauss 65-70.


Although Elizabeth I did not marry, there were times in her reign when she seemed willing to marry. She also consistently used courtship as a viable strategy in her foreign relations policy for most of her reign. Often, she would promise herself as a gift, only to later refuse it when the international situation stabilized or no longer made the proposed match advantageous for England (See Chapter 2).


Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures 481.

Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures 115. Lévi-Strauss continued this argument in his essay "The Principal of Reciprocity," arguing that in modern society

the relation which exists between marriage and gifts is not arbitrary; marriage is itself an inherent part of as well as a central motive for accompanying reciprocal gifts. Not so long ago it was the custom in our society to 'ask for' a young girl in marriage; the father of the betrothed woman 'gave' his daughter in marriage; in English the phrase is still used, 'to give up the bride'. And in regard to the woman who takes a lover, it is also said that she 'gives herself'.

He concludes, "It would then be false to say that one exchanges or gives gifts at the same time that one exchange or gives women. Because the woman herself is nothing else than one of these gifts, the supreme gift amongst those that can only be obtained in the form of reciprocal gifts." See his essay "The Principal of Reciprocity" in Komter, p. 24.

Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures 115. The assumption that sexual relations are part of marriage is taken for granted in his marriage model, part of the total giving of the woman in the exchange between men.

Rubin 174.


van Baal 76-9, 96.

van Baal 80.


See Weiner 47. Polynesia is one example where women's cloth production is highly valued and their items often become such inalienable possessions.

Weiner 14.

Sahlins 206.

Sahlins 193-6.


Derrida 12.

Derrida 13-14.


Davis 105.


Davis 116, 119.
van Baal 50. He uses the heading “Trade” rather than Contract, but the trading facets he identifies are applicable to contracts and I have used them accordingly.


46 Sharp 253.

47 Gifts and commodities as systems for understanding social relations are, of course, contingent upon cultural and historical contexts.

48 Bassanio is the only suitor to give Portia gifts, and like the rest of the giving in the play, such giving is calculated. Since they have a prior relationship, he knows about the casket test. If he is successful, he has nothing to offer financially since he has no money and is heavily indebted. The gifts, therefore, are an offering to indebted Portia emotionally before actually winning her and the disclosure of Bassanio’s embarrassing financial situation. See Chapter Two.


4. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

5. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Bible, King James version (1611) December 21, 2008. <etextcenter@virginia.edu>.

50 William Gouge, Of Domestical Duties (London: John Haviland, 1622) 563. For Gouge, it was the parents’ responsibility to find spouses for the children, and in his advice only daughters were figured as gifts in marriage: “Take wiznes to your sonnes, and give your daughters to husbands.”


53 Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, Abridged Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 128-9 (my emphasis). Stone’s claim is, of course, problematic, as Karen Newman has shown, in its generalization and pseudo-scientific diction to suggest that attitudes were widely held in England and elsewhere. Newman goes on to argue that Stone’s choice of “girl” is, moreover, surprising since social historians, including Stone himself, have shown that women’s average age at marriage was in their early twenties and therefore far from girlhood. As Newman contends, “Stone moves from describing a hegemonic ideology of elite marriage…to an ideologically suspect anthropology that conjures up visions of native girls paraded before men and chosen for their domestic and erotic talents.” See her essay, “Directing Traffic” (44). My interest, however, is not to criticize Stone but to look at the gap between the arranged marriage and the way women could negotiate themselves as sexual gifts after the marriage ceremony by the willingness to be a sexual playmate after the public ceremony.

54 See Chapter 2.


56 Acheson 80.

57 Acheson 78. Anne was clearly using Margaret as a pawn to rouse paternal feelings in Dorset, just as Dorset had used Margaret by taking her away from Anne in an attempt to get Anne to sign away her rights to her property in Westmoreland. Both strategies worked. Presumably the two continued to sleep in the same room, since they were doing so on the next recorded date, the 11th, which opens with the remark that “my L is very ill this day & cou’d not sleep, so that I lay on a pallet.” It is only because of Dorset’s illness that Anne moves into another chamber (Acheson 78). Anne records throughout the diary sharing a chamber with various people, such as her daughter Margaret, (May 14 and Aug 3 1617) and Mrs. Matthews (December 11, 1616).

58 See Chapter 2.
Of course, the refusing gifts and refusing to reciprocate gifts are also Monarchical powers, since monarchs, especially in this period, are exempt from the usual rules of reciprocity. See Chapter 2.


See Chapter 2.


Komter, “Social” 111.

Stone 139.


Discussion of how drama interacts with the culture that produces it is by no means new. L. C. Knights concludes that drama “embodies” the life of a period in his book Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (1937. London: Chatto & Windus, 1962) 177. My approach is more in line with that of Marianne Novy, who argues that Shakespeare's plays are “theatrical transformations of the social tensions that give them some of their subject matter and their appeal to a divided audience, not examples of Elizabethan social history”. See her Comic Transformations in Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1980) 6.

As early as the 1590s, English drama was exploring women's assertion of themselves as valuable individuals. Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle and William Haughton’s play Patient Grissil (1599), is one remarkable example of this assertion and its social ramifications. Drawing on the medieval tradition of Griselda, the playwrights use a familiar storyline of a wife forced to marry, stripped of all material comforts, and isolated from her family and children by her husband (Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle and William Haughton. Patient Grissil: A Comedy. [London: Shakespeare Society, 1841]. ) This Grissil, however, is not the suffering wife of medieval tradition; she expresses her subjectivity and her ability to withhold that subjectivity from her husband. In Gwalter's first test, Grissil is forced to hang up the russet gown that signifies her humble origins, a humiliation this Grissil does not suffer in silence. Deviating from tradition, Grissil urges her husband to also take away her rich attires, declaring “you may take all this outside, which indeede/Is none of Grissils” (2.2.71-2). Grissell's obedience satisfies Gwalter, but she simultaneously defies him by asserting and withholding the very thing he wants, Grissil herself. (For a fuller discussion of this play, see Edward Pechter, “Patient Grissil and the Trials of Marriage,” The Elizabethan Theatre XIV eds., A.L. Magnusson and C.E. McGee [Toronto: P.D. Meany, 1996] 95.)
Chapter Two: “She is herself a dower”¹: Women’s Presence/Presents as Social Power

Women’s status in early modern England is a subject under continual revision.² This chapter provides the historical background to the literary analysis by focusing on various facets (giving, withholding, refusing, rejecting) of women’s participation in the gift system of early modern England. Women became powerful in the patronage system through gift giving, but created anxiety. Giving was an acceptable female behaviour but allowed women to transgress status and economic barriers, and the drama was one medium through which such anxieties were expressed and exposed. Colliding with the rise of the gift under the Tudors was Henry VIII’s shift to Protestantism. By closing the convents, Henry eliminated an important avenue of choice for women, who could no longer establish an independent life through this monastic option. Consequently, there was increased pressure on women to marry and to marry well. Protestantism also opened up a new avenue of negotiation for women. The religious change involved an important ideological shift; Catholicism posited celibacy as the highest ideal for people, especially women, to attain, whereas Protestantism emphasized the importance of marriage and posited the role of wife as the highest ideal for women, while simultaneously desacramentalizing marriage.³ Women’s participation in the gift exchange system that was integral to early modern society coalesced with this shift in marriage; women could and did fashion themselves as sexual gifts both in and out of marriage and thus inserted themselves into the existing power system. Mary I gave herself in marriage despite public and councillor opposition and Elizabeth I promised to give herself to foreign suitors with the courtship negotiations that formed a large part of her international policy. The few times Elizabeth was prepared to marry, she found her ability to give herself blocked by councillor opposition. Women’s ability to give, even for a queen, was not limitless or unproblematic. Across rank, women’s gifts and women as gifts could
be given and withheld, thus women were able to wield power in a society in which they were legally and politically disenfranchised. In a society where female obedience was expected, gifts allowed women to give, refuse, withhold, and reject, regardless of rank or economic status.

Marriage is of particular interest, in this and subsequent chapters, because of the various agencies it afforded women and the attendant anxieties these created. In the period, marriage was an important event, socially, politically, and economically—it marked a couple’s entry into society as adults, with the obligations and the privileges adulthood entailed. Although for women the break from the authority of a parent or master was supposed to be replaced with that of a husband, marriage was more often a partnership, as demonstrated by the many examples of men whose wives ran the household while their husbands were away on business or at court. How this relationship was to work, exactly, was to be negotiated between the couple. Marriage also entailed a redistribution of power, status, and economic resources, and thus was a political event. The Protestant redefinition of marriage as a companionate relationship changed attitudes about how marriages were formulated. In this changing milieu, how much choice did people have? Particularly, how much choice did women have, how was this choice affected by rank, and how, if at all, could women reject marriages arranged for them? In this chapter, I contend that women’s right to refuse a marriage was signified by refusing courtship tokens offered or given by prospective suitors. In making marriages, women were able to insert themselves into the social power structure of gift exchange by using their bodies as erotic/sexual gifts that could be given or withheld in marriage. They could also withhold this gift to reject or nullify unwanted marriages. I will draw on examples of women’s gifts to add another dimension to the ongoing revision of women’s status in early modern England.
Gifts and Patronage

The patronage system was a way of securing offices and favours in early modern England. The gift system was integral to the patronage system (although it functioned in other realms) and both systems became increasingly important under the Tudors; under Henry VII political opportunities were opened to more men, most notably the gentry, rendering the sixteenth century the age of the successful courtier and politician. This strategy permitted diversity of opinion at court and in politics as these new men became patrons and the patronage system created a vast network of gifts and favours. Henry VII's governing strategies were adopted and expanded by his successors. Women participated in this gift system, maintaining the kinship ties that allowed the system to function and exchanging children, thus perpetuating the system between generations. Women also participated in the patronage system directly, using gifts to secure offices and court positions for relatives. In the early Tudor period, Lady Lisle was extremely adept at this practice, using gifts and tokens to secure favours at court from prominent figures such as the Countess of Rutland and William Coffin, a gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Henry VIII. Lady Lisle was thus able to get her daughter a position at court as lady-in-waiting to Queen Jane (Seymour) through the influence of the Countess of Rutland. Lady Lisle and her husband were also petitioned by women such as Mary, Duchess of Suffolk, and the Countesses of Rutland, Salisbury, and Sussex while Viscount Lisle was Lord Deputy of Calais. Lady Lisle skillfully used gifts to retain close ties with the court she was geographically isolated from and therefore could easily lose her status in. Later in the period, Elizabeth Cooke, Dowager Lady Russell, invoked a complex network of familial and courtly obligations in a suit for her daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth Cooke wanted to secure the Dunnington lease and she asked her nephew, Sir Robert Cecil, to intercede. She listed each gift sent to the queen (including
jewellery, clothing, curtains, hats, and her daughter, who had been a maid of honour to Elizabeth I for six years) in pursuit of said lease. In the letter Cooke sent to Cecil she was also careful to remind him of her daughter’s useful position close to the queen and the benefits of that as Bess ‘will be most ready to acquit any service to yourself.’

Lady Russell’s multiple gifts to the queen were calculated to accumulate symbolic capital; gift-giving was a means by which subjects attempted to make the queen obliged to them by forcing reciprocation. Elizabeth Lennox also sought to assure reciprocation from Elizabeth I when making her will in January 1582. Lennox left the queen ‘her best jewel set with great diamonds’ in the hope that her lands, granted by Elizabeth, would be left to her daughter, Arbella Stuart. As added insurance, Elizabeth Lennox also invoked the patronage of the Earl of Leicester, Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Burghley, and Francis Walsingham, all of whom she asked “to continue their good will to her ‘smale orphan’.”

Elizabeth Lennox died shortly thereafter, and her family attempted, unsuccessfully, to get an increase to Arbella’s annual pension. These attempts to obligate reciprocation from the queen through gifts were not always successful, therefore, since any gift exchange with the monarch was an unequal exchange because the monarch’s reciprocation was not assured. The inequality was clearly demonstrated in the yearly prestation of the New Year’s gifts and the annual Tilts. Queen Elizabeth could delay reciprocation, or she could, of course, refuse gifts or she could refuse to reciprocate them. This unequal giving between subject and monarch is a lesson King Lear forgets after giving land to his daughters; he makes them rulers and expects them to be indebted to him for the remainder of his life for his gifts of land and power. But as rulers they are not obligated to reciprocate gifts and Lear is genuinely surprised when they abuse his gifts by eroding his household and strip him of everything.
Women also had a prominent role in the patronage system through Elizabeth’s Privy Chamber. Although she had banned her women from political participation early in her reign, Elizabeth’s gentlewomen had politically significant functions by the nature of their duties. More importantly, Elizabeth used these women “to extend and amplify her physical presence” and they, in turn, managed access to the queen. Although many of the women of the Privy Chamber were married, the influence of these women depended as much on their own association with the queen as on the position of any male relation at court. The positions of these women might not have been acknowledged formally, but they were positions of power, acknowledged by other courtiers who continually curried favour with the Privy Chamber women or sought their support. Elizabeth also used the Privy Chamber as part of her exercise of power. She allowed them to bring her suits and sometimes granted them, and sometimes used her women to defer the suits without answer, thus allowing her women a role with real political consequences. Elizabeth I’s women were part of her complex power management and, like Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Elizabeth I used the women closest to her “simultaneously as an extension of her body for public display and as a way to reinforce her remoteness and inaccessibility”.

Elizabeth’s women were not mere pawns of their queen, they also acted independently. In 1562, two ladies of the chamber were put under house arrest for aiding the King of Sweden in his suit for Elizabeth. Katherine Ashley and Dorothy Broadbent wrote to the Swedish Chancellor Nils Guildenstern, motivated by encouraging a great match for Elizabeth and averting a scandalous one with Dudley. The women of the Privy Chamber also influenced Elizabeth in 1581 against the Anjou match, after she had announced that she would marry the Duke. The women thus participated in the courtships of Elizabeth despite her ban on political interference.
These women also had several books dedicated to them in the 1590s, in hopes they would seek rewards for the authors.\textsuperscript{21} Women continued to be important in the patronage at the Stuart court. Lucy Harrington, Countess of Bedford, and Susan Villiers, Countess of Denbeigh, were both more important than their husbands at the courts of both James I and Charles I in the dispensing of patronage; their influence extended beyond their positions as waiting women to Queen Anne and Henrietta Maria.\textsuperscript{22} Through the dispensing of gifts, women held prominent positions at court throughout the Tudor and Stuart periods.

**Marriage in a state of flux**

The Reformation changed religious theology, but it also rendered what exactly constituted a marriage ambiguous.\textsuperscript{23} Canon law recognized mutual consent as the basis of matrimony, and thus the various forms of betrothal, including handfasting and spousals, constituted matrimony as long as the vows had been voluntary and conditions fulfilled.\textsuperscript{24} There were, in essence, three types of contract; the *verba de presenti*, which used words in the present tense, the *verba de futuro*, which used words in the future tense and became valid immediately if consummated by sexual intercourse, and conditional contracts, which involved stipulations such as getting the goodwill of parents and friends and were binding upon fulfilment of the stipulated condition.\textsuperscript{25}

Law did not govern marriage, however, so much as social custom. Parental wishes were to be respected, and the couple themselves, as social commentators noted, should be compatible, “especially in respect of religious commitment, virtue, age, birth and breeding, and wealth and estate.”\textsuperscript{26} In practice, social rank affected the amount of choice individuals had in spouses. In lower ranks, where there was little economic gain in the dowries, there was more choice than in the upper ranks, where money, property, and titles, and the inheritance of these, were at stake.\textsuperscript{27}
It seems that the couple themselves often initiated marriages in the middling and lower ranks, as in the case of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, as well as both of their daughters, Susannah and Judith. Across rank, individuals had the right to veto a marriage and only at highest ranks and in the case of wards, was marriage usually enforced through coercion or simply ignoring the protests of the spouses, as in the case of Penelope Devereux Rich or Kate in The Taming of the Shrew. It was just as likely that a mother would negotiate the marriage as a father. Parents across rank could exert considerable pressure to force their choice of spouse, as Capulet does in Romeo and Juliet.

The new emphasis on marriage was particularly important to women, who were defined legally and socially in regard to marriage, as maid, wife, or widow. Juan Luis Vives’s The Instruction of a Christian Woman was divided into three books, each one dealing with one stage of a woman’s life, “youth until marriage, married domesticity, and widowhood.” The social formulation was pointed out by T.E. in The Lawes Resolutions of Women’s Rights: all women “are understood either married or to bee married and their desires [are] subject unto their husband. I know no remedy though some women can shift it well enough.”

Many women used gifts as the means to “shift it”. Social status was derived from father, and then husband, and for an untitled woman, the principal marker of social identification was marital status. Upon marriage, moreover, women were subject to the law of coverture, whereby their personal property and real property was surrendered to their husband, and their legal identity was eclipsed as Petruccio crudely summarizes in The Taming of the Shrew when declaring Kate to be “my goods, my chattels. She is my house/ My house-hold stuff, my field, my barn./ My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything” (3.3.102-4). Despite this law, considerable evidence has been amassed to show that women regarded personal possessions as their own,
especially the money and items they brought to marriage, and that husbands acknowledged this ownership.\textsuperscript{35} The marriage settlements of the period show women’s retention of their property during marriage in the form of a separate estate, pin money, or paraphernalia.\textsuperscript{36} Marriage settlements were, primarily, “to preserve the wife’s property rights” and were taken seriously across rank.\textsuperscript{37} Conveyance manuals such as Thomas Phayer’s \textit{Newe Boke of Presidents} (1543) and William West’s \textit{Symbolaeography} (1594) gave sample forms of jointures with different features for use, such as setting an amount of jointure, allowing a wife to make a will under coverture, obliging a husband to leave his wife a set amount at the time of his death, binding him to pay portions to her children by a previous husband, and establishing a separate estate.\textsuperscript{38} A separate estate could also be made during the marriage by will or deed of gift, and these deeds of gift were made across rank, from the Countess of Shrewsbury, who sought the deed to preserve her property by a previous marriage for her children by that marriage, to Margaret Edmonds of Sussex, who retained the money from her pre-marital days for herself alone.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Courtship and Marriage Gifts}

Diana O’Hara’s work has shown that gifts were an integral part of courtship in early modern England. A range of gifts marked the stages of courtship as it moved toward marriage, such that gift-giving had social and symbolic significance in marriage rituals and in marriage formation.\textsuperscript{40} Simultaneously, the gift transactions were part of the cultural milieu of gift exchange in England. Marriage was a ‘social drama’; certainly there was a legal dimension to its making and breaking, but more encompassing was the social aspect of marriage, the rituals and symbols (i.e., gifts and tokens) that played dynamic roles in the formation and dissolution of marriage. Gift giving was a vital economy in early modern England, and marriage gifts were a special category within this economy, used by a society that often transacted its relations via the
language of symbolic objects and encoded gestures. Gifts and tokens were thus a form of articulation and communication when negotiating marriage. It was not just the gift (its economic and symbolic value) that mattered in courtship transactions, but the “prestation,” the manner in which it was given and the intention behind the giving, that determined the meaning of specific exchanges. In Merchant of Venice, for example, Graziano dismisses Nerissa’s ring as “a hoop of gold, a paltry ring” (5.1.147) and does not understand her anger at his having lost it. But the ring was given at their marriage and he pledged to keep it. It is the manner of giving, the relationship it symbolizes, and Graziano’s oath that are lost with the ring. The ring is also a symbolic giving of Nerissa’s self since it is a wedding ring. For Graziano to so casually and carelessly part with it is a breach of the relationship. Conversely, Shylock mourns the loss of his engagement ring from Leah; indeed he values the turquoise ring beyond its economic worth because he understands the circumstances endow the object with an intangible significance. Gifts were versatile, ranging from money to items of clothing (most commonly handkerchiefs, like Desdemona’s in Othello) to household items, and this versatility made gifts particularly appropriate to the ambiguity of matrimonial negotiation.

Gifts played an important role in contracting marriage and signifying consent. Children could be espoused before the age of legal consent (twelve for girls, fourteen for boys), upon reaching which they could nullify the union by withholding consent. The union became binding if, upon coming of age, the couple gave their consent explicitly in words, or implicitly, by exchanging tokens or by consummating the marriage. Both sexual consummation and acceptance of a gift implied tacit consent to the marital union contracted in childhood, requiring a nullity suit to dissolve such a union. Perhaps gifts and sexual consummation were equated in this way because each could be considered a form of prestation, a deliberate giving of the self.
that signified consent to the marriage. Gifts were also integral to spousals and the contracting of marriages. Preliminary marriage negotiations were held at a meeting before the marriage, usually attended by the couple, witnesses, and family members. Agreements were negotiated, and the couple was contracted by a minister, family member, or trusted neighbour. After the couple was cautioned on the gravity of marriage and their mutual consent was affirmed, they would join hands, repeat the words of the contract, and seal it by exchanging tokens, kissing, and celebrating with a drink or a meal. The marriage ceremony followed soon after the espousal ceremony, with the publishing of the banns or the obtaining of a licence. The casket test in Merchant is a kind of espousal ceremony, since Portia is transferred from her father to the successful suitor. Portia gives the gift of a ring at the espousal and negotiates her courtship, since she adds to her dowry the gift of herself and adds her forfeiture clause when giving the ring. Gifts were thus a language for expressing and negotiating courtship, in which the intention of the donor often affected the binding force of the gift. To the larger community, gifts signalled that important stages in the economic, social and political transaction had been achieved.

The language of gifts was not a direct symbolic language, however, and disputes arose when parties disagreed about how far the courtship had progressed. Gifts were such a part of courtship relations and spousals that they were presented as evidence in cases where marriages had been promised or made before few or no witnesses. Since plaintiffs often could not establish the exact words of a contract in these disputes, ritual actions and symbols were often appealed to as circumstantial evidence to support their contention that a contract existed. Plaintiffs offered a range of gifts exchanged as marriage tokens either during the courtship or at the marriage – ‘a little gold ring enamelled in blue with the inscription to express my love’; ‘a piece of gold of ten shillings’; ‘a gilded nutmeg’; ‘a silver bodkin with a point in it knit in a true lover’s knot’.
evidence, the tokens themselves were insufficient proof of a contract or marriage in legal terms, however, because defendants often claimed these objects were only 'tokens of goodwill' or 'fairings', which were gifts that did not have matrimonial significance. Since the tokens themselves lacked objective value, they were insufficient as evidence to prove a marriage contract. The circumstances under which tokens were given and received transformed them from love tokens to marriage tokens, and in court such circumstances were often retrospectively changed by both plaintiff and defendant to suit the claims of their cases. Such redefinition of the gift in court cases was possible because gifts are symbolic, which leaves room for manipulative play in their definition and interpretation. In the case of Packenam v. Johnson alias Gybs, Anne Johnson (alias Gybs) confessed to a conditional contract with Arthur Packenam. She admitted that he gave her a purse and a pair of gloves; in return, she gave him a handkerchief. Her defence, however, was that 'all was given and received before the words aforesaid and therefore not in the way of marriage.' Similarly, in All's Well that Ends Well, Diana presents Bertram's ring as proof of their marriage while he claims that the token merely refers to a sexual encounter as he slanders her as a common gamester of the camp.

Mary I and Elizabeth I: woman given and woman willing to give

Mary I proclaimed herself queen, defeated the Janeite coup without bloodshed and triumphantly rode into London on August 3, 1553. Dressed in purple velvet, Mary was accompanied by the King's heralds, trumpeters, and sergeant-at-arms, as well as nobles, knights, ladies, and ambassadors. All told, the procession numbered over 3,000 (including horses) and was a display of her full, royal power. Her coronation procession a few weeks later, however, was something of a missed propaganda opportunity. Rather than capitalizing on her recent victory and showing her power as sole monarch, Mary dressed as a queen consort and rode in a
litter. By not riding to her coronation as a full monarch, Mary presented herself as something less than a full royal ruler; queens did have a considerable share in royal power, but that share depended on their married status. In the coronation ceremony itself, Mary was anointed full monarch, but the public display which preceded the ceremony reportedly confused the onlookers. Mary had entered London as a full royal monarch with a show of strength, but did not follow that up in her coronation. Instead, her coronation presented her in the lesser position of queen rather than a monarch in her own right. Mary followed the precedents for female monarchs before her rather than setting her own and in doing so, send mixed signals to a confused populace. Mary did not publish her own record of the event and therefore neither cleared the confusion nor controlled the message of the coronation, for contemporaries or posterity. Elizabeth I, on the other hand, used her coronation procession as a lavish occasion to both give and receive gifts and thus foster loyalty for the new regime. Elizabeth stopped the procession on several occasions to received flowers and tokens of goodwill from “baser personages” as well as hearing suits. Elizabeth is here the recipient of gifts, but she also the giver of gifts, of her time and of her presence to people who are deemed special recipients by the author, Richard Mulcaster, because ‘base’ and therefore unlikely to have such access to the queen. Yet this was just the first of many occasions on which Elizabeth allowed such public access to her person during her reign and such instances of gift exchange with her people. Richard Mulcaster is more approving when describing Elizabeth’s gift of gold from the London City officials. Elizabeth responded with thanks and a pledge that she would keep the peace with her blood, if needed. With the gift exchange of the coronation procession, Elizabeth displayed a common touch Mary never managed.
Mary was successful in giving herself in marriage, however, a feat Elizabeth never achieved. It was assumed that both queens would marry, and indeed marriage was the one thing Mary’s domestic and foreign advisers agreed upon. Unbeknownst to her councillors, however, Mary negotiated her own match to Phillip II of Spain, which she then presented as a fait accompli. Although the Spanish marriage garnered the expected opposition, from council, parliament, and populace, Mary did not back down, even when faced with Wyatt’s rebellion.

How news of the marriage was delivered is uncertain; one report has Mary forcefully informing the Lord Mayor and aldermen of her intention to marry Philip of Spain and advising them ‘like obedient subject[s] to accept her…pleasure, and to be content and quiett themselves.’ Another report has Gardiner diplomatically announcing

in the chamber of presence at Westminster…to the lordes, nobiliteye, and gentyllmen…that the quenes majesty, partley for the welthe and enryching of the realme, and partely for frendeship and other waignty consideration, hathe…determinyd, by the consent of hir counsaille and nobyltye, to matche herselfe [to the king of Spayne]…

Ultimately, how the news was delivered is a moot point—what is important is that Mary bestowed herself, as is clear from Gardiner’s account. Mary was queen, but this position did not come without limits, as her sister Elizabeth found when she attempted to marry. Mary’s negotiation of the marriage, which was completed largely without her councillors, allowed her to bestow herself in marriage and, in so doing, she put her in a position of power when it came to the marriage itself, in terms of the rituals of the court and the marriage treaty.

Hostility to the match was based on conventional models of spousal relationships, which would mean that Mary as wife would be subordinate to her husband and control of the kingdom would, in consequence, pass to Philip, who was a foreigner and a Catholic. Mary’s councillors sought to limit Philip’s powers in England, and consequently, he was granted titles but all policy-
making and patronage was reserved for Mary. The traditional argument is that Mary did not abide by the treaty, specifically allowing Philip control of foreign policy and as a result England was pulled into war with France and lost Calais. Recently, however, opinion of Mary’s reign has come under some review. Mary denied Philip the personal allowance that would allow him an independent patronage base, and she did little to push his coronation through parliament. Court rituals asserted Mary as sovereign and Philip as consort, from her larger throne to their different plate (hers was gold while his was silver). Philip had to pay the costs of his household, as per the treaty, and Council approved the war with France after the French raid on Scarborough Castle.

These rituals and denials of gifts were possible because Mary had initiated the marriage and given more to Philip than he had given to Mary; thus through the gift Mary had achieved the dominant position in her marriage and retained the power in both her marriage and her realm. The treaty had reinforced her dominant position and through the gift she had been able to enforce its clauses, despite the models of husband-wife relationships of the period. Likewise, in Merchant, Portia bestows herself in marriage, and is thus able to dictate the terms of the forfeiture clause to Bassanio. Mary I was not unique in initiating courtship negotiations. Some other women of lower rank did so as well, and used gifts as the means to do it.

Conversely, Elizabeth I succeeded Mary without having to fight for the throne, but Elizabeth still faced many problems; there was no standing army and the crown was bankrupt. To establish and consolidate her power, Elizabeth not only used and manipulated the gift exchange system that her father and grandfather had established, she used her presence as a gift to manage her courtiers, and used the promise of her body as a gift (without actually fulfilling the promise) in many of her courtship negotiations. Her complex manipulation of the gift exchange system extended or limited her courtiers’ power, both maintaining a delicate balance of power
among her courtiers and ensuring their loyalty to her.\textsuperscript{61} Elizabeth was also careful to put her body on public display. Her progresses were a way of doing this, and during them she engaged in the giving and receiving of gifts.\textsuperscript{62}

Another example is the St. George’s Garter ceremony, when the procession to the ceremony was deliberately developed because it was the portion of the ceremony that was seen by ordinary onlookers.\textsuperscript{63} Elizabeth was reluctant throughout her reign to confer the Order of the Garter, but when she did decide to confer it in 1592 on the Earls of Shrewsbury and Cumberland, she insisted that she confer it personally.\textsuperscript{64} That is, Elizabeth used her physical presence to bestow favour on courtiers just as, at other times, she withdrew her presence as a sign of displeasure. When courtiers, including her favourite Leicester, married without her permission or against her will, she exiled them to their country estates. At various times throughout the reign her councillors were banished from her presence.\textsuperscript{65} The most powerful examples are, perhaps, the events following the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth directed her anger at her councillors, particularly those she deemed responsible for Mary’s execution. Secretary Davison was publicly scapegoated, having secured the warrant for the execution; the council was berated; Burghley was refused all communication with the queen, banished from her presence and his letters refused for weeks.\textsuperscript{66} Elizabeth’s withdrawal thus brought the country to a standstill and simultaneously demonstrated that although her male councillors had forced her to unwanted actions, no matter how necessary, she had the power to express her displeasure by completely withholding her presence from them and thereby nullified their ability to perform their roles in her government.

By controlling access to her person, Elizabeth kept the power balance at court, such that one’s position depended on a personal relationship with the queen as much an actual title. The
manipulation of personal relationships also allowed Elizabeth to minimize clashes, personal and philosophical, between her closest advisors, such as Leicester and Burghley. Elizabeth went beyond the politics of access though, making her presence a type of gift that could be given or withheld. Her presence in and of itself was a sign of favour. When Burghley was sick, Elizabeth sent him her own physician, went to see him personally, and fed him herself. When Leicester was on his sickbed the queen would visit him also. In 1566, in order to weaken Leicester’s influence during the conflict between the Dudley and Howard alliances she deliberately and openly flirted with Sir Thomas Heneage.

Elizabeth was thus more successful than her sister at managing her courtiers, but her strategy for doing it was not always successful. In the rivalry between Charles Blount and the Earl of Essex in the winter of 1588-89, Elizabeth sent Blount a golden queen from her personal chess-set. Blount wore the gift on a ribbon on his arm to display the queen’s favour, to which Essex jibed ‘Now I perceive that every fool must have a favour!’ Instead of Elizabeth’s gift managing her courtiers, the intended result of the giving, the actual result was beyond her control, inciting violence between them. Elizabeth was the queen, at the pinnacle of society and the fount of gifts, but even she could not control the results of her giving. Affection and sexuality were features of her political relationships, and her use of her presence as a gift forced courtiers to compete for her attention, putting a premium on her presence as much as the presents that she gave out so frugally.

Elizabeth I also rejected and refused to give gifts as part of the personal aspect of her courtships, which was separate from the political aspect of these courtships. For example, Eric of Sweden was rather persistent in his pursuit of Elizabeth, despite being refused in 1559. In September of that year, he sent his brother Duke John to England to woo in his place. John gave
many presents as bribes to courtiers, as well as charity to the poor, to show Sweden’s largesse. Elizabeth did nothing to curb his actions, but refused the ring worth 5000-6000 crowns that was presented to her. In 1560, Eric sent gold bullion to England, which Elizabeth kept, even though she had no interest in the match. Elizabeth’s refusal of the personal gift stemmed from her disinterest in Eric; the gold bullion she could justify keeping because it could be put to state use and thus was a gift to England. The ring, however, was a courtship token and would personally oblige her. Since the diplomatic negotiations were still ongoing, one gift could be kept while the other could not. Similarly, in 1565 while Adam Zwetkovich was in England negotiating the suit on the part of Charles of Austria, Elizabeth refused to give a gift and thereby showed her personal lack of interest in Charles as a suitor while simultaneously maintaining the diplomacy of the suit. Elizabeth maintained, as she always did, that she would not marry an unseen suitor and thus, in July, the imperial envoy wrote Maximilian ‘that the Queen becomes fonder of His Princely Highness and her impatience to see him grows daily. Her marriage is, I take it, certain and resolved on.’ On August 13, 1565, while Elizabeth was walking with Zwetkovich and De Silva, the former noticed a ruby ring Elizabeth was wearing and suggested she give it to him as a token for the Archduke. Elizabeth refused. Enticingly, she reiterated her request that Charles visit her in England, for then a marriage could be concluded “and he would get much more than one ring from her finger.” Elizabeth was promising herself and all that came with her as queen. De Silva saw through the queen’s ploy and bluffing, suggested that Charles was already at court and had come in disguise. Elizabeth was horrified that her conditions had been met. Elizabeth had refused to give a token and thus rejected the personal aspect of the suit at a time when negotiations were not going well. Yet, she held out the promise of herself as a gift if her premarital conditions were met. Her strategy had backfired, but Elizabeth recovered, claiming...
that many princes visited her covertly. She did not, in fact, have any interest in marrying Charles, and her refusal to send the ring as a token was a sign of this lack of intent.

Women’s ability to bestow themselves as gifts in marriage was not without limits, and neither was Elizabeth’s. It seems Elizabeth I was willing to marry at least twice, and these attempts to bestow herself as a gift, as her sister Mary had, were thwarted by councillor opposition. This opposition proved to be a powerful limit on Elizabeth’s power as monarch for, unlike her sister, Elizabeth would not marry without councillor approval and consensus on a match proved impossible. Although Elizabeth was celebrated as the “Virgin Queen”, this view and the iconography associated with it were imposed upon her in the 1570s surrounding the negotiations with François of Anjou. From the time Elizabeth ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five until the negotiations with François of Anjou finally were aborted, she presented herself and more importantly represented herself as a marriageable virgin. Elizabeth’s first intended was, of course, Sir Robert Dudley, a match that was hampered first by his marriage and then by the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of his wife Amy in September 1560. In the months following Amy’s death, Elizabeth retreated from the idea of marriage to Dudley, signalled in November 1560 by her last minute withdrawal of his ennoblement. Elizabeth thus withheld a gift from Dudley to signal to the court and the councillors her refusal to give herself to him in marriage. Dudley continued to pursue Elizabeth, but for her the idea of marriage to him had passed.

Elizabeth also appears to have espoused herself to François, first Duke of Alençon and then Duke of Anjou, in 1581. This event was probably the closest she came to marriage and certainly caused a backlash of reaction in the court. Catherine de Medici had first proposed the match in the early 1570s, substituting François for his brother Henri when the latter refused to
marry Elizabeth on religious grounds. Elizabeth had, at the time, tried to dismiss the match since she had no interest in the youth, but, as her letter to Francis Walsingham in July 1572 expresses, she could not deny the suit altogether because of pressure from her councillors:

And in the end after their many conferences had both with us and with our Council, when we perceived them very much perplexed to see our strangeness from assenting to their desires and how loath they were to have any flat denial, we were advised to forbear from making a plain refusal....

In August the St. Bartholomew Day’s massacre of French Protestants rendered the marriage negotiations nothing more than a diplomatic tool to keep the lines of communication between France and England open.

In 1578, the negotiations were revived and Elizabeth seems to have been prepared to force a marriage despite the opposition of her councillors. François was now Duke of Anjou, heir to the French throne and, more importantly, was fighting in the Dutch states against Spain. With the Netherlands breaking up, some of the states were reconciling with Philip II of Spain, who was again a threat to England. Elizabeth sent Anjou gifts in October 1578 as the courtship renewed, and although she began to prevaricate, in January 1579, Jean de Simier arrived in England as Anjou’s representative, with costly jewels for the queen and a large expense account to press the suit. Elizabeth was courteous to Simier, seeing him often and giving him gifts (gloves, flowers crafted in gold, and miniatures of herself) as love tokens for Anjou. Simier was also invited to feasts, dances, masques, and jousts, all social expressions of gift exchange. Elizabeth agreed to proceed with negotiations. Council was divided as usual on the marriage and throughout the fall the council prevaricated while the queen grew increasingly infuriated with their excuses. By October key councillors were banished from her presence, including Hatton and Leicester; by November a marriage treaty was in place, which Simier took to France.
Rather than backing down in the face of council’s opposition, Elizabeth took a stand and forced them to negotiate her marriage. It was a strategy that, at least momentarily, succeeded.

Anjou arrived in England and opposition to the match was stifled, since many councillors were absent from court. Popular opposition was considerable, however, most notably Philip Stubbs’ publication of The Discoverie Of A Gaping Gulf, for which both he and his publisher lost their hands.\(^\text{81}\) Popular opposition to the match continued unabated.\(^\text{82}\) There was indirect opposition in Parliament and open councillor objections. Elizabeth signed a marriage treaty, but effectively nullified it almost immediately.\(^\text{83}\) She had stood up to her councillors, but unlike her sister who faced down an armed rebellion, Elizabeth’s resolve waned under such popular opposition. By early November 1581, Anjou was again in London for a three-month, public visit; he had lifted the siege at Cambrai, a Protestant town in France, but now had no money and his army had disbanded. He was warmly received by the Queen and her councillors, the latter partly because of Anjou’s victory at Cambrai, but mostly because they were fairly sure the marriage issue was dead.\(^\text{84}\)

Yet, Elizabeth had developed a fondness for Anjou, and this fondness brought her to the brink of marriage. It also revealed that her ability to give, both as a woman and as queen, was not without limit. During the Ascension Day activities of 22 November 1581, as the Queen and Anjou were together in public, the French ambassador asked her intentions toward the Duke. Elizabeth declared that she would marry Anjou, kissed him (on the mouth) and gave him her ring. In return, he gave her his ring. Those witnessing the event assumed it to be an espousal.\(^\text{85}\) In the cases of Eric of Sweden and Archduke Charles, Elizabeth refused a gift and to give a gift, of a ring, because she had no interest in the matches. In the case of François of Anjou, Elizabeth gave him the gift of a ring and received the gift of a ring, the very gifts she earlier refused to
signify her refusal to give herself in marriage. In light of Elizabeth’s earlier actions, the exchange of rings with Anjou is more than a mere token giving; it is not that the rings are important (although they would certainly carry significance as betrothal tokens). What is significant is that Elizabeth earlier had refused to receive and to give personal items to signify her refusal of the courtship and here, with Anjou, she was not only giving and receiving personal tokens, she was the initiator of the gift exchange which signified in a larger sense her giving herself in marriage. Elizabeth was, it appears, genuinely giving herself to someone, something she had never before done in her reign, and the espousal was probably taken as genuine because Anjou had fulfilled her conditions; he had journeyed to England to be seen, not once but twice. He was also willing to compromise on the religious issues and was a prince, fulfilling the status requirement. Anjou was thus the single most likely successful foreign candidate for Elizabeth’s hand. If only for a few moments, Elizabeth had bestowed herself on a man. Until the espousal, there had been no opposition to Anjou during this visit, but in the face of the backlash of opposition, from the ladies of her chamber and her councillors, which would serve as a taste of the popular opposition from her people, bestowing herself in marriage was a gift Elizabeth would be forced to retract. Ultimately, neither Elizabeth nor Mary was successful at marriage. Mary gave herself, but her marriage and reign were perceived as unsuccessful. Elizabeth was willing to marry, but her council and parliaments could not agree on a candidate. The result was the failure to provide for the succession. Neither reign solved the questions and problems of a queen regnant in a male-dominated society.

Bestowing the Self

Social rank affected the amount of choice individuals had in spouses. In lower ranks, where there was little economic gain in the dowries, there was more choice than in the upper
ranks, where money, property, and titles were at stake. Gifts, however, allowed women to initiate courtship negotiations and to make their own marriages. This was true for women of various social rank and economic status. Mary I made her own match by transforming herself into a gift, and lower down the social scale, women used gifts to bestow themselves in marriage as well. 

Elizabeth Godfrey, a well-off widow, offered John Smyth a considerable sum of money, pouring out a bag of gold containing around 100 marks and requiring him to take it, or as much as he would. Similarly, Alice Porter, a widow of St. Mary-in-the-Marsh engaged an intermediary, Regenold Smith, to act on her behalf in negotiations with yeoman Regenold Aderyn, who lived in Dymchurch, a neighbouring parish and whom Smith knew. Alice promised to take Aderyn for her husband, bestowing herself and her goods, a promise she repeated in front of Alice’s brother who acted as witness. Both Elizabeth and Alice used gifts to initiate the negotiations that included themselves as gifts in marriage, Elizabeth implicitly, but Alice explicitly, stating herself as part of the bargain, making herself simultaneously a self-negotiated commodity and gift. 

Likewise Livia in *Women Beware Women* offers her economic assets to Leantio when seducing him and thus uses the commodity as an offered gift to offer herself as his mistress. 

Women also insisted on a certain level of reciprocation in marriage if they were to bestow themselves and their goods in it. In 1570, Katherine Marshall from Durham and of the middling-sort had a house and land worth £4 annually and £10 in moveables. She asked the father of her intended to settle £13 6s 8d (20 marks) on the prospective marriage, to which he offered £5, which she accepted. She later changed her mind and called the marriage off. In Suffolk, the widow Yarmouth’s projected match fell through for similar reasons; the father of her intended young man would only give £40 and she had demanded £60 from him. In 1558 she blamed the failure of the match on the father. It appears that both Katherine and the widow
Yarmouth had a value that had to be reciprocated. That value was not simply economic and each woman brought more to the marriage than the economic value of their holdings. Their gifts had to be adequately recognized by the fathers’ settlement on the marriage and when it was not, both women withdrew from the proposed matches. Bianca in *Women Beware Women* will insist on this reciprocation when complaining to her mother-in-law:

> Wives do not give away themselves to husbands,  
> To the end to be quite cast away; they look  
> To be the better used, and tendered rather,  
> Highlier respected, and maintained the richer;  
> They’re well rewarded else for the free gift  
> Of their whole life to a husband. (3.1.47-52)

Of course, a wife’s gift is not free if Bianca is seeking such a return. But what she is expressing is that wives expect reciprocation of themselves in marriage, and that reciprocation has economic considerations (“tendered”, “maintained”).

Despite the obstacles put before them in the form of family and community, women did marry clandestinely, insisting they could bestow themselves on others without feeling the need for the consent of parents or, in their place, other family or friends. Some examples include Elizabeth Throckmorton, and Catherine and Mary Grey. In 1570 Alice Cheseman of the middling ranks insisted on her choice of husband despite the opposition of her community, from which she was facing expulsion. Wishing ‘her to be preferred to a better marriage’, the parishioners stayed the banns and marriage of Alice to her chosen husband, even though

> She did offend in carnallye knowing Cheseman before marriage notwithstanding she made as he thinketh in recompense in that she being persuaded to him bye her friends, she ever said that she should have him and in respecte alalso that she hath reconciled herself to god and the world by marrying of her husband.

Chesemen was required to fetch testimonials of his behaviour from Sussex, and the resulting two-month delay to the marriage meant Alice was two month’s pregnant when the couple finally
married; consequently the child was not born ‘in sufficient cumpas of tyme after marriage.’,

The offence of the early birth was forgiven, since it was the community that delayed the

marriage. Alice was able to insist on the marriage she wanted and to bestow herself in the

marriage despite the resistance of the parish and the threat of expulsion from her home. Giving

herself sexually before marriage was a risky proposition. Other women also gave themselves

before marriage as a means of obtaining marriage and such actions did not always end well. In

Alice’s case, however, the community had to recognize the circumstances in which the gift was

given and thus reconcile themselves to Cheseman and the marriage. Similarly, Othello and

Desdemona marry secretly to the outrage of her father, but when the marriage is tried before the

Duke, it is clear that Desdemona has given herself to the Moor and thus Brabanzio, Roderigo,

and the rest of Venice must accept it.

Other women resorted to cohabitation with men before marriage to get the match they

wanted. Although cases of premarital sex did not frequently come before the court, especially

after 1600, there were such prosecutions against women who gave themselves sexually to men.

These cases were usually blatant and usually resulted in the couple being married when brought
to court. So in 1591, it was reported in Woodborough “that ‘Henry Cantry was taken in bed with

Agnes Cantry before they were married’.”

The cases, according to Martin Ingram, often came
to court because the bride was pregnant at the time of marriage or, in rare cases, had delivered

before the actual marriage. Hence another Agnes, ‘Agnes Hellier alias Bowdler the wife of

Roger Hellier’ came to the attention of authorities in 1592 for being ‘delivered of a child within a

month after they were married’.

Ingram argues that most such cases involved betrothed or

seriously courting couples who had engaged in sexual relations before the church ceremony.

Nonetheless, some women chose to live with their intended husbands before marriage. In
Shornecote in 1621, Margaret Greene and John Prater were contracted to be married and the banns had been published when Jane Haskins claimed the John was engaged to her, thus forbidding the banns. Margaret proceeded to have sexual relations with Prater, subsequently had a baby, and then confessed that ‘she doth live in the house with the said Prater and purposeth forthwith to be married’. Such cases as Margaret’s were rare, but do show that women could use their bodies to achieve the desired marriage. Similarly, Helen in All’s Well will pursue Bertram to his bed, trick him into intercourse, and become pregnant to fulfill his conditions and force him to accept their marriage.

**Women refusing gifts/suitors.**

Diana O’Hara asserts that while women did participate in gift exchange, giving in return to suitors,

> Nevertheless, the unevenness of the exchange assigned to women the primarily passive and more obligated role of recipient. Widows were found to be more forthcoming, but women usually acted in response to their suitors, either in returning tokens and, by implication, terminating negotiations, or in reciprocation, reassurance and positive encouragement.

What is interesting, but what O’Hara does not explore, is that by rejecting the gift, women could refuse a suitor. This rejection of the gift was as powerful as giving and is taken for granted by O’Hara and by early modern society as a woman’s right, since O’Hara acknowledges that women reject gifts and therefore suits, but does not pursue the implications of the agency that this affords women in a male-dominated society. Yet, this rejection of the courtship gift does not invoke the complications that Mauss envisioned in his theory of the gift. The role of recipient was thus not as passive as O’Hara asserts, since the recipient was the one to determine whether negotiations would proceed or not by accepting or refusing the gift. For example, Henry Marche went to see Agnes Cobbe in her parish of Saltwood, and calling her to the door, put an old gold
royal into her hand. She kept it until he called again with his three friends, when Agnes returned the gold. Henry threw it in the doorway, where an old woman picked it up and gave it Agnes again. About a fortnight later, Henry tried again to get Agnes’s consent to marry and forced on her two old royals. Another fortnight later he returned, at which time Agnes offered him his three gold pieces, telling ‘him that she wold not have him nor anie of his gold.’ Agnes’s return of the gold conveys her answer to the suit.99 Yet it is not just Henry that Agnes is rejecting, but community pressure in the form of the old woman who gives Agnes the coin, and in the form of Henry’s friends. Nonetheless, it is a gift she is able to resist by returning the unwanted gift to him, thus ending the suit. The case also brings up the question of forced gifts, since Henry attempts to force the suit by forcing the coins on Agnes.

The forced gift was a notion not uncommon in early modern courtship, according to O’Hara. For example, Margaret Barnes, acting as intermediary, gave a ring to Joanne Stupple, telling her “that George More had sent it for a token, ‘forsing’ her to keep it until such time as she should see him again.” The day before, Margaret had delivered a silver and gilt enamelled button in similar fashion. Within three days of the ring’s delivery, Joanne admitted granting her goodwill to George, except ‘said that she could not tell wherunto she had granted her goodwill’.100 Thus, it seems that Joanne submitted to the forced gift, but the ambiguity of the intentions that came with it allowed her to reserve some of her agency. In giving her goodwill in return, she offered nothing else. Other women refused the forced gift outright. Edward Culling claimed Joan Essex ‘said she wold interprete her body by the grace of god as she wold forsake all other men, and submit herself to [him] to be his wif. And because she promised this, he tooke her a pece of gould at that time valued at 13s 4d upon condition that she shold be his wif, which
she upon that condition willingly received.' For her part, Joan accused Edward of unjust boasting, and claimed that when he put the gold in her hand

she refused to receive and cast it again after him on a table, and saith that he delivered to her an handkercher to wash wherein was an old grote, and purse he gave her for a fayring, and the neckercher he thrust into her pocket which she took out and cast to him again on the ground at Hith fayer, and an old 6d he gave her also.¹⁰¹

Edward attempted to force the money upon Joan and she refused it by throwing it onto a table. When he tried to conceal it in a handkerchief, she again refused it by casting it onto the ground. The concealing of gifts in items such as handkerchiefs and gloves was not uncommon, but to keep them could be implied as consent, and thus Joan cast away the gift to refuse it. In Twelfth Night, Olivia sends a forced gift to Cesario (Viola in disguise). As a sign of affection, Olivia has Malvolio give Cesario a ring, claiming to be returning it to Orsino. Cesario refuses the ring and only after Malvolio has thrown the ring on the ground does Cesario realize that it is a love token, intended for her, of Olivia’s affection (2.2.1-41).

Because of the connotations of gifts between men and women, especially the implications for marriage, women were careful to avoid any gift with implications.¹⁰² Constance Awsten was offered a pair of gloves by James Haffynden, ‘whiche she in no wise wold receive, James saying, Why Custaunce you may take them if it were of one that you never saw. And therapon she answering, and receaving the gloves said, I take them at yor handes as thoughe you were but a straunger towards me’.¹⁰³ Constance refused the gift at first because she did not want the suitor, and when pressed, she took the gift but alienated the suitor as a stranger, thereby nullifying any attempt at obligating her through the gift.

In 1574, Jane Salisbury refused gifts from her would-be suitor William Lloyde, paid him for gifts he attempted to force on her, and returned the gifts he sent via a servant:
while the sayde Lloyde was a sueter unto her she hadd occasyon to sende for a payre of hoose and a payre of sleapers whereof the sayde Lloyde having understandinge payde for them him selffe and att the delivery of them to this respondent caused it to be signified unto her that he bestowed them upon her which this respondent mislyked because she purposed to deserve no suche matter...partly for his money layde owte in that behalffe and partlye for wyen which he wolde sende unto her chamber againste her will she sent unto him 10 shillings in golde further she saithe that the sayde Lloyde beinge upon a tyme in her chamber in greate rage he left there halfe an angell which this respondent dirst not then presse upon him backe againe for feare he shulde have donne some hurt other of his goodes she never received but certaine parcels here mentyoned as the scarffe and stomacher the scarffe being worth 15 shillings and the stomacher worthe a mark and no more...being delyvered to her servante without her privyte she caused to be sente unto him backe again which he receaved.

In this case, Jane carefully recounts gifts returned, and refused, and the forced gifts that have been paid for, thereby cancelling the obligations of the gift transactions. By thus refusing the gift relationship, she refuses the ardent suitor.

Other women refused to be gifts by refusing suits. Mary Boyle, daughter of the Earl of Cork, had been promised to Mr. Hambletone, son of Lord Cladeboyes. The match had been concluded years before; in 1639 he was returned from France and she had reached the age of consent. The Earl received Hambletone as a son-in-law, and Mary was commanded by her father “to receive him as one designed to be my husband”. Mary stood to gain financially, since his estate was settled on him, “yet by all his kindness to me nor that I could be brought to endure to think of having him, though my father pressed me to it; my aversion to him was extraordinary”. Despite her father’s displeasure, and the ensuing trouble, she “could never be brought by either fair or foul means to it; so as my father was at last forced to break it off, to my father’s unspeakable trouble, and to my unspeakable satisfaction”. Even though pressure was exerted upon her to fulfill her father’s promise and to be his gift to the suitor, Mary could not be forced into the marriage, and she resisted the coercion to be made into her father’s gift. Similarly, Capulet exerts tremendous pressure on Juliet to marry Paris in Romeo and Juliet, as he
threatens to withhold her dowry and throw her out in the street, but she still refuses to be made her father's gift and secretly marries Romeo.

Women could also return gifts to end a courtship. Alice Fryer returned the angel noble she had received from Richard Rolf. She claimed they 'had further communication of marriage and there brake of because [she] cold not as she saith fynd in her hart to love hym' and so she returned the coin, saying 'that she was not mynded to have hym'. Similarly, Helen Throwley and Thomas Mayhewe exchanged various tokens, including sixpenny pieces and a little silver crucifix, which were restored after a falling out and ending of the courtship. The return of the courtship gifts thereby ends the courtship, since the gifts were symbolic of the relationship, the promises made and the future promises to be kept, including the giving of themselves to each other. To dissolve the promises, the gifts had to be returned.

Refusing a match

Women's right to refuse a marriage was often nullified by coercion and by pressure exerted by family and friends. Because there were few employment opportunities for single women, there were few alternatives to marriage. In higher social ranks, the threat of withholding dowries and withdrawing financial support was often used to coerce reluctant women into accepting a marriage. Across rank, pressure exerted by family and friends could also coerce such consent. The public ceremony, however, did not always achieve the desired marriage because women could refuse to consummate the marriage and this refusal to give their bodies sexually to their husbands was an expression of power on par with, if not greater than, giving that body, since culturally, women were to be passive and yielding and therefore were expected to submit to their husbands. Such private marital negotiations can be found in public documents, like Thomas Kydde's pamphlet about Anne Welles (1592). Welles is first described in the
pamphlet as “a proper young woman” who is “beloued of diuers young men, especially of two Goldsmithes…” 109 John Parker is the “better beloved, but least deserved” while John Brewen has a longstanding suit, the goodwill of her friends and family, and has given “gifts and fauours” but is “still disdained and cast off”. 110 Brewen’s gold and jewels were given “upon a promise betweene them” but since this came to naught, he called for the return of the gifts. When Welles did not return the gifts, Brewen had her arrested, to her astonishment. On condition that Brewen let the action fall, Welles agreed to marry him before witnesses. Parker was angry, and Welles turned against Brewen. The pamphlet alleges that a plan was hatched to poison Brewen.

Coerced into marriage by Brewen, Welles refused to act as a wife. She

would not lay with him after the first night of her marriage; neither would she abide to be called after his name, but still to be termed Anne Welles, as she was before: and to excuse her from his bed, she sayd she had vowed neuer to lie by him more till he had gotten her a better house. And more to shadow her trecherie, and to shew the discontent she had of his dwelling, she lodged neuer a night but the first in his house, but prouided her a lodging neere to the place where this graceless Parker dwelt. 111

Welles only entered Brewen’s house when she went to poison him. Kydde’s pamphlet was intended to show women’s agency as dangerous, but, though Welles’s first assertions of agency created tension, they were not violent. Her insistence on her own identity allowed Welles to resist her objectification in a coerced marriage. Her present withholding of herself with the promise of future sexual fulfillment (whether she meant it or not) allowed her to make demands within the marriage. 112 Neither was Welles’s reported refusal to return Brewen’s courtships gifts an anomaly; Diana O’Hara’s analysis of early modern court records analyzes several cases in which people across rank sued or were sued over courtship gifts.

Welles was not unique in using this withholding strategy. In 1565 John Bennet’s wife refused to live with him, despite his extensive negotiations with her stepfather and other friends.
He had tried to get into bed with her, but he claimed that she ‘did suddenly rise out of her bed refused to company with him…saying that she was the worse when she saw him’. Similarly, in 1588, Julian Cordwell was pressured ‘by means of importunity, suit and earnest soliciting of [Henry Cordwell of Corsley] unto her friends, viz. her father and mother, her master and her lady and mistress with other of her dear friends, who altogether thereupon did so menace and evil intreat her’. Eventually, she submitted to the marriage, but immediately regretted her decision and would not live with Henry.113

Playwrights alluded to gift discourse to illuminate and complicate the drama. In Hamlet 3.1, in which Ophelia attempts to return Hamlet’s gifts, Shakespeare invokes the gift and issues of returning gifts. Since Ophelia returns the tokens on her father’s command, she is not fully asserting agency. Although there is no spoken promise of marriage between these two (indeed the only one to speak of such a marriage is Gertrude), there are indications that the couple were expecting to marry and, as with the historical cases cited earlier, courtship tokens are invoked to symbolize that prospective marriage and the end of the relationship. Hamlet, however, responds to the returned gifts by denying he was the giver and thus repudiating their involvement altogether rather than accepting Ophelia’s rejection of him. Nonetheless, she persists in returning the tokens and her second attempt shows their increased value (beyond the material) because they symbolized marriage and that the marriage is no longer possible:

My honoured lord, you know right well you did [give them],
And with them words so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these things again; for to the noble mine
Rich things wax poor when givers prove unkind (3.1.99-102).

Ophelia may be acting on her father’s direction to return the gift, but she is not entirely without agency, since she blames the change in Hamlet for the relationship souring. Gift discourse is
thus a kind of shorthand to explain the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet while simultaneously complicating issues of Ophelia’s agency and relationship to her father and Hamlet.

**Breaking a match**

Once made, a marriage was difficult to break. Divorce and annulment were difficult to obtain, especially for women unhappily married. Amy Cooke, a Wiltshire shoemaker’s daughter, had been forced into a marriage by her mother. The man was described as a ‘lewd idle fellow’ and because Amy neither lived with him nor consummated the marriage, she was able to secure an annulment. Perhaps a more famous case is Frances Howard, who was married at thirteen to Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, a match arranged by James I to settle the enmity between their two families. After three years of marriage, two of which he spent abroad, Essex returned to England in 1610 and tried to live with his wife. Frances wanted very little to do with Essex, however, and refused to live with him, since in his absence she had enjoyed freedom afforded her as an unencumbered married woman at court and she had become enamoured of the King’s favourite, Robert Carr. Upon his return, Essex expected to return to Chartley House in Staffordshire, but Frances wanted to stay for Prince Henry’s investiture as Prince of Wales on June 4, 1610. After the ceremonies, she fled to Audley End, her parent’s home, where Essex visited over the summer in attempts at reconciliation. When Essex got her father’s sympathies, Frances fled to her lodging at Whitehall, where Essex followed and demanded she prepare to go to Chartley House. Frances fled again, this time to her uncle Northampton, who took her part, leaving Essex to return to Chartley alone. After a bout of smallpox, Essex returned in May 1611 to claim his wife; it is uncertain whether the marriage was ever consummated, but in 1613,
Essex agreed to an annulment on the basis of non-consummation, and the annulment was finally granted under pressure from James I.\textsuperscript{115}

These cases represent rare occasions in the period; Anne Welles's resorting to murder was certainly an anomaly. Her actions to control her own body, to stake a claim for herself in marriage, like those of the other cases I have cited, show women seeking control of their own sexual bodies, and the choice to refuse to consummate or continue a marriage. The few cases that came before Church courts or other authorities are indicative of more widespread marital discord. I do not want to use a few examples to argue that all women did use their bodies as sexual gifts to be given or withheld, but I do believe that these examples indicate a widespread practice women that could, and did, use to make a stake for themselves in marriage. Across rank, women negotiated the conflicting demands placed upon them and found ways to circumvent the restrictions placed them upon in their male-dominated world. Women's participation in the gift exchange system of early modern England was simultaneously acceptable and transgressive; it allowed women public and active roles while remaining within acceptable gendered behaviour. Women's bodies, moreover, did not absolutely belong to their husbands in marriage, even though men had the right to beat their wives, in moderation.\textsuperscript{116} Women's giving was not, however, without risk. The consequences of the giving could not be controlled, as Mary I found when she bestowed herself on a foreign husband. The ability to give was not without limit either, as Elizabeth I discovered when she attempted to bestow herself in marriage and found her ability to do so curbed by councillor as well as popular opposition. Women's giving, and their giving of themselves, was a complex issue in early modern England, and one which the drama explored.
Women's political and legal disenfranchisement has led historians such as Lawrence Stone to posit women as largely powerless objects passed between men in marriage to solidify political and/or economic alliances. More recent work by Alan MacFarlane, Sara Mendelson, and Patricia Crawford has shown that early modern Englishwomen did, in fact, have choice in their marriages and more social freedom than previously recognized. See Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) and Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (London: Blackwell, 1987).

In the medieval period, women had supported themselves, but this became more difficult in the hardening economic climate of later fifteenth century (P. J. P. Goldberg, “Gender and Matrimonial Litigation in the Church Courts in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of the Court of York” *Gender & History*, 19:1 [2007] 45). There were five hundred guilds in England; only five excluded women. Prior to the Tudor period, girls had apprenticed in various trades, but by the sixteenth century, few apprenticed to skilled trades. Women's guild membership was usually acquired by marriage, since they played a vital role in the business of their husbands, and usually carried on the business if widowed; they even took on apprentices (Alison Sim, *The Tudor Housewife* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1996] 97-8). Women's wages and the status of their work were subject to restrictions from both the community and guilds, and these restrictions became increasingly harsh in the early modern period (Barbara Kreps, “The Paradox of Women: The Legal Position of Early Modern Wives and Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore*,” *ELH* 69:1 [2002]: 87).

Christine Peters, “Single Women in Early Modern England: Attitudes and Expectations,” *Continuity and Change* 12:3 (1997): 236. Susan Dwyer Amussen points out, however, that this subordination was not total, but was, rather to be learned within the family, where each member of the family had his or her obligations and where power relations were reciprocal, such that “obedience and subordination were mirrored by care, protection and wise leadership.” In this model, the order of the household could be disrupted by either the subordinates or the head of the household. See her “‘Being Stirred to Much Unquietness’: Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England,” *Journal of Women's History* 6:2 (1994): 73.

The conduct literature of the period delegated women to the domestic sphere, but the household was the sight of economic production and thus the boundary between public and private was permeable. Women in landed households were responsible for administering estates that included a range of social, political, and legal responsibilities that could include inheriting a local office, as in the case of Lady Anne Clifford (although hers was a hard-won inheritance). See Judith M. Richards, “‘To Promote A Woman To Beare Rule’: Talking Of Queens In Mid-Tudor England,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28:1 (1997): 102. Lady Margaret Hoby’s diary is full of apt examples of the permeable boundary between the public and the private spheres. The diary includes both domestic details and business Lady Margaret would tend for her husband, including running estates (Sim 40-1). There are also business considerations that are Lady Hoby’s alone since, at the time of the diary’s writing, she had not signed all of her property over to her husband (Lady Margaret Hoby and Joanna Moody, ed., *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605* [Phoenix Mill, Thrupp, Stroud: Sutton, 1998]: 177 and n 304). One example of this marriage as partnership survives through the letters of John Johnson and his wife Sabine (m. 1541). He was a merchant who travelled to the Continent often and in his absence Sabine was in charge of the household, business, and apprentices. Their letters record the business she conducted for him, including selling wool for their customers. Their lives are detailed and their letters excerpted in Barbara Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955).

John Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 57. Since the husband now had authority over his wife (and potentially servants) and the wife had authority over the household (and any servants), the wedding and formation of a new household was a political event. The courtship was a private relationship, marriage was not; it was a both a “public institution and a private relationship, in which a husband’s formal authority was balanced and, at times, contradicted by, the very real power of wives” (82).

Marriage itself was reformulated in the period, as the conduct books and sermons show; the roles and duties of husbands and wives were subjects of debate as marriage underwent social, political, and religious redefinitions that
promised change from medieval ideas of marriage. These redefinitions, however, often conflicted with each other. The Protestant redefinition of marriage promised equality between spouses yet the political Tudor model of the household as "a little commonwealth" (Dod and Cleaver) structured that equality as a hierarchy within the household with the father as head and thus replicated the power structure the Tudors were seeking to establish. Socially, the rising middle class and patronage system meant that rank, economic status, and gifts were things to be carefully considered when favours were needed and, especially under Elizabeth I, these things became crucial when negotiating marriage. John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government: for the ordering of private Families, according to Gods word*, Whereunto is adjoin'd in a more particular manner, The several duties of the Husband towards his wife: and the wifes dutie towards her Husband. The Parents dutie towards their children: and the childrens dutie toward their Parents. *The Maisters dutie towards his servants: and also the servants duty towards their Maisters* (London: Thomas Creede for Thomas Mann, 1598) sig B1.


9 Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33:2 (1990): 265-8. Tokens were different from gifts in that tokens were personal belongings, particularly associated with their owner. The value was expressed in the relationship to the recipient, not in the material value of the object itself, thus underscoring the symbolic meaning of gift-giving. The token was ultimately meant to be returned to the giver, further emphasizing its symbolic significance. Because of the implied intimacy, Lady Lisle reserved her tokens for women, with one notable exception: Thomas Culpeper. When he requested one of Lady Lisle's tokens she sent it, rather reluctantly. For further examples of women's participation in the patronage system in the early Tudor period, see Harris, "Women and Politics" 259-81. A more detailed discussion of women's use of gifts and the patronage system in this period can be found in Chapter 8, "Beyond the Household—Family and Friends, Patronage and Power" of Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 175-209.


11 Klein 466.


13 Durant 111. Elizabeth Lennox was a widow at the time of her death. Elizabeth left her daughter to the care of her mother, Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, (aka Bess of Hardwick) and left the rest of her money to Arbella in trust with Bess until Arbella reached the age of sixteen.

14 Durant 111. Arbella was a claimant to the throne through her father, Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, who had married without Elizabeth I's permission. Arbella lacked independent means since James VI and Elizabeth I had seized her inheritance. Elizabeth granted Arbella and her mother a small annual pension, which left Arbella to be maintained by her maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Talbot. See Sarah Jayne Steen, ed., "Introduction," *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 5, 11.

15 As Queen, Elizabeth was exempt from the usual rules of reciprocity that govern the gift dynamic. An apt example is the annual tilts held for her ascension day, which presented occasions for gift giving to the Queen. In 1593, Robert Cary used the opportunity to present Elizabeth with a jewel to mollify her for marrying without her permission. These highly ceremonial events were expensive to the nobility who participated in them. Yet Elizabeth did not give prizes or gifts to the tilters, she merely thanked them. For a full discussion of the tilting pageant, see Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Wallop: Thames and Hudson: 1977) 134-46.

16 Klein 468-9. According to Marshall Sahlins, in hierarchal exchange, reciprocation does not necessarily bear an equivalence to the original gift, and the material flow of gifts can be in favour of one side for some time (Stone Age Economics [New York, 1972] 206. Mary Stuart tried to obligate Elizabeth by using gifts while under arrest in England and used the French Ambassador to send Elizabeth a crimson skirt she had embroidered. Elizabeth did not reciprocate and since Mary remained incarcerated, the obligatory relationship she sought was not created. Elizabeth also denied Mary's request for some of the Queen's gowns, instead sending some black cloth and suggesting a
suitable mourning period for Lord Darnley, after whose death Mary had hastily remarried (Klein 475-6, 469 [note 38]).


18 Brown 132-3. Sir Robert Sidney promoted his interests through the women of the Privy Chamber, as evidenced through the Roland Whyte letters, which cover five years of Whyte pursuing Sidney’s interests at court (133-4).

19 Brown 134.

20 22, July 1562, Ashley and Broadbent to Guildenstern, SP 70/ 39 fol. 119, cited in Susan Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony: The courtships of Elizabeth I (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 34. Doran points out that those men also wrote to the Swedish court were sent to the Tower. See also Christopher Haigh, Elizabeth I: Profile in Power, 2nd ed (London and NY :Longman 1998) 102-3.

21 For these and further instances of their political patronage, see Haigh 102-3.

22 Linda Levy Peck, Court patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England (Boston, London, etc.: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 68. For women’s influence at the Stuart Court, see Peck 68-74.


24 Gillis 20. Heinrich Bullinger (1540s) had written on the practice of handfasting, and had approved it, under the condition that a church ceremony not be delayed too long. Gouge wrote that contracted persons were in a middling state between being single and being married, and that taking the liberty to know each other in this state was a dishonourable practice (Gillis 20). Robert Cleaver wrote that those affianced should abstain from “the use of marriage” (sexual intimacy) (Gillis 52).

25 Ingram 190.

26 Ingram 136. The Medieval Church had insisted on individual consent as the basis of marriage and qualified this by recommending compliance with parental advice. The Protestant Church held that parents had the initiative in making a marriage and qualified this by urging parents to consider their children’s inclinations (Ralph A. Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700 [London and New York: Longman, 1984] 68). Thomas Becon’s Catechism (1560) advised children to allow the advise of their parents, whom are more learned and parents “to place children in marriage to their profit, ‘and that with the good-will and consent of the children, to whom the matter chiefly pertain; that the authority of the parents and the consent of the children may go together, and make an holy and blessed marriage’. “ (Thomas Becon, The Catechism... with other pieces written by him in the Reign of King Edward the Sixth, J. Aryre [ed.], Parker Society, 11 [1844] 372, cited in Houlbrooke 69).

27 Kreps 85. Mutual consent was the prescriptive norm in the manuals of the day. Of course, the marriage required consent of the couple to be legal. At higher economic levels, marriages were usually arranged to enhance patronage networks or economic ties. Daughters were dependent on dowries and these could be withheld as coercive means to assure a match. The age of marriage was usually quite young, avoiding the possibility of elopement and clandestine matches, although such marriages did occur and were sometimes accepted by the families of offending daughters (Harris, English Aristocratic Women 43-59).

28 Carol Thomas Neeley, “Shakespeare’s Women: Historical Facts and Dramatic Representations,” Shakespeare’s Personality, eds., Norman N. Holland, Sidney Homan, and Bernard J. Paris (Berkeley and Los Angeles, U of California P, 1989) 120. Of course, William and Anne’s marriage was somewhat extraordinary in that Anne was eight years older than William and, of course, was pregnant at the time of their marriage. But then again, their daughter Judith would marry a man five years her junior, Thomas Quincey in February 1616, so perhaps the age difference was not so unique. Like their parents, both Judith and Susannah seem to have made their own marital arrangements. (119-21).

29 Penelope Devereux was Elizabeth I’s goddaughter, cousin, and maid. She was also the Earl of Huntingdon’s ward. Penelope opposed her proposed match to Robert Rich and even spoke in protest at her wedding, but had little choice other than to marry Rich (Michele Margetts, “Stella Britannna: The early life (1563-1592) of Lady Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich (d. 1607)," diss., Yale University, 1992, 182-201).

30 Amy Louise Erickson shows that “throughout the early modern period one child in three lost at least one parent before age 21” (Women and Property in Early Modern England [London and New York: Routledge, 1991] 93). Anne Hathaway had, for example, lost both parents when she married William Shakespeare, as had Shakespeare’s mother, Mary Arden, when she married (Neeley, “Shakespeare’s Women” 120). The statistic notwithstanding,
women arranged their children’s marriages even when their husbands were alive and well. In 1635 John Green’s mother arranged his sister’s marriage while he was studying at Lincoln’s Inn. Upper class letter from the period show that marriage negotiations were largely carried out by women, whether their husband’s were alive or not (Erickson, Women 93). Further up the social scale, Barbara J. Harris has cited numerous examples of women arranging the marriages of their children, including the widows Dame Katherine Blount and Margaret, marchioness of Dorset as well as married women negotiating marriages for children by previous marriages, such as Lady Elizabeth St. Loe (Bess of Hardwick) and Margaret, Countess of Bath. See her “Women and Politics” 261 and Chapter 8, “Beyond the Household—Family and Friends, Patronage and Power” in her book English Aristocratic Women 175-209.

Erickson, Women 4. 


Erickson, Women 39, 3. Coverture debarred women from legal action; a basic economic exchange, coverture transferred the bride’s portion in exchange for her maintenance during marriage. As part of coverture, the husband was now responsible for her legal contracts and a guarantee of subsistence in her widowhood (a dower or jointure). Consequently, women were legally disenfranchised on the basis of marital status (not gender) and they had no legal remedy if a husband failed in his part of the agreement. See Erickson, Women 100. 

Many women also made wills dispensing of that property, usually, but not always, with their husbands’ consent. Domestic financial arrangements remain unexplored, and men could insist on their rights, but evidence suggests that women regarded their savings and/or earnings as their own. For example, Mary Gorse in 1637 discovered money missing from her pocket. She went to an astrologer’s, who described her husband, and Mary confronted him. Her husband confessed and returned the money. Bodlein MS Ashmole 418, fos 107, cited in Bernard Capp, When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 91. He notes similar cases at Bodlein MS Ashmole 418, fos 24, 261. See also Erickson, Women chs 6-8 and T. Stretton Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England (Cambridge 1998) 26-8. 

There were two types of marriage settlements in the period; the strict settlement that had the principle feature of entailing land on eldest sons and thus protected the principle of primogeniture and the separate estate. These latter settlements were used across rank since their principle purpose was the preservation of the wife’s property rights. The settlements were defensible only in the Court of Chancery and while there has not been a study of such settlements in the court record, Erickson estimates that 2 per cent of the bills of complaint identified settlements as their subject of dispute. See her “Common Law versus Common Practice: The Use of Marriage Settlements in Early Modern England,” Economic History Review 43:1 (1990): 21-28. 

In a separate estate, the property specified in the settlement was held in trust for the wife’s use. Another form of settlement was pin money, which was a specific amount paid annually by a husband to his wife, with which she expected to outfit household and apparel as befit her husband’s rank. Although unenforceable during marriage, pin money could be claimed up to one year in arrears once widowed. Another form of settlement, paraphernalia, included clothes, jewels, plate, and bed linens that belonged to a wife but became her husband’s property under coverture. This form of settlement was originally under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but in the early modern period became recoverable in equity. Although, a husband could dispose of these items during the marriage, those that remained reverted to the wife at his death (Erickson, Women 26). 

Erickson, Women 104. In the middling ranks, women’s economic resources were her labour and earning power as opposed to any portion she brought to the marriage, unlike the upper ranks, where women usually came with an economic settlement. Nonetheless, women and their wealth, in any form, needed to protected within the system of coverture (Erickson, “Common” 22). The majority of the population delayed marriage until economic resources could be built up. See Houlbrooke 66 and Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, Abridged Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 45. 

Erickson, Women 104. The Newe boke of presidents was published in 1543 and contained sample forms such as a bill in Chancery filed by a woman, conveyances that included the wife as a party (thus showing her as part-owner of the land), and an indenture of a marriage between a groom and the bride’s mother that allowed the wife to marry her daughter (presuming she was a widow) as she pleased, with what portion she pleased, and with the proviso that the wife could make a will disposing of £100 of the groom’s possessions. William West put out another early manual,
his *Symbolaeography* (1594), which included sixteen sample forms covering various settlements. There were forms to leave a wife worth £67 (100 marks) or £100 upon death, forms allowing a wife to make a will of designated amounts (£40 or £100), and forms to establish a separate estate. For remarrying widow there were forms protecting property from their first husbands; by establishing trusts the property could not be sold away by the second husband. As in other handbook, there were covenants reserving the widow’s right to marry a daughter and set the dowry as she pleased without hindrance from her new husband (Erickson, “Common” 27).

39 Erickson, *Women* 136 and Durant 77. Separate estates were widely used. For example, Margaret Edmonds had acquired £528 (largely in the form of debts due) while single and retained it in a separate estate while married to John Taylor. When he administered the estate in 1635, the residual of the estate went to him. It is unusual that Margaret retained the separate estate for herself alone, having no children. [Erickson, *Women* 136. (Margaret Taylor *as* Edmonds, £528/518 (1635) Midhurst, WSRO: Ep 1/53/1635 and Ep 1/29/138/027.)] The deed of gift between Elizabeth and George Talbot, Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, in 1572 was remarkable. In it, he gave William and Charles Cavendish, her sons by a previous marriage, the lands that she had brought to the marriage, while Bess retained life interest. In return, the Earl was released from paying substantial sums of money he had pledged for Bess’s younger children and for her debts. Since Bess and her former husband (Cavendish) had bought considerable land holdings, Talbot was giving up a lot, but Bess had also incurred considerable debt when Elizabeth I fined another of her husbands, William St. Loe, for abuse of office. (See Durant). For other cases, see Erickson, *Women* 144. It is significant that women below the aristocracy made marriage settlements at all. At higher economic levels women married younger and usually to older men, who were more likely to own freehold land. Since freeholds were passed automatically to the eldest son, this put women at risk in widowhood, and thus women in these types of marriage, where they were more likely to be widowed, were more likely to have settlements to protect their interests (Erickson, “Common” 36).

40 Fifty-seven per cent of the marriage cases in the Canterbury diocese between 1542 and 1602 “discuss the giving of gifts and tokens” at various stages of courtships, not just at formal occasions such as betrothals and official religious ceremonies, according to Diana O’Hara’s research. See her *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester; New York: Manchester UP, 2000) 64.

41 O’Hara 64.

42 O’Hara 57. Although gifts and tokens played a part in the litigation of courtship also, there was no unanimous agreement among canonists about their evidential status. Generally, gifts and tokens were regarded as expressing the mutual consent of a couple, but some jurists reject such objects as “fleeble conjectures”. Legally, spousals did require speech, not just signs and tokens. In the spousal, the giving and receiving of a ring was the sign above all others, legally, depending on the manner of delivery and acceptance, which signalled mutual consent to the marriage. The ring acted as a token of the exchanged promises in the ceremony. Of course, there were exceptions. In the diocese of Norwich and Winchester, couples preferred tokens other than rings in contracting spousals, which were delivered in a less solemn manner that demonstrated the value male suitors in particular attached to the gifts. In legal cases, gifts were useful additional testimony. In legal principles, they constituted only supporting evidence. See O’Hara 62-3.

43 Ingram 173.

44 Ingram 196.

45 O’Hara 74.

46 Ingram 197. In addition to such tokens, proof that the couple had behaved as though they were engaged was also offered as evidence.

47 Ingram 198. Interestingly, gifts had been cited as part of the proof of Anne Boleyn’s incestuous adultery. It was announced from Westminster that Anne “had procured and incited her own natural brother, George Boleyn; Lord Rochford, Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, to violate and carnally know her, with her tongue in the said George’s mouth, and the said George’s tongue in hers, and also with open-mouthed kisses, gifts and jewels.” Josephine Ross, *Suitors to the Queen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975) 3.


50 The ceremonies of the coronation were specified in manuals and included how a king and queen should ride, be dressed, and how their hair should be worn. According to the surviving official records, the day before her coronation, Mary was dressed in white cloth and sat in a ‘litter richly garnished... having upon her head a circlet of gold set with rich stones and perles’. In short, ‘all things there were apertening’ were done ‘according to the Presidents’. All the precedents were for a queen consort, however, not a fully royal monarch. All agreed that Mary

51 Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy” 900. Unlike the other Tudors who targeted domestic opinion by publishing records of events, such as Henry VIII’s record of Anne Boleyn’s coronation, Mary I did not publish a record of her coronation. On the whole, the Marian regime’s publication agenda was limited to religious texts and the shaping of foreign opinion (see Richards n. 21, p. 900)


53 Mulcaster 54.

54 Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy,” 905. Her cousin, the Emperor Charles V advised marriage on the basis of providing heirs and assistance to Mary, but was probably more interested in a marriage that assured him of influence over English affairs (Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy” 905). Edward VI’s minority had heightened the dangers of a weak succession, thereby placing emphasis on the need for Mary, who was approaching menopause, to marry and assure the succession (Ross 40).

55 Judith M. Richards, “Mary Tudor: Renaissance Queen of England,” “High and mighty queens” of early modern England: realities and representations, eds., Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, Debra Barrett-Graves, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 32-3. In the beginning, all of Mary’s councillors were hostile to the match, with the possible exception of Paget. Gardiner’s opposition was so intense it endangered his position. See Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy” 906.

56 Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy” 907. Richards pronounces the second to be more plausible, probably because of its diplomacy.

57 Richards, “Renaissance Queen” 34.

58 The treaty gave Philip a share in Mary’s titles and allowed him to assist her government, except in the laws, rights, privileges, and customs of her dominions. All patronage rights remained with Mary, the dispensation of which was reserved to the native English. The succession was limited to Mary’s children (Don Carlos was specifically excluded) and Philip was forbidden to take the children from England without the consent of the nobility (Constance Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 40:3 [1987]: 427). A royal proclamation of January 14, 1554 published the terms of the treaty to the realm. The proclamation did nothing to dispel the widely-held belief that, once wed, Mary could not function as a fully autonomous monarch. Protests to the match continued, ultimately culminating in Wyatt’s rebellion. Mary publicly promised to call a parliament about the marriage as part of her rallying support against Wyatt’s supporters when they threatened London. Parliament met in April 1554 and although it was ostensibly to ratify the queen’s marriage, two other acts were passed that were had bearing on the marriage. One declared “a queen’s power to be identical to that of a king” and the other impinged directly on marriage by defining the future relationship between Mary and Philip. The Act redefined the royal marital relationship:

> For the moore expresse explanation and declaration of the premisses, we your faithfull loving and obediyent Subiectes doo moost humblye besche your hignes, that it may be provyded, enacted and estabishedy by the authorytue of this present parliament, that youre maisteyse as our onely Queene, shal and may, solye and a sole queen use, have, and enjoye the Crowne and Soverayntye, of, and over your Realmes, Dominions, and Subiectes... in suche sole and onelye estate, and in as large and ample maner and foureme...after the solemnisation of the sayde marryage, and at all tymes duryng the same...as your grace hath had, used, exercised and enjoyed; or myghte have had, used or enjoyed the same before the solemnization of the sayde marryage... [-1 Mary 3, 2 ‘Anno Mariae Primo Actes made in the Parlyament’ (April 1554)]

Such a blatant redefinition of marriage reveals the anxiety created by the match; the redefinition ensures that monarchy is defined aside from gender and that one takes precedence over the other. See Richards, “Gendering Tudor Monarchy” 907-9.


60 MacCaffrey, “Place” 95-126.

61 The relationship between the queen and her nobles was celebrated annually by the exchange of New Year’s gifts. The Queen received gifts from her nobles, bishops, and courtiers and gave out silver-gilt plate in return (Haigh 61). Haigh contends “that the exchange became a bureaucratic routine rather than a personal giving, but the system did emphasise the close relationship between Crown and peerage” (61). The thought put into the New Year’s gift by
Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury and the personal gifts she gave to the queen, however, suggests that the giving was not routine but a chance to make a personal connection with the monarch to curry favour. In 1575, her standing with the queen was tenuous. The previous year the Countess had married her daughter to Charles Stuart without the queen’s knowledge or approval; in 1575 Arbella Stuart was born, further displeasing the queen. Also, earlier in the year some of the Countess’s servants had been arrested on suspicion of carrying messages for Mary, queen of Scots, who the Earl and the Countess had in their custody. In light of these circumstances, the Countess took great care with her New Year’s gift for Elizabeth, and wrote to Anthony Wingfield, the husband of her half-sister and one of Elizabeth’s gentleman ushers. He in turn consulted the ladies of the Privy Chamber; Lady Sussex provided detailed suggestions for an embroidered cloak. The Countess had it made and sent, and in January, Wingfield’s wife wrote “her majesty never liked any thinge you gave her so well....[She] sayd that good nobell copell the[y] show in all thirds what love the[y] here me and surely my lord I wyll not be found unthankedfull[] if my lord and yow ladywhip had geven v hundred poun& in my opennon yt would not have bene so well taken.” The gift thus reassured the Queen of the Shrewsbury’s loyalty, and although she hints at future thanks, no particular reciprocation is specified. The gift affirms the mutual but hierarchical relationship while gently coercing the queen into continued reciprocity (Klein 470-471). The gift also achieved the intended result, which was to smooth over the tensions of the past months through a personal gift.

In addition to the gifts she received from towns on her progresses, Elizabeth engaged in personal exchanges. In 1572, she took shelter from the rain in a barn while on progress through Oxfordshire. Waiting for the storm to pass, she was told by an old woman that the copyhold on her family’s small farm was about to expire; Elizabeth intervened by having her Council write to the landlord and requesting that the tenancy be extended. The chance personal encounter resulted in the extension of the queen’s patronage. Since the Council spread the story, the giving was not entirely altruistic. She did, however, give casual alms on her progresses in addition to the alms that were given daily by her almoner’s staff at the palace gates (Haigh 157).

By 1592, the crowd was so thick the arriving Knights could not get through. See Strong 172-3 for a full discussion.

The Garter Knights voted for new members, however, the Queen had the final decision of conference. Shrewsbury was brought from his lodging at Greenwich into the Queen’s presence to receive the Order. Cumberland was at Plymouth and the Queen refused for the Order to be conveyed by anyone other than herself (Strong 173).

In 1564, Bacon was banished from court for six months for covertly supporting the Grey succession claims. In 1579 both Leicester and Walsingham were banished for their opposition to the Anjou match. The banishment from the queen’s presence meant, of course, a banishment from her patronage (Haigh 87).

Peter E. McCullough, “Out of Egypt: Richard Fletcher’s Sermon before Elizabeth I after the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots” Dissenting Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 122-3. On 12 February, the council wrote seeking the queen’s grace. By 25 February Burghley was still being denied access (note 21, page 145). In March Burghley was finally allowed into Elizabeth’s presence, when she publicly abused him. He stood trial and was back in favour in late June (Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Elizabeth I [London, etc: Edward Arnold, 1993] 352-3).


Haigh 87. Leicester used such illnesses to garner the queen’s sympathy when in disfavour.

Haigh 104.

Doran, Monarchy 30. Despite the refusal, the Swedes persisted and in December formally presented the terms of the suit. In a letter dated 25 February 1560, Elizabeth told Eric that she was determined ‘not to marry an absent husband’ (Quoted in John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen." Renaissance Quarterly 43:1 (1990): 39). In September of that year, Gustavus died and Eric, now king, began to reconsider the marriage; he sent new, less favourable terms to England. Although he continued to pursue the marriage, Eric lost interest in the match when Elizabeth failed to show any. Eric did send a few letters to Elizabeth, but was looking elsewhere for a bride and in the autumn of 1562, became engaged to the daughter of Landgrave of Hesse. See—

Doran, Monarchy 32-5.


Once Queen, Elizabeth used the promise of her body as a gift to be given in marriage as a means of managing the ever-changing international political scene, and, consequently, whether or not Elizabeth actually intended to marry
has been a subject of debate. Wallace MacCaffrey, Christopher Haigh, Ilona Bell, and Susan Doran are among those who have argued that Elizabeth did intend to marry. See their works, Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony; Haigh Elizabeth I; Ilona Bell, “Elizabeth and the Politics of Elizabethan Courtship,” Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman, eds., Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003) 179-191; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, “The Anjou Match and the Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy in the English Commonwealth, 1547-1640,” *Essays in Politics and Society*, eds., Peter Clare et al (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1979) 59-75. John Neale argues that Elizabeth’s resolve to marry in the negotiations with Henry of Anjou (1571) was probably sincere in his *Queen Elizabeth I* (1934. rpt. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1957) 227. Carole Levin argues that the issue of Elizabeth’s virginity is more complex: “For while Elizabeth claimed virginity as her ideal state, and eventually resisted all demands on her to marry, she also loved proposals and courtship. These were not only politically valuable to her, they also seem to have had some deeper emotional resonance” (39). She also argues that Elizabeth considered marriage and that her failure to wed is hindsight (41) in her book *The Heart and Stomach of a King*. Allison Heisch argues that Elizabeth’s decision not to marry was “taken slowly, in graduated steps of wishful thinking”, but whether it was intended or not is ultimately unknowable. See her essay “Queen Elizabeth I and the persistence of patriarchy,” *Feminist Review* 4 (1980): 49. Others have denied that Elizabeth wanted to marry at all, a premise that began with William Camden’s annals. Camden reports that in response to her first parliament’s petition that she marry, Elizabeth responded that she was married to her kingdom, and was content to live and die a virgin. The chief problems with Camden’s account are that the speech he cites has no source in the Cecil papers or parliamentary record and that he was writing in Jacobean period. After having left the project, he returned to it at James I’s request and thus the work is a Jacobean representation after the Cult of the Virgin Queen iconography had taken hold (King 33-36). Josephine Ross asserts in *Suitors to the Queen* that Elizabeth never intended to marry and that she “lacked the normal inward satisfaction of sexual love” (122) although she concedes that Elizabeth came close to marriage in the Anjou match of 1579-81. Susan Bassnet argues that Elizabeth refused to marry from the beginning of her reign; having finally attained power, and seeing the examples of her sister and Mary of Scots, Elizabeth must have determined to stay single to keep the power she had. Bassnet does offer other motivations for Elizabeth’s resolve, such as her being the centre of a courtly love game. See her *Elizabeth I: A Feminist Perspective* (1988. Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), especially chapter 2, “This Virgin’s Estate”. Esther Clifford argues that Elizabeth had a “hysterical aversion to marriage, an aversion that extended to all things sexual if it is true that she said that a pregnant woman was no better than a sow” (39). Clifford attributes Elizabeth’s aversion to marriage to both her family history and personal history with Thomas Seymour, which included a lack of protection by servants as well as “her sexual disability” (39-40). See Clifford’s “Marriage Of True Minds,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15:1 (1984): 36-46. Larissa J. Taylor-Smith uses psychoanalytic theory to explore various traumas in Elizabeth’s life to explain why she did not marry. See her “Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15:1 (1984): 47-72. The essay is, I find, unconvincing. Elizabeth seems to have learned from the marriages of her predecessors rather than be tainted against marriage. For example, she refused to marry any suitor she had not seen, a lesson she probably learned from the flattering portrait sent of Anne of Cleves during the negotiations for her marriage to Henry VIII (a contention levied by various historians including King, p 39). Elizabeth also seems to have learned from her sister’s marriage. In 1560, she wrote Eric of Sweden that she had resolved, “not to marry an absent husband”, undoubtedly recalling the negative consequences stemming from Philip’s prolonged absences during Mary’s reign.

74 This particular line of argument is taken by Bell, “Elizabeth” 179. Susan Doran similarly argues that from the beginning of the reign, there is little evidence to support the contention that Elizabeth was determined not to marry. See her *Monarchy* 1-2. Doran points out that early portraits did use emblems of virginity, but were clearly representing a marriageable queen, not one whose power rested on celibacy. See her “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed., Julia M. Walker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998) 37.
75 Although Amy Robsart’s death was ruled an accident, the rumours of a cover up or murder persisted, especially since rumours about Dudley and the queen had already been circulating before Amy’s death. Following Amy’s death, Elizabeth had sent Dudley to Kew to distance him from her, and Dudley had distanced himself from the inquest into Amy’s death but the rumours and taint of her death remained. Cecil was also opposed to a Dudley match, worried that it would damage Elizabeth’s reputation (Doran, *Monarchy* 42-6). Her withdrawal was confirmed in January when Cecil was awarded the lucrative position of mastership of Court of the Wards, not Dudley.
Dudley turned to the Spanish for support for the match in 1561, and Elizabeth allowed these Spanish intrigues. The plays and entertainments at the Inner Temple in January 1562, including *Gorbov*, the masques, the *Prince of Pallaphilios* and *Beauty and Desire*, presented the dire consequences for the realm if Elizabeth did not marry and offered Dudley's credentials as consort. There was, however, no support for the Dudley match at the meeting of the Garter Knights in 1561 and at the same meeting in 1562, the council was divided. By the end of April 1562, Dudley lost Spanish support in his wooing of Elizabeth, and turned his attentions to foreign affairs. Susan Doran argues that in 1563, following Elizabeth's bout with smallpox, the wording of Parliament's petition urging Elizabeth to marry strongly suggests that it accepted Dudley as her choice, (he had a strong backing in parliament) but even if this is true, her council remain divided on Dudley as consort. If parliamentary approval came, it was too late. In 1563, Elizabeth was proposing Dudley as a match to Mary, queen of Scots. See Doran, *Monarchy* 58-9, 62-5.


Doran, *Monarchy* 132-138. Throughout 1572 and 1573 the French made overtures to reopen negotiations, but Elizabeth fell back on religion and Alençon's youth as excuses. Alençon called her bluff for a personal interview, which Elizabeth could not allow because of the religious persecution. The marriage negotiations broke off for two years in 1576, during which Alençon became Anjou.

The Portuguese throne had recently fallen to an elderly Roman Catholic cardinal. Philip was waiting to assert his claim to this throne, and with it, reclaim the remaining Netherlands states. From there, he could easily invade England. See Doran, *Monarchy* 155.

Doran, *Monarchy* 155-163.

Stubbs's attack on the marriage two-fold; first Protestant and Catholic marriage was against God's law and would be punished and second, it would not benefit personally or either state. It would not resolve the succession, nor would England gain a strong ally; thus it reflected Sussex's answer's during the debates in March/April 1579. Elizabeth suspected *A gaping gulf* was a collaborative work by opposing councillors at court. See Natalie Mears, "Counsel, Public Debate, and Queenship: John Stubbs's *The Discorvery Of A Gaping Gulf*, 1579" *The Historical Journal* 44: 3 (2001): 631-3.

Ilona Bell argues that with the treatise, Stubbs used the book to sway public opinion. Addressing the argument to Elizabeth and, simultaneously, to the people, Stubbs used the press to deny Elizabeth her freedom to choose a husband, a freedom she had defended since becoming queen. Anjou was, ultimately, unable to garner the approval of the necessary parties (queen, parliament, Privy Council, church and populace) for the queen's hand any more than earlier suitors. Public opposition to the match aroused by the treatise, the proclamation and Stubbs's punishment made the match so unpopular that it was, in the end, impossible, regardless of Elizabeth's desire ("Soueraign Lord of lordly Lady of this land": Elizabeth, Stubbs, and the Gaping Gvlf"); in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloria*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998) : 113).

The commissioners who ratified the contract were made to sign a statement which stated that Elizabeth was not obligated to marry Anjou until both were satisfied in all matters and gave Elizabeth a grace period of six weeks to reach a decision before the treaty took effect (Doran, *Monarchy* 182-3).


Camden records it thus in his Annals:

He ariued safe in England, and was magnificently entertained, and receiued with all royall courtesies could be expected, euident testimonies of honour and loue, which her Maiestie shewed apparently, insonmuch that on a time on the day of the solemnization of her Coronation (he being entred into amorous Discourse with her Maiestie) the great loue which shee bore him, drew a Ring from her finger, which shee gaue him vpon certain conditions meant an agreed vpon betwixt them. The assistants took that for an argument and assurance of mariagi was reciprocally promise contracted betwixt them. Amongst others, Aldegendy Governor of the City of Antwerp, dispatched messengers suddenly ouer, into the Low-Countries; where for great joy at the hearing thereof, both in Antwerp, and all ouer Flanders were made great bonfires, and their great Artillerie shot off. But this bred sundry opinions among the Courtiers: For as some rejoiced exceedingly, others were astonisht at it, & some quitestmcke downe with sadnesse. The Earle of Leicester who had laid a secret plot to prevent the marriage, the Vice Chamberlaine Hatton, and Walsingham, were most all malecontented, as if the Queene, Religion and Kingdome had been vndone. Her women which were about her fell all in sorrow and sadnesse, and the terror they put her into, so troubled her minde, that she passed all that night without sleepe amongst her houshold seruants, who made a confort of weeping.
and fighting. The next morning finding the Duke, and taking him aside, had serious discourse with him. The Duke retiring himself, after he left her, into his Chamber, plucketh off the Ring, casteth it on the ground, taketh it vp againe, rayleth on the lightnesse of women, and inconstancie of slanders. (Camden Bk III annals, London, 1625 p 12-13)

Elizabeth did take a vow regarding marriage, but not the one that historians usually cite. She did not vow to live and die and virgin, but ‘to marry no man whom she has not seen.’ See Thomas Hill, The most pleasante arte of the interpretation of dreams (London: T. March, 1576); quoted in Ilona Bell, “Elizabeth” 181. This vow was a condition that Elizabeth did not alter throughout her courtships, even though the condition was unprecedented. “As she told the foreign ambassadors, she had no intention of marrying unless a suitor appeared ‘pleasing her so much as to cause her to desire what at present she has no wish for’” (CSP Sp, 1:123). Elizabeth’s insistence that she would not marry anyone she had not met was a condition she would not alter since she has vowed “to see and know the man who was to be her husband.”” (Great Britain, Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs, Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas, vol. I, Elizabeth, 1558-1567, ed., Martin A. S. Hume (London, 1892; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1971), vol. XIV 70.) Emperor Maximilian though Elizabeth’s resolve not to marry anyone she had not seen was ‘entirely novel and unprecedented, and we cannot approve of it.’” (Victor Von Klarwill, ed., Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners [New York: Breton’s, 1928] 241).

The legal solution to Mary’s marriage (which inverted the usual power hierarchy) had proved unworkable in practice and Elizabeth’s enforced celibacy was equally as troubling since Protestantism advocated married chastity over celibacy (Jordan 426).


O’Hara 104-5. Alice’s brother was needed as a witness to Smith’s empowerment to act of Alice’s behalf. Alice would subsequently change her mind and deny having made any promise to Aderyn, although she did acknowledge having made a promise to Smith on Aderyn’s behalf. See O’Hara 104-5. C.C.A.L., MS. X/10/14, fos 229-31V, Aderyn v. Porter (1573).

Erickson, Women 94-5. Katherine was sued for breach of contract in the ecclesiastical court (Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings from the Courts of Durham, extending from 1311 to the reign of Elizabeth [1845] 226-8, also quoted in Gillis 48).


Elizabeth Throckmorton married Walter Ralegh, and the marriage resulted in their banishment from court, although Ralegh’s was temporary. Karen Robertson, “Tracing Women’s Connections from a Letter by Elizabeth Ralegh,” Mmaids and Mistress, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England, eds., Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford and New York, Oxford UP, 1999) 150-151. Catherine Grey married the Earl of Hertford, a marriage that was too close to the succession and declared illegal. The couple was incarcerated in the Tower. Mary had married a lesser servant of the court, but her marriage was also invalidated. See Anne McLaren, “The Quest For A King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England,” Journal of British Studies 41:3 (2002): 280.

O’Hara 44-45. (C.C.A.L., MS. X/10/11, fos 275-80 (1570).)


Ingram 223. W.R.O., AW/Delecta Bk, 1586-99, fols. 57, 77v. These cases were never common. For the period 1615-29 there were 34 in the three main Wiltshire jurisdictions, and 17 of these appeared voluntarily, often to get a marriage licence.

Ingram 225. Peter Laslett has suggested that tolerance for premarital sex was extended between espoused couples, but Ingram contends that local customs allowing such relations is insecurely based (Ingram 226). He offers the example of a case from Wootton Basset, in which John Parker and Margaret Webb were too long alone in a chamber together, and her uncle reported this to Margaret’s brother, who ‘would not like well thereof’. Similar sanctions were displayed in 1631 when George Cooke told Anne, to whom he was betrothed, ‘Let every man go to bed with his own wife; come, Anne, let you and I go to bed together’. George was stopped by the master of the house, Anne’s uncle, who asserted his own notions of propriety and refused to allow the couple to sleep together (Ingram 228; W.R.O., B/DB 48, fols. 27v-8; B/DB 46, fol. 50). Throughout the period, not all those charged with premarital incontinence could claim even an informal promise of marriage, let alone a formal one before witnesses. Attitudes toward antenuptial fornication were ambivalent, according to Ingram, but tending toward tolerance before the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Involved were a variety of circumstances and motives, and in the end, the line between bridal pregnancy and bastardy was narrow one. Besides, courting couples were expected to be familiar with each other and physical contact was to be expected (230).

160. She argues that both men and women engaged in gift-giving in courtship, but women were most obligated by them. "A man's gifts held, as a woman's did not, the implication of an emotional and, potentially, a marital bond, a woman's receipt of gifts implied consent to that bond."


106 O'Hara 77. C.C.A.L., MS. X 10/9, f. 28, Ralf v. Fryer (1563) and C.C.A.L., MS. X /10/12. fos 173, 175-6, Mayhew v. Throley (1565). Courtship gifts were conditional and thus there was an obligation to return them if the partner proved unsuitable or undesirable. If such gifts were not returned in a timely manner, citations could be issued for their return. Hence, Jane Bedford was required to take an oath that she was clear from Oliver Symons under such a citation. Jane's father answered that she would not appear in the court, but was told that her appearance was mandatory, since she was still in possession of Oliver's tokens, specifically 'a bracelet, a gold ring and other things which she must now restore' (O'Hara 77). C.C.A.L., MS. X10/6, fos 200v.-l, Symons v. Bedford (1558).

107 A notable exception was Mary Boyle, the future Countess of Warwick. Her father was the Earl of Cork.

108 Thomas Kydde, The Truth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murthering of John Brewen, Goldsmith of London, committed by his owne wife through the provocation of one John Parker whom she loved: for which fact she was burned, and he hanged in Smithfield, on Wednesday the 28th of June, 1592, two years after the murther was committed, (London: John Kid,1592). Reprinted in J. Payne Collier, ed., Illustrations of Early English Popular Literature, Volume 1 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1863) 5-15.

109 Kydde 6.

111 Kydde 7-9.

112 My reading here differs from France Dolan's, who argues that Welles uses her resistance to coverture (her keeping of her maiden name and her own residence) to defend her right to make such demands. See her Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700 (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994) 46.

113 Ingram 182. We know of these two examples from restitution suits. W.R.O., B/DB 5, fols. 30, 36; B/DB 10, fols 17v-18.


115 The commission of four bishops and six lawyers deadlocked on the granting of the annulment until James I appointed two bishops who would grant the annulment so that Frances would be free to marry Robert Carr. The cause of the deadlock was, in part, a lack of precedent for the case, which sued on the basis of non-consummation, specifically impotence towards her. The Archbishop of Canterbury was the main opponent to the annulment, refusing to grant the annulment since it seemed it was a case of an arranged marriage in which there was a lack of love, the solution for which was prayer. Among the reasons for refusing the annulment, interestingly, the Archbishop cited the Earl's testimony that his wife sometimes refused him sexually. The Archbishop, a man of integrity, would not bow to the pressure or bribes from the crown and as such spent his life in disfavour once the final decision was rendered. Shortly after the dissolution of the marriage, Frances Howard married Robert Carr, the King's favourite and the two were implicated in the death of Thomas Overbury. They were found guilty, but James commuted their death sentences (Le Comte 11, 32-45, 98-113). Whether or not the marriage of Frances and Essex was consummated has been the subject of debate ever since the annulment proceedings, and will undoubtedly continue to be debated by historians. There is insufficient evidence to make a determination on consummation. If Frances did, in fact, consummate the marriage, her giving of herself was a gift she was certainly willing to retract and re-give. The gift of herself in marriage was coerced when given to Essex, and one she went to great lengths to retract from him in order to give herself freely to Carr. Caroline Bingham has argued that Frances Howard's actions in the Overbury murder were motivated by her desire to be Robert Carr's wife, not merely his mistress, "Had she been content to conduct an adulterous affair with him, she could have done as many Court ladies did, and taken her

116 For specific cases of neighbours intervening in cases of domestic violence, see Susan Dwyer Amussen, "'Being Stirred To Much Unquietness': Violence And Domestic Violence In Early Modern England," *Journal of Women's History* 1994 6(2): esp. 78-83. She cites examples of women separating from abusive husbands with community support and women using the scrutiny of neighbours to protect themselves. She argues that because the family was a public institution, neighbours and family would intervene when domestic violence exceeded the acceptable parameters (it was accepted, but with rules—it was to be a correction of a specific fault, not generalized anger). Wives had a public role, in marketing and provisioning the household, and were, therefore, difficult to isolate. The beating of a wife was a public matter, and she did not believe that it resulted from her failure as a wife but rather from her husband's abuse of his power. A wife who suffered a beating could ask for intervention, and she usually got it, although such measures were not foolproof.
Chapter Three: "The gift hath made me happy": Redefining the Gift in *The Merchant of Venice*

I explore the dynamics of gift exchange in *The Merchant of Venice* by focusing on Portia’s and Jessica’s fashioning of themselves as gifts in marriage. Although inspired by Karen Newman’s essay “Portia’s Ring,” I argue that the economic metaphor that Portia uses in her betrothal speech is used to separate herself from her dowry. In doing so, Portia endows herself with a far greater value than the material items that she bestows on Bassanio and it is this gift of herself that he cannot adequately reciprocate. Bassanio, as a man with a keen understanding of the gift dynamic, is thus indebted to Portia as a person and to Portia as a bestower of economic gifts, but she ensures that he is bound to her more than her money. Similarly, I consider Jessica and the agency she takes in her marriage to Lorenzo. She gives herself to Lorenzo to change status from Jew to Christian, but her entry into Christian society is not fully accepted and she is left in a kind of limbo; neither Christian nor Jew, Jessica is increasingly marginalized. Lorenzo’s failure to reciprocate her gifts, including the dowry she steals from her father, shows that he does not value her as a gift. Portia and Jessica thus use the same gift strategy, but have different outcomes. Through the juxtaposition the play explores not just women’s use of gifts and their fashioning of themselves of gifts, but the consequences of that giving, which is not always positive. Through the responses of the husbands, Bassanio and Lorenzo, it becomes apparent that women’s giving, like the venture for Portia, runs the risk of failure.

*The Merchant of Venice* is dominated by gift exchange, ranging from easily reciprocated gifts, such as a dish of doves, to less easily reciprocated or unreciprocated gifts, such as Portia’s and Jessica’s giving of themselves in marriage. Reciprocation is an important facet of the gift and is important to this play because gifts are carefully calculated, with varying results. This calculated reciprocation arises at key moments in the play; the dish of doves, for example, is
intended to achieve peace with Shylock but is redirected and, with the addition of Lancelot himself, is used to attain a new domestic position. I focus on these instances of calculated reciprocation that involves commodification of the self, especially because the success of such giving is left open to question at the play’s conclusion. Jessica gives to gain Christian status, but is left in a kind of social limbo; no longer a Jew, she is not accepted as a Christian. The final ring episode is also symbolic of calculated giving, since I read it not as a trial of the husbands as some critics have suggested, but a critique and expression of the gift system. The scene shows that giving is not so much about dominance as the need for appropriate forms of gifts, and specifically, is about the gift of self in marriage. Gifts are represented as a good thing in the play, but the varying degrees of success of Portia’s and Jessica’s use of gifts, and of themselves as gifts within the play, suggest that while gift exchange was a social power women could access, gifts do not ensure a positive outcome, but are part of a complex, dynamic exchange and may, in fact, fail. Shakespeare thus explores positive and negative aspects of women’s participation in gift exchange. In doing so, he complicates the comic genre, since the marriages take place in the middle of the play, and in one instance the happiness of the couple is in question by the play’s conclusion while the two other marriages have their consummation deferred beyond the scope of the play, and their happiness is only temporarily settled. Antonio remains unmarried but is not a lone figure, since he is bound to Portia and Bassanio through the bonds of the gift in an uneasy threesome. Consequently, Merchant ends with unresolved questions and thus defies its comic genre because the play cannot contain the questions it raises about women’s giving and their giving of themselves.
Old Gobbo's dish of doves: the calculated gift paradigm

Old Gobbo's dish of doves has been read as an example of a free gift, given without expectation of reciprocation. Old Gobbo's gift, however, does provide a connection to Mauss's gift exchange system. Aware that relations between Lancelot and Shylock are strained, Old Gobbo brings the dish of doves as “a present” (2.2.95) for Shylock. Lacking monetary value, the doves have a weighted symbolic value as the Christian emblem of peace. The prestation therefore has the ulterior motive of buying peace, even with a Jew; the symbol may be Christian, but the gift transcends religious boundaries, evidenced as Old Gobbo addresses Lancelot: “How dost thou and thy master agree? I have brought him a present. How ’gree you now?” (2.2.94-6). Unspecified at this point, the gift’s value lies in the social relationship it articulates, not in the object’s monetary value, and Old Gobbo clearly expects his present will facilitate an improvement in the relationship between his son and Shylock. Old Gobbo’s gift is therefore part of an interested exchange, not the act of free giving Michael Shurgot describes in his theological reading. Lancelot’s subsequent appropriation and redirection of the gift to Bassanio pushes it into the commercial exchanges that characterize Venice. Telling his father “My master’s a very Jew. Give him a present?—give him a halter!” (2.2.99-100), Lancelot clearly rejects forging any social relationship with his master Shylock. Threatening to run away, Lancelot urges his father to give the gift to Bassanio and, in an addition that is crucial, Lancelot commodifies himself as part of the exchange, offering the dish of doves and himself when seeking a place in Bassanio’s household and, calculatively, the reciprocal gift of a “rare new liver[y]” (2.2.103-4). Old Gobbo’s gift is thus redirected to Bassanio, prefaced as a reciprocal exchange: “I have here a dish of doves that I would bestow upon your worship, and my suit is—” (2.2.129-30), which Lancelot interrupts with the offer of himself in service to
Bassanio. Lancelot’s offer of himself as simultaneous gift and self-negotiated commodity is not just for the new livery; Lancelot seeks a place in Bassanio’s household because he seeks a change in social status—to be the servant of a Christian nobleman rather than that of Jewish moneylender. That Shylock has already preferred Lancelot to Bassanio is a moot point; what the scene shows is that the act of giving is not the free giving Shurgot describes, but rather the exchange dynamic links giving to calculated reciprocation while demonstrating that business can be transacted via gifts rather than contract in Venice.\textsuperscript{6}

**Jessica: the unappreciated gift**

Like Lancelot, Jessica gives herself as a gift and does so, partly, in the hope of bettering her social position since she will attain Christian status by marrying Lorenzo. Jessica is initially presented as constrained by her father, like Portia, but Shylock seeks to keep his daughter locked away, hoarding her rather than commodifying her in marriage.\textsuperscript{7} Jessica’s first appearance in the play displays her own struggle with such parental control; she declares, “Our house is hell” (2.3.2), yet she grapples with disobeying her father:

\begin{quote}
Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father’s child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood
I am not to his manners (2.3.16-20).
\end{quote}

The struggle echoes that of Lancelot a few scenes before; where Lancelot wrestled with his conscience about running away from Shylock, whom he called “a kind of devil” (2.2.22), Jessica’s struggle also echoes that of Portia who chafes against the will of her dead father. Yet, where Portia decides to remain an obedient daughter and manipulate the gift system from within, Lancelot and Jessica use the gift system as a means of escape—Lancelot redirects the dish of doves and adds himself to the bargain to gain the position in Bassanio’s household; Jessica uses herself as a gift and steals a dowry to marry into Christian society, seeking to
become a “Christian and [Lorenzo’s] loving wife” (2.3.21 my emphasis). Critics have noted that Jessica seems to assume that her conversion upon marriage is a given fact. Yet, Jessica’s wording opens up an intriguing possibility, and merits close attention: “O Lorenzo,/ If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,/ Become a Christian and thy loving wife” (2.3.19-21). Since she is giving up her status as a rich Jew’s daughter, Jessica has much to lose socially and economically. Conversion means a complete social break with the Jewish community and, as Shylock’s only heir, she is giving up her future, secured inheritance for Lorenzo (though she does steal some of it), a man who has little financial solubility. Given that this is a play in which giving is always calculated, one must ask, what exactly is Lorenzo’s “promise”? If Jessica is seeking Christian status and marriage, her statement suggests that Lorenzo has promised both of these things to her and it is for both of these things that she is giving herself. Although she does not explicitly fashion herself as a gift, there is an implicit giving of herself in the elopement scene: “Lorenzo, certain, and my love indeed/ For who love I so much? And now who knows/ But you, Lorenzo, whether I am yours?”. Lorenzo acknowledges and accepts this gift with “Heaven and thy thoughts are witness that thou art” (2.6.29-32). The impromptu giving of self is sealed with Jessica throwing down the casket of stolen coins and jewels and it is she who is responsible, despite what Antonio later says (4.1.384-5), for the theft and the gift.

Jessica’s elopement is not a simple matter of a daughter undermining her father’s power in her marriage. Her words “I have a father, you a daughter lost” (2.5.56) express more than regret; as a Jew marrying a Christian Jessica has crossed religious, cultural, and social barriers that cannot be restored. Her status as Shylock’s (lost) possession is displayed as he raises the Duke to find her and blames the Christian community that stole her. Camille Slights has argued that Jessica’s break with the past is “a decision to forfeit her isolated security as a rich Jew’s
daughter in order to become part of the familial, social, and divine harmonies that bind people
together in Christian society." Jessica certainly forfeits the former but the argument among
Shylock, Salerio and Solanio in 3.1 shows that her attempt to attain the latter proves
problematic. The ducats Jessica stole can easily change their meaning; once Shylock’s but
stolen by Jessica who has married the Christian Lorenzo, the ducats easily convert in Shylock’s
lament from his ducats to “Christian ducats” because they are “[f]led with a Christian” (2.8.16).
Jessica’s conversion, however, is not so easily achieved. Salerio and Solanio taunt Shylock
with Jessica’s flight and deny that she is damned for it, also denying any inheritance to her
Jewishness (3.1), which makes it appear as though her conversion is a fait accompli. Of course,
Jessica’s conversion is used against Shylock as an outsider, a kind of closing of social rank. A
few scenes later, however, doubts are cast on the acceptance of that conversion within the
Christian community. Lancelot teases Jessica, telling her that she is damned because she is the
daughter of a Jew (3.5). Underlying the joke is the sense that Jessica’s conversion is not fully
achieved by marriage, since she remains a Jew’s daughter and the question of inheritance
lingers. James Shapiro’s work has shown that in early modern period the medieval conceptions
of Jewish identity that had been based on biological, social and religious grounds began to be
questioned and challenged by the emerging concepts of nationhood and race. Within the play,
Jessica’s objectives seem to be threefold, to escape from Shylock and his reputation, to marry
Lorenzo and, thereby, to gain entry into Christian society, all three of which she plans to
achieve all three by stealing a dowry and fashioning herself as a gift. Her considerations are
what she is losing and gaining in the world, which places emphasis on her giving; there does not
seem to be a theological consideration to her decision.
The consequences of Jessica’s giving, however, are not ones she can control and events do not turn out as she expected. When she arrives in Belmont, she is unwelcomed and unnamed, referred to only by Graziano who calls her Lorenzo’s “infidel” (3.2.216). Graziano is in a joking mood having just laid a wager for the first son in the marriages, but the remark is hardly a segue to the comfort he sends when he bids Nerissa to “cheer yon stranger” (3.2.234), a welcome that comes twenty lines after Jessica has arrived. More importantly, it is Graziano who notices Jessica’s need of comfort, not her husband Lorenzo, and Nerissa is a stranger to Jessica, as the two have not even been introduced. Calling Jessica “infidel” and “stranger”, simultaneously, signals her status as an outsider and is a reversal from having earlier called her a “gentile and no Jew” (2.6.51), a reversal emphasized by the fact that Graziano later calls Shylock an “infidel” (4.1.331) during the trial. Jessica does have important information about Antonio’s bond forfeiture, but it only serves to underscore her marginalization:

When I was with him [Shylock] I have heard him swear
To Tubal and to Cush, his countrymen,
That he would rather have Antonio’s flesh
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him; and I know, my lord,
If law, authority, and power deny not,
It will go hard with poor Antonio. (3.2.282-8)

Here she excludes herself from the Jewish community. The speech is given unprompted, however, since no one has addressed her and after she speaks no one responds to her; indeed no one speaks to her at all in the scene, thus emphasizing her marginalization. Her advice goes unheeded, moreover, since Portia sends Bassanio to Venice with money to pay Shylock “twenty times over” (3.2.305) even though Jessica has clearly stated that Shylock will not take the money. Her ambivalent status in the Christian community, not really accepted as a Christian but no longer a Jew, leaves her status unsettled socially and Lorenzo’s promise of Christian
status unfulfilled. She gave herself in married as part of a calculated exchange in which she anticipated a change in status, but her gift is only partially reciprocated. She has become a Christian’s wife and thus lost her status as Shylock’s heir, but none of the Christians forgets that she was a Jew and therefore do not accept her as fully Christian. Like Helen in *All’s Well*, Jessica as a Christian wife is “the name and not the thing” (*AW* 5.3.310).

Although the complicated issue of Jessica’s Jewish identity helps to explain her isolation, there is also the issue of inheritance. It becomes clear that Jessica’s gift has failed because Lorenzo neither appreciates nor reciprocates that gift. In 3.5 Lancelot, jokes with Jessica and the inheritance discourse is used again as he tells her she’s damned because “the sins of the father are to be laid up the children” (3.5.1-2); her only hope is that her father “got [her] not” (3.5.10), in which case her mother has damned her by making her a bastard. When Jessica claims her husband has saved her by making her a Christian, Lancelot denies her claim to salvation by stating an economic “fact”, “This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs” (3.5.21-22). Tension is created by the fact that, although she has married into Christian society, no one forgets that Jessica was Jewish. When Lorenzo enters, Jessica draws him into the joke, but it is also an appeal for aid, telling him that Lancelot has insulted them both:

He tells me flatly there’s no mercy for me in heaven because I am a Jew’s daughter, and he says you are no good member of the commonwealth, for in converting Jews to Christians you raise the price of pork. (3.5.30-4)

Lorenzo does not defend his wife, probably because he feels there is no need to; instead, he turns the joke on Lancelot stating that he shall answer better to the commonwealth than Lancelot who has gotten the Moor with child. By turning the joke on Lancelot, and making it a competition about who is more culpable, Lorenzo excludes Jessica from the merriment. His actions are somewhat callous; rather than accepting Jessica’s invitation to the merriment, he
appropriates the joke with Lancelot and in doing so defends himself. Consequently, the underlying sense that Jessica’s conversion is not accepted remains unaddressed. Lorenzo finally acknowledges his wife some forty lines later when he asks “How cheer’st thou, Jessica?” (3.5.60) and it is the second time in the play she has been identified as needing cheering. Although this time Lorenzo recognizes the fact, he immediately changes the subject to ask her opinion of Bassanio’s wife. Earlier in the play, it is understandable that Lorenzo does not counter Graziano’s greeting of Jessica as an “infidel” (3.2.216) in front of a strange court when arriving at Belmont because it would be indecorous. Yet, when Jessica apparently needs cheering from this greeting, it is Graziano of all people who sends her comfort in the form of Nerissa, it is not Lorenzo who offers it. Here, the threat underlying Lancelot’s joke goes unchecked, and especially in light of Jessica’s appeal to her husband, shows that Lorenzo fails to value Jessica’s gifts and again her sadness is registered with the question of her cheer.

Embedded in Jessica’s opinion of Portia is the valuation Jessica seeks from Lorenzo:

> It is very meet
> The Lord Bassanio live an upright life
> For, having such a blessing in his lady,
> He finds the joys of heaven here on earth,
> And if on earth he do not merit it,
> In reason he should never come to heaven. (3.5.68-73)

Jessica certainly is overestimating Portia’s worth, but there also seems to be an expectation that Bassanio should recognize that worth. This recognition is a cue Lorenzo certainly does not take when he responds, “Even such a husband/ Hast thou of me as she is for a wife” (3.5.78-9). Lorenzo’s response is probably a joke, but it is ill-placed. Jessica is seeking to elicit reciprocation from her husband and thus she draws him in to the joke with Lancelot, but her attempt fails when he excludes her. When he asks for her opinion of Portia, she intimates the need for recognition of a wife’s value, but again she fails. Lorenzo’s narcissistic remark that
shamelessly overvalues himself succeeds in drawing her into back into comic bantering, but her
tone is combative, “Nay, but ask my opinion too of that!” (3.5.80). Lorenzo wisely puts her off
with the promise that it will “serve for table-talk” (3.5.83) as they go into dinner. This scene
thus provides a crucial comment on Jessica’s marriage and is more than just playful banter; the
argument reflects Marshall Sahlins theory of “Balanced Reciprocity” in which a relationship is
expressed through gifts and where the failure to reciprocate a gift disrupts the relationship.¹²

The argument between Lorenzo and Jessica is truncated in 3.5, but is revived at the
beginning of act five as they play the game of “in such a night” (5.1.3) in which they place
themselves in the company of lovers from antiquity. Underlying the game, they invoke the
fates of those lovers by placing them in moments of betrayal or separation.¹³ Lorenzo starts
with Troilus, but as the game unfolds ends with Jessica’s betrayal of her father, which serves as
another reminder of her Jewish heritage and of what her moment of betrayal cost her—a father,
an inheritance, a secure future.¹⁴ With Jessica’s reply that,

In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne’er a true one. (5.1.17-20)

Her version of the night shows Lorenzo’s failings, positioning him as both a thief and liar.¹⁵
Critics have fallen into two camps to explain this game; either Jessica and Lorenzo are arguing
and the list shows that they are doomed, or they are listing the lovers to show that they have
thwarted the fate that befell them.¹⁶ Is she just following the narrative implications of the
classical tales in a merry jest? I do not believe so. Throughout the play, Lorenzo has failed to
reciprocate Jessica’s gifts and here she again calls for reciprocation by reminding him of this
failure on his part. The playful accusation of stealing her soul, alluding to the problems of her
conversion, first time draws on the theological implications of her conversion. She has given
herself and all she stole in an exchange that clearly was not what she anticipated since she remains on the fringes of Christian society and lacks the social and secure financial status she used to enjoy; even her tenuous status as a Christian has become a joking matter. Lorenzo does not appreciate Jessica's sacrifice of her status as a rich Jew's daughter to become a poor Christian's wife, and her conversion is something he takes for granted. Accordingly, I would argue, she refashions the exchange as his stealing of her soul to voice a sense of betrayal. He retaliates by calling her "a little shrew" and her accusation "slander", but "he forgave it her" (5.1.21-22) and amidst her claims that she would 'outnight' him the argument is again cut off by the approaching messenger. After Portia returns to Belmont at the beginning of act five, Jessica simply recedes into silence and sadness; "I am never merry when I hear sweet music" (5.1.69) are her final words and she is largely ignored for the remainder of the play. Her father's caustic assessment of Bassanio's and Graziano's willingness to sacrifice their wives is apt, "These be the Christian husbands" (4.1.291).17

Bassanio and Antonio: the gift understood and abused

Bassanio is one of the few characters in the play that understands that gifts should and must be appreciated and reciprocated and he is at the centre of the gift nexus of the play. Although various critics have considered him something of a cad, Bassanio's understanding of gifts is clear from the first scene of the play when he tells Antonio "To you, Antonio, I owe the most in money and in love," (1.1.130-1).18 Throughout the first scene, Bassanio's discomfort with his obligations to Antonio appears in his qualified excuses for having spent the money previously lent and his failure to repay the emotional debt. Bassanio is obviously embarrassed at requesting another loan from Antonio, and tries to evade the subject with a circumlocutory conversation. Casting his pursuit of Portia as business venture, he assures Antonio that he will
be successful. Bassanio’s reluctance to disclose his request for another loan, even one he feels sure will allow him to discharge all debts to Antonio, both indicates his current inability to repay the financial debt and implies his uneasiness over Antonio’s personalization of the transaction. Despite Bassanio’s discomfort during the conversation, it is evident that he understands that his previous debts, both emotional and financial, must be reciprocated.

Antonio’s personalization of his economic dealings transforms the contract into a gift, thereby extending the business relationship into the realm of friendship. By thus establishing social bonds, Antonio wins both social and economic power. Indeed, Antonio seems to reject contracts altogether, “making loans that do not seem to be secured by any written, or even oral, contract or surety. Certainly, Antonio’s loans to Bassanio are not contractual in nature but offered as generous bounty.” It is also evident, however, that Antonio’s willingness to lend or give economically and his conflation of business and personal relationships is a power strategy; not only does Antonio gain prestige in Venice, he binds the noble Bassanio to him. Some critics have seen Antonio’s motivation as homosexual desire; I am not interested in his motivation so much as his method. Antonio’s ability to give obviously exceeds Bassanio’s ability to repay or reciprocate the debt since Bassanio has, admittedly, disabled his estate, thus the inequality in the exchange both prolongs ties between the nobleman and the merchant and wins Antonio recognized power in the relationship. Antonio responds to Bassanio’s request for another loan by again collapsing the distinction between commodity and gift, transforming the loan into an open gift by offering “My purse, my person, my extremest means/ Lie all unlocked to your occasions” (1.1.138-9). Antonio offers an overwhelming gift (money, self, and all) that is both a commodification and offering of self to Bassanio. It is a gift that Bassanio cannot refuse because of need and their past, established relationship. Antonio is attempting to indebt
Bassanio beyond measure with the very thing that he hopes will get him free of Antonio. The gift is simultaneously a reminder that Antonio possesses the means to give beyond Bassanio’s ability to reciprocate, and thereby perpetuates the bond between them.

Antonio makes good on his promise and offers to try his credit “that shall be rack’d even to the uttermost” (1.1.181) for Bassanio. This seemingly selfless generosity ensures that Antonio will find inadequate reciprocation. He responds to Bassanio’s request for money with his usual generosity and the resulting flesh bond further indebts Bassanio. The repayment of the friendship, however, will prove Antonio’s generosity to be as usurious as Shylock’s interest rates. Antonio’s willingness to give so excessively to Bassanio, not just financially but to the point of risking death, has often been read positively, as generosity and selflessness, a reading that has also been given allegorical treatment such that Antonio becomes a Christ-figure, willing to take on the debts of others and lay down his life for his friend. Critics have recently raised objections to these readings based on early modern Protestant writings and the Aristotelian virtue of generosity. One need only look to Bassanio’s excuses about disabling his estate by living beyond his means and Antonio’s flesh bond to see how short he falls of Aristotle’s description. The genuine virtue of generosity, moreover, benefits the recipient. Antonio’s loans, in effect, do not lead Bassanio to become self-sufficient and responsible, they just lead to further debt and indulgence. Antonio’s generosity is calculated to keep Bassanio dependent upon him in order to elicit love and indebtedness. Shylock appears greedy, but the terms of his loans are limited economically by the rates he sets and temporally by the terms of the contract. Antonio’s lack of a contract means there is no such limit, signalled by Bassanio’s perpetual sense of indebtedness and by his presentation of Antonio to Portia as the man “To whom [he is] so infinitely bound” (5.1.135), signifying a debt he is unable to repay. Antonio
may not be a usurer in the economic sense, but just as there was spiritual usury, gifts allow

Antonio a social and emotional usury, the rates of which far exceed Shylock’s rates but appear

more socially acceptable because they are couched in terms of generosity and gifts.25

Bassanio and Portia

Of Portia’s suitors, Bassanio is the one who explicitly objectifies her and many critics

have noted her commodification as Bassanio couches courtship of Portia in terms of an

economic venture.26 Although Bassanio’s talk of Portia as an object of financial speculation

has unsettled some critics, it was not unusual for impoverished noblemen to trade their status for

the wealth of heiresses in marriage in the early modern period, as Alan MacFarlane’s work has

shown.27 Many conduct books of the period warned against marrying women of higher

economic or social status because, in practice, such unequal marriages resulted in the wife’s

domination of the husband.28 Under the coverture laws, Portia’s fortune would pass to Bassanio

upon marriage and thus it is not surprising that Bassanio would present it as security for the loan

he requests of Antonio. Antonio raises the question of Bassanio’s pursuit in religious terms,
calling it a “pilgrimage” (1.1.120) in the courtly love tradition and although Bassanio shifts the

images from religious to mythological ones, he creates an economic subtext that objectifies

Portia:

In Belmont there is a lady richly left...
...Sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages.
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
To Cato’s daughter, Brutus’ Portia;
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renownèd suitors, and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis’ strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her. (1.1.161, 163-72)
Bassanio not only presents Portia as a sound business investment, he assures Antonio of Portia's "fair speechless messages" (1.164) a guarantee of a favour and therefore success. The romantic pursuit of Portia is almost lost, subsumed by the characteristics of a commercial enterprise as she is cast as the means that will enable Bassanio to repay his debts. It is, however, a fairly risky enterprise, if one goes by this speech alone. Portia is mentioned only in first few lines; the remainder of the speech slides into classical allusion before broadening out geographically to the "wide world" (1.167) and mythically to include Jason and the golden fleece. Nonetheless, Antonio readily agrees to the assist with the loan and thus Bassanio is further indebted to Antonio's through the bond with Shylock.

Yet, Bassanio incurs further debt in order to buy gifts for Portia and as the only suitor to bestow gifts (2.9.85-90), Bassanio represents the dynamic of exchange, and of the calculated exchange found elsewhere in this play, since the gifts undoubtedly have the aim of winning Portia's favour in reciprocation. Yet, there is a pre-existing relationship between Portia and Bassanio and therefore he must know about the casket test, and Portia being barred "the right of voluntary choosing" (2.2.16) as she tells Morocco. The gifts Bassanio brings, therefore, can win Portia's favour, but that favour has no bearing on the outcome of the test. Knowing that Portia's ability to reciprocate is limited, Bassanio still sends the gifts, which makes them almost free gifts. If Bassanio is successful in the test, the gifts are still an investment that have won Portia's favour. In the test, Portia is the prize, a gift bestowed by her father upon the suitable candidate. The test itself, however, criticizes commercial values and endorses exchange; the gold and silver caskets express values of acquisition and self-interest while only the lead casket denotes exchange, since the successful candidate "must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.9).

Lars Engle has asserted that this dynamic of exchange approximates, vaguely, the usual early
modern English marriage settlement, in which the groom was expected to bring some money to the marriage, in the form of a jointure or surety.\textsuperscript{30} The jointure, however, was to provide for the wife in her widowhood and Bassanio’s gifts do not provide such financial security; moreover while choosing the lead casket shows Bassanio’s willingness to give, the jointure entitled a wife to a third, or half, of a husband’s estate.\textsuperscript{31} Bassanio offers no such settlement, although he expresses his intention to reciprocate her gifts when he states, “I come by note to give and to receive” (3.2.140) once Portia is won. Of course the offer is vague and there is little he can actually give, other than himself, but he has made the overture of reciprocity. The usual marital negotiations of dowry and jointure are absent from this play altogether, their absence a sign that this play is about gift giving. The scrolls in the caskets exert the usual paternal control as they deny the unacceptable candidates and bestow Portia on the suitable one. Once won, Portia’s objectification is reiterated by Graziano’s exclamation, “We are the Jasons; we have won the fleece” (3.2.239).\textsuperscript{32} Bassanio, however, shifts to the exchange dynamic. He insists that he has come to give and receive, and although Portia is won by the casket test, he asks her to confirm the results of the lottery. By winning Portia and her economic assets, Bassanio may be read as forging a social bond with her father since he becomes heir to the previous Lord of Belmont and has Portia bestowed upon him through the scroll in the lead casket. In a financial position to repay his debts, he is thus in a position to repay the economic bonds with Antonio.

Portia’s criticisms of her suitors reveal her dissatisfaction at her lack of agency but they also show a need for mutuality, and her father’s casket test seems devised to reflect this need.\textsuperscript{33} For all of Portia’s xenophobic wit, what she most criticizes about her suitors are those qualities that hinder the mutuality of social exchange.\textsuperscript{34} The Neapolitan prince’s failing is that “he doth nothing but talk of his horse” (1.2.39-40); the County Palantine “doth nothing but frown”
Falconbridge "hath neither Latin, French, not Italian" (1.2.66-7) and thus Portia cannot and does not speak to him; but the worst may well be the Duke of Saxony's nephew who apparently is a vile man and gets drunk every afternoon. Underlying the ethnic stereotypes is the fact that each of the suitors is self-involved in some way and it is this self-involvement that Portia criticizes. Her need for mutuality is linked to the casket test since her criticism of her suitors is introduced immediately after Nerissa's assurance that Portia's "ever virtuous...and holy" (1.2.27) father devised the test out of some dying inspiration, therefore the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but by one who you shall rightly love (1.2.28-32).

The question then becomes, who is the one that Portia "shall rightly love" (1.2.32)? The self-involvement that Portia criticizes in her suitors begins to answer the question. Although Bassanio is also self-involved, he shows that he is capable of giving. Her need for mutuality is also reflected in the casket inscriptions, which criticize economic values and the overvaluing of outward appearances, but crucially, Shakespeare deviated from his source in the motto for the lead casket. In the *Gesta Romanorum*, the source for the casket story, the lead casket's inscription was "Who so chooseth mee, shall finde that God hath disposed for him"; which Shakespeare changed to "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.9). The change denotes a denial of self-involvement and thus tendency to the mutuality that Portia has expressed a need for. Since Portia's father devised the test to bestow her where she "shall rightly love" (1.2.32), the casket is not just a general criticism of economic values. It is more specifically focused on Portia, and recognizes that her marriage would be spent with someone she would have to, at the very least, find amiable company. The inscription on the lead casket
denotes, accordingly, Portia’s need for mutuality and reciprocity. This need is one she expresses when she gives the ring to Bassanio, the disposal of which will prove the ruin of his love. It is Bassanio’s willingness to reciprocate, moreover, which makes him stand out among the suitors. His approach is announced with the gifts he has sent for Portia, and although these are an investment, intended to gain Portia’s favour, they signal a willingness to give and thus the mutuality that Portia needs. Since Bassanio knows how gifts work, that one must give in order to receive, he is someone who is attuned to social propriety and mutuality in relations. He also realizes that Portia must be wooed with gifts for favour, unlike the other suitors who think that the test must simply be passed and her favour will automatically be given. Although Bassanio would seem to be the sort of suitor the test would guard against because he is so heavily indebted, his comparison to the Scottish Lord suggests otherwise. From Portia’s criticisms, the two sound curiously similar; the Scottish Lord is described as one who

\[
\text{hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he hath borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore he would pay him again when he was able. I think the Frenchman became his surety, and sealed under for another. (1.2.76-80)}
\]

Portia mocks the system of indebtedness when describing the Lords fighting over her.

Although Portia mocks the indebtedness of the Scottish Lord, the test does not seem set to guard against such suitors, suggesting that it must be looking for something else. The comparison of the Scottish Lord and Bassanio suggests that it is the willingness to give that both Portia and the test are looking for in a suitor. When Portia learns of Bassanio’s indebtedness to Antonio, she dismisses it as a trifle,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{What, no more?} \\
\text{Pay him six thousand and deface the bond.} \\
\text{Double six thousand, and then treble that,} \\
\text{Before a friend of this description} \\
\text{Shall lose a hair through Bassanio’s fault (3.296-300)}
\end{align*}
\]
Portia is, of course, displaying her vast wealth with the increasing sums of money. Her condition that Bassanio marry her before leaving to save Antonio assures Bassanio's bond to her, and it is needed in light of the warning Jessica has given about Shylock refusing monetary payment of the bond.

Portia's betrothal speech employs economic terms that accept her objectification, as Karen Newman has shown, using a rhetorical manner that is also engagingly personal. Portia objectifies herself socially as the means by which her inheritance is given from her father to Bassanio and objectifies herself grammatically through the use of passive language as she is "to be directed" (1.164) by and is "converted" (1.167) to Bassanio's control. By objectifying herself, Portia suppresses her own agency in giving herself to Bassanio, creating the illusion that an unstated agent bestows her. The ring given to Bassanio ratifies the exchange as Portia takes on the subjected position to Bassanio's rule as husband and signifies her place in the male-dominated system of male power and privilege. The speech then moves into the future tense with the giving of the ring, and a projected loss of that ring, in the aftermath of which Portia has "vantage to exclaim on" Bassanio (3.2.171) and here Newman posits Portia not just as the gift-giver, but as Mauss's "Big Man" of New Guinea who gives more than can be reciprocated, thus winning prestige and power. According to Newman, Portia's giving to Bassanio, to Antonio, and to Venice in her actions at the trial, allows her to short-circuit "the system of exchange and the male bonds it creates, winning her husband away from the arms of Antonio."^38

Portia, however, first gave herself to Bassanio at the opening of the scene. She then frames the betrothal speech with this giving of herself, and stressing her own worth, transforms herself into a valuable gift. This gift is Portia's alone to bestow on Bassanio and she is therefore more than merely the means by which the dowry is transferred to him. As the scene
opens, Portia tries to get Bassanio to delay the casket test so she can continue to enjoy his company. Torn between her duty to her father and her desire to give Bassanio the answer to the casket test, Portia gives herself to him:

Beshrew your eyes,
They have o'erlooked me and divided me.
One half of me is yours, the other half yours—
Mine own, I would say, but if mine, then yours,
And so all yours. (3.2.14-18)

Like Desdemona in Shakespeare’s other Venetian play, Portia “perceive[s] here a divided duty” (Othello 1.3.180), but since Bassanio has not won the test, “these naughty times/ Put bars between the owners and their rights;/ And so though yours, not yours” (3.2.18-19). Portia is giving herself alone and doing so without her father’s consent. When she takes herself back it is so she can give herself again, this time with her dowry in a giving that is socially sanctioned. Portia then frames the betrothal speech by giving herself once Bassanio wins the casket test, and thus I propose that Portia, not an unstated agent, does the bestowing. Portia poses as an object in the exchange between men, as van Baal has proposed in his anthropological model, but she is a willing object, simultaneously given (object) and giving herself (subject). Portia begins the speech giving herself again, fashioning herself as a gift that she now has the right to bestow and, as with the initial giving, she is giving herself alone, separate from the dowry and any other economic consideration. Within the betrothal speech itself, she stresses that she gives herself alongside the goods inherited from her father at least three times: “Myself and what is mine” (l.166); “Queen o’er myself” (l.169); “This house, these servants, and this same myself” (l.170) and all within the space of a few lines. Although Portia does represent herself in mercantile metaphors, what she stresses is her worth as a person, a thing of value, with only a few lines dedicated to describing the actual financial gain—the “fair mansion” and “servants”
that Bassanio will enjoy and this financial gain, carefully itemized to emphasize the value, is each time linked to the gain of Portia herself, thereby emphasizing her value.\footnote{The speech ends with Portia giving the dowry from her father, i.e. the house and servants, and giving herself to Bassanio with the ring that stands as her “vantage to exclaim on [him]” (3.2.174) should he part with it.}

The ring symbolizes the giving and the conditions of that giving, since Portia creates a forfeiture clause, one which Bassanio accepts.\footnote{Still, Bassanio’s first action upon receiving the ring is to reciprocate the gift with an oath pledging to keep the ring. The ring becomes a multi-layered symbol of Portia’s betrothal, giving, and Bassanio’s oath given in reciprocity. It is this reciprocity that the casket lottery tested, that Portia’s criticisms of her suitors shows she has a need for, and that Bassanio has shown he can give. Although the oath is later transgressed under pressure from Antonio, it signals Bassanio’s willingness to give and his understanding that gifts require such reciprocation. Giving herself to Bassanio as a gift is part of a ritual; the casket test objectified her as a gift bestowed by her father but through her betrothal speech she metamorphoses herself into a valuable gift and emerges as the actual partner in the exchange, able to give the ring and place conditions on the giving and thus emerge as a dominant partner in the exchange rather than the object of it. This dynamic is evident as Lorenzo and Salerio arrive from Venice. Graziano, just betrothed to Nerissa, quickly assumes the right to welcome them and to send Nerissa to cheer Jessica, but Bassanio, who has just won Portia and thus Belmont does not assume the role of Lord of the manor. He does welcome the visitors, but does so after asking Portia’s leave, indicating that she has given something for which he is indebted, and I would posit that something as Portia herself. In giving herself; however, she has endowed herself with value, and this giving has overwhelmed him; thus his unease at assuming the role}
of master of the house. With the arrival of Antonio's letter, Portia quickly retains the initiative and her position as Lord of Belmont. Shedding her deferential rhetoric, she uses thirteen imperative verbs in sixteen lines (3.2.298-312) instructing Bassanio to return to Venice and save Antonio with her money immediately after the marriage ceremony. Her superiority in the exchange relationship with Bassanio is signalled as she states he is “dear bought” (3.2.311) providing an analogy to the triumphant Shylock’s statement that Antonio’s pound of flesh is “dearly bought” (4.1.99). Although Portia’s dominance is evident, so is Bassanio’s acknowledgement of his indebtedness and his willingness to reciprocate the gifts she has given.

Antonio v. Portia: revealing the need for reciprocation

Many critics have seen Antonio and Portia as rivals for Bassanio’s love, often with Portia as the winner. I think the issue is more complicated. Analyzing Antonio’s and Portia’s gift giving, and Bassanio’s response, demonstrates that Antonio and Portia may start out as rivals, but the rivalry is complicated by its gift dimensions such that they become, ultimately, something else. The gift bonds entwine them in a threesome with Bassanio, with Portia as wife and Antonio as friend, but Antonio is bound to Portia and Bassanio to both. Juxtaposing Portia’s and Antonio’s gift giving also reveals the dangers of gift giving. Having given all he has, including risking his life with the flesh bond, Antonio has not received anything from Bassanio or allowed him to reciprocate the gift; he refuses to accept Bassanio’s promise of a speedy return from Belmont (2.8). In the Jessica/Lorenzo plot, the failure to reciprocate a gift disrupts the marriage, and in the main plot, the same thing happens because Antonio’s refusal of reciprocation leads to the flesh bond. Only when his life is in jeopardy does Antonio call for reciprocation of the gift and taken together, the plots emphasize the need for mutuality and reciprocity in gift relationships. Martyring himself in the trial, Antonio does not request
repayment from Bassanio of the financial debts despite his ruin. Instead, his use of giving as a power strategy is evident in his behaviour surrounding the trial; Antonio expects “ever-increasing recompenses of Bassanio’s love” after the bond forfeiture.\(^46\) Antonio is not alone once the bond is forfeit; there are “Twenty merchants/ The Duke himself, and the magnificoes/ Of greatest port” (3.2.277-9) trying to persuade Shylock for him, but it is Bassanio’s presence that Antonio desires at the trial. His letter to Bassanio describing the forfeiture yields emotional power; couched in mercantile terms, it reminds Bassanio of the economic and emotional debt he owes as well as the extreme price Antonio is paying for him:

> Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit, and since in paying it, it is impossible that I should live, all debts are cleared between you and I if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter. (3.2.313-19)

By appealing to Bassanio’s love while simultaneously reiterating the financial debt he owes, Antonio is demanding a reciprocation of the outstanding emotional debt.\(^47\) Though willing to sacrifice his life for Bassanio, Antonio is not entirely altruistic in performing the deed, fulfilling Morocco’s observation that “Men that hazard all/ Do it in hope of fair advantages” (2.7.18-19). Antonio demands the reciprocation that he has, hitherto, delayed or refused from Bassanio. He makes it appear as if Bassanio has a choice “use your pleasure” (3.2.318) but then appeals to the outstanding emotional debt “[i]f your love do not persuade you come” (3.2.319), which recalls Bassanio’s earlier statement, “To you Antonio,/ I owe the most in money and in love” (1.1.130-1). Knowing that Bassanio is indebted emotionally as well as economically, Antonio calls in the emotional debt and in doing so extracts a kind of interest on the financial debt. He had claimed in the negotiations with Shylock that he “neither lend[s] nor borrow[s] /By taking nor by giving of excess” (1.3.59-60); yet he does lend money to Bassanio and by transforming the
loan into a gift, gives excessively to Bassanio. Shylock remarked on Antonio’s business strategy, perhaps noticing his conflation of gift and loan “Methoughts you said you neither lend nor borrow/ Upon advantage” (1.3.68-9). Shylock shifts terms here, from Antonio’s “excess” (1.3.60) to the more general “advantage”, a shift that includes the “love” he extracts from Bassanio; when Bassanio links the debt of money and love, it “suggests that a return of love may partially compensate financial debt, or vice versa”. Antonio is a man who insists his transactions be read in emotional rather than financial terms, asserts Lars Engle, and I suggest he does so by making the loans gifts, which allows him to bolster his reputation on the Rialto while ensuring that he can rely on reciprocation of the gift and during the trial he demands reciprocation in increasing amounts.

Throughout the trial Antonio appears eager that judgment be given and the bond fulfilled, requesting: “with all brief and plain conveniency/ Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will!” (4.1.82-3). Later, reasserting Bassanio’s debt, Antonio asks to be commended to Portia, “Tell her the process of [his] end” so that she may “be judge/ Whether Bassanio had not once a love” (4.1.271, 273-4). Therein, Antonio is using his death as a gift, and it is a death that Bassanio has been made to feel responsible for and been forced to witness. Antonio has thus bound Bassanio to him by not only commodifying himself with the flesh bond, but giving his life for it, thus bestowing a gift that Portia cannot possibly match. Antonio then offers what seems to be a release, only to again remind Bassanio how much he is indebted, “Repent but you that you shall lose you friend,/ And he repents not that he pays your debt;” (4.1.275-6 my emphasis). Michael Zuckert asserts that Antonio’s selflessness is subtly selfishness, but Antonio’s framing of the speech with Bassanio’s indebtedness wears any subtlety rather thin. Bassanio did try to prevent Antonio from taking Shylock’s terms; it was Antonio’s over confidence about
his ships and his misjudgement about Shylock’s motives that make the responsibility of the bond his and his alone. Yet he is able to draw on Bassanio’s guilt and sense of obligation. Bassanio’s unease regarding his obligation to Antonio is evident as he only offers his love when Shylock’s triumph seems assured. Using hyperbole, Bassanio states that he esteems Antonio above “life itself, [his] wife, and all the world” (4.1.281), all of which he would lose, and sacrifice to Shylock to save Antonio. Although the episode may be read as a sign of Bassanio’s ineptitude, the hyperbole combined with the timing suggests an emptiness to the gesture, even though Portia takes offence at it. The offer is, moreover, in response to Antonio’s request to convey the circumstances of his death to Portia, and Antonio’s reminder that he is dying to pay Bassanio’s debt, so it seems Bassanio is attempting to reciprocate the emotional debt Antonio has reiterated. The timing thus implies that the gesture is merely symbolic and Portia’s response undercuts the oath’s extravagance.

Much has been written about the significance of usury in this play. There is certainly a contrast drawn within the play between usury and friendship; Antonio refuses Shylock’s attempts to forge social bonds with the loan, “for when did friendship take/ A breed for barren metal of his friend?” (1.3.131-2) Antonio’s gives knowing that Bassanio will squander the money; even his chances of success with Portia seem slim, although Antonio does not scrutinize the proposed business venture. Antonio’s giving seems aimed, therefore, at keeping Bassanio in his perpetual debt. After the trial, Antonio again asserts his emotional power over Bassanio via Portia’s ring. In refusing to part with the ring, Bassanio again demonstrates his understanding of gifts by distinguishing between the economic and emotional value of the ring. In doing so, prioritizes the bond with Portia over the one with Antonio. Antonio invokes Bassanio’s indebtedness again, bidding Bassanio to send the ring, explicitly setting his “love.../gainst your
wife’s commandement” (4.1.447-8). Antonio’s presence here is a crucial addition to Il Pecorone. In the source the husband gives up the ring on first request without any prompting but Bassanio vacillates, knowing its more than monetary value. Bassanio is now faced with an impossible choice; knowing that gifts must be reciprocated, and reminded yet again of the extent of his indebtedness, how can he choose but to reciprocate the bond with Antonio? How can a vow outweigh the many gifts of Antonio? By sending the ring, however reluctantly, Bassanio confirms, through gift exchange, that Antonio’s claim on him is the stronger, a point Bassanio stresses to Portia claiming that he “was enforced to send [the ring] after him” (5.1.216), a gesture that was an “enforcèd wrong” (5.1.240). Bassanio is ‘forced’ by the decorum of gift exchange to repay Antonio’s many gifts. With the letter, the desire for Bassanio to witness his death, indeed all his actions in the trial, and finally the plea for the ring, Antonio is calling for reciprocation and increasing repayment of Bassanio’s debt. With a contractual loan, any terms would have been limited fiscally and temporally, but Antonio’s loans are gifts and, as Ronald Sharp has shown, a gift assumes a return while masking the expectation of return. Antonio delays Bassanio’s reciprocation, making the debt an ongoing and unending one, but when Antonio asks for reciprocation, it is ever-increasing in intensity and becomes a threat to Bassanio’s marriage.

The Ring Episode: limits on giving and reciprocation revealed

The ring episode exposes not only the dangers of excessive giving, but the tensions created with the gift obligations come into conflict. After all, gifts transcend religious and geographical barriers; they are used by Shylock and Jessica as well as Antonio and Portia, which means gifts are understood to work in the same fashion in Belmont and Venice. Portia has given more than simply her dowry with the ring, she has given herself, and Bassanio’s
dealings with Antonio have taught him about the conflation of economic transaction and gift. The multiple gifts, moreover, endow the ring with a value greater than its economic one, which is evidenced as Graziano calls Nerissa’s similar gift “a hoop of gold, a paltry ring” (5.1.147) and is amazed at her anger over the losing of it; Nerissa chastises him,

What talk you of the posy or the value?
You swore to me when I did give it you
That you would wear it till your hour of death,
And that is should lie with you in your grave. (5.1.151-54)

The ring’s importance is the oath he swore when accepting the gift, a fact Graziano does not seem to realize. Stephen Orgel has contended that Nerissa and Portia “have made their husbands’ love equivalent to the rings they have given them” but the issue is not that simple. Nerissa has probably little else to give her husband other than herself, and, in part, it is this giving that the ring symbolizes. His failure to appreciate her gift by giving away the ring shows a failure to reciprocate the gift, and his behaviour in the trial, where he wished “she were in heaven” (4.1.288) for Antonio’s sake without the reminder of indebtedness that is levied at Bassanio, causes disruption in the relationship just as the Lorenzo’s failure to appreciate Jessica causes disruption in their marriage. The ring episode stresses the value of gifts, the consequences of the failure to reciprocate gifts, and raises the tensions of competing gift obligations.

Karen Newman argues that Bassanio’s obedience to Antonio in giving away the ring affirms the male bonds and the exchange in women the ring represents; in thus losing their rings and breaking their promises to their wives, Bassanio and Graziano “lose the male privileges the exchange in women and the rings ensured.” The husbands certainly lose power by failing to keep the gifts from their wives, but Bassanio’s introduction of Antonio as the man to whom he is “infinitely bound” (5.1.135) shows the extent to which Antonio has extracted interest on debt.
Portia’s correction of “You should in all sense be much bound to him/ For as I hear he was much bound for you” (5.1.136-137) tempers Bassanio’s statement of the bond from hyperbole while recognizing the bond between the two men. Portia’s disclosure of her participation in the trial and her final gift to Antonio places him in the position of recipient and therefore erodes his power. It has been argued that at the end of the play, Portia publicly resumes her role as Lord of Belmont, referring to Belmont as “my house” (5.1.273) and commanding “Let us go in” (5.1.297), not waiting for direction. Portia, however, gave the house and servants she commands to Bassanio with the ring conditionally. When he gave the ring away at Antonio’s behest, he forfeit Portia’s gifts and thus when he pleads

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I left the ring
When naught would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure (5.1.193-8)

it is not surprising that Portia does not accept the argument or the privileging of friendship over the pledge to her. Instead she reasserts her worth, while reminding Bassanio of the conditions upon which the ring, and all that came with it, was given:

If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Of half her worthiness that gave the ring
Or your own honour to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with ring. (5.1. 199-202)

She is, simultaneously, reminding him of his failed reciprocity, since he had pledged to keep the ring. She then gives a lesson on proper gift decorum that is pointed at both Bassanio and Antonio:

What man is there so much unreasonable,
If you had pleased to have defended it
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty
To urge the thing held as ceremony? (5.1.203-6)
Portia knows that Bassanio did defend the ring, having refused it to Balthasar to the point of offence, and therefore the lesson is aimed more at Antonio for being "so much unreasonable".

The fact remains, however, that Bassanio has given the ring away and in doing so he has given away all rights to Portia, including his sexual rights, as she stresses:

Since he [the Doctor] hath got the jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me,
I will be as liberal as you.
I'll not deny him anything I have,
No, not by body not my husband's bed....
Now by mine honour, which is yet mine own,
I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow (5.1.224-33 my emphasis)

Portia now has her "vantage." She has taken back the house, which has shifted from "ours" to "my", but what the sexual teasing and threats of cuckoldry stress is Portia's assertion that her body is her own, a gift to bestow as she will. It is a gift, moreover, which she can rescind when her gifts are not reciprocated as promised. When Nerissa levies the same threat Graziano responds with anger, but Bassanio recognizes his failure to reciprocate the gift and responds by pleading for forgiveness, swearing by his soul to "never more...break an oath with [Portia]" (5.1.247). Portia gives the ring again, this time through Antonio, who pledges his soul as surety for Bassanio. How can one pledge a soul? Surely Antonio is making a grand gesture, increasing the value of his gifts to Bassanio; he has pledged his body with the flesh bond, so the natural progression for Antonio may indeed be his soul. Portia, however, "gives" Antonio his argosies and Antonio, forced to receive a gift, is thus indebted to Portia. He has pledged his soul to ensure Bassanio's pledge, she has reciprocated by revealing she was Balthasar and given him argosies, a gift that, while somewhat disguised in a sealed letter, he acknowledges as hers, and the complexity of giving and receiving insures that the bonds of friendship and marriage are intertwined, not short circuited. Antonio has seen the danger of giving without receiving and
has finally been forced to receive at the hands of someone who can out-gift him. The play ends with an uneasy conclusion, but Portia has a husband who understands gifts and reciprocity, and thus there is a promise of future reciprocation for her. It is an uneasy resolution, as reflected in Graziano’s bawdy and flat joke that ends the play, which extends the sexual connotations but more powerfully invokes the ring as gift and conflates the two as woman and token are given. The joke also reflects upon the consequences of failing to keep and reciprocate these gifts.

Finally, the spiritual value of the ring as a gift must be read against Shylock’s reaction to the loss of Leah’s ring. This ring was presumably an engagement present from Shylock’s now deceased wife, and by valuing the turquoise above all the other things Jessica stole, including the Frankfurt diamond that “cost [him] two thousand ducats” (3.1.79), Shylock endows it with an emotional value that far exceeds economic considerations. Displayed as an anguished widower who “would not have given [the ring] for a wilderness of monkeys” (3.1.114) Shylock elicits pathos because, of the various things that Jessica is described as having stolen, it is the thing of least economic value, Leah’s turquoise ring, that causes Shylock the most pain because he has endowed it with the greatest symbolic value. The loss of the turquoise ring thus demonstrates that although the giver is gone, the moment of giving survives and remains potent. His pain at the ring’s loss reveals that the memory of Leah lives on not in obligation but in love, aptly demonstrating the emotional value of the gift, which exceeds its material worth. Bassanio demonstrates his understanding of this when he denies Portia’s ring to Balthasar three times before succumbing to Antonio’s demand. They are the only two husbands who understand such bonds in the play.

The play asks us to compare Portia and Jessica in many ways: both are constrained by their fathers, both struggle with those constraints and their duty to obey, both bestow themselves
and their dowries on their husbands, and, in an unusual move for a comedy, the audience sees the result of these women bestowing themselves on their husbands because the marriages occur in the middle of the play. Jessica marries a man who neither appreciates her as gift nor defends her conversion and thus is marginalized, increasingly receding into silence. Portia marries a man who understands her need for reciprocity, but who is heavily indebted to a man who abuses gifts. The play ends with a complicated layering of exchange; Antonio and Bassanio are indebted to Portia, who is not the dominant partner so much as one who understands that gifts must be reciprocated and both gifts and reciprocation must be appropriately limited. She also has given Antonio lessons on gift decorum through the trial and the final ring episode, but whether he has learned them is open to question since he readily offers his soul as surety for Bassanio.
Chapter Three Notes

1 The Two Gentlemen of Verona (5.4.146).
3 Michael Shurgot, “The Gobbos and Christian ‘Seeing’ in The Merchant of Venice,” The Upstart Crow 4 (1982): 57. In Shurgot’s view, Old Gobbo’s gift of a dish of doves, which is intended for Shylock, lacks an ulterior motive and therefore he stands out from the other Christians in the play who give either in expectation of repayment or with an objective purpose.
4 Shurgot 56.
5 Shurgot does acknowledge this aspect of Lancelot’s behaviour, but he attributes it to the “un-Christian” view in the play that treats Shylock as other (58).
6 Critics have drawn a sharp distinction between the two worlds of Venice and Belmont, the former being characterized by business and contracts and the latter a fairy tale world or landed, feudal society. Gifts, however, seem to transcend the distinction. For the distinction, see W.H. Auden, “Brothers and Others,” Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice, ed. John Wilders, Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1979) 59-78 and Sigurd Burckhardt, “The Merchant of Venice: The Gentle Bond,” ELH 29:3 (1962): 243.
7 Critics have been divided regarding Jessica’s flight from Shylock. Some have seen it positively, as a move toward the Christian values of the play and others have condemned it as act of cold callousness.
8 Camille Slights has shown, in an essay that seeks to offer a balanced view of Jessica, “In Defense of Jessica: The Runaway Daughter In The Merchant of Venice” SQ 31 (1980): 364.
9 For a full account, see James Shapiro, Shakespeare and the Jews (New York: Columbia UP, 1996). Compounding the problem of a clear definition was the Inquisition; although some Jews converted to Christianity willingly, many others were forced converts, leaving the Spanish government to fear apostasy. Foxe has also an account of a false Jewish conversion in his Acts and Monuments (1570; London: Seeleys, 1875) vol. 2, part I, 276-77, as found in M. Lindsay Kaplan, ed., William Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice Text and Contexts (New York: Palgrave St. Martin’s 2002) 301-3. England had expelled the Jews in 1290 but did have Conversos living in England and writers were concerned with their reversion to Judaism (Shapiro 19). The most public of these was, arguably, Elizabeth I’s physician Roderigo Lopez, who was executed for high treason in 1594. Lopez came from a Portuguese Converso family and claimed to be a Christian, which did not stop the rumours stemming from his heritage; in 1584 he was called “‘Lopez the Jew’” in the libellous Leicester’s Commonwealth (Shapiro 73). Whether or not Lopez actually was a Jew is unclear from the historical record, as Stephen Orgel shows in his essay “Shylock’s tribe,” Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Valencia, 2001, eds., Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, Vincent Fores (Newark: U of Delaware P) 38-53. What is clear is that Lopez was a pawn in international power struggle between Spain and England, and more specifically, a victim of Essex’s plans for advancement by inciting an armed conflict with Spain in which he would play a heroic role. Under the various Tudors, religion has become a political issue not just for Jews but for all people, who were now caught between outward conformity, national loyalty, and personal theological belief. To be socially accepted, politically safe, and economically viable, outward conformity to the religion of the current monarch was imperative, personal theological beliefs notwithstanding. See Susan Oldrieve, “Marginalized Voices in ‘The Merchant of Venice,’ Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature, 5:1 A Symposium Issue on “The Merchant of Venice” (1993): 95. This religious problem further complicated the Jewish issue in England by heightening the fear of outward conformity that hid apostasy. Exacerbating the lack of a Jewish definition was the lack of an official Jewish presence, which meant that the English depictions of Jews in myth, legend, drama and stories for conceptions of what a Jew was, and the emerging notions of an “English identity in which color, religion and class converged” also intersected with the Jewish problem. Mary Janell Metzger “‘Now by My Hood, A Gentle and No Jew’: Jessica, The Merchant of Venice, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity,” PMLA 113:1 (1998): 53.
10 Janet Adelman reads Jessica’s speech as an attempt to ingratiate herself into the company by confirming the company’s sense of her father’s blood-thirstiness and defining his “countrymen” as specifically his, not hers (“Her Father’s Blood: Race, Conversion, and Nation in The Merchant of Venice,” Representations 81 [2003]: 7).
11 It also relates her to the larger culturally category of Jewish converts in early modern period, Samuel Purchas noted in the early seventeenth century that such converts existed in a social limbo; unaccepted by Christians they
were considered "apostates, renegados, fugitives," by Jews (Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [London, 1613, 1614, 1617, 1626] as cited in Shapiro 19-20.)
14 Burckhardt 250. He argues that we (presumably as audience and readers) are never permitted to forget the Jessica was a Jewess and Lorenzo a Christian.
15 Paul Gaudet argues that Jessica's charge of theft can, of course, be read as a conventional Petrarchan reference, or it may be read with more ominous associations such that "her soul is lost through an act of masculine appropriation." See his essay "A Little Night Music': Intertextuality and Status in the Nocturnal Exchange of Jessica and Lorenzo" *Essays in Theatre* 13:1 (1994): 11
16 Tennenhouse reads the situations that Jessica and Lorenzo cite for the classical lovers as undercutting the "lyrical celebration of the night and [Jessica and Lorenzo's] love" (64). Lisa Hopkins sees the classical lovers being cited as avatars of Jessica and Lorenzo's own situation. "Like Parrots at a Bagpiper": The Polarities of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice* *Parergon* 19:1 (2002): 116. Michael Zuckert reads the reminders of the lovers’ fates as reflecting on Lorenzo and Jessica's own love as well as the unfolding betrayal of Portia and Bassanio ("The New Medea: On Portia's Comic Triumph in *The Merchant of Venice*" *Shakespeare's Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics*, eds., Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan [Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996] 25-6). Lynda E. Booze reads the classical lovers as "ominous archetypes of bonds somehow shattered in conjunction with attempts to invalidate family or cultural allegiances" in her essay "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare," *Ideological Approaches to Shakespeare: The Practice of Theory*, eds., Robert P. Merriex and Nicholas Ranson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992) 30. Elizabeth A. Spiller argues that Lorenzo and Jessica banter these as "sentimental love stories" in which they insert themselves, understanding themselves to be inheritors of the romances "without being implicated in their tragic consequences" because, having achieved a success cross-cultural marriage by domesticating racial difference and thus achieved the union their antecedents could not (155). See her essay "From Imagination to Miscegenation: Race and Romance in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*" *Renaissance Drama* 29 (1988): 134-164. Austin Dobbins and Roy W. Battenhouse argue that the interlude is a jest because Jessica's and Lorenzo's love story has only a superficial resemblance to these examples of "pagan dotage" ("Jessica's Morals: A Theological View," *Shakespeare Studies* 9 [1976]: 117). Gaudet offers alternative readings of the intertextuality of the interlude within the play.
17 Shylock has been harshly treated by critics for statements about wishing his Jessica dead in 3.1, and his remarks are harsh. After her elopement, however, he does launch a search to find her and recover what may be left of the money she stole and in the trial, seeing how easily the Christian hubands would give up their wives, he does pause, "I have a daughter. / Would any of the stock of Barabbas/ Had been her husband rather than a Christian" (4.1.292-4). Although the evidence for Shylock's affection toward Jessica is scant, his use of the present tense, "have a daughter", despite the severance of ties caused by her conversion and his wish that she had a better husband than the examples before him do provide evidence of paternal affection even after her betrayal.
did the English Stage Boys for Women?” South Atlantic Quarterly 88 (1989): 27-8; Graham Midgley, “The Merchant of Venice: A Reconsideration,” Essays in Criticism 10 (1960): 125. Rather, the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio seems to be homosocial as defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a continuum of relations that may include desire but is distinct from and include fear of homosexuality. See her Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 1-2.


22 Paul Franssen has shown “human presumption in wanting to take the part of Christ and confusion about one’s own motives for doing good works were among the aspects of Catholicism that Protestants found most objectionable.” Paul Franssen, “‘With All My Heart’: The Pound of Flesh and the Execution of Justice” Critical Self-Fashioning: Stephen Greenblatt and the New Historicism. ed., Jürgen Pieters (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999) 93. Franssen cites a passage from Calvin, who made a rigid distinction between the Passion of Christ and that of humans:

Moreover, that mixing up of the blood of Christ with the blood of the martyrs, and forming out of them a heterogeneous mass of merits or satisfactions, to buy off the punishments due to sin, are things which we have not tolerated, and which we ought not to tolerate. For, as Augustine says, (Tract. In Joan. 84,) “No martyr’s blood has been shed for the remission of sins. This was the work of Christ alone, and in this work he has bestowed not a thing which we should imitate, but one we should gratefully receive.

(John Calvin, The Necessity of Reforming the Church, Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church, trans., Henry Beveridge, Vol I. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1958]: 164, as qtd in Franssen 93). Franssen points out that Calvin continues by showing that people have a tendency to be confused about the motives underlying their behaviour, a failure Calvin posits as the failure to “proceed from the pure and perfect love of God which is demanded by the Law” (94). Antonio seems to have a clear grasp on his motives throughout and thus, as Franssen asserts, his sacrifice in the trial actually is a kind of suicide. Christ-like sacrifice was not a thing, it seems, Antonio could reasonably achieve. Michael Zuckert has similarly challenged the notion of Antonio's generosity via Aristotle’s description of the virtue. The possessor of generosity, according to Aristotle, ‘will give to the right persons the right amounts at the right times... He who gives to those he should not... is not generous but may be given another name.’ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, ed. and trans., Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1975), 1120, 1126-130 as cited in Zuckert 7.

23 Zuckert 7.

24 Tovey 221. Antonio does this by buying Bassanio’s love with lavish amounts of money. Tovey does not explore the dynamics of the gift.

25 In the period there was an acknowledged spiritual usury as cited in Thomas Wilson’s, A Discourse Upon Usury, “Why didst thou not bestowe my grace and gifts to the profite of others, by communicating the same amongst them? Thus spiritual usurie is called the multiplicacion of the giftes and graces of god” (1595; reprint, New York, 1925) 190, quoted in Ronald A. Sharp, “Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in The Merchant of Venice”, Modern Philology 83:3 [1986]: 260). He relates to the conversions of Shylock and Jessica. He also ties to gift exchange in the sense that it increases one’s investment, such that gifts, like the Portia’s ring, are valuable but only if they are given or spent. It is important to note that his definition of the gift relies on Lewis Hyde’s formulation, in which the gift must be kept in circulation such that, Sharp claims, Portia is not distressed by Bassanio giving her ring away (255, 260).

26 Particularly illuminating discussions include but are not limited to Holdemess, especially 3-6; Engle 20-37; Zuckert 3-36.


31 Cook 91. Critics have argued over whether or not Portia leads Bassanio to the correct choice of casket, but as Harry Berger, Jr. has convincingly indicated that if he had, Bassanio would clearly be in her debt for the assistance (158). “Marriage and Mercifixon in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Casket Scene Revisited,” *SQ* 32 (1981): 155-62. This line of argument, moreover, tends to underestimate Bassanio; he is the only suitor who does not read the casket motto and, indeed does not need to, because he understands the logic of the test—his line of reasoning is based on the deceptiveness of appearance, a subject Bassanio would have a particular aptitude for since he is a man, heavily in debt, putting on the appearance of what he is not, a man of means who bestows rich gifts to announce his impending arrival.

32 I do not, however, mean to suggest that Portia realizes it. There is no textual evidence to suggest that Portia makes this equation between the mottoes and her need for mutuality in social exchanges.

33 Marianne L. Novy, “Giving, Taking, and the Role of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*” *Philological Quarterly* 58 (1979): 143. Russell Astley has also noted this tendency towards self-involvement among Portia’s suitors but overstates the case when he argues that Portia is “won by the only suitor whose love transcends narcissism” in his essay “Through a Looking Glass, Darkly, Judging the Hazards of *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Ariel* 10:2 (1979): 19.

34 History 32 of the *Gesta Romanorum*, translated and “now newly revised and corrected by R. Robinson” (1595) as found in Tovey 217. Shakespeare altered the source story significantly. In the original story, the caskets were used by the Emperor of Rome to ascertain the Princess of Amplus’s worthiness to marry his son. Shakespeare added both contestants and complexity to the casket test; the pious lady in the source faced a relatively simple choice between God’s disposition and the lusts of the flesh. See Neil Carson, “Hazarding and Cozening in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *English Language Notes*, 9 (1972): 169-170.

35 Lisa Hopkins similarly argues that in Nerissa’s speech “Whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you...” the operative words are “his meaning” (1.2), suggesting that a correspondence of tastes and preferences will guarantee Portia’s happiness rather than any absolute ethical schema in the casket test (112).

36 Sharp also argues that Portia gives herself to Bassanio as a gift in addition to her possessions, but sees it as an act of free giving (251). Portia is here walking a fine line and could almost have ventured into the contemporary marriage debate. Reformers were clearly against matches that did not have parental sanction, thus Portia insists that she is not Bassanio’s because she is not won. Yet Thomas Aquinas had drawn a clear distinction that limited the father’s power with regard to the Corinthians passage that was often cited when invoking the father’s power regarding the daughter’s marriage. The passage about parental obedience, wrote Aquinas, referred to matters within a father’s authority, but did not extend to those matters in which a person is subject under God, and regarding marriage: The maid is in her father’s power, not as a female slave without power over her own body, but as a daughter, for the purpose of education. Hence, in so far as she is free, she can give herself into another’s power without her father’s consent, even as a son or daughter, since they are free, may enter religion without their parents’ consent. (S.T. *Suppl* 45.5 as cited in Dobbins and Battenhouse 112.)

41 See Chapter One.

42 Harry Berger Jr. also argues Portia that carefully itemizes herself in this speech, but does so as a free and generous gift while relinquishing control and laying Bassanio “under a burden of gratitude beyond his means to discharge” (161). Berger discusses the use of gifts but not the gift theory.

43 Coppélia Kahn sees the ring as Portia’s gift, but one limited by a stringent condition. He must keep the ring, "or their love will turn to 'ruin', an ominous note reminiscent of Othello's handkerchief, but without the magic. Portia's ring has more to with rights and obligations because Portia is concerned with "vantage", defined in OED as gain or
profit, rather than some vague “ruin.” For Kahn, Portia “sees marriage as a contract of sexual fidelity equally binding on both parties, for their mutual ‘vantage.’” The ring thus symbolizes the marriage bond but it also carries a specifically sexual meaning, as alluded to in Graziano’s final lines in the play (108-9). Keith Geary sees Portia as giving herself as a piece of property to a new owner and the ring as “the symbol both of their love in its ideal aspect and of the legal bond that embodies it”. It is a contract that she spells out the conditions of when she gives the ring and conditions which Bassanio swears adherence to when he accepts the ring (62-3). Laurie Shannon argues that “vantage” lies not in the ring, but in “the generation of a new power out of the clear blue sky, as she works by sheer invention to establish leverage outside the terms of her father’s will has left her to be distributed” in her essay “Likenings: Rhetorical Husbandries and Portia’s ‘True Conceit’ of Friendship,” Renaissance Drama 32 (2002): 16. Harry Berger Jr. argues that the ring turns the gift into a loan which can be forfeit (161). Brian Vickers terms Portia’s conditions as a “penalty clause to her gift, unnecessary though it may seem”, and that Bassanio reciprocates Portia’s love, but does not elaborate further. “The Idea of Exchange in The Merchant of Venice,” L’Image de Venise au Temps de la renaissance, ed., M. T. Jones-Davies (Paris: Touzot, 1989) 38.

47 This idea is similar to Geary’s (63). Geary sees the letter as Antonio’s “desperate attempt to hold on to Bassanio, to bind the young man to him” in response to the threat posed by Bassanio’s expedition to Belmont and the letter as Antonio’s claim for payment of Bassanio’s love debt, fusing the language of love and commerce. Other critics have noted the manipulative nature of this letter. Robert W. Hapgood, “Portia and The Merchant of Venice: The Gentle Bond,” MLQ 28 (1967) 19-32. Leonard Tennenhouse argues that Antonio’s request when he cancels Bassanio’s debt “is suspiciously self-indulgent” (61). Michael Zuckert writes that “Antonio has a knack for saying the very things that will heighten both Bassanio’s misery and his guilt” (14). Barbara Tovey notes that “Such a letter is calculated to make Bassanio spend the rest of his life in remorseful remembrance” (225).
48 Engle 28, 24.
49 Engle 26.
50 Geary 64.
51 Tovey cites an interesting passage from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics that shows that had Antonio truly been selfless, he would have kept Bassanio away from the trial, not called him to it: ‘...to see [our friend] pained at our misfortunes is painful; for everyone shuns being a cause of pain to his friends.’ For this reason people of a manly nature guard again making their friends grieve with them, and, unless he be exceptionally insensible to pain, such a man cannot stand the pain that ensues for his friends... (1171b5-8) as cited in Tovey 226.
52 Zuckert 15.
53 See Tovey 226.
55 Holmer, Choice 262.
56 Jason Gleckman also argues that Antonio receives an intangible interest from his debtors and that Bassanio expresses a theoretical willingness to repay Antonio many times over for his loans, and indeed acts upon this noble desire” but does not go into further detail (84). For Gleckman, Antonio only lends to his friends and thus there has to be a pre-existing social foundation (89). I argue that Antonio uses the transaction to establish and exploit the social relationship.
57 Sharp 253.
58 Orgel, “Shylock’s Tribe” 49.
60 Newman, “Portia” 32.
Newman asserts that Portia short circuits the system of exchange and the male bonds it creates by giving more than can be reciprocated ("Portia" 30).

Critics have noted that the shock of the loss is also the thing that makes Shylock appear most human. See Tennenhouse 58; Maurice Charney, "Jessica's Turquoise Ring and Abigail's Poisoned Porridge: Shakespeare and Marlowe and Rivals and Imitators," *Renaissance Drama* 10 (1979): 39-40.
Chapter Four: “‘Father as it please me’”¹: Women’s Choosing and Refusing in *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore*

In *All’s Well That Ends Well*, Helen both manipulates gifts and exploits herself as a gift to achieve the marriage she desires. Having transgressed social and economic barriers in her marriage, Helen then pursues Bertram to his bed, forcing him to accept her as a sexual gift. Yet, because Helen seeks to legitimate her transgressive desire through marriage, her behaviour remains “acceptable”. The play stays within the comic genre but uncomfortably so, since the progression towards the marriage is halted and averted, and the ending forced. The play is more of a domestic tragedy, narrowly averted, and even with the comic ending, there is a sense that Helen’s giving is not to her advantage. Yet the tragedy is averted because of Helen’s unrelenting giving of herself, to the King as a divine gift, to Bertram as a wife, and finally to Bertram as a sexual body. The play thus takes women’s giving to an extreme by forcing Bertram to accept Helen sexually through the bed-trick (turning her into a forced gift) and in doing so almost shatters the comic convention. But Helen’s desire is legitimated in marriage, and Bertram does, however temporarily, accept her at the play’s conclusion. Shakespeare thus changes the comic genre with his subjection matter but the genre is also a comment on the issue of women’s giving. Even when carried to extremes, women’s giving can be controlled in marriage (hence the comedy) and it can be a positive force (restoring Bertram to his rightful place).

John Ford’s *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore* provides a complementary study to *All’s Well* because where Shakespeare averts the tragedy Ford plays it out and inverts the gift dynamic while doing so; Helen pursues Bertram by giving, but Annabella gives herself to her brother Giovanni secretly by refusing to give herself to the many suitors who are rivals for her hand. Annabella’s refusal of a gift and refusal to reciprocate that gift when directed to do so by her
father shows her unwillingness to be commodified in marriage. For both Helen and Annabella, the gift system allows them to resist their commodification in marriage. More importantly, it allows them to act on their transgressive desires; Helen pursues Bertram and wins him despite the differences in rank and when he spurns her after the marriage, she pursues him to Italy and his bed. Annabella’s also gives herself in a kind of marriage, but since her chosen lover is her brother, her marriage cannot be valid and her desire is more transgressive than Helen’s. Yet Annabella remains a heroine that transcends her tragedy and, like Shakespeare, Ford twists convention and uses it to comment on the issues he raises about women’s giving. Both Helen and Annabella use themselves as gifts to attain their transgressive desires while seemingly remaining within accepted gender behaviour, but whether their use of this system is, ultimately, to their benefit remains in question for both Shakespeare and Ford.

**Helen: the Dual Gift**

Both Claude Lévi-Strauss’s formulation of women as gifts in marriage and some of the feminist critiques of his work have alleged that women lack agency in the gift-giving process. What if a woman was given as a gift in marriage and simultaneously gave herself as a gift? The choosing scene (2.3) of All’s Well That Ends Well presents such a situation of simultaneous giving. The King presents Helen as a gift to be bestowed on one of his wards, but it is Helen who actually selects Bertram for her husband and when she chooses Bertram she gives herself to him as a gift. Her status as this dual gift not only collapses the subject/object dichotomy, it simultaneously transgresses and affirms what a contemporary audience would recognize as acceptable gendered behaviour. While Helen’s choosing of a spouse from among the King’s wards is a reversal of gender roles and thus transgressive, she fineses the problem by transforming herself into a divine gift, one given to the kingdom, “Heaven hath through me
restored the King to health” (2.3.65). Her agency in the healing is thus removed to a divine power, but she is the sole agent of that power, and thus a gift to both King and kingdom. By this gift, she has won the power to choose her own husband, as the King twice states in denying the wards the right to refuse her (l. 57, 73-4). Thus assured of success in her suit, Helen approaches the four Lords with an offer but when each seems to accept, she denies them. Then, when she faces Bertram, she changes tactics. Rather than presenting a suit that she knows he must accept, she again transforms herself into a gift, one that is hers alone to bestow, and she gives all to Bertram, herself and her service, “I dare not say I take you, but I give/ Me and my service ever whilst I live/ Into your guiding power” (2.3.103-5). The giving of gifts was acceptable behaviour, even if Helen has made a somewhat radical move in transforming herself into a gift. This move is one she makes twice within the scene, both in the King’s cure and in giving herself to Bertram, and the effects of her metamorphoses into gifts allow her to achieve her desire while legitimating that desire within marriage. She also forges an alliance with the King in which she will emerge as the dominant partner, yet remains within prescribed gendered behaviour and, unlike many of Shakespeare’s other heroines, Helen does not don male attire to achieve her goals.

**Commodifying the Self**

Helen’s ability to bestow herself on Bertram would not be possible, however, if she had not first healed the King. In order to achieve the healing, she both commodifies herself and offers herself as a kind of gift, collapsing the distinctions between the market and gift economies. In the source, Boccacio’s *Decameron*, Giletta of Narbonne also seeks a Count in marriage and although she is not noble, she is rich, and she gains the right to marry the Count by healing the ailing King, but in a less direct way; her reward is a husband the king will choose for her and it is
only after another request that she is permitted the right to choose a husband for herself, a right the king is reluctant to grant. 3 Shakespeare deviates from his source and, as in The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night, has his central female figure engage in gift exchange to mobilize the action of the play. In All’s Well, however, he deviates from both the source and Merchant by giving Helen neither social nor economic status. Unlike Portia, who can give lavishly both of herself and her wealth, Helen has only herself to give. That self is, however, also a body, a thing that can be sold as a commodity, as Paroles makes quite clear, and if it is a commodity, it is also a gift. By using herself as a gift Helen negotiates an alliance with the King, thereby gaining the right to choose Bertram as her husband.

Paroles’s insistence on virginity as a commodity has been regarded as inspiring Helen to action, and he certainly does this, but I propose something different from what has hitherto been suggested. 4 The conversation begins on the topic of how virginity may be defended and when Paroles insists that there is no defence, Helen seems defeated and proclaims she will “therefore die a virgin” (1.1.132-3) because none of the arguments advanced so far aids her in her love for Bertram. The conversation then turns as Paroles treats virginity as commodity that can be used for personal gain: “Within t’one year it will make itself two, which is goodly increase, and the principal itself not much the worse. Away with’t” (1.1.145-7). When Helen inquires “how might one do, sir, to lose it [virginity] to her own liking?” (1.1.148), Paroles answers in marketplace terms, “Marry, ill, to like him that ne’er it likes. ’Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth. Off with’t while ’tis vendible.” (1.1.149-52). The conversation has turned; Helen’s question is much more than an expression of female desire, 5 it is an inquiry into the market value of her virginity. Since her virginity is a commodity to be sold, it can also be given as a gift because the two economies were not mutually exclusive, and from this point in
the conversation Helen becomes increasingly active, taking control of the banter that began as a
nuisance to her. When Paroles inquires, “Will you anything with it?” (1.1.160), Helen responds
with what has been widely read as a list of conventional references to the loves Bertram will find
at court:

Not my virginity yet...
There shall your master have a thousand loves,
A mother and a mistress and a friend,
A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,
A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear:
His humble ambition, proud humility,
His jarring concord and his discord dulcet,
His faith, his sweet disaster, with a world
Of pretty fond adoptious christendoms
That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he—
I know not what he shall. God send him well. (1.1.161-72)

“There” is ambiguous, and may refer to the court, or to Helen’s giving of her virginity to
Bertram. In the folio the punctuation reads “Not my virginity yet:” (the Oxford edition
substitutes an ellipsis for the missing half-line), and the line has been read as incomplete due to
textual corruption. If “There” refers to the court, Helen may well be listing conventional
references, including those in the courtly love tradition. “There” can also be read as Helen’s
virginity, given to Bertram, which makes the list read as a series of possible gifts she will give
him. The ideas expressed in the speech show that Helen views her virginity as both commodity
and gift, and if “There” refers to Helen giving herself to Bertram sexually, as though she were
thinking through her plan, how she would achieve this aim, and how she might be perceived in
achieving it, then she is describing various things she will be to Bertram. She is also endowing
herself with value such that she becomes an all-encompassing gift, which includes negative
possibilities, by taking all of these roles as the speech moves from “friend” and “mistress” to
“captain” and “enemy” to “goddess” and “sovereign” and finally “counsellor…traitress, and a
dear” (163-5). It is when thinking of Bertram that Helen seems to forget momentarily that Paroles is there until she catches herself in the moment when she appears on the verge of speaking her desire by taking the allusions too far and thus revealing her desire to him. The conversation with Paroles shows Helen how to legitimately attain her desire: by manipulating the gift system. By the end of her second soliloquy, Helen seems to have shed her previous conviction that Bertram is unattainable because of the difference in their social rank and is determined to go to the court to heal the King as a means of obtaining Bertram, with the prescription left by her father, the famous physician, Gérard de Narbon.

Helen does not adopt a male disguise when achieving her goals of healing the King and marrying Bertram, which are male prerogatives, and therefore she must perform her actions in a way that the male-dominated structure does not recognize as a violation of gender or rank differences. Mary Free argues that Helen uses her linguistic powers, but Helen also plays on the stereotypes of women, performing and exaggerating the submissive female role, taking her cues from her social superiors. This behaviour aids her when she commodifies herself to enact her plan to heal the King. First, Helen must gain the permission of the Countess to go to Paris. Having learned of Helen’s love from the steward, the sympathetic and supportive Countess is doubtful that Helen will be admitted to try her cure. When explaining about her father’s prescription, Helen alludes to a mysterious element that borders on self-commodification, “There’s something in’t [the inherited prescription]/ More than my father’s skill, which was the great’st/ Of his profession” (1.3.240-2). In Merchant, Lancelot added himself to his father’s gift when presenting it to Bassanio and thus commodified himself as part of the gift. Like Lancelot, Helen is seeking a better social position with her marriage and thus as the end result of the gift, but unlike Lancelot, Helen does not explicitly commodify herself. I believe that the mysterious
something in the prescription is Helen, and that it is this combined gift that she will offer the
King as a kind of divine gift. But Helen mystifies herself and her participation in the cure. For
now, Helen tells the Countess that she will “venture/ The well-lost life of mine on his grace’s
cure/ By such a day, an hour” (1.3.245-7) and it is this willingness to risk her life that wins the
Countess’s consent and help in the endeavour.

In Paris, Lafeu acquaints the King with Helen by emphasizing her paradoxical status: first
he describes her more as a woman to arouse him than as healer (2.1.71-7) and then he
immediately undermines this erotic description by insisting that Helen is chaste in her wisdom
(2.1.78-84). Lafeu withdraws with an allusion to Pandarus, and thus Lafeu ultimately seems to
envision the meeting as a sexual encounter as much as a medical treatment. Critics have noted
the sexual connotations of the cure, but what is interesting is how Helen exaggerates Lafeu’s
sexual suggestion to make her gender essential. Indeed, throughout the scene she picks up such
cues from the King. He dismisses her cure, even though it is the “dearest issue of his [her
father’s] practice” (2.1.1.5) that has been hoarded. Still, the King dismisses her ability because
she is female and relies on the advice given him by male physicians, even though it means his
impending death: “But what at full I know, thou know’st no part;/ I knowing all my peril, thou
no art” (2.1.131-2). Taking this cue, Helen casts herself as a “simple source” (2.1.139) from
whom great things might come. When the King dismisses her, almost in desperation, addressing
her as “kind maid” (145), Helen invokes the myth of the mystical virgin, “But most it is
presumption in us when/ The help of heaven we count the act of men” (2.1.151-2). This
statement is an obvious reversal from her earlier soliloquy that proclaimed “Our remedies oft in
ourselves do lie,/ Which we ascribe to heaven” (1.1.212-13), and thus suggests that Helen is
invoking a trope to convince the King to try her cure. Appealing to heaven, she urges, “Of
heaven, not me, make an experiment” (2.1.154). When the King asks what she will venture on the certainty of her cure, the first thing Helen offers is her sexual reputation, a response to the King’s earlier assertion that he “must not/...prostitute our past-cure malady” (2.1.118-20). Helen has picked up this cue and offered herself as sexualized, yet quasi-mystified, gift in which she both seduces the King and ensures non-consummation by invoking the mystical virgin trope. Her offer is a deviation from the source; in Boccaccio Giletta only risks death. The risk of her sexual reputation was not a small one; her honour was linked to her chastity, as the vast conduct literature shows. The educator Juan Luis Vives was quite frank on the subject “As for a woman [she] hath no other charge to see to, but her honestie and chastitie.” The King assents and it is then that Helen negotiates what she wants in return, the right to choose “What husband in thy power I will command”, with the assurance that she will not choose “From forth the royal blood of France” (2.2.194; 196). In the source, the idea of rewarding Giletta with a husband is the King’s but Shakespeare deviates from his source to make the healing of the King a gift Helen uses to get Bertram.

Helen’s bargain with the King begins as a contractual exchange: “If thou proceed/ As high as word, my deed shall match thy deed” (2.1.209-10). Still, there is tension in the scene between contract and gift. Helen sets the terms of reciprocation, and although gift exchange implies reciprocation, it does not negotiate terms. Yet, what Helen uses her father’s prescription, which is described as her “dear father’s gift” (111), and it is a gift that is cherished because it is not only “the dearest issue of his practice” (105) but the only one he had her retain, thus limiting its circulation. It is thus the one gift she can redirect as she sees fit. The use of this gift modifies the exchange from one that is merely contractual, especially since Helen adds herself to the exchange, placing herself in the role of mystical virgin healer. Bertram is...
commodified in the proposed deal, but Helen is only quasi-commodified; her body is on offer to
the King in a sexualized way, yet she must remain physically untouched to effect the cure.
Helen thus mobilizes one gift (her father’s) in a commercial transaction, adds to that the gift of
her sexual body by tantalizing the King, and does so in order to give another gift (herself) to
Bertram.

**Helen as Gift**

The transaction between Helen and the King is transformed from quasi-contract to a gift
relationship in which Helen emerges as the dominant partner when the intangible curative skills
he bargained have tangible, physical results that restore his health and sexual vigour. The King’s
unending reciprocation of what he now perceives as Helen’s gift establishes an ambiguous social
tie between them and retrospectively transforms the contract into a gift. Kay Stanton argues that
Helen deliberately underplays her skill because she is aware that she has traversed into
traditional male territory and succeeded where men failed. Facing the court after the King’s
recovery, Helen publicly states that, “Heaven hath through me restored the King to health”
(2.3.65) and by transposing her agency in the cure to the realm of divine intervention, she uses
the myth of the mystical virgin to indeed underplay her skill in the male-dominated society. The
myth is a role she uses to convince the King to try her cure and before the court, but it has the
effect of transforming her into a kind of divine gift. Although it is unclear what exactly has
cured the King, whether it is Helen’s prescription from her father, the return of his sexual vigour
from their encounter, or the “blessèd spirit” (2.1.175) he perceived in her, it is clear that he feels
indebted to her and it is her he credits for his cure. The King’s indebtedness is indicated by his
continued reciprocation after the initial terms have been fulfilled. When Bertram refuses Helen
on the basis of social and economic status, the King offers to bestow a dowry on Helen twice in
the choosing scene (2.3.145, 175) and it becomes clear that restoring the King to health is a gift he cannot reciprocate, because throughout the play he proceeds to enact the Countess’s words: “There is more owing her [Helen] than is paid, and more shall be paid her than she’ll demand” (1.3.100-2). After bestowing the dowry and enforcing the marriage on Helen’s behalf, the King remains sympathetic and indebted to Helen; Bertram’s flight incurs his displeasure. Yet, the King is not done giving; in the final act the ring episode reveals that he has given Helen a ring that she may use to call on him for help at any time, thus making the ring an open and perpetual gift.

As the Lords are paraded before her, Helen’s power is publicly displayed as she assumes the King’s authority in selecting a husband. Helen prevents her objectification in marriage via her exchange with the King and, in a reversal of sexual prerogatives, claims the right to choose her husband from among the King’s wards. Helen’s agency is a deviation from Boccaccio in two important ways. First, the King in Boccaccio is reluctant to give Giletta because she lacks title. Shakespeare transfers the objections to Bertram, which means Helen has royal support despite the legitimacy of the objections. Second, the corresponding scene in the Decameron occurs in private. Shakespeare’s public scene displays the royal support of Helen as officially endorsed. Although the selection scene is set up as the King bestowing a gift on Helen, her agency is apparent as the King reiterates his recent healing, calling her his “preserver” (2.3.48). Helen’s agency fills the scene with tension as she publicly assumes the masculine position of desiring subject. Formally conferring on her the power of the gaze with “Fair maid, send forth thine eye….Peruse them well” (2.3.53, 63) and the masculine privilege of choice “Thou hast power to choose, and they none to forsake” (2.3.57), the King objectifies his male wards. The objectification is an anomaly, as is evident from Lafeu’s comments that see the Lords rejecting
Helen because he can only conceive of women as an object of choice, not the chooser. Carol Rutter has aptly noted that Lafeu’s alternate reading of the scene is one that expresses the dominant culture’s anxiety about Helen’s actions as choosing subject.

Critics have debated whether the lords Helen first approaches are eager to accept her suit or not, given Lafeu’s comments. When she approaches Bertram however, the scene changes. Critics have read this change as a lack of confidence or as Helen denying her role as desiring subject to carefully situate herself in the feminine position of desired object. Having healed the King, Helen is prized by him as a “good gift” (2.3.152), but he does not bestow Helen on Bertram: rather, he bestows his ward on Helen. The King has stated “Who shuns thy love shuns all his love in me” (2.3.74) indicating that Helen securely has his support and approval. As a ward, Bertram is the gift of the monarch and has little power to refuse the King’s command.

Thus, despite the social structure’s endorsement of the male’s right to choose, Helen’s use of herself as a gift allows her to circumvent the usual marital exchange and bestow herself upon her choice of spouse, and despite her dalliance with the other wards, that choice will obviously be Bertram, since he is the reason for her bargain with the King. She is a self-negotiated, self-offered commodity, since she offers herself and her service. Her transgressive desire is also tempered by the fact that she is legitimating it with marriage.

Julia Briggs argues that Helen’s desire for Bertram displays transgressive overtones in numerous ways, “in loving a man who is socially above her, in giving love unsolicited and in actively pursuing the fulfillment of her desires, she has broken at least three social rules.” Helen’s wording when presenting herself to Bertram, however, shows that she again transforms herself into a gift, thus mitigating the transgression of choosing by invoking acceptable gendered
behaviour. Suppressing her own agency, Helen objectifies herself, approaching Bertram with the words:

I dare not say I take you, but I give
Me and my service ever whilst I live
Into your guiding power (2.3.103-5).

By not “taking” Bertram, Helen disguises her agency by appearing subordinate to him, and by giving both herself and her service, she is making the appropriate private and public offering by agreeing to fulfill the public and private (presumably sexual) duties of a wife. Helen is, however, also singling out herself, i.e. her body and/or interior self, as a thing of value that can be bestowed on another. The scene thus offers an example that challenges Lévi-Strauss and the feminist criticism based on his marital exchange system because the woman, as gift, has retained agency by choosing to become the gift itself. Helen’s giving is much like Portia’s giving of herself to Bassanio, but without the attendant dowry and possessions; Helen has only herself and her “service”. Her timidity at the opening of the scene is therefore understandable and recalls her earlier soliloquy about the differences between her status and Bertram’s (1.1.78-97). Having solidified publicly the King’s support, it seems that her gift is one Bertram cannot refuse because she is simultaneously the King’s gift.

The Gift Refused

Bertram does, nevertheless, rebuff Helen. Giving establishes a social relationship, and Bertram does not want such a relationship with Helen; he also refuses to be an object of exchange between Helen and the King. Bertram raises legitimate objections to the marriage, most importantly that Helen’s lower social and economic status will socially degrade him.24 The rejection is directed to the King without responding to Helen, “My wife, my liege? I shall beseech your highness./ In such a business give me leave to use/ The help of mine own eyes
Bertram’s refusal offends the King and creates a tense situation because the King’s power has been publicly challenged. The King attempts, however, to resolve the conflict by lecturing Bertram on virtue and honour and offering to grant Helen a dowry, insisting that “Virtue and she/ Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me” (2.3.144-5). When Bertram refuses the marriage again, Helen withdraws her claim with a reminder that the King is “well restored” (2.3.148). She may be withdrawing her claim. Since her manipulation of the gift system was to gain Bertram, it is more likely that here she manipulates the King by reminding him of the outstanding debt. Consequently, the King turns on Bertram, calling him, “proud, scornful boy, unworthy this good gift [Helen]” (2.3.152) and, in a speech reminiscent of Capulet’s to Juliet (3.5.187-95), threatens:

Do thine fortunes that obedient right  
Which both thy duty owes and our power claims,  
Or I will throw thee from my care for ever  
Into the staggers and the careless lapse  
Of youth and ignorance, both my revenge and hate  
Loosing upon thee in the name of justice  
Without all terms of pity. Speak. Thine answer. (2.3.161-7)

Faced with no alternative, Bertram acquiesces by asking the King’s pardon but when the King commands “Take her by the hand/ And tell her she is thine” (2.3.174-5) promising again to provide a dowry, Bertram only responds with “I take her hand” (2.3.177), a response the King overlooks while he forges ahead by announcing the wedding will be performed that night and the feast soon thereafter, warning “As thou lov’st her/ Thy love’s to me religious; else does err” (2.3.183-4). Yet if this is to be a spousal, a kind of handfasting before the proper marriage ceremony, it is a truncated one. Spousals were a dramatic convention, as Alan J. Powers has shown, a way of representing on stage the sacred rite that had to occur offstage, and Shakespeare used them elsewhere, in Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Winter’s Tale, and The Merchant of
Spousals have distinct features, however; they privilege the spoken and they require individual consent, both of which are curiously missing from this spousal as Bertram does not consent, he merely describes an action, and then is silent; there are no words approaching a spousal intention of “taking” Helen as his wife, either now or in the future. It is remarkable that in this scene Bertram does not speak to Helen and after she offers herself as a gift to him, and she does not speak to him and indeed, does not speak after reminding the King of his indebtedness to her.

Bertram’s withholding the second half of the statement implies the superficiality of the agreement, which threatens to transform marriage in the play into an empty legalism. What is at issue now is the personal relationship; Bertram has been compelled to marry but he cannot be similarly compelled to love and this lack of emotion becomes the barrier to the comic plot of the play. Once married, Helen performs the role of subservient and obedient wife, but it is significant that there is no exchange of rings or any outward sign of marriage to seal the contract. After Bertram has put off the wedding night by sending Paroles with the news, Bertram and Helen finally come face-to-face in 2.5 to take their leave of each other. While Bertram feigns excuses for the parting, Helen attempts to establish some sort of social relationship, telling him “Sir, I can nothing say/ But that I am your most obedient servant” (2.5.71-2), phrasing that recalls her presentation of herself as a gift. Just as Bertram rejected her gift then, he awkwardly rejects her offer here and becomes increasingly uncomfortable and irritable as she proclaims her unworthiness of “What the law does vouch mine own” (2.5.82). Finally forcing Bertram to accept or reject her, Helen asks, in a question couched in paradox, for a kiss before parting. In response Bertram sends her away, demonstrating that she has not established the social tie she was seeking and thus has failed to win him personally. It appears that Bertram’s reduction to a
commodity of exchange between Helen and the King in reciprocation of her gift transforms the marriage into an expression of Helen’s agency, which Bertram attempts to resist. He rejects the usual promise of marriage and emphasizes the formality of the union in his letter to his mother: “I have wedded her, not bedded her, and sworn to make the ‘not’ eternal” (3.2.21-2).

The importance of the distinction between wedding and bedding can be found in the earlier Taming of the Shrew. As Hortensio and Gremio plot to find a suitor to marry Kate and thus remove the obstacle to Bianca, they insist that the prospective man must “thoroughly woo her, wed her, and bed her” (1.1.142). To avoid the empty legalism of marriage and the possibility of annulment or divorce, the consummation must take place “to rid the house of her [Kate]” (1.1.142-3).

**Helen as Dowry**

The offer of a dowry is another important addition Shakespeare makes to the source. In Boccaccio, Giletta is rich but not noble and the King makes no offer of a dowry. In All’s Well, the dowry serves two functions. First, it effectively removes Bertram’s objection to the status issue, since the King offers both wealth and status. The King’s first offer is somewhat vague, offering “honour and wealth” (145) because he insists that Helen is a thing of value in herself, “Virtue and she/ Is her own dower” (144-5). The King’s insistence on Helen's value suggests that he is merely balancing economically and in title the value that she brings to the dowry in her own person. The King’s second offer to Bertram is less vague and places Helen at a higher value if the King is indeed balancing what she herself is worth, as he promises her “A counterpoise, if not to thy [Bertram’s] estate/ A balance more replete” (2.3.176-7). Because marriage was largely indissoluble, questions of rank were carefully considered during marriage negotiations. Aware of the disparity of rank between herself and Bertram, and her lack of dowry, Helen
believes that Bertram is unattainable. Consequently, she appears as the unrequited lover in her first soliloquy. Once chosen by Helen, Bertram raises the crucial issue of rank as a legitimate objection to the match. In response the King discourses on true nobility: “From lowest place when virtuous things proceed/ The place is dignified by th’ doer’s deed” (2.3.126-8). In linking Helen’s deed to the idea of innate nobility, the King is praising her in reciprocation of her gift to him.

The dowry again raises the issue of gift versus commodity since with it the King offers a gift in reciprocation to Helen, where Bertram, trapped, falls back on contractual thinking. Seeing Helen as commodity, Bertram wants her value precisely defined, because he believes that once her value is defined it will be inadequate to his status. The King promises to raise Helen to a title to match her natural qualities and thereby believes he has removed Bertram’s objection. The status issue is not, however, resolved in Bertram’s mind since the King has, effectively, sidestepped the issue. The King values Helen as bestower of gifts, and this may be why he cannot value her precisely whereas Bertram values her as a servant’s daughter, and cannot re-evaluate her given the King’s imprecise terms. For herself, Helen never again protests inferiority, having bridged the gap of rank and enjoying the public admiration of the King.

Bertram is faced with a wife he cannot accept, but he publicly recants his objections and accepts here. He then the commits the barbarous act of rejecting her after the marriage and returning her to her home. The act may be done in private, but it soon becomes public knowledge and incurs “the everlasting displeasure of the King” (4.3.9-10).

The choosing scene, which would likely have led to a comic resolution in earlier plays, has left many critics troubled; yet other Shakespearean comedies have placed marriages in the middle of the play, such as The Merchant of Venice and The Taming of the Shrew. But All’s
*W*ell is more troubled and unresolved as a play. What is anomalous about this play is the reversal of gender roles, since it is the woman who chooses and does so with the King’s endorsement. Conduct manuals and handbooks on marriage were full of advice on how to choose a wife, but there was not advice on how to choose a husband because it was assumed that it was the man, or the parents, who did the choosing of the spouse, not the woman. In the *Anatomy of Melancholy* Robert Burton warned that “A woman should give unto her parents the choice of her husband lest she be reputed to be malapert and wanton, if she take upon her own choice, for she should rather seem to be desired by a man than to desire a man herself”, and as late as 1706 Mary Astell still lamented, “A woman, indeed, can’t properly be said to choose: all that is allowed her is to refuse or accept what is offered”. Most importantly, Helen’s manipulation of the gift successfully and publicly insists that women, their bodies and/or interior selves, have value separate from the economic, political, and social considerations usually emphasized in early modern marriage negotiations, fulfilling the King’s assertion that “she is her own dower” (2.3.145). Yet, the marriage is a forced one, and Bertram does raise a legitimate objection, which creates tension in the scene. It is clear (from Bertram’s formal acquiescence) that the union will be one in name only.

**Giving in the bed-trick**

Rejected by Bertram, Helen reflects on the results of her giving. In her speech of self-renunciation, it is clear that she realizes that she has failed to establish a social relationship with him through the gift. Where she has called him Bertram throughout the play, she now calls him “Rossillon”, signalling the distance between them emotionally and socially as she berates herself:

Poor lord, is’t I
That chase thee from thy country, and expose,
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
Of none-sparing war?” (3.2.104-7).
Her gift giving has obviously brought about unexpected results; it has won her Bertram only as empty formality. The reality of her giving has driven him away to the war and left her alone to return to Rossillon, a hated wife with no husband. Nonetheless, Helen rises to the challenges set out in his letter as conditions upon which to win him personally, and sets out on pilgrimage. The text is ambiguous about whether or not her arrival in Florence is deliberate. It is curious, however, that Helen’s letter to the Countess stating that she will relinquish Bertram is in sonnet form (3.4.4-17), and this combined with its Petrarchan rhetoric suggest Helen’s intent to pursue Bertram. Her disguise as a pilgrim is also the conventional image of the lover: humble, penitent, and in search of forgiveness. More importantly, her following Bertram shows her determination to attain her desire by any means necessary.

Through the bed-trick, Helen procures Bertram’s ring and becomes pregnant, thus fulfilling (almost) the conditions of his letter. A sexual encounter within the five acts of comedy is exceptional in Shakespeare, as was a woman actually speaking her desire; tragedy is the genre that manipulates anxieties about female desire and usually does so as a prelude to death. Yet, the bed-trick is integral to the play, not only because it enacts a marriage (simultaneously allowing Helen to act on her desire and to remain chaste), but also because by replacing Diana, Helen forces Bertram to accept her virginity as a gift. The exchange of rings publicizes the consummation that Bertram has hitherto refused, although his lack of awareness of the event complicates the gift. Mary Bly remarks that Helen subdues her desire and does not repent, and this marks the play as an “experiment with female erotic rhetoric” but cautions that Helen “may also be destroyed by it.” Helen’s desire does not require subduing, however, because it the impetus for her transformation of herself into a gift, and she legitimates it within marriage and thus her desire is a cultural paradox. Although transgressive in the terms Bly describes, it is
channelled into a gift and socially sanctioned since women could and did give gifts. It is the form the gift takes that produces the paradox since sexual desire is not typically seen as a gift.

Bertram later describes the rendezvous as a commercial transaction, a contract that has been fulfilled and is therefore ended. Helen’s pregnancy demonstrates, however, that the events of the evening have resulted in a child that establishes a bond between them. Helen has, it appears, nullified the threat of dissolution to her marriage. Superficially the trick shows women as physically exchangeable commodities, but in substituting herself for Diana, I would argue that Helen objectifies Bertram and robs him of sexual autonomy since his choice of sexual partner is usurped. Via the restrictions of darkness and silence, Bertram is deprived of the two male capacities that define the masculine subject: the gaze and speech. Thus disempowered and deluded, Bertram is forced to accept Helen’s gift of her virginity and forced to so publicly with the ring, which the King recognizes as the one he gave Helen and which she has publicly declared she would only give to Bertram in bed. The ring thus signifies sexual bonds and sexual acts, since it is given by the King, whose first gift from Helen was that of her sexual (though non-consummated) body and it was given again to Bertram following the consummation of the marriage, when she did give herself sexually:

This ring was mine, and when I gave it Helen
I bade her, if her fortunes ever stood
Necessitated to help, that by this token
I would relieve her (5.3.84-7).

She called the saints to surety
That she would never put it from her finger
Unless she gave it to yourself in bed,
Where you have never come, or sent it us
Upon her great disaster. (5.3.109-113)

With the promises made, the consummation, and the exchange of rings, the bed-trick takes the form of a second marriage, expressed by Diana.
When you have conquered my yet maiden bed,
Remain there but an hour...
And on your finger in the night I'll put
Another ring that, what in time proceeds,
May token to the future our past deeds...
You have won
A wife of me... (4.2.58-66)

Consummation not only ratifies the original contract, but renders the second marriage doubly
binding, publicly signified by the ring exchange and Helen’s pregnancy. The marriage is a fear
that Bertram seems to acknowledge. Bertram elides the encounter with Diana in a catalogue of
his “sixteen businesses” (4.3.88) that he dispatched, which includes the summary dismissal of
Helen’s death and his mourning. The last reference is to Diana, and while it is “the greatest, but
that I have not ended yet” (4.3.94-5) after seducing Diana, Bertram “yields almost immediately
to his fear that Diana will claim him as her husband.”

Whether Bertram will accept this gift as given remains in question as part of the
conditional ending of the play, as does Helen’s response to the encounter itself. Once she has
given herself, Helen reflects on how easily men make use of women:

But O, strange men!
That can such sweet use make of what they hate,
When saucy trusting of the cozened thoughts
Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play
With what it loathes, for that which is away (4.4.21-5).

Barbara Hodgdon notes that Helen attempts to analyze the mental operations of lust, hate and
wantonness. Although this is true, I am more interested in the sense of regret she expresses
while working through these connections. Helen’s giving may not have been the experience she
was anticipating, and certainly is a far cry from her image in act one of the hind being mated by a
lion and dying for love (1.1.90-1). In the final scene, the results of her giving reconcile Bertram
to the King, if he accepts Helen, but whether Helen and Bertram can be reconciled to each other
is a question that remains unanswered. Helen insists Bertram acknowledge that he is “doubly won”, (5.3.316) and therefore that she is both the “name” and “thing” (5.3.310) of wife. Yet there is a sense from this speech that giving herself to Bertram may not be what she expected. Instead of the usual feelings associated with gifts, namely power and obligation, Helen feels something quite different. Helen realizes that women are interchangeable for men, and that Bertram, tricked, can “make sweet use of what [he] hate[s]”. If he can enjoy her sexually when tricked by these conditions, surely he could “trick” himself in future by mere thought. The experience is, therefore, diminished by knowledge, and her opinion of Bertram must be affected by this knowledge. There is an element of regret in her relationship; the bed trick proved that he could easily be fooled by darkness, silence, and his own imagination. In future, if his mind is always somewhere else, especially sexually, then Helen’s gift would never and could never be enough. The doubt would remain because having fooled Bertram, she would wonder if she was ever enough or if he was thinking of someone else. The play demonstrates that gifts may be given, but they do not have to be accepted and even when they are, the results of that giving are not always to the giver's benefit.

Reconciliation: Maudlin, Diana, and Helen as Gift

Because Bertram’s rejection of Helen was the action that caused his schism from society, he can only return when she is believed dead. As an act of reconciliation, Lafeu proposes the marriage between his daughter and Bertram to be offered via the King. Appearing penitent, Bertram accepts the marriage to re-establish ties with the King and court. Bertram speaks admiringly of both Maudlin and Helen, claiming affection for the former and misappraisal of the latter:

At first
I struck my choice upon her [Maudlin], ere my heart
Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue;  
Where, the impression of mine eye enfixing,  
Contempt his scornful perspective did lend me,  
Which warped the line of every other favour,  
Stained a fair colour or expressed it stolen,  
Extended or contracted all proportions  
To a most hideous object. Thence it came  
That she [Helen] whom all men praised and whom myself,  
Since I have lost, have loved, was in mine eye  
The dust that did offend it. (5.3.45-56)

The sincerity of the conversion to affection for these women is doubtful since Bertram has expressed and recanted such sentiments previously. The significance of the speech therefore lies in the ties Bertram is attempting to re-establish with the King and the way in which he does it. Bertram accepts Maudlin by claiming she was his first choice of spouse and thus not only accepts her as a gift now, he gives her supremacy of affection over Helen. He also claims that Maudlin is the perspective through which he saw Helen, thus distorting his view of her and causing him to reject her. This is, of course, an excuse for his actions, but he is, more importantly, blaming one woman for the rejection of another. Whether he really chose Maudlin first, and has learned to love Helen since her death is unlikely, but he is saying what the King and Lafeu wish to hear about the beloved Helen and the new prospective bride. Ordered to send Maudlin a token of affection, Bertram must give in order to receive. Her objectification into a commodity of exchange is indicated by her absence onstage. Sending the ring to Maudlin instead of delivering it himself indicates that she is the means to establish ties between Lafeu, Bertram, and the King. Bertram gave his monumental ring to Diana himself, after having tokens and letters sent back to him, indicating a personal engagement directly with her. Maudlin’s objectification as a facilitator of peace is compounded by the assumption that unlike Diana, Maudlin will accept Bertram’s gift. The assumption of Maudlin’s agreement indicates that she is the gift whereby Bertram may be reconciled to the court.
Bertram’s reconciliation is only achieved through Helen and the conditions of that reconciliation suggest that the reconciliation must be a personal negotiation. As the bed-trick is revealed, Helen saves Bertram’s life. Nonetheless, his reluctance to accept Helen herself as a gift remains. Having pursued Bertram to his bed and fulfilled the conditions of his letter, Helen seeks her rights as a wife, publicly forcing him to either accept or reject her with a statement designed to evoke reciprocation or rejection: “Will you be mine now you are doubly won?” (5.3.316). Bertram seeks to evade her ultimatum by directing his response to the King and couching it in a condition: “If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly/ I’ll love her dearly, ever ever dearly” (5.3.317-18). Critics have various comments on the conditional ending. I suggest that Bertram is attempting to have it both ways; he attempts to mitigate his indebtedness to Helen with the condition that must be satisfied while making the overture to the King that he will accept Helen as the King’s gift. What this suggests is that the marriage will be accepted publicly, thus establishing ties with the King, but the relationship itself must be negotiated between the spouses privately and not before the public forum of the court. Reasserting her power, Helen tells Bertram that if her claims “prove untrue,/ Deadly divorce step between me and you” (5.3.319-20), reminding him that without her intervention he would be dead, and as David McCandless argues, there is a sense that Helen schemes to rescue Bertram from the trouble with the King that she has created in order to elicit feelings of indebtedness. When Helen offers herself as a gift to Bertram in the final scene, she comes not as a physician’s daughter, but as a woman of rank and wealth, who has almost fulfilled his seemingly impossible conditions, is in possession of his monumental ring, and, moreover, is the woman who has saved his life. The fulfillment of his conditions she will trade for his acceptance, but the remaining
conditions allow Helen to emerge as the dominant partner in an exchange relationship by giving beyond the ability of Bertram to reciprocate.

Critics have similarly concerned themselves with what Gerard J. Gross has called "one of the knottiest problems of the play", the question of how Bertram can be as he is, a man who has deserted his wife, attempted to seduce a different woman, and so shamefully lied about it, and still be attractive to Helen. Gross himself acknowledges that Bertram's wealth of faults makes it easy to play him "not as a comic figure, but as a totally unsympathetic character—an arrogant, conceited, headstrong, lecherous, deceitful, shallow cad." This may be overstating the case, but it does name several of Bertram's faults and echoes Dr. Johnson's famous condemnation:

A man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself with falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.

Bertram does have good qualities, as Diana's appraisal of him shows, but it is not my intention to defend or condemn character because I am interested in a different feature of the final scene. Having been given conditions by Bertram to fulfill, and having fulfilled them, Helen now has the means to form a social relationship and she will use these conditions to gain acceptance as per the terms of his letter. As Richard Hillman suggests, "the bed trick's mechanical nature and intimations of interchangeability imply sexuality...is impersonal, becoming personal only when characters use it as a means of negotiating power relations." By saving Bertram's life, Helen is building a social relationship that hitherto had not existed and she is giving a gift, one which he must accept if he wants to live. By manipulating the gift, Helen achieves her goal by relentlessly pursuing Bertram, even to the point of sexual consummation without his knowledge. When joining royal wards, the customary formula was to ask "'Can you like of this man?' 'Can you like of this maid?'", a formula that, as M.C. Bradbrook has pointed out, "did not imply love but
only the ability to live harmoniously together." The King approximates this formula when he tells Bertram "If thou canst like this creature as a maid, I can create the rest." (2.3.143-4). What the King acknowledges in the choosing scene, and what is still present in the final scene, is that love and attraction cannot be compelled; the question is not whether these two will ever find each other attractive or love one another, it is whether, as the King's phrasing suggests, they can live harmoniously together. That can only be achieved if Bertram accepts the gifts Helen offers. Non-acceptance has meant exile from King and country, and in the final scene to not accept the gifts Helen offers means "Deadly divorce" (5.3.20). As Gross indicates, in terms of stage action there is no reasonable opportunity for Helena and Bertram to embrace after her lines "No, my good lord,/ 'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see," (5.3.308-9) without interrupting the dialogue; it is unlikely they would kiss on his line "Both, both. O pardon" (5.3.310) and her final line to him, "Deadly divorce step between me and you." (5.3.320) is an implausible line on which to kiss. The play has shown the two characters to mature: Helena from her idealistic objectification of Bertram and Bertram from a peevish boy. Helen has certainly advanced socially and economically by use of the gift and herself as gift, and the play ends with steps towards Bertram's acceptance of her as wife. But whether Helen's use of the gift is a positive thing remains in question given the play's tentative ending and Helen's feelings after the bed-trick. If women are interchangeable, she may never be enough. Her gift is, after all, forced. The play ends by suggesting that marriage is a negotiation between spouses and that each spouse must be willing to negotiate with the other. The first step in it is Bertram's acceptance of Helen's gift, and it is a step he takes by acknowledging her as both "name" and "thing" (5.3.310) and asking "pardon" (5.3.310).

Annabella's Multiple Refusals in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore
Soranzo: Tell me his name!
Annabella: Alas, alas, there's all.
Soranzo: Will you believe?
Annabella: What?
Soranzo: You shall never know.
Annabella: How!
Soranzo: Never: if you do, let me be cursed.
Annabella: Not know it strumpet! I'll rip up thy heart
And find it there.
Annabella: Do, do. (4.3.50-4)

This exchange from John Ford’s play draws attention to many aspects of male containment of women in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. Having discovered that his new wife Annabella is pregnant by someone else, Soranzo attempts to exert force over her, bodily if necessary, to discover the father of her baby. Soranzo’s questioning dramatizes early modern anatomical discourse, which held that truth could be found in the body and was (metaphorically) inscribed on the heart. His demands further raise the discourse of confession; Annabella is constantly urged to confess her sin of incest but Annabella has the power to resist such confession. Finally, the exchange evokes the question of Annabella’s agency; the dialogue foregrounds her physical body and thus recalls not only her earlier pledging of that body to Giovanni in 1.2, but the various rival suits that have objectified and commodified that body. Annabella has married Soranzo only because she is pregnant with Giovanni’s child, but despite such forced circumstances, she has chosen Soranzo from among the three suitors who pursue her after she rejected them earlier in the play. Annabella is able to resist her commodification not only by refusing the suitors and thus refusing to be her father’s gift in marriage, but also by refusing to receive and reciprocate Bergetto’s gift, as well as by giving herself, first to Giovanni and then to Soranzo. Juxtaposing the two conflicting readings of female erasure and female agency highlights the play’s ending as ambivalent and resistant to closure, an ending represented in microcosm through 'Tis Pity in the
oxymoronic final presentation of Annabella as both virgin and whore. Although much of the criticism has focused on Giovanni, the play hinges on Annabella; she is the heart of the play since the pursuit of her introduces most of the characters as well as the subplots. Placing the play within the cultural context of anatomical discourse and gift exchange and focusing on Annabella will raise the question whether her refusal of her suitors is a social power on par with women’s ability to give.

**Anatomical Discourse: A mode of erasure and appropriation**

Anatomical illustrations of the early modern period were graphic depictions of the anatomical dissections undertaken in public anatomy theatres. Widely distributed, these illustrations were reprinted from anatomy texts such as Andreas Vesalius’s *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, the leading anatomy text of the period, in which the male body is depicted both in its entirety and in disembodied fragments, depending on the piece of text the illustration is elucidating. Conversely, the illustrations of women consist only of disembodied, pregnant uteruses. The female body in its entirety is absent, which posits the male body as the norm. Simultaneously, the reduction of the female to a disembodied and pregnant organ effectively erases that body by focusing attention on the fetus that was always depicted as a fully developed, male, autonomous figure that actively negotiated his environment. This schema of anatomical representation naturalized social hierarchies and their accompanying gender roles. Karen Newman contends that these illustrations erased female individuality along with the body, which left women physically, linguistically, politically, and legally vulnerable to male appropriation.

*Tis Pity complicates Newman’s view because the play offers conflicting and competing images of Annabella by invoking anatomical language, evident from the opening scene where Giovanni and Friar Bonaventura debate the morality/immorality of incest. Because Giovanni
introduces his sister Annabella to the audience through the conversation, he is able to construct and appropriate her linguistically while suppressing her individuality. He idealizes her as the object of his incestuous desire and dismisses the incest taboo as “a customary form” (1.1.25). Her idealized beauty is immediately undercut, however, by Giovanni’s appropriation of Annabella as part of himself. He attributes and justifies his incestuous desire through their shared parentage, a link that binds them “to be ever one/ One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all” (1.1.33-4). Elucidating this shared parentage, Giovanni states that he and Annabella “had one father… one womb…/ [that] gave us both life and birth” (1.1.28-9). His use of the word “womb” to indicate his mother explicitly equates and reduces her to her reproductive function while distancing himself from her by limiting their relationship to the duration of the pregnancy. Conversely, the word father connotes a more enduring parental relationship. Giovanni’s language thus parallels the period’s anatomical illustrations by figuring man as person and woman as disembodied organ.

Giovanni’s suppression of Annabella’s body continues at crucial moments in the play and is part of his larger tendency to assert his possession of her. In the play’s final scene, Annabella is only present in the disembodied heart that Giovanni brings to Soranzo’s banquet. Reduced to a single organ, she is diminished and linguistically erased as Giovanni states that his heart is entombed within hers (5.6.27). The statement recalls his numerous references to her heart as his, which makes the allusion his final appropriation of her body and identity. Giovanni’s stated intention of eating the heart (5.6.24-6) threatens, furthermore, to make her appropriation literal and thus the representation of Annabella ends as it began: her body is absent and subject to male appropriation. In the play’s concluding line Annabella is linguistically reduced from the third-person pronoun “she” to the label of “whore” with the Cardinal’s casual
pronouncement "‘Tis pity she’s a whore" (5.6.159). Such a reduction into a broad social category threatens to erase her as did the anatomical discourse by removing her individual identity. The dismissive label of "whore" has little to do with Annabella’s experience as shown in the play.

**Annabella: The gift refused**

Annabella demonstrates social agency through her ability to resist marriage, which is in turn linked to her participation in the gift economy, both giving and rejecting gifts. The few critics who have considered Annabella usually see her as passive within the play. Although her father Florio insists that he will not force her to marry because his “care is to match her to her liking” (1.3.10) his actions belie this insistence as he entertains the three suitors, Grimaldi, Soranzo, and Bergetto. Florio constantly changes which one has his favour, moreover, in a play that marks but does not clearly delineate rank. Consequently, the suitors are distinguished by their flaws and Florio’s shifting favour rather than their social position. As a result of Florio’s behaviour, the suitors constantly compete with each other for position; Grimaldi fights with Soranzo’s servant Vasques in the opening act and Donaldo is constantly tutoring his buffoon-like nephew how to win Annabella’s favour. Florio assures Soranzo of his favour twice (1.2.53-4, 3.2.1-6), but since Soranzo’s adultery with Hippolita is well known, this means that he is favouring an adulterer to make a match that will ally him with the nobility through marriage. Valerie L. Jephson and Bruce Thomas Boehrer argue that the failed courtships show the “folly of cross-class wooing” and invert the social order. The suits are, however, thwarted as much by Annabella’s refusals as by her father’s greed and shifting favour and her refusal is apparent from the outset of the play.
The suitors are presented to the audience and Annabella in 1.2; not only is it clear that she
does not favour any of them, there is the suggestion that none of them should be favoured.

Putana judges Grimaldi:

they say he is a Roman, nephew to the Duke of Montferrato; they say he did good
service in the wars against the Milanese. But faith, charge, I do not like him, an’t
be for nothing but for being a soldier....I like him the worse...he’s not the man I
would choose. (1.2.75-83)

Richardetto later comments that Grimaldi hopes to use his rank “to get the love of Annabella”
(2.3.33) but the status wins no favour with her father, as the Cardinal points out, “you, Sir
Florio,/ Thought him too mean a husband for your daughter” (3.9.55-8). Grimaldi wins no
favour from Annabella either and his subsequent plot to murder Soranzo reveals him to be
cowardly and inept, in what, by his own admission, is “an unnoble act, and not becomes/ A
soldier’s valor” (3.5.3-4). His flight to the protection of the Cardinal to escape justice proves just
as cowardly as he goes unpunished for the accidental murder of Bergetto, having mistaken
Bergetto for Soranzo in the dark. Putana likes Soranzo since,

he is wise; and what is more, rich; and what is more than that, kind, and what is
more than all this, a nobleman...Then he is bountiful; besides he is
handsome....Liberal, that I know; loving, that you know; and a man sure, else he
could never ha’ purchased such a good name with Hippolita the lusty widow in
her husband’s lifetime... (1.2.86-94)

Putana’s judgment suggests that he has purchased her opinion by being “liberal”, and
Annabella sees through her fulsome praise.72 Annabella’s comment, “Sure the woman took
her morning’s draught too soon” (1.2.99) shows her opinion of Putana’s commendation of
Soranzo. Then Bergetto enters, speaking of Annabella as a mere item of market exchange:

Why, I’ll undertake with a handful of silver, to buy a handful of wit at any time.
But, sirrah I have another purchase in hand: I shall have the wench, mine uncle
says. I will but wash my face, and shift socks, and then have at her i’faith!
(1.2.110-14)
Annabella’s comment “This idiot haunts me too” (1.2.118) is not only a dismissal of Bergetto, but an indication that she rejects all three of the suitors Putana has been discussing.

Annabella’s rejection of her suitors is not confined to her comments to Putana. Donaldo solidifies marriage negotiations with Florio in 1.3, despite Florio’s promise to Soranzo of his favour (1.2.53-4), with Donaldo promising “Three thousand florins yearly during life; And, after I am dead, my whole estate” (1.3.17-18). Florio promises “free passage to commence his suit” (1.3.20) but Donaldo does not trust the suit to his fool nephew. Donaldo learns that Bergetto has absurdly pledged to Annabella that “he loved her almost as well as he loved parmesan,” (1.3.57-8). Annabella’s reported response at first seems encouraging, enquiring whether Bergetto would inherit his uncle’s wealth. Bergetto’s response, however, seems not to have done anything other than elicit a smile and exit from Annabella, who entertained the suit no further. Bergetto’s awareness of his ineptitude is signalled by his “Nay, I did not fit her” (1.3.73-4) and marked by her exit. Donaldo takes matters into his own hands, planning to have Bergetto write a letter “after some courtly manner” (1.3.79) and as added encouragement to “enclose some rich jewel in the letter” (1.3.80).

Donaldo’s presentation of the jewel as an agent for his nephew Bergetto reveals gift-exchange both as a power strategy and the social agency that gift-exchange allows women. The lavish gift is clearly an attempt to surpass the other rivals for Annabella’s affection and is thus calculated to ensure that she favour him as reciprocation. In Mauss’s study, a gift indebts the recipient until reciprocated, but to reject a gift is to reject a bond of alliance and thus the social relationship the gift articulates. $^{73}$ The jewel is needed to advance the suit and seal the negotiations Donaldo has undertaken with Florio because Annabella has previously rejected Bergetto’s advances (1.3.16-21). But Annabella rejects Bergetto’s jewel and thereby refuses to
solidify male bonds by participating in the marital economy that figures women as gifts and/or objects of exchange passed between men to create and solidify alliances. Presented with Bergetto’s letter that accompanies the jewel, Annabella attempts to give the letter to her female companion Putana and thus defer the suit. Donaldo and Florio intercede to stop the deferral; Annabella accepts and reads the letter, her obedience situating her in the accepted posture of femininity.⁷⁴

Donaldo: Signor Florio, in any case bid her read it [the letter] instantly. Florio: Keep it, for what? Pray read it me hereright. Annabella: I shall, sir. She reads. Donaldo: How d’ee find her inclined, signor? Florio: Troth, sir, I know not how; not all so well As I could wish. Annabella: Sir, I am bound to rest your cousin’s debtor. The jewel I’ll return; for if he love, I’ll count that a jewel. Donaldo: Mark you that? Nay, keep them both, sweet maid. Annabella: You must excuse me, Indeed, I will not keep it. Florio: Where’s the ring, That which your mother in her will bequeathed, And charged you on her blessing not to give’t To any but your husband? Send back that. Annabella: I have it not. Florio: Ha! ‘Have it not’, where is’t? Annabella: My brother in the morning took it from me, Said he would wear’t today. (2.6.26-42)

The letter is not, strictly, a gift that would indebt her and thus her acceptance of it does not indebt her to Bergetto, since she can still deny the suit. Her acquiescence to the pressure of this forced token is, therefore, a cover since she appears obedient. The jewel, however, forces her hand to accept or deny Bergetto and Annabella’s refusal of the jewel is a clear and shrewd refusal of the suit. Despite the two men’s vehement insistence she accept it she cannot be forced to do so because accepting means accepting the suitor and therefore entering into a marriage contract.
Taking a different tack to establish social ties, Annabella’s father Florio orders her to reciprocate the gift with the ring her mother left her to give to her husband. The reciprocation would, implicitly, be an acceptance of the suit even though the gift has been rejected because a new gift had been offered. Annabella’s prerogative in refusing to accept one gift and give another in return emphasizes the agency gift exchange permits her. Despite Florio’s imperative “Send back that [ring]” (2.6.39), her refusal is more powerful than giving because not only is she withholding obedience to her father’s command, she clearly has the agency to do so since her refusals are not subject to parental censure. The gift thus shows the necessity of female consent, and the ability to withhold it.75

Having thus failed with gifts to gain Annabella’s favour and consent, Florio forces the issue verbally, asking Annabella if she will consent to the match. Despite his earlier claim that he wants to “match her to her liking” (1.3.10), it is clear that Florio wants her married to someone and his shifting allegiance between the suitors seems to suggest that any of them will do. Annabella asks for “freedom” (2.6.47) from her father, and thus given leave to speak, she denies with words what she has just denied through gift exchange. She tells Donaldo,

Signor Donaldo, if your nephew mean
To raise his better fortunes in his match,
The hope of me will hinder such a hope.
Sir, if you love him, as I know you do,
Find him one more worthy of his choice than me;
In short, I’m sure I sha’ not be his wife. (2.6.48-53)

Donaldo’s commendation of Annabella’s “plain dealing” (2.6.54) is addressed to her, and he leaves her with the jewel as a gift for her future marriage (2.6.113).76 Donaldo’s subsequent questioning of his friendship with Florio is clearly raised by Annabella’s rejection of Bergetto; the male bond that she has refused to affirm by rejecting the suitor must therefore be reasserted and confirmed. The confirmation is tenuous, however, as Donaldo’s question is addressed to
both Annabella and Florio: “Your father yet and I will still be friends,/ Shall we not, Signor Florio?” (2.5.55-6) and is met with the tentative “Yes, why not?” (2.5.56) from Florio, thus leaving the social bond between them ambivalent.

Annabella remains an obedient daughter while her agency in rejecting a suitor is not subject to paternal censure. Despite Florio’s genuine attempts to pressure her into marriage, Annabella remains firm in her refusal. Florio immediately shifts favour to Soranzo, stating that he meant Bergetto to be rejected. This shift, however, is an obvious move to save face and he is forced to admit that he made a bad match. What is almost elided in this scene, however, is the fact that Annabella has given the ring. She again takes the pose of obedience and in acquiescing to Giovanni’s demand for the ring, Florio and Donaldo think nothing of her having done so. Yet because of the incestuous affair, the ring does indeed invoke the conjugal connotations belonging to her “husband”. Annabella seems obedient, but is in fact gulling the men, making a declaration of truth that they do not recognize as such.

’Tis Pity would appear to fit within Lévi-Strauss’s marriage paradigm since it follows the early modern aristocratic practice of objectifying children as the means of transferring property and enlarging social connections. Accordingly, Florio seemingly favours the noble Soranzo as a suitor because the match would allow him to move from the merchant class into the aristocracy. The scene with Donaldo makes it clear, however, that Annabella cannot be given in marriage without her consent, and her mocking of Soranzo in 3.2 shows her withholding such consent. When Florio leaves Annabella alone with Soranzo in this scene she rejects him by withholding herself. Florio leaves them with the injunction “She knows my mind” (3.2.5), which is an indirect cue to both. It shows approval of Soranzo and gives direction to Annabella to accept the suit before the explicit direction to her “hear you, daughter, see you use him nobly”
(3.2.6). Despite her father’s dictates, Annabella proceeds to mock Soranzo by undermining his suit. When Soranzo asks, “Have you not will to love?” she responds “Not you” (3.2.19). In the courtly love tradition he offers, “Did you but see my heart, then would you swear—” which she cuts off and deflates with the literal reply, “That you were dead” (3.2.24-5). Annabella continues to mock Soranzo, which he acknowledges in aside, “‘Tis plain, she laughs at me!” (3.2.38).

Although Annabella does not present an outright rejection, and Soranzo is unsure if he has been rejected, there is certainly a withholding of the approval that her father has clearly intimated she will give.78 Her mockery and equivocation are a sign of withholding of her approval, but they are also a withholding of herself. She refuses to be made her father’s gift and she refuses to give herself.

Annabella: The gift given and given again

The discussion of the suitors in 1.2 is framed by an indication that Annabella does indeed desire someone, but that person turns out to be her brother, Giovanni. Before Putana begins her judgement of the suitors, she says to Annabella, as a jest and a warning,

Here’s threatening, challenging, quarrelling, and fighting, on every side, and all is for your sake. You had need to look to yourself, charge, you’ll be stolen away sleeping else shortly. (1.2.63-6)

Putana is referring to the fight between Vasques and Grimaldi and the ensuing verbal quarrel between Grimaldi and Soranzo, but Annabella says “such a life gives no content/ To me: my thoughts are fixed on other ends./ Would you would leave me ” (1.2.67-9). Clearly, she has made another choice, and after her dismissal of all three suitors she states outright that the one man she admires and desires is her brother, whom she describes as a “blessed shape/ Of some celestial creature” (1.2.127-8).
When Giovanni presents his suit, Annabella, like Helen in *All's Well*, chooses to act on her transgressive desire. Annabella, however, does not have to overcome barriers of status. Her desire is more transgressive because incestuous but she, like Helen, gives herself to her desired mate, both sexually and in a kind of marriage. This is a relationship that the play represents as unnatural, as expressed by Friar Bonaventura, and yet, in the corrupted world of Parma where murderers go unpunished, the relationship simultaneously has an innocence about it, as critics have often noted, and thus the incest is presented with a duality and level of complexity. Not only is Giovanni the only appropriate suitor put forward for Annabella, but as early as 1.2, it is fairly clear that he is the one that she has chosen. When he seduces her with arguments that justify incest, therefore, the seduction that follows is able to happen so quickly because it is what Annabella has desired. Bruce Boehrer argues that the force of Giovanni’s argument about the naturalness of incest “derives not from logic but from Giovanni’s own dedication to his love, his self-validating conviction that his possibilities in life have been narrowed to two: love and death.” Annabella has, it seems, reached the same conclusion. When Giovanni professes his love, her response is “Forbid it, my just fears./ If this be true, ’twere fitter I were dead” (1.2.214-15) and after disclosing her long-concealed love, she is the one who first vows “Love me, or kill me” (1.2.251). Annabella succumbs not so much to the logic of his argument as to the emotions that are confirmed and to his ultimatum “Must I now live, or die?” (1.2.239). The imitation of a wedding that follows, although the marriage appears legal with both Annabella and Giovanni on their knees repeating formulaic vows and kissing three times, is not as legal as Boehrer would have it. Annabella and Giovanni are pledging marriage in accordance with a *de praesenti* union but are within the prohibited degrees. Thomas Beard writing in 1597 makes this clear:

> It is...unlawfull to marry those that are neare unto us by any degree of kindred or affinitie, as it is inhibited not only by the law of God, but also by civill and
When Bishop Arthur Lake gave a sermon at St. Andrew's Church at which there was a woman doing public penance for incest, he confirmed the received opinion that this sin was the worst sexual depravity:

_**Fornication, Adulterie, Incest:** all communicate in _Incontinencie_, but so, that _Adulterie_ is worse that _Fornication_, and _Incest_ worse that _Adulterie_. _Fornication_ violateth the good order that should be betweene single persons, through unruly Lusts; _Adulterie_ addeth thereunto a confusion of Families, and taketh away the distinction of Heires, and Inheritance; but _Incest_ moreover abolisheth the reverence which is ingraved by nature, to forbid that persons whom nature hath made so neere should one uncover the others shame.

The incest in _Tis Pity_ is consanguine, not by affinity, and thus the marriage cannot be legal; although Giovanni may have abandoned Christian doctrine as Boehrer argues, society has not. Otherwise, Annabella would not be concerned with keeping the incest hidden and a union could be proclaimed publicly as legitimating the relationship. Still, Giovanni obviously feels himself a husband and refers to himself as Annabella’s husband in the fifth act; he refers to her as “still one to me” (5.3.8) referring to the Biblical doctrine of man and wife as one flesh. Giovanni’s comment may also be read as part of his insistence throughout the play on his and Annabella’s “oneness”:

> [We have] One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all. (1.1.34)
> She is like me and I like her (2.5.67)
> Oh, the glory/ Of two united hearts like hers and mine! (5.3.11-12)
> ’Tis a heart [referring to Annabella’s heart in the banquet scene]/ A heart, my lords, in which mine is entombed. (5.6.26-7)

What is important to note is that they have sworn to each other in a formulaic way in 1.2 that would be recognized as imitating marriage and thus Ford is twisting convention, heightening the relationship as Giovanni keeps vows to Annabella that Soranzo promised to make and then refuses to Hippolita; “The vows I made…/ Were wicked and unlawful, ’twere more sin/ To keep
them than to break them" (2.2.85-7) Soranzo declares. The promise of marriage and his known adultery with Hippolita will cast doubt on the validity of Soranzo’s marriage to Annabella, especially when compounded by Annabella’s vows to Giovanni and her pregnancy. The incestuous vows are kept while the legitimate vows are broken and declared sinful. Ford thus erodes the lines between marriage, fornication, and adultery. Woman can be given in all three and thus it is not women’s gifts that are tragic, but society. There is some sympathy for Hippolita, who gave herself to Soranzo and then is spurned by him for granting him the very gift he sought. Even though she is an adulterous, it is Soranzo’s failure to appreciate women’s gifts that is tragic. Annabella’s tragedy is not incest, it is the society around her.

Refusing is part of Annabella’s strategy of self protection. When Giovanni insists, probably in jest, that she must be married once they have consummated their vows because as a sexualized woman she must be married, he is expressing the social rule that women, especially the sexualized “knowing” woman must be married. Annabella responds confidently and playfully, “You must” (2.1.23), reminding both him and the audience that her desire is for him and no one else.91 When Putana discovers them there is no censure, only a confirmation of female desire that objectifies men, “Your brother’s a man, I hope, and I say still, if a young wench feel the fit upon her, let her take anybody, father or brother, all is one” (2.1.43-5). Putana’s opinion is, of course, an anomaly and hardly condoned by the play as a whole, and her name does mean “whore”. It is only Annabella’s pregnancy and the Friar’s threats of hell that win her consent to marry Soranzo. Despite this marriage, Annabella remains faithful to Giovanni, and refuses to reveal their affair to Soranzo. In their final scene, Giovanni is admitted to her chamber where he expects that they will again have intercourse, as does Vasques. The bitterness of Giovanni’s opening speech, however, makes it obvious that she has refused him:
What, changed so soon? Hath your new sprightly lord
Found out a new trick in night-games more than we
Could know in our simplicity? Ha! is’t so?
Or does the fit come on you to prove treacherous
To your past vows and oaths? (5.5.1-5)

Annabella’s withholding of herself sexually is not a result of sexual preference for another man as Giovanni suspects but of true repentance for their incest. The ending of their sexual relationship is the betrayal that leads Giovanni to make good on the vows “love me or kill me” (1.2.251). This withholding of herself sexually adds to the play’s complex representation of both Annabella and the incest relationship. Her refusal shows her repentance of the incest since part of penitence is the resolve to sin no more and thus she is protecting her soul by refusing to give herself sexually.

Pregnant, Annabella marries Soranzo on the Friar’s advice. That advice, however, proves faulty. Soranzo insists in the betrothal scene that Annabella give herself, so that she agrees to the engagement three times. Apparently weeping, which Giovanni mocks before leaving (probably so that he does not witnesses the betrothal), she answers the Friar’s “Daughter, are you resolved?” with “Father, I am” (3.6.50). Florio joins Soranzo’s and Annabella’s hands, a joining the returned Giovanni does witness. Soranzo is not content with the giving of Annabella by her father though, and turns to her with “Lady, say you so too?” to which she replies “I do, and vow/To live with you and yours” (3.6.53-4). Soranzo probably seeks the affirmation from Annabella in light of her earlier refusals and Florio’s shifting favour amid the rival suitors. The gift

Annabella bestows in marriage is not what Soranzo expected, however. At the wedding feast he proclaims her as “this most precious jewel, such a prize/ As earth hath not another like to this” (4.1.10-11) objectifying her before the wedding guests, but the irony of the objectification turns to rage when he discovers that she is pregnant. The level of deception on both sides means that
Annabella's and Soranzo's vows are a mockery of the marriage ceremony; there is no honour in this union with the adultery, pregnancy, and pre-existing contract, all of which are impediments to the union and all of which the friar conceals even though it is his duty to reveal them. The friar thus becomes complicit in the deception on Soranzo, betrays his sacred role, violates the holy rites, and risks future incest. The friar has, indeed, embarked on a course that could render kinship meaningless. Female chastity was integral to marriage because it ensured the bloodline and the integrity of kinship.

Married to Soranzo for her honour, and discovered on her wedding night to be sexually experienced, Annabella is dragged onstage and denounced as “strumpet, famous whore” (4.3.1.) and “Harlot, rare, notable harlot” (4.3.4). Regardless, she attempts to negotiate liveable terms with him, pointing out that:

I sued not to thee, for—but that I thought
Your over-loving lordship would have run
Mad on denial—had ye lent me time
I would have told 'ee in what case I was;
But you would needs be doing. (4.3.16-20)

Annabella’s tone is condescending as she mocks Soranzo. She takes the dominant position of pursued object and falls back on the pattern of previous encounters in which she mocked him because of the power this position of desired object gave her. She even adds sexual mockery to her arsenal now they have consummated their relationship. Soranzo is shocked that Annabella would reveal that she was not a virgin, yet she seeks to negotiate new terms on which to establish the marriage now that he knows that truth, telling him plainly:

You were deceived in me: 'twas not for love
I chose you, but for honor. Yet know this:
Would you be patient yet and hide your shame,
I'd see whether I could love you. (4.3.22-5)
Annabella’s tone remains self-assured but with the offer of loving him, she makes a concession. Realizing that she has lost her advantage now that he knows she is not as she seemed, her earlier bravura is revealed as a tactic to gain a position from which to negotiate a personal relationship with Soranzo in their marriage. The mockery is partly a fallback to old patterns and partly this is a negotiation tactic since she has just been rejected, physically and verbally, in violent terms, because she was not the gift he was expecting. Annabella, assuming that Soranzo still loves her, holds out the promise that she may come to love him in return, a gift that he also rejects because it is one he no longer wants. He demands to know if she is with child, a fact she deems “superfluous” (4.3.27) but confesses that she is pregnant. When he demands the father’s name, Annabella shuts down the negotiation with “Soft, sir, ’twas not in my bargain” (4.3.28). It is clear that she has misjudged the situation and that Soranzo no longer wants the gift she offers. She cannot negotiate terms in this relationship with Soranzo since his one condition, the name of the child’s father, is the one she will not meet. Unable to negotiate on her own terms, Annabella turns to baiting Soranzo by withholding the information he wants, just as earlier in the play she refused his suit by mocking him. The result is a stalemate; not even Soranzo’s threats of death, his appeal that she abused his love, or his appeal for forgiveness manage to elicit the information he seeks. Annabella’s subsequent penitence adds complexity to her character and the play because she arrives at it independently and in soliloquy (5.1) rather than succumbing to the friar’s pressure; neither is her change of heart a preference for another man, even though this is what Giovanni attributes it to in his jealousy and refusal to allow Annabella to follow her conscience. She repents the sin, moreover, without forsaking Giovanni or betraying him to Soranzo. Even in repentance, therefore, the dual nature of the incest is maintained. Soranzo’s insistence that she dress in her wedding robes for the final banquet may be, as Martin Wiggins
suggests, in anticipation of a public shaming ritual to expose her as the pregnant bride. This would be Soranzo’s final rejection of her, a return of the gift as “damaged goods, returned to the merchant ‘in the original packaging,’” on their wedding night.

Confession and Salvation

Michel Foucault compellingly argues that the subject is discursively produced and as such both has access to the signifying practice and is formed by that practice. The subject is, however, constrained by the range of positions the discourses define. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault contends that confession has been one of the major modes of discursive reproduction in Western civilization since the medieval period and asserts that when confession is not spontaneous, violence or threat can compel it. In 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore the ritual of confession enables men to contain women, and as Susan J. Wiseman indicates, in the seventeenth-century context, the religious language of confession was how incest became known. The confession is needed, as Wiseman argues,

for the church and law to assign meaning to an individual body in its social context, as the mere body in front of an audience is not self-explanatory. Even a pregnant body does not tell all its own secrets, and incest is undiscoverable from external evidence. Nevertheless, contemporaries did link sexual irregularity to external signs; in the early-modern period what was perceived as sexual laxity or deviance was associated with monstrous births.

For Foucault, confession frees those who articulate their innermost thoughts but it simultaneously reduces them to silence because confession takes place in a power relationship; confession has long claimed sex as a privileged theme. The power dynamic of the ritual of confession is displayed in the play as Annabella kneels and Friar Bonaventura sits while he conjures images of hell and urges her to confess her sin and repent. Annabella’s acquiescence to this power elicits the hitherto withheld consent to marry and thus it is through confession that
Friar Bonaventura is able to exert the male authority that she has hitherto evaded by deferring Soranzo’s suit. The refusal to confess is equally constraining. Annabella confesses her pregnancy to Soranzo on her wedding night but her confession is incomplete as she withholds the name of her seducer and she refuses to confess to her father, which results in her physical confinement. Again, she uses withholding as a strategy for self-protection.

Early modern gender codes demanded that women be silent except when acquiescing to male authority. Nonetheless, Annabella’s refusal to speak when Soranzo demands her seducer’s name is as transgressive as Hippolita’s verbal displays and as imperilling because silence can be threatening, as Cordelia’s is in King Lear when she refuses to participate in the love test. Like Cordelia, Annabella uses silence as mode of resistance. As Wiseman shows, only Annabella’s confession of the father’s name will reveal the incest and in her refusal the incestuous sexuality’s symbolic meaning remains concealed because it cannot be read on the body, despite Soranzo’s insistence that he can and will read the truth on Annabella’s heart.102 Annabella takes this new position in her quarrel with Soranzo, which shifts between his demand for her seducer’s name and her deferral of an answer. Annabella makes the fight a contest for meaning by casting her pregnancy in terms of the Virgin birth and the unnamed father as an angel (4.3.36-48); therefore Annabella retains meaning by withholding and manipulating information. Giovanni is an angel only in Annabella’s eyes, however; when he reveals the incest in the final scene, he is denounced as “incestuous villain” (5.6.51), “Monster of children” (62), “Inhuman scorn of men” (69), and “lecher” (92). Soranzo demands a confession, threatening violence, but Annabella withdraws into silence after recasting Giovanni and their incestuously produced offspring. She thus refuses to participate in and perpetuate the discourse that will subjugate her to Soranzo and inscribe her as a whore and her child as monstrous. Her silence refuses Soranzo’s appropriation of her
meaning and representation. Annabella’s pregnant womb is simultaneously fecund and secretive because it will both produce a child and offer a mode of resistance because her death ensures that the secret of her incest that is literally buried within her is kept. As Katherine Maus indicates, the possession of this unreadable space could potentially protect an aspect of the self from public scrutiny or control; female biology therefore “incarnates in risky but compelling ways some of the particular privileges and paradoxes of Renaissance subjectivity.” Soranzo may control Annabella by confining her and therefore subjecting her to only his gaze, but her inferiority clearly both deflects this gaze and facilitates her resistance to his scrutiny. Her refusal to name her seducer is reinforced by anatomy; the truth inscribed on her womb is not vulnerable to outside discovery or manipulation. Giovanni’s removal of Annabella’s womb at the end of the play may subject it to the male gaze but the secret of incest remains intact until revealed by Giovanni because the disembodied womb is unreadable; the father’s name is inscribed neither on the child nor on the womb that contains it.

Annabella’s withdrawal into silence resists her discursive production as a whore but cannot stop her interpretation and inscription by others; that interpretation is as oxymoronic as her presentation in the text. Newman’s analysis of early modern marriage elucidates the influence of the Bible as a model for marital relations; influenced by Proverbs, marriage was justified against the Catholic ideal of celibacy as God’s gift. The most cited verse regarding marriage in the period was Proverbs 12:4, A good wife is the crown of her husband, a verse which offers a synecdochic representation of woman that manages female behaviour by erasing the female body and foregrounding masculine agency. Pointing to erasure of the proverb’s second half, she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones, Newman argues that this
omission is yet another means of managing women: “the shameful wife is literally unrepresented, she is not written.”

Much criticism of Ford’s plays has been limited to his use of dramatic convention and finding echoes of earlier plays. *Tis Pity certainly draws on earlier work, but is more nuanced in foregrounding the shameful wife in the figures of Annabella and the adulterous Hippolita while allowing Annabella to retain the qualities of a heroine. She is admired in Thomas Ellice’s Commendatory Verse to the play as the means of restoring Giovanni, an opinion that is offered in retrospect:

> With admiration I beheld this Whore
> Adorned with beauty such as might restore
> (If ever being as thy muse hath famed)
> Her Giovanni, in his love unblamed;
> The ready Graces lent their willing aid,
> Pallas herself now played the chambermaid,
> And helped to put her dressings on. Secure
> Rest thou that thy name herein shall endure
> To th’end of age; and Annabella be
> Gloriously fair, even in her infamy.

Annabella urges Giovanni to repent, moreover, with the letter written in her own blood and she dies penitent; her atonement combined with her confession liberates her from sin and promises her salvation. Annabella thus attains what none of the other characters do, except Philotis who retreats to a convent, and Annabella’s penitence consequently aligns her more with Philotis the nun than with Hippolita the adulteress. The difference is, of course, that Philotis is ordered into a convent by her uncle to find this salvation while Annabella comes to hers independently and, just as she does, she is killed.

**Annabella: Virgin and Whore**

Annabella’s equation with Philotis is part of a larger alignment of Annabella with the Virgin Mary. Lisa Hopkins identifies this through an allusion to the mystery plays, one that
occurs at the rather unexpected moment when Annabella is revealing her pregnancy to Soranzo.

She exclaims:

Yet, somewhat, sir, to stay your longing stomach
I am content t’acquaint you with. The man,
The more than man, that got this sprightly boy—
For ’tis a boy, and therefore glory, sir,
Your heir shall be a son— (4.3.29-33)

Following Soranzo’s interruption, she continues:

This noble creature was in every part
So angel-like, so glorious, that a woman
Who had not been but human as was I,
Would have kneeled to him, and have begged for love. (4.3.36-9)

Hopkins draws the parallel between these speeches and the moment in Joseph when he reacts to the confession that an angel is responsible for Mary’s pregnancy:

An aungel! Allas! Alas! Fy for schame!
Ye syn now in that ye to say
To puttyn an aungel in so gret blame.
Alas, alas! Let be, do way! (Happe 224)

Ford may not be referring to this particular play, but Annabella’s confession has religious connotations nonetheless and these connotations run throughout the text and are particularly significant in their framing of ‘Tis Pity, since the play’s opening and closing lines are spoken by religious figures. Annabella enters the play from above, which positions her above both the play’s action and Parmesan society. Her final scenes promise, furthermore, to return her to this status above the others. In her solitary confinement, Annabella figures herself as a sacrifice in conventional Christian, almost Christ-like terms: “O, would the scourge due to my black offense/
Might pass from thee [Giovanni], that I alone might feel/ The torment of an uncontrolled flame” (5.1.21-3). Before murdering her, Giovanni urges Annabella to pray because they must part and again alludes to the Madonna as he says “Go thou, white in thy soul, to fill a throne/ Of
innocence and sanctity in heaven” (5.5.64-5). Annabella’s dying words that beg forgiveness both for herself and her killer further recall Christ’s asking forgiveness for his executioners. This last allusion carries over into the final scene, where Giovanni presents her heart as sacramental and Eucharistic. The religious allusions surrounding Annabella combined with Giovanni’s mystification of her heart present her in terms of both Mary and Christ. Ford thus gives double, paradoxical representations of Annabella as virgin and whore within the play, complicating our responses to her.

Overall, Annabella may be “a woman more spoken to than speaking” as Nathaniel Strout contends, but her body resists inscription and the agency afforded by gift exchange allows her to resist her commodification. Susannah Mintz postulates, “The culture’s inability to arrive at a form of marriage based on compatibility or equality may be what organizes the play around loss, and therefore desire.” Ultimately, the heart ripped from her body makes the triumphs of the early modern anatomy theatres both literal and ambiguous; although physically displaying the heart as both the repository of secrets and as readable, the play’s conclusion cannot resolve the immorality of Parmesan society or the identity of the whore. Neither can the conclusion resolve Annabella’s oxymoronic inscription by others or her attempts to resist it through the gift and through the play’s twist in dramatic convention. Early in ‘Tis Pity Putana points to Annabella’s position at the centre of the conflict for meaning: “Here’s threatening, challenging, quarreling, and fighting, on every side, and all for your sake” (1.2.63-4). It seems she was right since all ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore really offers in its concluding scene is an enigma, as impenetrable as the womb that holds Annabella’s secrets. All’s Well That Ends Well similarly defies resolution with its conditional ending, but women’s agency is also expressed, through Helen’s transformation of herself into a gift at key moments in the play. She is able to forge an alliance with the King.
through the manipulation of the gift, but whether her husband will accept the gift she has forced on him in the bed trick remains an unanswered question, suggesting that the marriage is one that must be negotiated between the spouses and not in the public forum of the court. Women’s agency to refuse gifts and suitors has also been demonstrated through Diana’s refusal of Bertram’s tokens and letters. Both Shakespeare and Ford present the complex nature of gifts and how they impinge on courtship relations; each dramatist shows that gifts permit women to assert agency and to resist commodification in marriage while, paradoxically, remaining within accepted gendered behaviours. Pursuing these topics, both dramatists show that women’s giving is not always to their benefit and raise questions about women’s agency vis-à-vis the gift.

Consequently, neither play fits neatly within its genre because these forms cannot resolve the issues. Instead, endings are forced and uneasy, leaving the questions unanswered. In turn, the genre is a comment on the issue. *All’s Well* is a comedy because the tragic elements within it are averted, and no matter how uncomfortably the play ends, Helen’s desire is legitimated in marriage. *’Tis Pity* is a tragedy, but the tragedy lies with society and the failure to appreciate woman as gift. This failure leads to Hippolita’s bitterness, Annabella’s murder, and Philotis being shut in a convent, thereby unable to give herself as a gift. These women are portrayed sympathetically and thus Ford comments on women’s plight in male-dominated society.
Chapter Three Notes

1 *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.1.50).

2 In Annabella’s case, the incest is transgressive, but her behaviour seems “acceptable” because she has given herself as a gift in a kind of marriage to Giovanni and because, for most of the play, the incest is largely undiscovered. She uses the courtship ritual of rejecting suitors to cover her relationship with Giovanni, and her rejection of the other suitors is within “acceptable” limits on female behaviour.

3 G. K. Hunter, “Introduction,” *All’s Well That Ends Well*, Arden 3rd series, General Editors, Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (1959. Surrey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997) xxvi. *All’s Well* is based on the Third Day of the *Decameron*, or more probably William Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure*, a translation of Boccaccio. The tale emphasizes Giletta’s methods in achieving her goals rather than her emotions as desiring female, an emphasis that may account for both Shakespeare’s use of gift discourse from his own society as well as the problems critics have encountered with characters, who are more fully developed than the externally-conceived characters found in Boccaccio (Susan Snyder, “All’s Well that Ends Well and Shakespeare’s Helens: Texts and Subtext, Subject and Object,” *ELR* 18:1 [1988]: 75).

4 Lisa Jardine sees the conversation with Paroles as informing Helen’s actions while showing her as a match for him in equivocating on virginity, thus betraying herself as too knowing for the innocent virgin she professes to be in her essay “Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare’s Learned Heroines: ‘These Are Old Paradoxes’,” *SQ* 38:1 (1987): 9. Susan Snyder argues that the conversation impels Helen from a “reminder of time’s passage and the fear of being left to wither, to the sharp realization that Bertram will find fulfilling love elsewhere, and to answering urgency that propels her to act on her desires” (“*Shakespeare’s Helens*” 72). Richard A. Levin argues that in Paroles’s ‘commonswealth of nature’, creatures use whatever endowments they have to gain advantage amidst constant struggle. Consequently, in the battle of the sexes, a woman’s virginity is probably her highest valued ‘commodity’ and not to bargain it risks losing a change at advancement. Skilful sexual negotiation can, accordingly, bring untold successes to a woman, although Paroles casually handles the question of offspring and declares it “but one of the goals of nature expressed in a woman’s sexuality.” See Levin’s essay “Did Helena have a Renaissance,” *English Studies* 87:1 (2006): 28. David McCandless sees the conversation between Paroles and Helen’s concluding speech as containing language of her coded desire and as such containing a link between the “heretofore unthinkable idea [of possibly losing her virginity to Bertram] and the conception of her bold plan for winning him” in his essay “Helena’s Bed-trick: Gender and Performance in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *SQ* 45 (1994): 451-2. Patricia Parker discusses the passage in terms of the theme of increase and multiply and how Paroles links generational increase with monetary increase. See her essay “All’s Well That Ends Well: Increase and Multiply,” *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, eds., David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G.W. Pigman II, and Wayne A. Rebhorn, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Volume 95 (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) esp 362-365. R.B. Parker sees the conversation as representing Helen’s move into a practical mind frame in his essay “War and Sex in ‘All’s Well That Ends Well,’” *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 108.

5 Critics have noted it as such and it is an expression of her desire, but it is more as I suggest. For the comment as an expression of her desire, see Hee-Won Lee “Helena’s Tricks: Transgression and Negotiation in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” in *Hamlet on Screen*, eds., Holger Klein and Dimiter Daphinoff (A publication of Shakespeare Yearbook Vol 8 Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997) 459.

6 The latter argument has been put forth by critics including Peggy Munoz Simonds, “Sacred and Sexual Motifs in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 42:1 (1989) 33-59, esp. 41. David McCandless has similarly read the passage as Helen’s erotic desires, but a coded disclosure (449-68). Richard Hillman in *William Shakespeare: The Problem Plays* (New York: Twayne, Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993) acknowledges the textual corruption argument but argues that the speech incorporates sexual thinking and possessiveness that feeds into the confidence of the second soliloquy (69-70). In his annotation on the line for the New Arden edition, G.K. Hunter suggests that Helen is “fooling the time” and she uses an abrupt transition to conceal her deeper frame of reference from Paroles. He thus suggests a pattern of continuity (note to 1.1.161). Following Hunter’s suggestion, Joseph Price suggests that the Folio punctuation be reinstated and the speech be delivered by an actress in a distracted manner because it seems to suggest the formulation of a plan that is explained in the second soliloquy (*The Unfortunate Comedy: A Study of All’s Well That Ends Well and Its Critics* [Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1968] 143). Conversely, Susan Snyder argues that the difference in punctuation makes Helen’s response appear disjointed and tangential, reading “There” to refer
to the court and raises the question of why Helen would expose her love to Parolles ("Shakespeare's Helen's" 67-8). Finally, Ruth Nevo points out that while Helen has a tendency to reflective inwardness, as this speech shows, the speech remains a challenge to interpreters with indefinite references such as "There" (where? Paris? Or in Helen's virginity?) but the oddity that remains is the reference to a mother ("Motive and meaning in All's Well That Ends Well," "Fanned and Winnowed Opinions": Shakespearean Essays presented to Harold Jenkins, eds., John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendleton (London and New York: Methuen: 1987) 37-38.

Mary Free, "All's Well That Ends Well as Noncomic Comedy," Acting Funny: Comic Theory and Practice in Shakespeare's Plays, ed., Frances Teague (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP; London and Toronto: Association UP, 1994) 44. Free's exact wording is "sex or class differences" but I would argue that "rank" is more appropriate to the time period. In her essay, Free argues it is Helen's linguistic powers that enable her to win the King's help.

Michael Friedman sees Lafeu as describing the King's ailment as a form of impotence that can be cured by Helen's cure replenishing the King's sexual vitality ("Service is no heritage: Bertram and the Ideology of Procreation,", Studies in Philology 92:1 [1995]: 86). Richard A. Levin has noted that the king is described as languishing of the mysterious fistula, (1.3:1-2) and the word "languishes" was associated with love melancholy in early modern England ("Did Helena have a Renaissance" [241].) Richard Wheeler has noted that the emphasis on erotic properties that stress the power of the medicine to restore and also to arouse male potency. These erotic suggestions are brought fully into play when Lafeu withdraws with the allusion to Pandarus. See his essay "The King and the Physician's Daughter: All's Well That Ends Well and the Late Romances," Comparative Drama 8 (1974): 321.

Susan Snyder notes that Lafeu introduces Helen more as a woman to arouse the King that as a doctor to treat him in her essay "The King's not here': Displacement and Deferral in All's Well That Ends Well," SQ 43 (1992): 24. David McCandless also shows that Shakespeare follows Boccaccio in making the healer a woman but deviates from the source in emphasizing her sexual allure and making this indispensable to the King's cure (449). Ruth Nevo argues that Lafeu barely cloaks the sexuality of language in the "Doctor She" speech, "takes a salacious pleasure in persuading the King to attempt the cure" and that Helen restores the King's virility in her essay "Motive and Meaning" (32). R.B. Parker also notes that curing the King represents some sort of sexual risk for Helen, but sees the reasons for this as being left unclear (110). Conversely, Susan Snyder argues that the King does not respond to the offer of public shame in her essay "Shakespeare's Helens" (68).

Barbara Hodgdon argues that the formal, riddling couplets and Helen's presentation of herself as one possessed of God's grace and heaven's help strongly counter the sexual suggestiveness of Lafeu's introduction (2.1.75-77). See her essay "The Making of Virgins and Mothers: Sexual Signs, Substitute Scenes and Doubled Presences in All’s Well the Ends Well," Philological Quarterly 66:1 (1987): 51. Kay Stanton argues that Helen deliberately plays down her skill before the court in claiming that the Heven has used her restore the King, an explanation the men accept but Helen does not believe because it is in direct contradiction to the lines she speaks before she goes to court "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie/ Which we ascribe to heaven" (1.1.208-09). For Stanton, "It cannot be that she changes her mind on this point at court, because in that same speech ...she goes on to state her intent to cure the king." See her essay "All's Well in Love and War" Ideological Approaches to Shakespeare: The Practice of Theory, eds., Robert P. Merriex and Nicholas Ranson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992) 157.


Juan Luis Vives, A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Boke Called The Instructiow of Christen Woman, trans., Rycharde Hynde (London: T. Powell, 1557) Bk. I, fol. Aii, as found in Eileen Z. Cohen, "'Virtue is Bold': The Bed-trick and Characterization in All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure," Philological Quarterly 65:2 (1986): 172. Lisa Jardine argues that Helen's phrasing in the lines "Exempted be from me the arrogance/ To choose from forth the royal blood of France" is an elaborate pun and can be read to mean that Helen is free to marry above her rank, except from marrying a royal heir; or may be read to as intending that she will not choose anyone above her station; or as a combination of the two. Her phrasing is, for Jardine, "designedly imprecise enough to dupe the King ("Cultural Confusion" 9).
13 Hodgdon argues that “Helena sets the terms of the bargain herself, a change that foregrounds her sense of her own power” (“The Making of Virgins” 52.)
14 Patricia Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 34. Maurice Hunt also argues that Helen’s curing of the King is based on a plan to choose Bertram as her husband in a lottery and thus her motives are not disinterested. His argument is a theological one. See his essay “Helena and the Reformation problem of merit” (347).
15 Stanton, All’s Well in Love and War 157.
16 Hunt notes that the cure stresses Helen’s merit, not divine mercy once the cure is affected (“Helena and the Reformation problem of merit” 345-346). Edward L. Hart argues that in saving the King, Helen saves him both physically and “spiritually by opening up new, imaginative approaches to living” (“A Mixed Consort: Leontes, Angelo, Helena,” SQ 15:1 [1964]: 82). Richard Wheeler does not deal with gift exchange, but he does argue that “The play’s closing does not effectively restore a strong feeling for the king’s power to give order to his society or to balance his debt to Helena”. See his essay “The King and Physician’s Daughter” (326).
17 R.B. Parker argues that the marriage is forced by the King’s authority alone, not by Helen’s “worth or her determination” (110).
18 McCandless 450, 453.
19 Carol Rutter, “Helena’s Choosing: Writing the Couplets in a Choreography of Discontinuity (All’s Well That Ends Well 2.3.),” Essays in Theatre 9:2 (1991): 129. She goes on to argue that this anxiety is suppressed because the audience sees both scenes (Lafeu’s view of the Lords’s rejection and Helen’s view of her rejecting them) and sees that Lafeu is simply wrong.
20 Barbara Hodgdon argues that the scene “transforms Giletta’s refusal of many husbands into a miniature occasion that foregrounds Helena’s undesirability...by surrounding her with a group of unwilling potential husbands (and sympathetic, if not willing, older men...) from which Helena chooses... the singularly unwilling Bertram (54-5). Friedman sees Lafeu commenting on the suitors apparent rejection from a distance as showing that, “In Old Lafew’s mind, any young man who foolishly passes up the chance to enjoy Helena’s physical charms within the context of marriage does not deserve to possess sexual capability in the first place” (“Service is no heritage” 88). Rutter analyzes the couplets of the scene and argues that Helen is in control with these Lords, in each case closing off the male’s partial line and intervening with a rejection as each successive suitor accepts her such that “In a comic reversal of expectation, that she should ‘be refused,’ Helena must silence a superabundance of willing suitors” (128). Dorothy Cook sees Lafeu’s comments about the Lords being “Boys of ice/ They’ll none of her” (1.93-4) as showing a general reluctance on their part that serves to strengthen Bertram’s position in her essay “Helena: The Will and the Way,” The Upstart Crow 10 (1990): 20. W. David Kay argues that Helen’s dialogue of their body language implies that the Second and Third Lords share Bertram’s disdain despite verbal claims to the contrary, in contrast to the First and Fourth Lords who accept her with unqualified willingness in his essay “Reforming the Prodigal: Dramatic Paradigms, Male Sexuality, and the Power of Shame in All’s Well That Ends Well,” in Re-Vision of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstien, ed., Evelyn Gajowski, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004): 112. As Joseph Price’s study of the play indicates, this is a long-standing argument. Dr. Johnson insisted Lafeu and Paroles were located some distance from the King and Helen and Lafeu misinterprets action (Samuel Johnson, The Plays of Shakespeare iii, 376) while Theobald argued that to the contrary, that Lafeu’s comments are an accurate commentary on the hostility of the young Lords to the marriage (Lewis Theobald, The Works of Shakespeare, iii [London, 1773] 37) as cited in Price (81).
21 R.B. Parker argues that when facing Bertram in the choosing scene, her “confidence drains away and she reverts catastrophically to the earlier humility” (110) while David McCandless argues the latter position (450).
24 Jardine argues that Bertram is right to raise the objection because the match is a disparagement, violating a prime obligation of wardship, which was to ensure a suitable match for the ward. It is at this point that Jardine sees Helen’s learning having “fulfilled its potential as a sexually and socially disruptive force” (“Cultural Confusion” 9-10). Conversely, W. David Kay argues that the play resists such readings that view it as a protest against wardship as an institution because the issue of wardship is not pursued in the play, the King’s goodness is emphasized by the courtier Lafeu, and the thematic center of the play is the King’s speeches on virtue and true nobility which criticize Bertram and his snobbish objections to the marriage. See his essay “Reforming the Prodigal” 112-113 for further discussion.
Alexander Leggatt, "All's Well That Ends Well: The Testing of Romance," *Modern Language Quarterly* 32 (1971): 29. Leggatt argues that Bertram rejects Helen because his motivations are too realistic for the patterns of romance; he does not want to marry Helen and his refusal shows the direct clash between the values of romance and those of reality in the play. (29)

Richard Hillman sees this as indirect reminder of the King's obligation, but Helen's invocation of the King's restored health is a direct reminder of the King's obligation to her (78).


Powers 29.

29 Judge Swinburne distinguished between two types of spousal in his Treatise of Spousals or Matrimonial Contracts (1560?-1623). A spousal de futuro or engagement and a spousal de praesenti a marriage in fact, the difference being whether the couple used vows in the future or present tense. See Powers 29.

30 In Mary Free's analysis of the play, Helena and Bertram have five scenes together in the play, and in three of them they speak to or about one another but do not actually engage in any dialogue with each other and this distances the comic spirit of the play for the audience, especially when compared to plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* where Kate and Petruchio have witty battles or *Much Ado About Nothing*. From this analysis she argues that Helen's and Bertram's exchanges indicate the dynamic of power in their relationship, which is Helen as subservient and Bertram as playing his superiority until the final scene. See her essay "*All's Well That Ends Well* as Noncomic Comedy" 42-43.


33 Free 41.


37 Parker argues that in the bed trick Helen is both active and passive: "If the bedtrick is the ultimate sign of her active achievement, it is also the place where she takes the place of the passive object of desire, becoming the traditional ‘vessel’ of bearing in a tradition where the pregnant male body was the seal and sign of that passivity" (389). Helen's agency as a gift, however, negates this passivity.

38 Bly 37.

39 Neely 86.

40 Married before a priest, the de praesenti contract is binding even without consummation. However, Bertram’s fleeing to the wars threatens marital dissolution because an absence of three years without consummation would allow him to sue for divorce (Ranald 43). Refusing consummation, he could also claim “consent obtained through respect for authority (per metus reverentialis)” or “mental reservation at the time of the ceremony” (Ranald186).

41 McCandless 463.

42 Ranald notes in her essay that the promises, consummation and exchange of rings would have been recognized by Elizabethan law and practice as binding Bertram to Diana (191).

43 Cook 24.

44 Hodgdon 60.

45 Hodgdon 61. Asp notes Helen's conviction of the impersonal nature of the act and uses theories by Lacan to explain how the darkness of the bed trick hides the particularity, or subjectivity, of the woman and the place of castration, an imbalance that Lacan explains "by commenting that what man approaches in the sexual act is the cause of his desire (lack). The male identifies the woman with what he has repressed in himself and makes love to complete himself in her. Thus the woman's specificity is subordinate to the man's quest for this own fulfillment. Helena seems both shocked and disillusioned by this experience of sexual objectification in which she is not seen and in which may not speak. Yet from this place of apparent lack (her genitals) and seeming powerlessness she traps the cozened Bertram's wild desires and lures them into consummating the legal bond" (57).
Critics have noted that the marriage is something to be resolved beyond the limits of the play. Asp has noted that “This marriage is an unknown item, a risk whose outcome is to be determined beyond the limits of the play” and that Helen’s last words in the play are to the Countess, a greeting that is warm in contrast to her greeting to Bertram and seems to indicate that Helen has “re-adjusted the focus of her desire” (58). Michael D. Friedman notes that “Helena’s dual role as virgin sinfully seduced and a wife lawfully impregnated is merely illusory; readers are fully aware, in a way that Bertram is not, that the excitement of his ‘illicit’ act was not in the deed itself but in his mind, as is the ultimate confluence of Helena’s two roles. Can Bertram now desire Helena for herself and not simply as a body substituted for Diana’s?” Helen, moreover, has made a subtle change to the tasks assigned by Bertram; he stipulates that he is to be shown a child of her body that he is father to (3.2) but when she reads the conditions in the final scene she changes the condition to “is by me with child” (5.3.307) and thus Bertram is not yet, technically “doubly won”. See Friedman’s essay “‘Service is no heritage’” (97). Similarly, Julia Briggs points out that the marriage (here and in Measure for Measure) is achieved via a sexually arousing deception. The bed trick brings together this transgression and marriage in order to bring the sexual dissident (Bertram and Angelo) back into the community, “yet there remains the disturbing suspicion at the end that their marriages are founded on mistakes, on a transient desire for an unattainable woman.” Both plays end with a recall to earlier circumstances, reinforced by the Bertram’s and Angelo’s reluctance to recognize themselves or the woman who love them and thus Briggs concludes that it would be difficult to imagine the momentary sexual conquest of the bed trick transformed into the repetitive acts of marriage (311-12).

David McCandless points out that Bertram has falsely expressed admiration for Helen twice, once in 2.3 and again here, and that no accompanying gesture could give credibility to his sincerity as it may be symptomatic of gratitude for saving his life rather than stemming from genuine conversion, or it may an act that Bertram “cunningly” puts on. See his essay “Helena’s Bed-trick” 466. Similarly, Cynthia Lewis notes that “Bertram’s unreliability is his habit of promising to reform and then reneging” (164). William Babula sees the reply as “courtly and contrived; he manages to use this woman [Maudlin] as an excuse for his behavior” (“The Character and the Conclusion: Bertram and the Ending of ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’” South Atlantic Bulletin 42:2 [1977]: 98). Dorothy Cook points outs that there is no evidence to support Bertram’s claim of prior preference for Maudlin and thus it “is simply propitiating” in her essay (25).

Leggatt states that with the King’s closing speech “[t]he happy ending is not seriously in doubt; but it is not completely confirmed, either” (39). Christy Desmet sees it as Bertram controlling the terms of reconciliation by reserving the right to test Helen’s improbable account of fulfilling his conditions (“Speaking Sensibly: Feminine Rhetoric in Measure for Measure and All’s Well That Ends Well,” Renaissance Papers, eds., Dale B.J. Randall and Joseph A. Porter [Duke: The Southeastern Renaissance Conference Duke UP, 1986] 51. Also published as Reading Shakespeare’s Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity [Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992] 162). Michael Friedman sees Bertram addressing the remarks to the King as revealing the extent to which they represent a renewed political alliance with him at least as much as an emotional tie with Helen. Michael D. Friedman, “Male Bonds and Marriage in All’s Well and Much Ado,” SEL 35 (1995): 243.

I do not go as far as McCandless, however, in claiming that Helen schemes to rescue Bertram from a situation of her own making “in order to elicit feelings of indebtedness conducive to capitulation.” McCandless goes on to argue that Helen “depends on his feeling like the rescued sinner of the medieval morality play to ensure her reception as savior and wife” (466). I think this assertion overstates Helen’s position.

Asp also argues that Helen will trade the ring and child for Bertram’s acceptance of her as wife and mother of his child, but does not put this exchange in the context of the gift (59).

Gerald J. Gross, “The Conclusion to All’s Well That Ends Well,” SEL 23 (1983) 263. W. David Kay finds a parallel to this situation in Heywood’s The Wise Woman of Hogdson. Kay argues that All’s Well belongs to a subgenre of prodigal-husband plays. In Heywood’s play, Luce appears to love the reprobate Chartley for reasons that are as ambiguous as Helen’s desire for Bertram, and although it is unclear whether Heywood’s play preceded Shakespeare’s or not, according the Kay, the similarities between the two plays “show the fantasy of a clever, devoted woman winning the love and acceptance of a prodigal husband by shaming him had enough appeal to the Elizabethan audience to seem worth imitating” (120). See his essay for further discussion.


Dorothy Cook raises these questions about the play’s conclusion: “But is justice done? Does Bertram deserve forgiveness? Is he is worthy of his wife? Why does Helena still want him after he slanders Diana? And, if she does,
will he change?” and Cook argues that it is the last that is the one of relevance “because of Helena’s love.” Bertram has yet to prove himself, and therefore gain our trust, but Helen has proven herself throughout the play and her self-assurance overcomes the apparent ambiguity of play’s conclusion. We do not doubt that Helen will satisfy Bertram’s final condition to make the bed trick known and thus the mention of divorce is comic irony. Although her attitude does not redeem him fully, it assumes he is redeemable. My reading is somewhat different. See Cook’s essay “Helena: The Will and the Way,” 26. Similarly, W. David Kay insists that the reading need not be read too pessimistically because Helen’s reply is in the same confident spirit of her earlier vows to accept death if her cure failed the King and the audience, whether readers or spectators, are in a position to appreciate the plot’s dramatic ironies and therefore know that Bertram’s final condition can be fulfilled without difficulty. The dramatic emphasis, for Kay, falls on Bertram’s promise to love Helen “ever dearly” and the conditions infuse a realism to qualify the conventionality of the comic ending (123-4).

56 Hillman 67. He goes on to argue that Helen never really wants Bertram and never displays any sign of caring of whether or not he wants her. Rather, Hillman asserts, “Bertram may be seen as filling the sudden vacuum of authority created by her father’s absence, but on terms that enable her to regain a form of control over her existence” (67).


58 Gross 272.


61 Jennifer A. Low indicates, furthermore, that throughout the play “there are a plethora of metaphors about various containers, and many of these figure Annabella as the container.” See her essay “‘Bodied Forth’: Spectator, Stage, and Actor in the Early Modern Theatre,” Comparative Drama 39:1 (2005): 10 and note 28 Sir specifc examples.

62 Verna Foster, “‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore as City Tragedy,” John Ford Critical Re-Visions, ed., Michael Neill (Cambridge etc, Cambridge UP, 1988) 189-90. Foster argues that “Annabella is at the centre of much social business” while I posit her at the centre of the play. Martin Wiggins argues that Annabella “has the more structurally central position in the narrative” than Giovanni in his introduction to the New Mermaids edition (18).

63 Andreas Vesalius, De humani corporis fabrica, libri septem (Basilaeae: Per Ioannem Oporinum, 1543). Karen Newman, Fatal Positions: Individualism, Science, Visuality (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) preface; 24-44. Not until the 18th century was the female body depicted in its entirety.


65 In the play, Giovanni’s mother is dead, which may explain the connotations of a lasting relationship with the father. What I am trying to show is that the connection to the mother is limited temporally and ideologically through the word “womb” and its accompanying connotations of pregnancy.

66 Giovanni’s speech is riddled with possessive pronouns, especially when referring to Annabella. In their wedding vows, Annabella swears by “our mother’s dust” (1.2.260) while Giovanni swears by “my mother’s dust” (1.2.263); he calls her “my precious sister” (5.3.4); his final words are “Where’er I go, let me enjoy this grace/ Freely to view my Annabella’s face” (5.6.110-11 my emphasis).

67 As Michael Neill points out, there is no consensus on the interpretation of this episode among scholars. He gives various views in his essay, arguing that the final tableau lacks a controlling ritual context and therefore no one explanation can be confirmed “so that the heart always threatens to become nothing more than itself, a grisly tautology — a piece of offal en brochette, brutally stripped of all vestiges of metaphor.” See his essay “‘What Strange Riddle’s This?’” 153-179, esp. 155-156 and 165.

68 Nathaniel Strout’s essay “The Tragedy of Annabella in ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore” opens be arguing that “For most of the play, Annabella is a woman more spoken to than speaking” and that she “listens to others rather than asserts her opinions”. See his essay in Traditions and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, eds., David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1990) 163. His assessment of
the number and type of Annabella’s lines not only appears persuasive, but seems to find corroboration in an earlier essay. Larry S. Champion estimated that of the nine characters who speak soliloquies and asides in the play, Annabella has only 30 lines, or 17.3% while Giovanni has 109 lines or 45.5% (“Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective,” PMLA 90:1 [1975]: 81). Similarly, Sidney R. Homan, Jr. asserts that Annabella is “passive in the midst of circumstances” (271) and passively accepts “whatever befalls the lovers” thus remaining “far less interesting than her brother” (“Shakespeare and Dekker as Keys to Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” SEL 7:2 [1967]: 275). Alison Findlay asserts that Annabella has no autonomy to step outside conventional morality and “sins in ignorance” (A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama [Oxford: Blackwell, 1999] 26). An exception is Richard McCabe, who asserts that Giovanni is nothing without Annabella’s cooperation, and that she is the play’s supreme object of desire and denigration, judged a whore by the Cardinal, Soranzo, the friar, and Giovanni himself (“‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore and Incest,” Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion, eds., Garrett A. Sullivan, Fr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield [Oxford, New York, etc: Oxford UP: 2006] 316). Although I agree that Annabella’s giving of herself is integral to the play, her denigration as a whore is in question. All of these men are of questionable character for one reason or another; the Friar has violated his duty in officiating the marriage of Soranzo and Annabella; Soranzo has broken vows to Hippolita; the Cardinal has protected a murderer; and Giovanni has “married” and impregnated his sister.

Verna Foster has suggested that while distinctions are subtle, Ford does make distinctions through speech patterns. For example, Soranzo’s speech is marked by slow rhythms that mark his noble status while Florio’s speeches are marked by politeness. For a full discussion see her essay “‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore as City Tragedy,” John Ford Critical Re-Visions, 187.

As Roper indicates in his introduction to the Revels Edition, Florio never refers to the adultery, but Putana’s and Richardetto’s comments (1.2 and 4.2) make it clear that the affair is well known, so we can infer that Florio has knowledge of Soranzo’s reputation. See his Introduction (1).

Valerie L. Jephson and Bruce Thomas Bohrer, “Mythologizing the Middle Class: ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore and the Urban Bourgeoisie,” Renaissance and Reformation n.s. 18:3 (1994): 9.

Putana will later solicit money from Donaldo for a favourable commendation of Bergetto to Annabella, and thus her commendations are for sale (see 2.6.15-17) and direction to line 20. Terri Clerico suggests that Soranzo is a desirable suitor because of his rank (“The Politics of Blood: John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” ELR 22:3 [1992]: 415) but if rank were the determining factor, Grimaldi would hold as much desirability because of his social rank. Verna Foster similarly asserts that Soranzo is judged a good match because of his noble status and has the contributing qualities of being wise, rich and kind and although she places the play in the cultural context of Stuart England, her argument seeks to make a one-to-one identification between the play and Stuart England that simply does not hold true. See her essay in John Ford: Critical Revisions, 186. The criticisms of her argument have also been made by Clerico (412). Lisa Hopkins also complicates the argument by showing that at least five of the major characters are clearly identified as outsider, not to mention the banditti who appear at the end who can be presumed to be regular inhabitants of the city. See her essay “City Tragedy: Middleton, Shakespeare and Ford,” Comparison, 1 (1994): 71-76.


Why Donaldo gives the gift is unclear. It may be a sign of admiration for Annabella’s “plain dealing”, but it comes the closest in the dramatic works under study to being a free gift as Donaldo expects nothing in return at this point in the play.


Nathaniel Strout, argues this a tactic of Annabella’s to defer to male authority and thus please her father, Soranzo and her jealous brother in (171).

Strout 167. Valerie L. Jephson and Bruce Bohrer acknowledge the dualism of the incest, atrocious when attached to the bourgeois other and simultaneously an occasion for pathos within the socially constructed self (16). George F. Sensabaugh sees the incest not as innocence but as equated with romantic love, particularly through juxtaposition with Soranzo and Hippolita, the latter of whom he figures as uncomplicatedly evil. See his essay “John Ford Revisited,” SEL 4:2 (1964): 194-216. Thelma N. Greenfield also argues for the dualism, seeing the
incest as horrific and yet with an “aura of innocence” in her essay “John Ford’s Tragedy: The Challenge of Re-Engagement,” “Concord in Discord: The Plays of John Ford 1586-1886, ed., Donald K. Anderson, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 18. David M. Bergeron sees Ford approving of the incestuous bond while paradoxically condemning the lovers because the incest is an expression of jealousy in his essay “Brother-Sister Relationships in Ford’s 1633 Plays,” also in “Concord in Discord,” 195, 210. Larry S. Champion sees the incest as “fundamentally repellant” yet “also intensely sincere” and placed in the context of a decadent society, the spectators are left to judge “that sincere immorality against the lust, avarice, treachery, vindictiveness, and hypocrisy of the society whose morality the lovers have rejected” (78). Dorothy M. Farr notes the incest was used as theme in earlier plays such as Women Beware Women, The Duchess of Malfi, and A king and No King but Ford uses it as his main plot with “honesty and frankness...to build up round the lovers an impression of inviolable innocence which, though perilously poised, is above the level either of moral law or of the emotional is inherent in social taboo.” See her John Ford and the Caroline Theatre (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979) 38-9. Of course, critics have taken the opposite view. William Hazlitt regretted the subject matter of incest and saw it as confirming Ford’s inferiority as a playwright (The Complete Works of William Hazlitt 21 vols, ed., P. How [Rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1967] 6:268. William Gifford saw it as immoral. See his “Introduction” The Works of John Ford, I (London, 1869) xxix-xxii. T.S. Eliot insisted that while there should be no objection in principle to the subject of sibling incest, the subject matter was not well done in Ford. Of his characters, he wrote that “Giovanni is...almost a monster of egotism, [Annabella] virtually a moral defective” (T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays [London Faber and Faber 1932] 197). Clifford Leech complained that the incest theme was used for shock value (John Ford and the Drama of His Time [London: Chatto and Windus, 1957] 49. R.J. Kaufmann has a somewhat different view, asserting that the world of the play acts as a foil to the incest of Giovanni and Annabella, a choice he calls “desperate” and claims “This is not, of course, because Ford approves of incest, but it is done to put the unthinkable within access of thought. Not the least of the functions of tragedy is to enlarge out imaginable tolerance.” See his essay “Ford’s Tragic Perspective,” TSLL 1 (1960) Rpt Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed., R.J. Kaufmann (New York: Oxford UP, 1961) 366.

80 This view has also been asserted by Champion (82-83). These critics see the other suitors as foils to Giovanni. Verna Foster sees the audience as being asked to scrutinize the suitors in 1.2 as (implicitly) a bad lot that gets worse as the play progresses and Giovanni as a positive choice first presented later in the same scene (194). Richard McCabe argues that Annabella and Giovanni are “better suited to one another than any rival claimants” (232). Kathleen McLuskie also asserts that “the structure of lovers rejected a lover chosen leads the audience to accept Annabella’s choice in spite of the startling danger of incest which emerges when the lover turns out to be her brother Giovanni. Annabella’s choice is further ratified by the physical organisation of the scene.” For a full discussion see her Renaissance Dramatists, Feminist Readings, Series Editor Sue Roe (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities 1989) 130. Mark Stavig argues that “Annabella’s three suitors are obviously much inferior to her in everything except status....Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Annabella turns to Giovanni, the one admirable person in her circle” (John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order [105]).

81 Susannah B. Mintz argues that Annabella seeks a relationship of “romantic and erotic equality” that symbolizes what Ford called ‘parity of condition’ in the dedication to The Lover’s Melancholy. In the incestuous relationship, Annabella’s “incestuous desire becomes a model for equality, openly opposing social and gender hierarchies” (275-6). Although I agree with much of her argument, she does not address Annabella’s subsequent marriage to Soranzo and her attempts to negotiate a position within that marriage once her pregnancy is discovered. See her essay ‘The Power of ‘Parity’ in Ford’s Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” Journal of English and Germanic Philology 102:2 (2003) 269-91.

82 Bruce Boehrer, “Nice Philosophy”: Tis Pity She’s a Whore and the Two books of God,” SEL 24 (1984): 358.

83 Boehrer 367-8. He argues that “This is a real marriage, and not an imitation” with the exchanging of vows and sealed with the ring in 2.6, and since Giovanni has discarded the Christian prohibition against incest, the union would be binding (367). See also Derek Roper’s introduction to the Revel’s edition, in which he argues that “Giovanni regards the exchange vows in I.ii as a unique and particularly sacred form of marriage” (xliv); Stavig sees it as a “pseudo-religious ritual...exchange of vows” (103). Kaufmann stresses the importance of vows as conferring identity as sees these vows as like a betrothal and calls the relationship a counterfeit marriage (533). Champion takes a slightly different view, calling it a “ritualistic betrothal” (82).

84 The forbidden degrees were recorded in Leviticus and codified in a table in the English Book of Common Prayer. Richard A. McCabe explores these in his essay (311).


As Homan points out with regard to the incestuous relationship, outside of society the relationship would not be a crime, but Annabella and Giovanni must live in the world (273). They can create one of their own temporarily, but that created world cannot sustain itself once Annabella becomes pregnant. Their discovery becomes inevitable and so then does social censure.

Boehrer 369.

Clerico reads Giovanni’s frequent allusions to this “oneness” as his flaunting his familiarity with neoplatonic rhetoric (420).

That this adultery is common knowledge is clear not only from Putana’s comments in 1.2 but also from Richardetto’s comments in 4.2.

Richardetto’s view that Annabella is a gift Giovanni should have refused because it is one he cannot bear reciprocate since he cannot bear to give it away. See her essay “The Gift: economies of kinship and sacrificial desire in *Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” Studies in the Humanities 29:2 (2002): 139-40.

McCabe 313-314. Dorothy Farr similarly asserts that the marriage can only degrade both Soranzo and Annabella, but does not pursue specific reasons as I have here. See her *John Ford and the Caroline Theatre* (46). Conversely, Stavig argues that the friar assumes Annabella is repentant and prepared to end her affair with Giovanni and therefore there is no reason why her marriage will not work (100).

Banerjee argues that Annabella “does not ‘truly’ give herself in marriage. Nor does she present herself as a ‘real’ gift to Soranzo at all. At best, she appears to be on ‘loan’ from Giovanni. Ironically, as far as Soranzo is concerned, she come with too many gifts – the dubious gift of her own self, as well as the gift of the unborn child in her womb” (142). Although I agree that she comes with too many gifts for Soranzo, I would argue that she does, in the negotiation, make an attempt to offer herself as a gift to Soranzo.

McCabe 316.

Here my thinking akin to Strout, but he sees Annabella subordinated to Giovanni (173) where I do not. Robert B. Heilman also sees Annabella’s repentance as adding complexity to her character and thus distinguished from Giovanni. He argues that Annabella’s portrait “is humanly ampler that that of the essentially monomaniac Giovanni, for we see different phases of her” (39). Annabella moves from the standard refuge of marriage to sorrow and self-blame while continuing to love Giovanni to repudiating sexual love and developing a loving concern for the denied lover’s safety. This is part of his larger argument that there are two competing themes in his play, one of decadence, shown in Giovanni, and one of tragedy, represented in Annabella. See his essay “The Perverse: An Aspect of Ford’s Art” in “Concord In Discord”: *The Plays of John Ford 1586-1986*, ed., Donald K. Anderson, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 27-48, especially 39 and 42-43.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; New York: Vintage-Random House, 1990) 18-25; 59. Foucault further asserts that the obligation to confess is so deeply ingrained that the truthful confession that power inscribed at the centre of the procedures of individualization has ceased to be perceived as the effect of that constraining power. Confession began as a religious sacrament and became a secular ritual, a transformation which posited it as an issue of public and political interest and reconfigured it as a universally decreed obligation. In the public sphere, the required detail of confession increased (18-25, 58-9).


Wiseman 212.

Ford provides an elaborate stage direction for this scene, indicating that the Friar will sit, Annabella kneel, weeping and wringing her hands at the beginning of 3.4. Alan C. Dessen has shown that early editors were concerned with the geographical placement of the scene and so added their own headings such as “The Friar’s Cell” or “Florio’s House” or “Annabella’s Chamber”. The scene occurs in Annabella’s room, an inference from Florio’s line in 3.4.33 where he says he will conduct the Friar to Annabella’s chamber. The problem seems to arise from the Quarto, which includes the heading “in his study.” For a full discussion, see his essay “*Tis Pity She’s a Whore: Modern Productions and the Scholar, in “Concord and Discord”: The Plays of John Ford 1586-1986*, ed., Donald K. Anderson. (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 104. Wiseman notes that incest was not declared a felony in England.
until 1650, prior to which it was a matter investigated, tried, and punished by ecclesiastical authorities. Incest only seems to appear in the records when people were caught or accidentally married within the prohibited degrees, with the latter offences often pardoned later (213).

102 Wiseman 213-214.
104 For a discussion on the womb's lack of vulnerability to outside discovery see Maus 192.
105 Newman, Fashioning 15.

106 Terri Clerico indicates this critical emphasis on Ford's use of dramatic convention and makes a case for her statement in her essay (408-11). There is known direct source for the play, as Dorothy M. Farr points out, although some critics have pointed to the case of Sir Giles Allington's punishment in 1631 as a result of marrying his half-sister's daughter as inspiration for the material (37). Derek Roper also discusses a number of sources in detail, including François de Rosset's Histoires Tragiques de Notre Temps (1615), Ovid's Heroides (1567, repr. several times), Thomas Heywood's Gunaikleon: or, Nine Bookes of Various History concerning Women (1624), Women Beware Women, A King and No King, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and Hamlet in his introduction to the Revel's edition (xxvi—xxviii) and Martin Wiggins similarly indicates that although Ford usually devised his own plots and therefore there is no direct source for this play, there a number of "synthesized situations, scenes, and character relationships from a range of material." He proposes non-dramatic sources, John Florio's First Fruits (1578), George Whetstone's Heptameron of Civil Discourses (1582) and François de Rosset's Histoires Tragiques de Notre Temps (1615), in addition to dramatic sources. See his introduction to the New Mermaid edition, "Introduction" 4-5.

107 Among the sources for the play, critics have identified links to Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Dr. Faustus. See H.J. Oliver, The Problem of John Ford (Melbourne 1955) which draws the comparison to Romeo and Juliet; R. L. Smallwood, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Romeo and Juliet," Cahiers Elisabethains 20 (1981): 49-70; Raymond Powell, "The Adaptation of a Shakespearean Genre: Othello and Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Renaissance Quarterly 48:3 (1995): 582-92; Boehrer 355-71 (for a comparison of Giovanni to Faustus); Homann, Jr. 269-76 which compares the play to Romeo and Juliet and The Witch of Edmonton; Cyrus Hoy, "Ignorance in Knowledge: Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni," Modern Philology 57:3 (1960): 145-54; and Michael Neill elucidates the parallels in the wooing of Annabella to Ferdinand's incestuous overtures to his sister in The Duchess of Malfi in his essay "'What Strange Riddle's This?" 171-2. Verna Foster argues that Ford's play is a city tragedy and thus anticipated by plays such as Romeo and Juliet and Women Beware Women, both plays from which Ford borrowed (181-200).

108 Thomas Ellice was a member of Ford's literary circle. See Mary Hobbs, "Robert and Thomas Ellice, Friends of Ford and Davenant," Notes and Queries, n.s. 21 (1974): 292-3.
109 For the liberating aspects of confession, see Foucault 59-62.
111 See stage direction at line 1.1.31.
112 Strout 163.
113 Mintz 289.
Chapter Five: “Give him all...your excellent self”: Private negotiation on women’s terms

Although The Taming of the Shrew and Women Beware Women, the focus of this final chapter, differ in genre and date, both provide social critiques of marriage and present to their audiences the processes of marriage vis-à-vis dowries, and the pressures and ambiguities in making a match. Each play also shows women using gifts and using themselves as gifts as part of the dynamic interplay of making matches and negotiating spousal relationships once the public ceremony was over. Both Shakespeare and Middleton show women’s gifts as dynamic and complex, and reveal that their use of the gift, even as a calculated power strategy, is not always beneficial because the results of giving are beyond the giver’s control. Where Shakespeare leaves the issue of giving open to question and negotiation, Middleton explores the contradictory positive and negative consequences of women’s giving. Middleton thus raises questions about the opposing sides of exchange and how, or if, they can be reconciled.

The Taming of the Shrew has long proved problematic for critics and scholars, who have tended to fall into one of two camps; those who see Kate as an abused, broken woman by the play’s conclusion and those who, conversely, see her as resisting her victimization. I follow neither of these courses, but rather view the Kate/Petruc्चio relationship in terms of gift exchange. Gifts proliferate throughout this play, and allow women various forms of agency. Bianca and the widow give themselves in marriage, thus gaining power that informs their disobedience in the final scene; Kate offers her obedience in her final speech as a gift rather than a duty, thus limiting male sovereignty by stating the duties that are expected in reciprocation of the gift of obedience. Whether
Kate will give such obedience remains open to question and rests on Petruccio’s acknowledgement and reciprocation of her gift. In each case, there is a potential gap between professed obedience and subsequent behaviour, and it is through this gap that women insert themselves into the exchange relationship, thus displaying marriage as an ongoing negotiation of obligation and reciprocation between spouses. Since reciprocation is deferred beyond the play’s conclusion, the play does not adequately resolve the issues. Instead, it ends with many unanswered questions—is Kate tamed? will Bianca stay a shrew?—but the questions posed within the play about gift giving raise other questions—will Petruccio recognize Kate’s gift? will he reciprocate? will the other wives be recognized as gifts?—and the lack of resolution suggests that these questions and issues of women’s giving are ones that the genre cannot fully contain. They belong to the larger culture and suggest that women’s gift must be recognized instead of demanded or taken for granted.

In his ironic tragedy *Women Beware Women*, Middleton looks at similar issues of marriages arranged and those based on desire, but shifts focus to the consequences of not recognizing women as gift. Isabella gives herself to Hippolito, unaware that she is thus entering into an adulterous affair, and allows herself to be married by her father to the Ward. She thus remains an obedient daughter and achieves her goal of covering her affair. Bianca gives herself to Leantio in marriage, and when her hoarding husband does not appreciate this gift of herself, she redirects it to the Duke. In a play fraught with negative and exploitative relationships, this one may, ironically, be the one presented as the least negative while simultaneously being the most exploitative. Women’s eroticized exchange is both positive and negative because Bianca resists her objectification by her
husband but her giving ultimately results in her death. Middleton may well be responding to Shakespeare's play, and also suggests that woman as gift must be recognized, appreciated, and these relationships negotiated. The tragedy, for Middleton, is that these conditions are subject to exploitation and manipulation by others because the consequences of giving are, ultimately, beyond the control of the giver.

The Taming of the Shrew: Obedience proclaimed and withheld

I begin with the Induction to The Taming of the Shrew, which may seem an odd choice but it is, I believe, an important one. Bartholomew, though a boy, plays the wife with verisimilitude, and although (s)he proclaims absolute obedience, withholds herself from Sly. It is in the portrayal of the wife and this withholding, and the two telling differences therein, between The Shrew and the companion play, The Taming of a Shrew, which have ramifications for the rest of The Shrew. First, in A Shrew, the wife is played by a boy player, while in The Shrew, the wife is merely a page in the Lord's service; second, in A Shrew, the boy is directed to establish his role through strong sexual advances while in The Shrew, Bartholomew is directed to act as a lady and to show love through obedience and concern for Sly's welfare. In part, these constructions turn the boys into female objects (since there is no indication in either play that the boys are not accepted as women) with parts to play in the Lords' games. In A Shrew, Slie's unnamed wife has but a few lines asking Slie to leave his fits, which puts the focus on the physical displays of affection as Slie has her sit on his knee before announcing they "will go to bed anon" (2.43). Before the Lord's delaying excuse can be provided, however, the Lord turns Slie's attention to the waiting players. The wife goes to bid the players begin but is paused by Slie's command that she return after doing so, and she replies with the sexual
innuendo that she “will not leave [Sly] thus” (2.52). The play presents, interestingly, a possible gap between expected wifely obedience and actual behaviour, because the wife’s physical dalliance and sitting on Sly’s knee raises a sexual expectation that would not be fulfilled because of an excuse, and indeed could not be fulfilled to maintain the illusion. The lack of fulfillment, however, comes from the Lord and the waiting play, not from the wife’s choice, and thus the presentation of women in the opening scenes is one of uncomplicated wifely obedience in which the wife is objectified sexually.

Conversely, in The Shrew Bartholomew appears to be a dutiful wife, but there are two moments when the objectification is broken by withholding obedience, moments that are telling and need to be explored. Indeed, one of the first things Bartholomew does when dressed as Sly’s wife is withhold obedience in the form of a lesson on social decorum. Entering, she addresses Sly as “noble lord” (Ind 2.99; 101) twice, a title he does not recognize, possibly because he does not recognize her, and when he asks to be called simply “‘husband’” because his “men should call [him] lord” (Ind. 2.102-3) she corrects him: “My husband and my lord, my lord and my husband. I am your wife in all obedience” (Ind. 2.104-5). Sly obviously needs the lesson on salutations between spouses of rank, but while claiming to show deference his ‘wife’ is insisting on claiming rank rather than simply calling him by a marital title, and thus refuses his request. The linking of “husband” and “lord” is also a linking of the husband to authority in a proclamation of wifely obedience to that authority. Yet, within a few lines, the declaration of “all obedience” is undermined; when Sly orders his wife to undress and come to bed, Bartholomew has a seven-line speech rebuffing Sly, citing physician’s advice. The excuse is necessary to maintain both the Lord’s pretence and Bartholomew’s
disguise; however, it is important to note that shortly after proclaiming “all obedience”, the wife belies her words. It is not an excuse that Sly argues with or questions, nor does he question her right to refuse his command and therein refuse to fulfill his sexual desire. Instead, the play carries on without comment on this moment where a woman has refused her husband.

Throughout the Inductions, Sly’s sexual appetite has been whetted by the descriptions of the erotic mythological pictures and the description of his lady who is “inferior to none” (Ind. 2.64), and who then appears full of concern for him. The physicality of A Shrew is missing, but there is no reason to suspect that the wife’s actions in The Shrew do anything to dampen Sly’s sexual appetite; indeed the wife laments being absented from Sly’s bed, heightening the sexual tension. The damper comes when the wife refuses to appease the aroused Sly, offering the excuse that Sly so easily accepts. He acknowledges the difficulty of sexual abstinence once aroused, as Michael Shapiro notes, but does not press the issue, argue with, or question her right to refuse him. I think it is significant that in a culture that prescribed women’s obedience, here a woman’s refusal goes unquestioned by a man—the play continues without disruption. The Inductions of both plays provide a wife for Sly, but A Shrew deals only with a wife’s obedience where The Shrew adds layers of complexity; the noble lady displays the appropriate obedience, but in doing so makes claims of rank in addressing her husband and in the moments of refusing to call him husband and refusing to go to bed, shows that obedience is not an absolute given, but is contingent on circumstances and in some circumstances, can be, and should be, withheld. The Lord may imagine and give
directions for an idealized, objectified wife, but the wife of the Induction in *The Shrew* is not such a wife in her actions, a gap that the rest of the play will pursue.

**Bianca: giving the self**

Kate and Bianca are also objectified, and indeed commodified, by the men in the play, including their father, Baptista, and their behaviour shows the same gap between obedience proclaimed and enacted. In *The Shrew*, the Bianca plot appears rather routine as a courtly love story in which women's dependence upon and obedience to men is confirmed. Compared to Kate, Bianca is less developed as a character, but she is the favoured daughter, courted by various suitors, all of whom see her as a woman who will make a perfect, obedient wife. Yet there are indications that Bianca is not all she seems. In the first scene, Bianca is compared to her sister and the two seem to be complete opposites. Kate is loquacious while objecting to being reduced to a mere commodity offered to her sister's suitors, while Bianca is silent at the same prospect, since she is the favoured commodity. It is a silence that Lucentio reads as "Maid's mild behaviour and sobriety" (1.1.70-1). Indeed, all of the suitors read into Bianca's silence and proclaimed obedience to her father, and each, consequently, concludes that she will make the perfect wife. But their view of her is biased, and based on glimpses of behaviour and their own assumptions. Many critics have accepted this one-dimensional view of Bianca while others have viewed her as more nuanced, but still conventional until the final scene.

Closer scrutiny of Bianca's behaviour, however, suggests that she is more like Kate than she seems. In the first scene, Baptista must tell Bianca twice to go in before she obeys and the delay allows her to speak to both her sister and father. She may proclaim obedience, but she certainly chooses when to obey. Bianca's manipulation of
silence and speech is more apparent in 2.1. Bullied and bound by Kate, Bianca shows her
adeptness for play acting, beginning by pleading that she will do whatever her sister
commands, “So well I know my duty to my elders” (2.1.7). But when Kate commands
“Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell/ Whom thou lov’st best. See thou dissemble
not” (2.1.8-9), Bianca does indeed dissemble and withholds the information from her
sister, despite her earlier proclamation of obedience. When Baptista chastises Kate,
“When did she cross thee with a bitter word?” (2.1.28), Kate responds, “Her silence
flouts me, and I’ll be revenged” (2.1.29). Baptista is fooled by Bianca’s silence and reads
it as obedience, but Kate is not. Bianca uses socially prescribed behaviour, silence, to her
own ends, in this case, withholding the very piece of information her sister wants. By
acting as her father wishes and expects, Bianca ensures that he takes her side not only in
this dispute but in all disputes. It is Bianca’s manipulation of silence that has clearly
确保ed her place as her father’s favourite.

Silence has also “insured Bianca’s place in the male economy of desire and
exchange”, but this position is not as passive as it may seem. Although Bianca is
physically bound in 2.1, she is the one with power. She withholds information from Kate
and, more importantly, asserts her ability both to choose between the suitors and to take
the role of surrogate wooer for her sister. When Kate demands to know if it is Hortensio
Bianca favours, her answer, “If you affect him, sister, here I swear/ I’ll plead for you
myself but you shall have him” (2.1.4-15) displays Bianca’s confidence in her skill at the
mating game. Bianca is, simultaneously, objectifying Hortensio as something to be cast
off to her sister and she has no doubt of her ability to make the match. Kate counters
with the charge that Bianca must value riches and therefore prefer Gremio. Bianca
dismisses this as jest, but is, again, actually asserting a choice in the suitors. Although Kate is unsure of how seriously to take her sister, Bianca’s agency in courtship, her ability to manipulate her suitors, and to choose between them fill the scene. These abilities come to the forefront in 3.1 as she chastises her tutors. Unbeknownst to Bianca, the tutors are her suitors, Lucentio and Hortensio in disguise, who are vying for her affection. Nonetheless, Bianca does not hesitate in asserting herself: “Why, gentleman, you do me double wrong/ To strive for that which resteth in my choice” (3.1.16-17). She takes control of the situation and issues directions to the tutors:

I am no breeching scholar in the schools.
I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed tunes,
But learn my lessons as I please myself;
And to cut off all strife, here sit we down.
Take you your instrument, play you the Ales.
His lecture will be done ere you have tuned. (3.1.18-23 my emphasis)

Bianca appears to take on the role of peacemaker but is actually inciting the rivalry between the men since she chooses who has her attention. She does this by, fittingly, asserting her social status in issuing tasks to the tutors. She is, simultaneously, asserting the right to choose the lesson and acting on that assertion as she directs the lesson and decides which of the men will have her attention. Lucentio introduces himself amidst a Latin lesson and Bianca shows her agency in courtship by willingly keeping up the pretence rather than exposing him. Throughout the verbal exchange Bianca dissembles, although she offers some encouragement when telling Lucentio to “presume not...despair not” (3.1.43). She ensures that they are not exposed with the warning that they must not be overheard and is thus wilfully defying her father’s command. When playing Hortensio’s gamut that presents his suit, she quickly refuses it by dismissing the musical piece: “Call you this gamut? Tut, I like it not./ Old fashions please me best” (3.1.77-8).
Nonetheless, she keeps Hortensio's identity a secret and thus prolongs the suit to keep the suitor in play. Bianca thus takes an active role in her courtships and conveys the possibility of playing the wooer.

With Baptista's equivocal decision, it seems Bianca has been won. Bianca has not, however, been consulted in these negotiations and her behaviour suggests that she may not be so easily disposed of by her father. Indeed, while Baptista plays the "merchant's part" (2.1.322), Bianca plays the wooer's. In act three we see her actively choosing to maintain Lucentio's disguise so that he may woo her without her father's knowledge and by act four, it is clear that she has chosen him. Bianca and Lucentio, still disguised as Cambio, are seen kissing and courting by Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, and Hortensio, disguised as Licio. Hortensio is amazed by the display of affection and forswears Bianca. Importantly, it is Bianca who is wooer: "see how beastly she doth court him!" (4.2.34). She has indeed courted Lucentio by maintaining his disguise and thus choosing among her suitors. By eloping with him, she negates the bidding war Baptista incited for her hand and wrests the power to choose a husband from her father. Bianca's agency in her marriage is not unproblematic; when the marriage is revealed to Vincentio and Baptista the fathers are, understandably, angry. In the revelation, Bianca is largely silent, leaving Lucentio to do the explaining to their fathers. Bianca is, I suggest, "playing" her silence because she knows her father's displeasure at her usurping his authority in her marriage; Lucentio tells her "Look not pale, Bianca, thy father will not frown" (5.1.129) as they go offstage to face the angry Baptista. When the couples return, all is apparently settled but Bianca's demeanour is markedly changed. Indeed, Bianca in the final scene behaves differently than she has hitherto and the difference, I argue,
asserts from her choice to elope. By making her own marriage, Bianca has bestowed herself, thus nullifying the marriage contract made between Baptista and the man he has chosen for her. This giving of herself is an open defiance of her father. Since Lucentio has yet to reciprocate that gift, Bianca is in a position of power, and it is a position that Bianca knows how to manipulate, as demonstrated in the bullying scene with her sister and in the earlier tutoring scene. It is this power imbalance, I believe, that accounts for Bianca’s sharp words and refusal to come at her husband’s bidding during the obedience test. Lucentio tells Bianca that her refusal cost him “a hundred crowns” (5.2.133) and she replies by chastising him, publicly calling him a fool for wagering “on my duty” (5.2.134). The play shows that obedience can be given and withheld, and Bianca, having given throughout the play, now withholds obedience until her gift is reciprocated, which does not occur within the play and must, like the consummation of the marriage of Petruccio and Kate occur after the play’s conclusion.

Kate: the woman given and the lesson learned

Similarly, Kate is objectified and passed from father to husband as her consent to her marriage is elided throughout the marriage negotiations. The dowry is settled quickly and the negotiations are presented to the audience as Kate is traded to Petruccio. Petruccio negotiates with Baptista to marry Kate even before meeting her and does so because he is more interested in what he will gain in the marriage than in Kate herself. He manages to make quite a bargain since the jointure only goes to Kate if she is widowed and is limited to life interest. When Baptista concludes their bargain with the caveat that Petruccio must get Kate’s love, his caveat is dismissed by the young man as “nothing” (2.1.130). Petruccio seems to think that the marriage is settled since the
negotiations with Baptista are successful. Kate becomes a means to an end for both men; for Petruccio, she represents economic gain and for Baptista is a way to gain “quiet in the match” (2.1.326) and will allow him to arrange Bianca’s marriage. When Kate refuses the match, her protests are ignored by both father and groom, and there is even an impromptu handfasting to seal the marriage as Kate and Petruccio join hands with Baptista, who proclaims the match, and Gremio and Tranio jump in as witnesses. Petruccio even calls Kate his “wife” (2.1.323). Again, Kate’s consent is nullified by what appears to be a handfasting ceremony concocted by the men, in which Baptista inserts himself by taking the couple’s hands, and Gremio and Tranio hastily add “Amen say we” (2.1.316). Kate has withheld her consent and by all indications will continue to do so, but she must be removed as an obstacle to Bianca’s match, so by jumping in as witnesses while the couple hold hands with Baptista, the issue of Kate’s consent is quashed. Baptista joining hands with the couple is a deviation from the usual handfasting and may indicate that Kate is an object passed from him to Petruccio. More significantly, no tokens are exchanged by Kate and Petruccio, and this is especially curious since this play is rich in the description and presentation of material things, and the lack of such exchange between Kate and Petruccio reinforces Kate’s objectification as the match is a union between Petruccio and Baptista.

Once married, Kate undergoes a series of trials, each calculated to show her that she must offer reciprocation in order to get something, whether it be a necessity such as food or clothing, or something she desires, such as a visit home. Many critics have found these trials troubling and I do not seek to minimize Petruccio’s outrageous behaviour; after all, he does enter the play violently, knocking Grumio about physically and Grumio
does call him “quarrelsome” and “mad” (1.2.13; 18). I do, however, think it is significant that Petruccio is a man who knows how to manage gifts; he uses one to gain entrance to Baptista’s and blatantly states the purpose of and expected reciprocation of the gift.

Shortly after his marriage, Petruccio offers thanks to “all/ That have beheld me give away myself! To this most patient, sweet, and virtuous wife” (3.3.67-9 my emphasis). He has clearly given something that he values, and that he is a gift to be valued beyond the material may be signalled by the strange clothing he wears to the wedding. When bid to change, he responds that Kate weds him, not his clothes, which may indicate that there is an inherent value beyond the wrapping to the gift and that the gift is a personal one.

When he is entreated to stay to the wedding feast three times, first by Tranio on behalf the guests, and then by Gremio, who appeals to friendship with his personal entreaty, Petruccio responds positively only to Kate’s entreaty. Although he will not stay, he is “content you [Kate] shall entreat me to stay” (3.3.75) because it shows that she is accepting of the marriage (and thus his gift) by inviting him to a public celebration of their marriage. But when Kate insists that she will stay “till I please myself” (3.3.81; 84 my emphasis) and adds that he will stay at her leisure, it is clear that she is taking the gift without giving back. By making these demands, Kate does not show any intention of reciprocating his gift. Petruccio then states offence and reduces her to an object, a possession to do with as he likes:

I will be master of what is mine own.  
She is my goods, my chattels. She is my house,  
My household-stuff, my field, my barn,  
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.…. (3.3.101-104)
Petruccio has given, but Kate’s insistence on her own pleasure is an abuse of his gift because she accepts it without repaying it. This failure signals her inability to recognize how gifts work and thus she is reduced once again to a commodity.

The relationship between Kate and Petruccio is mediated by objects and it is everyday objects that he uses to educate her about gifts and thus, ultimately, to appreciate his gift. Each time he offers her something, he sets out the terms of exchange instead of physically or psychologically dominating her into submission. For example, when they arrive home and are ready to eat, he asks, “Will you give thanks, sweet Kate, or shall I?” (4.1.145). The food is not simply a commodity for consumption, it is a gift for which he is showing her thanks have to be offered in reciprocation. When she offers no thanks, the gift is denied. In A Shrew, Kate does offer thanks for the meat offered by Ferando (8.28), but she is denied the food nonetheless. Throughout the play, she undergoes the same trials of denial, but the attendant lesson of reciprocation is missing. In The Shrew, the things Petruccio offers, such as the food, water, and bed to sleep in, take on added meaning both in the way they are offered and because reciprocation of some kind is expected. The form of reciprocation is told to Kate to teach her how gifts work and if reciprocation is not forthcoming, then the gift is withheld—the meat is sent away as being choleric, the water basin is shattered, the pillow, coverlet, and bed dressings are flung aside. In 4.3, Petruccio brings her meat and tells her “this kindness merits thanks” (4.3.41). Again, his gift is met with her silence, and therefore the meat is taken away. But a lesson is also delivered. The meat is not merely a consumable; Petruccio claims to have dressed it himself and by denying thanks, she is abusing the gift, since “thou lov’st it not/ And all my pains is sorted to no proof” (4.3.42-3). When Kate asks, “I pray you,
let it stand” (4.3.44), Petruchio explains exactly how gifts work: “The poorest service is repaid with thanks./ And so shall mine before you touch the meat” (4.3.45). The point is made; Kate cannot simply take, she must give, and what he wants her to give is thanks. She gives it, but does so begrudgingly, with the curt “I thank you, sir” (4.3.47). The half-line is left uncompleted, and the silence speaks volumes. Kate refuses to speak any more than she thinks is necessary to get the food to satisfy her hunger. Again, she is attempting to placate him and take a gift without adequately reciprocating it. In response, Petruchio instructs Hortensio to eat all the meat because he sees through her inadequate reciprocation.

Petruchio then turns to the dress, another gift that is offered to Kate. It is a dress he has ordered, and he begins by promising grand presents to Kate of dresses, caps, and array. When the cap is presented, however, he dismisses it as not fitting for Kate. She disagrees and again insists on her own rights:

> Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,  
> And speak I will....  
> My tongue can tell the anger can tell the anger of my heart,  
> Or else my heart concealing it will break,  
> And rather than it shall I will be free  
> Even to the uttermost as I please in words. (4.3.73-80 my emphasis)

Petruchio is trying to play a game, as he will in the sun and moon scene, but Kate is still unable to reciprocate. She insists on her freedom in the singular because it is what she is accustomed to, but Petruchio is trying to teach her that to be included in the larger society, she must reciprocate gifts and therefore must give. To insist on the singular is to run into defiance and denial. In the sun and moon scene, she discovers that she is free, but that freedom comes, ironically, not through defiance but obedience. When she gives Petruchio ultimatums like: “I like the cap/ And it I will have, or I will have none” (4.3.84-
5), she indeed gets no cap. But in the sun and moon scene, when she gives the field and follows Petruccio’s lead about the sun and moon, she not only gets the trip home, she indulges in a verbal game in which she trumps her husband. At every turn, there is the promise of Kate’s appeasement; the meat, and dishes are brought in before Petruccio denies the food and drink to Kate, they enter the bed chamber where he tears up the bed, she is shown the dress and cap before Petruccio tears them up and they are en route to Baptista’s when he threatens to turn back. Continually, therefore, Kate is promised inclusion and it is her lack of reciprocity and her lack of participation in the attendant social relationship that lead to her exclusion within the household and delay the foundation of the marital relationship because she first must learn to reciprocate the gifts. The scene with Gremio, 4.3, makes a similar point. Kate laments that she “never knew how to entreat./ Nor never needed that I should entreat” (4.3.7-8) and cannot counter Petruccio’s argument that he denies her out of “perfect love” (4.3.12). The point here is not that she is learning to “entreat” but rather she learning that gifts must be reciprocated, and it is clearly something she did not know before her marriage.

In 4.6, it appears that Petruccio has won the battle when, after threatening to return home instead of proceeding to Baptista’s, Kate is urged by Hortensio to concede to Petruccio’s ridiculous claim that the moon is in the sky, not the sun, or “or we shall never go” (4.6.11). Seemingly defeated, Kate states,

> Forward, I pray, since we have come so far, And be it moon, or sun, or what you please; And if you please to call it a rush-candle, Henceforth I vow it shall be for me (4.6.12-15)

and after further testing by her husband about the sun and moon, she concedes “When you will have it named, even that it is/ And so it shall be for Katherine” (4.6.21-2).
Hortensio proclaims that Petruccio has won the field and it appears he has indeed. Does she give in because she is tired and has no fight left? Or has she learned the reciprocation lesson her husband has been trying to teach her? I think it’s the latter. Kate may give up the field, but she also stakes a claim for herself by reclaiming her name. Since their first meeting, Petruccio has called her Kate while she has insisted on her full name (Katherine), and it is a contest she rekindles here, and therefore her submission to him is qualified. Vincentio enters and the word play begins anew as Petruccio calls him first a “gentlewoman” (4.6.30) and then “a man, old, wrinkled, faded, withered” (4.6.44). This word game differs in two significant ways from the earlier trials; first, there is no threat of adverse consequences if Kate does not play along and, second, Kate seems to genuinely delight in the word play as she greets Vincentio with “Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet” (4.6.38) and goes on to speculate on the happiness of the man who “Allots thee [Vincentio] for his lovely bedfellow” (4.6.42). Kate both enjoys this part of the game and shows renewed vigour in playing along, displaying the wit that marked her first meeting with Petruccio. As Karen Newman notes, her playfulness and irony are indisputable, and thus reciprocation and concession are not loss but gain for Kate, which are lessons she takes into the final scene and displays in her final speech.

Gifts Indebt the recipient, and thus cause a power imbalance in Petruccio’s favour. He has the power to give and to withhold. These are lessons that Kate learns from her husband and expresses in her final speech when offering her obedience. Kate thus learns to reciprocate gifts and turns the tables on her teacher by offering a gift of her own: her obedience. Her offer is tempered, however, and to fully understand the qualification I would first like to explore the obedience offered in the final speech of the parallel play A
In the final scene, this Kate’s speech about wifely duty is one of complete obedience and submission to male authority. Although speaking publicly, her speech is couched in religious terms, and therefore acceptable for a woman. She begins with God as the ultimate power that created man, and from man created woman, who was named ‘woe of man’ by him (14.133). She thus establishes a chain of authority from God through man to woman. She then goes on to state women’s blame for bringing death into the world, further subordinating women before invoking the biblical Sarah as the model that all wives should emulate, declaring “so should we,/ Obey them, love them, keep and nourish them” (14.136-137). Significantly, she names Sarah, the Old Testament Matriarch, who as the wife of Abraham, not only followed her husband, she urged him to take her maid so that he may beget a son. Sarah was the exemplar of obedience in the early modern marriage ceremony and Homily on Marriage, and many contemporary marriage manuals pointed to her as an example to emulate as a model of obedience and behaviour. At the end of Kate’s speech, she puts her hand beneath her husband’s foot, signifying her complete submission. The theological reference adds to her submission, moreover, because traditionally when the shrew did not triumph, she ‘submitted either to high theological argument or to a taste of the stick.’

In The Shrew, Kate does not submit to the theological argument or the stick. Instead, she offers a qualified obedience in a speech that outlines a husband’s duties in marriage as well a wife’s, and by stating both sides, makes a claim for herself. The scene begins with Kate again being objectified, albeit with a difference. Petruccio has dropped his bestial metaphors towards his wife and even insists on a distinction between her, his hounds and his hawk; upon Kate he’d wager “twenty times so much” (5.2.76) because
she, unlike these other commodity possessions, has shown she can reciprocate gifts and therefore is more valuable. Petruccio has begun to change, but Kate is still objectified economically; this time she is the means by which Petruccio will win the men’s wager over their wives’ obedience. The bet is won when she treads on her cap as Petruccio bids, but he pushes her farther and commands that she tell the unruly wives their duty to their husbands. As in the sun and moon scene, Petruccio positions her as speaking object and seems to expect that she will say what he wishes to hear. After all, he has taught her the value of reciprocating gifts by giving her cues about what to offer in reciprocation of his gifts and by doing so in the sun was the moon she won the visit home. More importantly, she has learned that by giving up her role as shrew and offering obedience does not mean, necessarily, that she has to sacrifice the independence that her former role afforded her. The shrew is a privileged position, but by giving it up, she is able to indulge in the game.

**Kate’s final speech: tables turned**

The bet has been won, and Kate’s learning about gifts and reciprocation had been aptly demonstrated, so when she speaks about wifely duty, it is to offer something of her own. She begins by invoking political discourse, stating that a husband is “thy lord, thy king, thy governor,” (5.2.143), a haphazard order, as Margie Burns suggests, because “[to] support a political hierarchy, they should form a linguistic hierarchy, as in Portia’s use of the same terms when she gives herself to Bassanio as a gift:

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Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As for her lord, her governor, her king. (Merchant 3.2.165-7)
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Burns says that Kate’s choice of word order “suggests [the terms’] rather loose application.” The loose application is, I contend, part of a qualification and necessary for the shift to keeper, and with that word Kate changes the connotations of the relationship. A keeper has an obligation to provide for those who are kept, duties that Kate elaborates in her speech and which are alluded to by the political comparison of the disobedient wife to a “foul contending rebel/ And graceless traitor” (5.2.164-5). A sovereign, as keeper, has duties to those subjected, just as the husband, sovereign of the house, has duties to the wife. The change to “keeper” marks Kate’s move from speaking object to speaking subject, taking control of the speech as she names the duties owed to a wife and in doing so, she makes a claim for herself in marriage by stating the terms of reciprocation for her gift. It is the husband who “commits his body/ To painful labour both by sea and land./ To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,” (5.2.153-5) to maintain his wife. But Kate understates wifely duty, which is to “liest warm at home, secure and safe,” (5.2.156). She has obviously accepted that her “maintenance” (5.2.153) is a gift to her, something for which she is indebted. She acknowledges that in return, husbands want obedience, and thus utters the cultural expectation and marks it as “too little payment” (5.2.129) since the play has shown, through both Kate and Bianca’s manipulation of obedience, that it can bring women freedom rather than constraint. By making obedience a gift, Kate complicates it because it must be reciprocated rather than demanded. She also changes the power dynamic since she is stating what she as wife wants in reciprocation for her gift, mirroring what Petruccio had done earlier. Their roles have reversed, and she is now teaching not just Petruccio but all the husbands of the reciprocation wives expect for their obedience.
Kate goes on, moreover, to state the consequences of refusing one’s spousal duties and thus offers a reminder that the gift can be withheld. Dod and Cleaver described the household where duties were neglected as a hell; in the kingdom where such duties are neglected there is violent conflict, as Kate reminds her audience with images of “foul contending rebel[s]” and “graceless traitor[s]” (5.2.165-165). The reminder revalues the gift of obedience by showing that such contention will be avoided and thus her gift is something of value that reciprocates the maintenance given her. I do not think the images of rebels and traitors so soon after the statement of women’s duty are coincidence; as Karen Newman notes, Kate is self-conscious about the power of language and uses punning and irony as mimetic strategies, in the sense of Luce Irigaray:

To play with mimesis is...for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by language, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It is to resubmit herself...to ideas—notably about her—elaborated in and through a masculine logic, but to “bring out” by an effect of playful repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It is also to unveil the fact that if women mime so well they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere.26

Kate reformulates the offering of obedience through the use of political metaphor into something of value because it will maintain the peace.

Kate’s offered gift of obedience is, however, itself qualified in that it is given to a husband’s “honest will” (5.2.163) and the inclusion of honest is important since it places a limit on a husband’s authority. Just before Kate’s speech, Petruccio demands that she throw her cap under foot and tread on it, a demand she complies with but which the widow dismisses as a “silly pass” and Bianca calls a “foolish duty” (5.2.129; 130). The potential for the withholding of obedience to such a request that is not “honest” means that Kate and the other women are not objects to be so foolishly wagered upon. With the
speech, Kate is obeying Petruccio’s command, and thus has sanction to speak, but her speech limits such obedience by limiting a husband’s power. In this speech Kate, oxymoronically, is obedient and prescriptive, and while showing that she understands the value of exchange, offers obedience, places a value on that obedience, and then qualifies that obedience to limit male authority and resist her objectification. In doing so, she remains within the accepted gender role and becomes, paradoxically, the desired *speaking* woman. Here is she a precursor to Helena of *All’s Well* as discussed in the preceding chapter; where Helen manipulated the gift exchange system to bestow herself on Bertram while simultaneously publicly insisting that women have a value separate from the economic, political, and social considerations usually emphasized in marriage negotiations, Kate in this play publicly insists that women have something to offer, obedience, in exchange for the duties owed them in marriage, and does so in a public forum. In a comedy that curiously foregrounds the economic aspects of marital negotiations and then shifts focus to the couple attempting to live together afterwards, Kate’s final speech suggests that marriage is an exchange relationship that spouses must negotiate for themselves on an ongoing basis.

Kate’s final speech, I realize, may not be sincere at all, as many of the revisionist critics have argued. In the Induction, the page is dressed as Sly’s wife in a game and, as David Daniell notes, “*wifely* submission…is sport by a page dressed as the sham wife of a ridiculously deceived ‘husband.’ It is all a pastime, and false.” Kate’s use of hyperbole when describing the duties of husbands and the easy life of wives certainly allows for this meaning, but the hyperbole is grounded economically—the husband’s duty is to provide materially for his wife. Even if the speech is ironic, it does not negate
Kate’s insistence on exchange in a marriage that, hitherto, has left her powerless. Rather, by staking such a claim, she counters the submission of the Induction.

**Marriage as reciprocation and negotiation**

The play ends with the promise of the consummation that has been delayed, picking up the theme that ended the Induction. Christopher Sly does not return, however, and many critics have debated the lack of the frame’s closure. I am not convinced that it is missing; there is no evidence that such an ending was ever written, but more importantly, the comedy seems to have another agenda. Not only are marriage negotiations enacted onstage, which is unusual for a comedy, but the main marriage is placed in the middle of the play, not at the end, and the odd placement puts the emphasis on the negotiation of the relationship between the individuals in the marriage.

Petruchio’s emphasis on reciprocation for his gifts, both from Baptista and Kate, indicates that the interest is in the establishment of relationships, especially that between spouses after the marriage ceremony. Reciprocation is again foregrounded in Bianca’s change in demeanour after her clandestine marriage is revealed and it is even evident in the third marriage in the play; having forsworn Bianca, Hortensio marries a rich widow, who proves to be a shrewish as Bianca in the final scene, fighting with Kate in the opening lines (5.2.20-35), refusing to come when entreated by Hortensio, (5.2.92) and refusing to hear what duties wives owe their husbands (5.2.137, 139) because not only has she given herself to Hortensio, she has brought wealth to the marriage. The final scene’s wager is not simply about obedience but willing compliance since the men do not compel their wives to appear but wager on their willingness to appear. The play presents three forms of marriage—arranged, clandestine elopement, and marriage to a widow—and in each
the spouses must negotiate power and dominance. With Kate’s demand for and offer of
derciprocity made in her final speech, it is her marriage that seems the most “settled”
because Kate and Petruccio are the only couple that exit the stage having (if only
temporarily) stopped struggling for dominance in the marriage. Although Kate and
Petruccio’s future is in doubt, they are the most peaceful couple at the end of the play,
and thus the reciprocity in marriage is foregrounded while the other couples leave the
stage still fighting for the dominant position in the marriage.

By the play’s conclusion, Kate has learned that even within limiting social roles
negotiation is possible, and gifts are one means of negotiation. Just as Bianca
manipulated silence to wield power even when bound and bullied by her domineering
sister, Kate has learned to turn an expected duty, obedience, into a thing of value, and
worthy reciprocation for her maintenance. The lack of frame in The Shrew leaves the
story of Sly and Bartholomew (as wife) open, just as the audience is left wondering
whether the wives will go to bed or come up with some excuse as Bartholomew did. The
play may seem unfinished, but it the subject matter makes it so—to return to the Sly
frame would impose an artificial closure that would be inconsistent with the subject
matter of marriage and its ongoing reformulation in the period.

**Women Beware Women: Bianca as gift**

When Helen presents herself as a gift to Bertram in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, she
does so in a way that masked her desire, offering herself and her service with humility.
The fact that she is, simultaneously, the King’s gift, helps to elide the transgressiveness
of her acting on her desire for Bertram, which is to be legitimated within marriage.³²
Conversely, in *Women Beware Women*, it is clear from the outset that Bianca has given
herself in a marriage that transgresses rank and that she has acted on her desire. The gift of herself is one that she redefines from being one who consents to marriage to a sexual being, and it is a gift that she will revalue after her sexual encounter with the Duke. Leantio does not recognize the gift offered even though Bianca’s agency in the marriage is apparent from his introduction, “From Venice her consent and I have brought her” (1.1.49 my emphasis). Bianca’s gift of herself is further displayed as she reveals that she has “forsook friends, fortunes, and [her] country” (1.1.131) for Leantio, indicating all that she has given up for him, socially and economically. Bianca further consents to live according to her new husband’s means and does so because “nothing can be wanting/ To her that does enjoy all her desires” (1.1.125-6). Expressing her erotic attraction by making herself a gift, and gaining social agency through that transformation, Bianca is able to engage in comic banter that has a chiding undertone as she addresses Leantio for the first time in the play, “You have not bid me welcome since I came” (1.1.142). Her comment is playful but, simultaneously, Bianca stakes a claim since Leantio should have bid her welcome to the home and to her rightful place as his wife. Bianca’s rebuke is significant, moreover, because it shows his failure to recognize the significance of Bianca’s giving of herself to him in marriage.

Since Bianca is never named in the scene her identity is subsumed into Leantio’s as his wife and devalued as his possession. When Leantio’s mother asks who the gentlewoman he has brought home is, the question begs an introduction in answer. Leantio’s response immediately displays his objectification and commodification of Bianca, “you [Mother] have nam’d the most unvalued’st purchase” (1.1.12); this reduction of Bianca to an object and commodity denies her agency and choice in the
marriage, a denial that is compounded by Leantio’s references to her as something he has stolen. He grossly exaggerates his theft, calling it “noble/ As ever greatness yet shot up withal/ . . . Never to be repented” (1.1.37-9) and “the best piece of theft/ That ever was committed” (1.1.43-4). Leantio’s speech is also marked by his possessiveness, “As often I look up that treasure/ And know it to be mine” (1.1.14-15). Part of Leantio’s behaviour stems from his uneasiness at the difference in their status, but it is apparent that by ignoring Bianca’s agency in the marriage, Leantio does not value the gift she has given. He presents her to his mother not by name but as his “treasure” (1.1.14), “masterpiece” (1.1.41), and “a most matchless jewel” (1.1.162). Although these images are rich in value, they depersonalize Bianca and thus undermine the compliments he seems to be paying her. Leantio’s possessiveness climaxes in his stated intention to keep Bianca locked up in her new home, a prisoner guarded by his mother, while he goes abroad on business. Leantio does not recognize Bianca’s gift, or seeks to deny it, and consequently, feels no obligation to reciprocate it.

Leantio’s hoarding of Bianca leads to her isolation within the household. Marriage was a communal event, in which the processes of settling house involved rituals and customs whereby the newly married couple took on social and domestic roles and were recognized as doing so by the community. In establishing their new household, the husband was expected to serve food and wine and the wife was to receive household goods, such as brooms and keys, symbolizing their respective claims as master and mistress of the household. Leantio and Bianca’s elopement, however, means that the marriage cannot be celebrated by the community, the new roles of husband and wife cannot be publicly signified and celebrated, and more importantly, Bianca is not
introduced to the community. Instead, Leantio pleads with his mother to keep Banca’s presence secret. Instead, it seems that Leantio considers her a pleasure to indulge or a distraction from work, which is made clear as he anticipates the wedding night:

’Tis a bitterness
To think upon tomorrow, that I must leave her
Still to the sweet hopes of the week’s end.
That pleasure should be so restrained and curbed
After the course of a rich workmaster,
That never pays till Saturday night! (1.1.154-9)

Yet, Leantio gives no thought to what she will do when he is not there. When the Duke’s messenger arrives, Leantio denies all knowledge of Bianca and seeks to hide her once again denying her status as wife and gift. Throughout the play, Bianca’s status as a stranger will be blamed for her seduction and even in her death she will emphasize this status, because by keeping Bianca a secret locked within the house, Leantio has denied her valuable ties to the community that publicly announcing the marriage would have given her. This stands in stark contrast to the “overtly earnest manner in which he conjures up a fantasy image of Bianca as the perfect middle-class housewife, frugal, fertile and obedient.” He may envision this image of Bianca, but he does nothing to create this position for Bianca within the household.

Leantio then abandons Bianca, forced by economic necessity to attend to his business and this hasty departure was one contemporary literature warned against.

William Perkins in his Christian Oeconomie, or a Short Survey of the Right Ordering a Familie According to the Scriptures quoted Deuteronomy 24.5, “When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.” To settle the new marriage, the literature warned, husbands should be at home with their
wives. Bianca gives herself sexually to Leantio and then he refuses her request to stay.\textsuperscript{38} The scene shows the disparity of rank; Leantio has to work, while Bianca is used to a class where work is not necessary. It is possible that Bianca does not recognize the necessity of his work and takes his refusal to stay as his inability to appreciate her. Bianca is, nonetheless, left alone with her new mother-in-law, a woman who objects to her marriage. The mother first greets Bianca only after prodding from Leantio and even then the greeting is tentative, first expressed in an economic metaphor as “a debt of courtesy/ Which fashionable strangers pay each other” (1.1.111-12). The official welcome is not much better, “What I can bid you welcome to, is mean;/ But make it all your own; we are all of wants,/ And cannot welcome worth” (1.3.119-21),\textsuperscript{39} as Leantio comments on “Now this is scurvy,/ And spake as if a woman lacked her teeth” (1.1.121-122). It is a welcome that denies Bianca welcome by stressing both the deficiencies of the household and Bianca’s elevated position and, therefore, by implication, not so much the unfitness of the house as Bianca’s lack of place within it. When watching the Ducal procession, the two women are still not amicable:

\begin{verbatim}
Mother:....do you stand easily?
Bianca: Exceeding well, good mother.
Mother: Take this stool.
Bianca: I need it not, I thank you.
Mother: Use your will, then. (1.3.100-2)
\end{verbatim}

The mother’s offer of the stool may be meant to offer Bianca comfort, but it is phrased as a command, which Bianca takes as demonstrating the mother’s dominance in the household and therefore emphasizing her own ambiguous status within it. It is no wonder then that she rejects the mother’s overture. For her part, the mother is probably exasperated when Bianca refuses her overture of hospitality when she offers the stool,
and dismisses Bianca like a wilful child with "use your will then". Bianca will, indeed, do just that after her encounter with the Duke. The argument continues as the mother rejects Bianca's suggestion that the Duke looked at her (1.3.106-112), even though she will later admit to her son that the Duke looked up twice (3.1.232). Perhaps she is looking for an excuse to find fault with her new daughter-in-law, or is merely covering since Bianca is not to be seen. It is clear that Bianca is left secluded, in an ambiguous social position because she is not invested in the household as a proper wife, and with a mother-in-law she does not relate to because Leantio has neglected to settle his household properly before his hasty departure and thus failed to acknowledge Bianca.

**Bianca: the gift redirected**

Leantio's failure to recognize and reciprocate his wife's gift results in Bianca redirecting her gift. Although her presence in Florence is to be kept secret, the Duke sees Bianca in a window during the procession, one in which it seems that women are put on display to catch the Duke's attention, since the Citizen is concerned that his wife have "a standing.../ The best in all the city" (1.3.75-6). The procession is, therefore, more than a State event, it is one in which women are commodified and displayed for the Duke to choose from and, probably, gain advancement for the husbands through the wives' sexual favours. Bianca does catch such attention during the procession and, subsequently, the mother is forced to confirm Bianca's existence when pressured by Livia under the latter's guise of hospitality. Having been informed by Guardiano that the Duke is "infinitely taken" (2.2.14) with the woman he saw, a fact which promises wealth and favour to those who help him attain Bianca, Livia keeps the widow busy at chess while the unsuspecting Bianca is set up for a meeting with the Duke. Recognizing the Duke's intentions
immediately, Bianca resists him, even amidst his threats, including that he “can command” (2.2.362) her to yield to him sexually. Bianca is obviously frightened in the encounter. Guardiano has abused his position as guardian to leave her with the Duke. Bianca’s position as a stranger in Florence, moreover, leaves her no friends and her absent husband is no protection. The Duke dismisses Bianca’s protestations of her marital status. It is ironic that the Duke uses the metaphor of imprisonment in light of Bianca’s seclusion by Leantio and that she is made the Duke’s masterpiece in the scene after being Leantio’s metaphorical masterpiece in the opening scene:

Strive not to seek
Thy liberty and keep me still in prison...
thou seem’st to me
A creature so composed of gentleness
And delicate meekness, such as bless the faces
Of figures that are drawn for goddesses,
And makes art proud to look upon her work; (2.2.329-30; 339-43)

But Bianca’s question “Why should you seek, sir/ To take away that you can never give?” (2.2.367-8) denotes the very exchange of her sexual gift that Leantio has refused her. With the question Bianca changes tactics. She is “caught in the fierce economy of sexual exchange—she is indeed the currency of the exchange” as Anthony Dawson argues, and as Suzanne Gossett asserts, the Duke has made clear his wants and Bianca’s lack of options. Her physical and verbal protestations have failed; her question however opens the possibility of what she will gain if she yields to the Duke’s advances. He has intimated that threats are not his intent:

Yet, if thou truly knewest
The infinite pleasure my affection takes
In gentle, fair entreatings, when love’s businesses
Are carried courteously ’twixt heart and heart,
You’d make more haste to please me. (2.2.363-7)
Bianca’s question in response to this opening withholds the very entreatings the Duke asks for while simultaneously prompting such entreatings from him. Her yielding to his advances by choice rather than force is the gift of her sexual body and it is a gift he promises to reciprocate with his pledge:

But I give better in exchange: wealth, honour.
She that is fortunate in a Duke’s favour
Lights on a tree that bears all women’s wishes;
If your own mother saw you pluck fruit there,
She would commend your wit and praise the time
Of your nativity. (2.2.369-74)

What began as coercion and possibly as a rape here changes direction as the Duke promises Bianca wealth, social esteem, and honour, and there is a definite conciliatory note. The Duke does point out the inability of Leontio to provide for Bianca, while he can provide ongoing stability and protection as added persuasion, ironically turning his position to advantage, by indicating his power to protect and provide for her emotionally:

Come, play the wise wench, and provide for ever;
Let storms come when they list, they find thee sheltered.
Should any doubt arise, let nothing trouble thee;
Put trust in our love for the managing
Of all thy heart’s peace. We’ll walk together,
And show a thankful joy for both our fortunes. (2.3.82-7 my emphasis)

Here, he promises the one thing Bianca has said that she wants. In the scene, she typically denies the Duke’s advances with one word, or one or two lines. Yet, she speaks at length when she tells him she does not fear him, but rather fears a lack of protection in rough times,

Make me not bold with death and deeds of ruin
Because they fear not you; me they must fright,
Then am I best I health. Should thunder speak
And none regard it, it had lost the name
And were good be still. I’m not like those
That take their soundest sleeps in greatest tempests;
Then wake I most, the weather fearfullest,  
And call for strength to virtue. (2.2.351-8)

The Duke's answer to this fear, and his language of togetherness and joining of fortunes (2.2.386-7) may well be a product of his rank and noblesse oblige, but it is, nonetheless, a sharp contrast to Leantio's language of theft and commodification. The Duke has offered the very thing she has asked for, peace, and offered these gifts in unending reciprocation in accordance with the exchange structure that turns his earlier bribe of wealth and position into to an open and unending gift. The Duke's offer silences Bianca's objections and although this is not outright consent, it is not an objection either, leaving the issue of consent ambiguous until she leaves Leantio. The scene thus raises the possibility that Bianca engages in, or at least is complicit in, the sexual exchange that promises future economic benefit. The Duke's offer of unending reciprocation is proven by his invitation to the banquet and his making Bianca first his mistress and then his wife, which transforms the ongoing reciprocation into a gift. The relationship is thus presented as potentially a better alternative to the marriage in which Bianca's gift is not reciprocated and valued, while simultaneously being transgressive because adulterous and exploitative as the Duke abuses his position to initiate and maintain the relationship.

The reciprocity of the Duke and Bianca's relationship is contrasted with Livia's attempts to seduce Leantio after Bianca has left him. The scene is an ironic doubling of Bianca's seduction, since the proposal Livia offers is largely an economic exchange. Livia is the worldly-wise widow, who has buried two husbands and has no intention to marry again, being very aware of women's status in marriage and their position in society. Instead, she buys Leantio and although she offers her body, she first proposes to show him her beautiful house and then offers him wealth, servants, sport, and inheritance.
Although the Duke does offer money to Bianca, the deal between Livia and Leantio is one of stark economic gain only and a marked contrast to the genuine affection shared by the Duke and Bianca. When Leantio accepts Livia’s offer, the exchange is economic and devoid of real emotion:

Livia: Do but you love enough, I’ll give enough.
Leantio: Troth then, I’ll love enough and take enough.
Livia: Then we both pleased enough. (3.2.373-5 my emphasis)

Livia has made it clear that she has money to buy Leantio, and the love he offers, I suggest, is physical only, bought and paid for with Livia’s money. Livia’s passion is presented as genuine and intense, but her sincerity is ironically undercut by the economic arrangement and Leantio’s “acknowledgement of minimal love in exchange for maximal wealth.” Bianca while chaste is Leantio’s “treasure”, “jewel” and “life’s wealth” and he is, in turn, Livia’s “riches”. Indeed, because of the lack of emotion and merely economic reciprocity, Leantio remains jealous of Bianca because the emotional tie has not been severed. Livia may have bought Leantio, but he is still focused emotionally on Bianca as evidenced by his need to confront her and when he dies, Leantio laments equally the death of his marriage and of himself, “My heart-string and the marriage-knot that tied thee/ Breaks both together” (4.2.44-5) though it is Livia, not Bianca, who is distraught with grief over his death. Bianca does not mourn Leantio, indeed urges his death, because she has moved onto a relationship in which she finds herself valued and her gift reciprocated. The unappreciated woman does not, therefore, just withhold herself, she can redirect herself to another who does appreciate her gift.
The necessity of reciprocation

The importance of reciprocating women’s gift of themselves is thus shown in *Women Beware Women* through Bianca’s relationships with Leantio and the Duke. After she has sex with the Duke, Bianca does feel guilt, initially blaming herself and the Duke and then turning the blame on Guardiano and Livia, who set up the situation. At home, Bianca becomes “cutted” (3.1.4), complaining about the lack of material comforts in her husband’s home. This lack is certainly one source of Bianca’s displeasure, since material comforts are an assurance of security; yet I suggest the more important source of her anger is Leantio’s treatment of her, specifically, his failure to reciprocate the gift she has bestowed. This failure is evident in Bianca’s complaint to her mother-in-law:

...Must I live in want,
Because my fortune matched me with your son?
Wives do not give away themselves to husbands,
To the end to be quite cast away; they look
To be the better used and tendered rather,
Highlier respected, and maintained the richer;
They’re well rewarded else for the free gift
Of their whole life to a husband. I ask less now
Than what I had at home when I was a maid
And at my father’s house; kept short of that
Which a wife knows she must have—nay, and will,
Will, Mother, if she be not a fool born;
And report went of me that I could wrangle
For what I wanted when I was two hours old,
And by the copy, this land still I hold.
You hear me, Mother. (3.1.45-60 my emphasis)

The material terms of Bianca’s protest are certainly concrete as she documents the various items that are lacking (items ranging from “a cushion-cloth of drawn work” to “a silver basin and ewer” [3.1.19, 23]) but underlying this is Bianca’s actual grievance with her ill treatment, and the lack of reciprocation for what she has given. In this reading, the “want” that Bianca lives in must in part be Leantio’s failure to reciprocate her gift by
abandoning her while he goes away on business and keeping her alienated by locking her up with only his mother as company. There is irony in Bianca’s speech since the lack of reciprocation she is complaining about means that the “free gift” she describes is clearly not free since reciprocation is expected and the lack of it is the source of Bianca’s irritation. There is also a sense that she is eliding responsibility in her marriage since now “fortune” is blamed for her marriage, which contrasts with her earlier claim to accept its material conditions. Bianca is clearly recalling her premarital status and perhaps she is thinking of the Duke’s promises of wealth; obviously she is fascinated by him and his promises of reciprocation may be behind what she now sees as the complete lack of reciprocation from Leantio. At the end of her speech, Bianca vows to demand reciprocation on the basis of this gift she has given and she certainly sets a higher value on herself than the house affords, reflected in the material comforts she notes as lacking. The lack harks back to the opening scene, where she proclaimed,

...there is nothing can be wanting
To her that does enjoy all her desires.
Heaven send a quiet peace with this man’s love,
And I am as rich as virtue can be poor. (1.1.125-8)

Bianca’s complaints of the house’s deficiencies now indicate that she has other desires than the house or her marriage offers, and she has been denied Leantio’s love by his prolonged absence.

When Leantio returns home, Bianca is somewhat cold and she chides him verbally. She denies him first the kiss he asks for and then all physical affection while couching herself in wifely obedience, “‘Tis time to leave off dalliance; ’tis a doctrine/ Of your own teaching, if you be remembered./ And I was bound to obey it” (3.1.168-70). Leantio does not recognize that his marriage has collapsed, signified by Bianca’s denial
of herself as sexual gift and again reduces her to his hidden jewel when he orders her to withdraw so the Duke’s messenger will not see her. Leontio’s continued commodification rejects Bianca as gift and thus results in a state of war. At the messenger’s departure Bianca returns and when Leontio rails that she has been discovered, she rebukes him for his treatment of her, “Do you think y’have married me to mew me up/ Not to be seen?” (3.1.218-19). She reiterates her rebuke when he plans to hide her in a secret passage in the house, stating that she fears for his health and sanity. In desperation, Leontio reveals that the Duke has invited Bianca to a banquet, believing that the invitation will urge her to hide. Bianca responds, however, by highlighting Leontio’s ingratitude, sarcastically declaring “You show your loyalty/ And honesty at once” (3.1.256-7). His failure to offer her even these pushes Bianca to a decision and she bids him farewell. Her parting words show both her resolve to become the Duke’s mistress and the results of Leontio’s failure. In the seduction scene, Bianca does not verbally consent to become the Duke’s mistress; she just goes off with him and later repents the encounter. But in the face of Leontio’s total inability to reciprocate her gift, Bianca states that she will go to the Duke, which is significant because she does not say she will go to the banquet, as the mother does, nor does Bianca say that she has accepted the invitation. Her statement, therefore, reveals her choice to redirect her gift and pursue her erotic attraction as she bids farewell to one man to go to another. Bianca’s parting words to Leontio also show him the results of ingratitude; banquets are performed gifts in that they are held to celebrate an event with the community, making the host the bestower of the gift. Bianca’s statement that she would “prove unmannerly,/ Rude and uncivil,
mad, and imitate you [Leantio]” (3.1.260-1) if she refused the invitation both emphasizes his failure to reciprocate her gift and chides him for this failure.53

At the feast, the Duke’s reciprocation of Bianca’s gift of herself is evident as he greets her and speaks against the “uncourteous opinions/ That man’s uncivil rudeness ever held of ‘em [women]” (3.2.26-7), a statement which echoes Bianca’s rebuke of Leantio’s ingratitude. Bianca declares the redirection of her gift at the banquet by openly displaying herself as the Duke’s mistress; the two embrace, whisper to each other, and sit beside each other, and the Duke treats her as an equal, marking her entry into Florentine society.54 Bianca’s redirection of herself sexually is a regifting of herself and her decision will, ironically, lead to her tragedy. The Duke’s wooing in this scene is contrasted with that of the Ward: the Duke realizes Bianca’s gift and there is reciprocation between the two. Both Bianca and Isabella are displayed in the scene, but Bianca is included by the Duke’s turning the occasion into a celebration of Bianca, thus presenting her to society, where Isabella is simply presented for the talents that she will bring to her husband as a commodity to be sold at a later date. The Duke confirms the affair by advancing Leantio to the captainship of the Rouans citadel to smooth over his anger with Bianca. That the captainship is a poor position, and therefore an empty gift, indicates the Duke’s indebtedness is to Bianca, not Leantio, for both the gift of her sexual body and for her public declaration of that gift.55 The blatancy of the affair is Bianca’s public direction of herself as gift and her redefinition of the Duke’s gift; her flaunting of the affair redefines the Duke’s banquet to celebrate her choice to throw off one man and give herself to another. This giving of herself to two men is not unproblematic. Bianca has the agency to give and redirect herself, but in choosing to do so, she problematizes
the mores of the society that the agency helps to create. After all, her affair is adulterous, and not everyone accepts her choice—the Cardinal speaks out against it vehemently and in doing so, sets in motion both Bianca’s marriage and her death. The play thus raises the cultural anxiety about the very agency that gift giving allows women. At the banquet, the agency of female choice is expressed when the Duke presents the entertainment, stating that Florentine damsels are not brought up idly and Bianca responds, “They are wiser of themselves, it seems, my lord,/ And can take gifts when goodness offers ’em” (3.2.132-3). Although taking a gift seems a contradiction, since a gift is something one receives, the contrast between Bianca’s relationships with Leantio and the Duke demonstrates that one must know when and how to take a gift as well as recognize who is giving the gift. To not recognize these facets of the gift has disastrous consequences.

The relationship between the Duke and Bianca is the most positive one in the play and yet is also problematic. The relationship is not explicitly couched in mercantile terms, but his economic wealth is implied by his rank, even though it is his offer of exchange that wins Bianca. As Vema Foster argues, “the appeal of individual characters [in the play] exists in tension with the moral judgment inherent in the play’s structure” as tragedy, but the precise nature of the tragedy is elusive. Indeed, their relationship approaches a partnership since the Duke asks for Bianca’s opinion during the banquet, treats her with respect, and seeks to marry her, even before the Cardinal chastises him for the illicit affair, thus restoring Bianca’s honour despite her reputation and her lack of dowry. He gives her the public marriage and celebration that Leantio denied her, and with it the public status as wife and Duchess. Thus in a play that emphasizes the monetary commodification of love and sexual relationships, the Duke and Bianca’s affair
is the best alternative where a woman's gift of her sexual body is recognized, valued, and reciprocated. The relationship is seen from Bianca's point of view and the Duke succeeds in every way that Leantio fails as a husband. Bianca and the Duke are given a marriage ceremony celebrated by a masque, yet a happy marriage cannot follow because Bianca is, partly, using the Duke to find peace and security while the Duke is using Bianca to satisfy his lust. The desire expressed by them is morally questionable and ultimately destructive as becomes obvious when Bianca inadvertently poisons the Duke and then kills herself, kissing poison from his lips and then drinking poison from the aptly named cup of love. Foster suggests that Bianca attempts to poison the Cardinal because she believes he "will not accept her new marriage at the value she herself places upon it" because of her former adultery with the Duke. If we follow this premise, then the Cardinal is another of the men in the play who is unable to recognize and value the gifts women make when they give themselves to men sexually and in marriage. Once the Duke dies, Bianca is once again alone, "What make I here? These are all strangers to me," (5.2.206). At her death, Bianca may be surrounded by people, but she dies friendless and alone, and therefore becomes a figure of sympathy for the audience since she is once again isolated from the community.

Bianca's giving of herself also makes an important point about how these women redefine the social ties the gift establishes. Livia who sets up the seduction in anticipation of a reward, and she stage-manages the scene going on in the gallery, as indicated by the chess match, which is a brilliant commentary on the coercion tactics the Duke uses on Bianca. The chess match thus gives us a second, critically ironic, point of view on the seduction that sees it as a game of skill in which Livia is in command,
winning the game for her “duke”. Yet, Livia is not actually involved in what happens above. The Duke is not indebted to Livia, even though she and Guardiano have set up the encounter, because the Duke negotiates directly with Bianca and it is Bianca who bestows the gift by becoming his mistress. Likewise, in The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio is indebted to Portia, not her dead father, because she bestows herself and her belongings. The gift may originate with someone else, but the actual bestower is the one to whom the debt is owed. Livia and Guardiano may have set up the seduction, but the Duke orchestrates it and Bianca accepts it; it is Bianca’s choice to enter into the affair and to publicly affirm the gift at the banquet. Livia remains a “pandress” (4.1.73) to whom the Duke owes nothing, which is apparent as he advances the idea of the marriage to Vincentio only as an incentive for Hippolito to kill her lover, Leantio.

Isabella: the woman sold

The other marriage in the play is that of Isabella to the Ward, in which both parties are commodified, Isabella by her father and the Ward by his guardian, the aptly named Guardiano. Isabella laments her lack of choice in the marriage as her father commands her to agree to it such that her duty as an obedient daughter leaves her no choice but to marry the obvious fool. When Fabritio commands “This is your husband/ Like him or like him not, wench, you shall have him./ And you shall love him” (1.2.128-30), Livia cautions him that while he can compel Isabella to marry he cannot command her to love the Ward:

Oh soft there, brother! Though you be a Justice,
Your warrant cannot be served out of your liberty.
You may compel, out of the power of father,
Things merely harsh to a maid’s flesh and blood,
But when you come to love, there the soil alters;
Y’are in another country, where your laws
Are no more set by than the cacklings of geese  
In Rome’s great Capitol. (1.2.131-8 my emphasis)

Livia, twice widowed, offers a woman’s perspective on marriage when urging her brother to allow Isabella to see the Ward before marriage because “Maids should both see, and like” since “she takes one man till death;/ That’s a hard task, I tell you” (1.2.32, 34-5). When her brother points out the a man is “Tied to the same observance” (1.2.38), Livia points out the extra duties laid upon wives and that men do not reciprocate women’s gifts given in marriage:

'Tis enough for him;  
Besides, he tastes of many sundry dishes  
That we poor wretches never lay our lips too-  
As obedience, forsooth, subjection, duty, and such kickshaws,  
All of our own making, but served in to them.  
And if we lick a finger then sometimes  
We are not too blame: your best cooks use it. (1.2.39-45)

Livia thus provides a perspective that is sympathetic to women by emphasizing the female plight, although her view is rather cynical. Indeed, when women fail, Livia blames male absence that leads to women’s adultery, as she does in the false story of Isabella’s conception (2.1.135ff).  

Isabella’s choice of two men  

Isabella is thus faced with a forced marriage, but it is a marriage she accepts to cover her (unbeknownst to her) incestuous affair with Hippolito. She thus gives herself to two men, allowing herself to be objectified and commodified in marriage so that she may give herself sexually to the man she desires. When Livia exposes her lie, that the affair is in fact incestuous, it is Isabella who chooses to end it, asking to never see Hippolito again. The results of Isabella’s giving are disastrous and transgressive because incestuous and adulterous, but the blame for the incest is alleviated by Livia’s lie (at least
temporarily) and the adulterous nature of the giving is blamed on the forced marriage to the fool Ward:

Marry a fool!
Can there be greater misery to a woman
That means to keep her days true to her husband,
And know no other man! So virtue wills it.
Why, how can I obey and honour him,
But I must needs commit idolatry?
A fool is but the image of a man,
And that but ill made neither. (1.2.159-66)

It is obvious that the fool husband cannot fulfill the duties of a husband and therefore Isabella cannot fulfill the duties of a wife if married to a fool. It is a view of marriage that is expressed in terms of prisoners bribing their jailors:

The best condition is bad enough:
When women have their choices, commonly
They do but buy their thraldoms, and bring great portions
To men to keep ’em in subjection—
As if a fearful prisoner should bribe
The keeper to be good to him, yet lies in still,
And glad of good usage, a good look
Sometimes. By ’r Lady; no misery surmounts a woman’s!
Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters;
Yet honesty and love makes all this happy
And, next to angels’, the most blest estate. (1.2.168-78)

Isabella’s claim that honesty and love make the marriage happy is surely ironic. The images of women buying thraldoms alongside the comparisons to prison and buying masters are of little comfort. Her elaboration of the image of imprisonment, an image that is reflected in the main plot by Bianca’s seclusion, suggests an ambivalence toward women’s giving of themselves, especially since Isabella is claiming her opinion of marriage to be a general social condition. Protestant and humanist ideas had placed more value on the wife as a helpmate in marriage and Protestantism, as a household religion, had given more responsibility to the roles of wife and mother. Although marriage was
now figured as partnership, it did not ensure equality; women had some choice before marriage and could divorce for adultery, as well as when love and companionship were withheld. Yet within marriage the relationship was still a hierarchy with women subordinate to men.

Middleton’s critique of forced marriage continues as Isabella is put on display at the banquet as some kind of trained animal, prompted to display the education that has been calculated to get her a husband, and she is practically sold to the Ward as her father repeatedly refers to her education and courtly accomplishments as an investment: “Nay, you shall see, young heir, what y’have for your money./ Without fraud or imposture” (3.2.174-75). In the next scene, Isabella is inspected in private by the Ward and his companion as a horse or heifer, in a scene that is unparalleled in its graphic commodification of women in Jacobean drama. In these scenes, Isabella is a commodity, but also an erotic object to be looked at, as the Ward and Sordido scheme to look at her eyes, nose, teeth, gait, hair, etc.; Isabella is displayed, kissed, tasted, leered at, talked about, assessed, and bought. Isabella’s commodification carries to the extreme that of Bianca in the main plot, but it is one she has accepted and chosen by deciding to marry the Ward to cover her affair with Hippolito. It is her decision to thus act as a willing object in the forced marriage that leads, in part, to her tragedy.

Isabella’s decision to marry the Ward comes as a surprise. Livia’s lie makes Isabella appear illegitimate and thus a stranger to the family, alleviating her duty to obey her father’s command to marry the Ward. This, along with Livia’s repeated insistence on Isabella’s choice, is designed by Livia to free Isabella for the affair with Hippolito, and
Livia’s initial promise was to “cross this match” (2.1.92). Isabella’s decision to marry the Ward surprises Hippolito and only after she makes her choice does she explain it:

For all this match able to kill one’s heart,
Nothing can pull me down now. Should my father
Provide a worse fool yet—which I should think
Were a hard thing to compass—I’d have him either:
The worse the better; none can come amiss now,
If he want wit enough. So discretion love me,
Desert and judgement, I have content sufficient. (2.1.210-16)

She tells Hippolito meanwhile,

—She that comes once to be a housekeeper
Must not look every day to fare well, sir,
Like a young waiting-gentlewoman in service;
For she feeds commonly as her lady does,
No good bit passes her but she gets a taste on’t;
But when she comes to keep house for herself
She’s glad of some choice cates then once a week,
Or twice at most, and glad if she can get ’em:
So must affection learn to fare with thankfulness.
Pray make your love no stranger, sir, that’s all. (2.1.217-26)

Isabella thus figures Hippolito as a delicacy to be enjoyed once she has the autonomy of her own household after having rejected him (1.2.224). Ingrid Hotz-Davies argues that the problematic point of Isabella’s reasoning in the aside is that she “assumes that she will be alright as long as her husband is too stupid to notice her adulteries” and that she, along with the other characters in the play, seem “to be entirely oblivious to the fact that a husband is more than a piece of ugly furniture in the house; that he will acquire total control over her with every right to command her services at his own pleasure.” The play shows, however, that the Ward, for all his bawdy talk and demonstrations, is too stupid to notice Isabella’s adultery until it is exposed by Livia and the total control over her body, which Hotz-Davies is concerned with, is shown to be more theoretical than actual. In 3.3, the Ward and Sordido’s attempts to inspect Isabella are not entirely
successful, as when she covers her mouth with a handkerchief so they cannot see her teeth.

Once the adultery is exposed, the Ward reveals that, “I thought there was some knavery abroach, for something stirr’d in her belly the first night I lay with her” (4.2.99-101) and blames Sordido for not finding the fault in their inspection. The Ward has had access to Isabella sexually, but he has not had total control over her as Hotz-Davies asserts, since she has continued her affair with Hippolito and the Ward has been too stupid to suspect the pregnancy and adultery despite the physical signs that he himself has witnessed, signs that could not be found in the physical inspection in 3.3. Isabella thus gives herself to two men, controlling the affair insofar as she chooses to enter into it, to use the marriage to cover it, and to end it once the truth of the incest is revealed. By using the marriage to cover the affair, Isabella further chooses to allow herself to be commodified both publicly, as in the banquet scene, and privately, as in the inspection by the Ward and Sordido. Although giving has allowed her to defy the mores of society by giving herself to two men at once, she cannot control the results of her giving from the revenge planned by Guardiano and the Ward to Hippolito’s revenge once their affair is exposed, any more than she can control the pregnancy that results from the incestuous affair. Swearing revenge against Livia, Isabella agrees to participate in the masque and therefore finds that she must continue to see Hippolito despite her request not to see him again after the revelation of the incest. The affair may be ended, but the results of Isabella’s giving are ultimately beyond her control since the masque ends in death for its participants.
Both Shakespeare and Middleton explore issues of women using themselves as gifts in instances of forced marriage and elopement within a male-dominated society. For both playwrights, women’s gifts are dynamic and complex, with the result that the issues raised cannot fully be contained within the chosen genre. Shakespeare shows women manipulating expected duties, such as silence and obedience, and turning them into gifts, but leaves the ending of The Taming of the Shrew open and deferred, suggesting that marriage is a negotiation between spouses. Middleton uses the tragic genre ironically, as a comment on his subject matter in Women Beware Women, showing that the consequences of women’s giving are not always to their benefit because men do not always acknowledge or appreciate the women’s gifts; giving is thus revealed as a tactic that is difficult to control and can all too easily be manipulated by others.
Chapter Five Notes

1 *Duchess of Malfi* (1.1.395).
2 It would be impossible to list the various scholars who take each of these positions. There have been various strategies, both in scholarship and in performance, to resist Kate’s victimization, which include reading/delivering the final speech ironically or as part of a game with Petruccio.
3 The relationship between the two plays remains one of speculation among scholars. *The Taming of a Shrew* was first published in quarto in 1594 and *The Taming of the Shrew* in Shakespeare’s first folio in 1623, although it was most likely composed between 1588-94. The two plays were considered interchangeable for quite some time, as evidenced by the publication and editorial history including Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Warburton, Johnson, and Capell. It was Edmund Malone, in 1790, who argued that *A Shrew* was a source for *The Shrew* (Dana Aspinall, “The Play and the Critics,” *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed., Dana Aspinall [New York; London, Routledge, 2002] 17-18). Of the theories about the relationships between the two plays, I am most convinced by Leah Marcus’s argument that *A Shrew* should be accepted as a viable alternative to *The Shrew*. As this paper will argue, however, I do not agree with her conclusion that, in the more realistic portraying of male-female relationships in *The Shrew*, women lose “power and autonomy, since there is nothing to qualify the ‘truth’ of female subordination” (*The Aching Heart: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* [London ; New York : Routledge, 1996] 190).
5 Shapiro 220.
6 Shapiro 221.
8 Jeanne Addison Roberts has seen Bianca as sweet, gentle and compliant compared to her sister, until the final scene when the two sisters seem to merge into one, more fully developed human and Karen Newman has seen her as associated with silence throughout the play. Harriet Deer notes that Bianca “knows how to please her suitors, how to dissemble before her father, how to discriminate between Lucentio’s love and the other suitors’ interest in her dowry, and how to reap the rewards of conformity.” Until the final scene, however, she sees Bianca and Lucentio as acting thoroughly conventional. See Roberts, “Horses and Hermaphrodites: Metamorphoses in *The Taming of the Shrew,*” *SQ* 34:2 (1983): 159-71; Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 40; and Deer 69.
9 Newman 43.
10 Dana Aspinall claims “Lucentio finds himself stuck in with the shrewish and unregenerate Bianca at the end of the play” (12).
13 Petruccio does offer a tutor for Kate, but the offer is made to her father and the tutor is really Hortensio disguised as a tutor so he can woo Bianca, so this is not really a gift to Kate.
14 Margaret Lael Mikesell argues that the alterations away from the physical violence of sources such as *A Merry Jest* enlarges the vision of marriage from simple domination to “the same kind of mutuality within hierarchy celebrated in the conduct books as the foundation for a healthy marriage, family, and society” in her essay “‘Love Wrought These Miracles’: Marriage and Genre in *The Taming of the Shrew,*” *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed. Dana Aspinall (New York; London, Routledge, 2002) 117.
Douglas and Isherwood argue that the distinction between goods that are necessary to sustain life and goods that service the heart and mind must be put to rest. Goods such as food are no less carriers of meaning than poetry (quoted in Orlin 190).

Orlin notes this and states that objects (the meat, dishes, and bed) by “their very presence project[] certain performances” and the failure of these objects to fulfill their those performances intensifies Kate’s physical torture because their presence gives her evidence that her needs will be met (194).

Many critics have seen Petruchio as an educator, including M.C. Bradbrook, “Dramatic Role as Social Image: A Study of The Taming of the Shrew,” Shakespeare-Jahrbuch 94 (1958): 132-50; Alexander Leggatt, Shakespeare’s Comedy of Love (London: Methuen, 1974); Camille Slichts, “The Raw and the Cooked in The Taming of the Shrew,” Journal of English and Germanic Philology 88:2 (1989): 168-89; E.M.W. Tillyard, “The Fairy-Tale Element in The Taming of the Shrew,” Shakespeare: 1564-1964, A Collection of Modern Essays by Various Hands, ed., Edward A. Bloom (Providence: Brown UP, 1964); and Valerie Wayne, “Refashioning the Shrew,” Shakespeare Studies 17 (1985) 159-87. While each has their own view of Petruchio’s value as an educator, Bradbrook admired his ability to pierce below the surface of Kate’s angry abuse to her desire to be mastered (as unconsciously betrayed by her conduct.) Tillyard saw “Petruchio’s enactment of a ‘more kindly and educadve method’” as the reason Kate’s improvement while Legatt attributed Kate’s transformation to Petruchio’s teaching of “an ‘inner order and a sense of ‘conventional decent behaviour’”, Wayne believed the taming to be for Kate’s own good, and Slichts argued Shakespeare is less interested in the proper distribution of power between the sexes than in exploring the comedy inherent in the human desire for individual freedom and fulfillment as a social being. (Aspinall 14) As Aspinall notes, whether these “concomitant possibilities that some of these critics either emulate on some level this fantasy of male dominance and desire...or that they struggle with some culturally informed reluctance in themselves to sully Shakespeare’s reputation as an ‘enlightened’ man, Petruchio does seem to lead Kate to a better life. Some critics argue that Petruchio’s enhancement of not only Kate’s social position but also her demeanor and, possible, her ability to become in Laurie Maguire’s words, ‘a synecdoche for “woman”’ (130) lies in his unconventional application of contemporary humanist thought and marital reform circulating around him.” (Aspinall 14) I do not deny that this is possible, but I do think that Shakespeare was also influenced by the gift exchange system of the period and the system’s infiltration of marriage. “Wayne believes that Petruchio teaches Katherine to ‘mimic’ the role of obedient wife and thus ‘transcend the roles and hierarchies that govern their world’.” (Aspinall 14) I think she mimics the role via hyperbole, but I think the transcending of hierarchy is through exchange and that the roles are not transcended, but rather are in the process of renegotiation.


Although women were to be silent in public, it was perfectly acceptable for women to speak on the subject of religion. They even published books on the topic, though usually these translations of religious texts.

The characterization of Sarah remained unproblematized in the period; she was simply seen as an obedient wife. In the marriage set out in The Book of Common Prayer, a prayer is said that the new wife may be “faithful and obedient as Sarah” (Church of England, The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book, ed., John Booty [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1976] 296) She is cited in several marriage manuals, including William Whately’s A Bride bush or A Direction for Married Persons (London, 1617), John Dod and Robert Cleaver, A Godly Form of Household Government: for the ordering of private Families, according to Gods word, Whereunto is addedowned in a more particular manner, The severall duties of the Husband towards his wife: and the wisues dutie towards her Husband. The Parents dutie towards their children: and the childrens toward their Parents. The Maisters dutie towards his servants: and also the servants dutie towards their Maisters. (London: Thomas Creede for Thomas Mann, 1598), and William Gouge’s Of Domestically Duties (London: John Haviland, 1622) as well as Rachel Speght’s defense of women, A Movzell for Melastoms, The cynical Bayler of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evoka sex; or, An Apologetical Answere to that Irrelitious and Iilliterate Pamphlet made by Io. Sw. and by him Intituled “The Arraignment of Women, (1617).

Bradbrook, “Dramatic Role” as quoted in Daniel 81.
Jeanne Addison Roberts 170. Addison posits that through the transformations, Kate’s true identity is revealed, and the way is prepared for the long-deferred consummation.


Here there is an echo of Dod and Clever:

The duty of the husband, is to get goods: and of the wife, to gather them together and save them. The duty of the husband is to travell abroad to seeke living, and the wives dutie is to keepe the house. The dutie of the husband is, to get mony and provision: and of the wives, not vainely to spend it....The dutie of the husband is to be a giver: and of the wife, to bee a saver....The dutie of the husband is, to bee Lord of all: and of the wife, to give account of all. The dutie of the husband is, to dispatch all things without doore: and of the wife, to oversee and give order for all things within the house. Now where the husband and wife performeth these duties in their house, wee may call it a Colledge of quietnesses: the house wherein these are neglected, we may term it a hell.

Quoted in Orlin 204. Dod and Cleaver are 1598, but the works are contemporaneous.

The term revisionist was posited by John Bean. These critics take the last speech as ironic and her submission as pretense. For a discussion of revisionists and anti-revisionists, see Newman 46.

See Orlin 203 for a discussion of the speech’s economic grounding, specifically the economic manifestations of travel in this speech and the play.

Many critics have hypothesized an ending for the play that has since been lost. I am not convinced by these arguments because, as Burns indicates, A Shrew and numerous productions of The Shrew that have added a Sly ending prove that a return to the frame is possible but there is no proof that such an ending was lost or cut from Shakespeare’s play (100).

Burns 90, my emphasis.

See Chapter 4.


Inga-Stina Ewbank notes, “Leantio is constantly referring to his experiences of love, for good or ill, to events in the life of ‘some rich man’, thus judging himself by the play’s prevailing image-pattern commercialized relationships” in her essay “‘Realism and Morality in ‘Women Beware Women,’” Essays and Studies 22 (1969): 64.


Christensen argues that Leantio’s “neglectful absence provide[s] occasion for [Bianca’s] transgressions” and that “[t]hroughout the play, in both dramatic action and diegesis, the absence of husbands is seen to foster adultery to the extent that the conditions become cotemdnous” (501). Livia’s two cuckoldry stories specify the husband’s absence on business as legitimating adultery (2.1.139ff. 2.2.159-66), thus gaining rhetorical capital. I agree that the play blames husbands for their wives redirection of themselves as sexual gifts, but for more reasons then their mere absence.

Christensen discusses the problematic nature of the mother’s welcome (504-5).


41 Dawson 310. He argues that Leantio’s “theft” of Bianca and the Duke’s rape of her “turn out to be similar strategies carried on in the name of an identical power…. From this we can perhaps speculate that the play redefines aristocratic rape as a bourgeois act—one motivated by a spirit of possession and characterized by the deployment of a power that despite its flamboyance has a clear counterpart in middle-class marriage; indeed, the so-called ‘conjugal family’ was marked by a distinct ‘reinforcement of patriarchy’ during the Jacobean period” (310).

42 Dawson argues unequivocally that this is a rape 304. Gossett hedges her arguments, stating, “If this is not rape, it is certainly sexual mastery rather than sexual persuasion” (319). Gossett is exploring the pattern of rape as depicted in several plays and sees this play as not fitting the pattern. She does not explore the complexity of the play satisfactorily, seeing Bianca attracted to the Duke’s power as expressed in the rape and Leantio as accepting his wife’s “simply passing to the stronger man” (320) without allowing for her agency in the exchange or for Leantio’s bitterness about the exchange as displayed in the play.

43 Hotz-Davies 36. Although she argues that the encounter is a rape, she notes the conciliatory note in the Duke’s offering. She argues that Bianca accommodates herself to her new conditions, becoming reconciled to her rapist. She identifies this development as presupposing certain assumptions about the nature and effect of sexual violence. First, Bianca must have been asking for it, second, the rape does not have a lasting effect and third, the Duke is Bianca’s ideal mate: “Under these assumptions, rape is not a crime or even an inadmissible violation of the woman’s person, but a symptom of the rapist’s superiority over his rivals. It is the story of the alpha male’s overriding his opponents, and claiming his rightful prey. The theatre-goer, who may not argue these implications through to the end, will still be left with the assurance that violent arguments of seduction don’t do anyone any harm, but are somehow courted by the victim, and may even be acceptable features in a powerful male personality” (37).

44 Verna Foster argues that the Duke’s language at the end of the scene is full of references to his power to be protector and provide for Bianca’s emotional needs and thus “It is psychologically right that Bianca says no more: morally she cannot acquiesce, emotionally she cannot resist” (512). Although I find this argument attractive, Bianca’s silence leaves the issue ultimately ambiguous in the text. As Jennifer L. Heller has argued, the play seems to want it both ways. There is the threat of violence in the scene and thus the threat of rape is present, and yet because no rape is staged “the text leaves open the possibility that Bianca has an active role in this scene. Herein lies the interpretative paradox: a woman the play asks us to see as innocent may very well play a part in her own trade to the Duke. The staging dramatizes the difficulty the play has with representing Bianca’s sexuality as both violated and willingly exchanged. By placing a key scene in the wings, Middleton avoids representing what is ultimately unknowable and unrepresentable—the true nature of Bianca’s desires” (428). Similarly, Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey argue that most of Bianca’s behaviour can be read in two ways in this scene, such that she can be seen as taking an active part in her seduction. The same can be said for the chess game, in which “the loser is always guilty of some complicity in his or her own defeat” (353). Bruzzi and Bromham indicate the ambiguity surrounding the scene, namely that the early part of the play lays heavy emphasis on women’s subjection to male power and thus generates sympathy for them while establishing a counterview through
the sequence of spectacle scenes, “which present a strong counterpoint of strict morality to human sympathy” (254-255).
46 Bianca will later tell the Duke that she loves peace as an indirect request that he kill Leantio.
47 Christensen 509.
48 Christensen argues it is “unromantic” p. 509.
49 Charlotte Spivack, “Marriage and Masque in Middleton’s Women Beware Women,” Cahiers Elisabethains 42 (1992): 51. She argues that the relationship is a mock marriage and that the “financial bond, although vulgar, is at least real” (51). Verna Foster argues that Leantio calls Bianca a whore, but he is the real prostitute (518). Inga-Stina Ewbank argues that the people’s wit in the play is epitomized in the lines that seal the bargain in the way in which Leantio and Livia are using each other (her emphasis) (68).
51 Spivack 52.
52 Charles A. Hallet also makes this point as part of his argument that Bianca is working herself up into a state of defiance within the scene that will allow her to leave Leantio with a clear conscience. See his essay, “The Psychological Drama of Women Beware Women,” SEL 12:2 (1972): 383.
53 In the source, Bianca loves the Duke and her husband simultaneously. Middleton also ages the Duke, who was 23 in 1564, the year Bianca became his mistress, and compressed the time scale as historically Duke Francesco was married and he and Bianca waited twelve years to marry. See J. B. Batchelor, “The Pattern of Women Beware Women,” The Yearbook of English Studies 2 (1972): 80.
54 Foster also argues that at the banquet the Duke treats Bianca more as an equal, but does so by flattering her vanity and showing her off such that she begins to feel herself secure in Florentine society (514).
55 Spivack 50. She argues that Bianca’s exchanging of Leantio for the Duke is accomplished with the aid of the captainship as a bribe that financially restores the domestically ruined Leantio. The captainship is such a poor position, however, it is nothing more than a token acknowledgement from the Duke and is independent from Bianca’s leaving of Leantio.
56 Foster 508.
57 As Foster points out, the Duke sets up Leantio’s murder before the Cardinal’s admonition and thus the marriage plan cannot be entirely attributed to the Cardinal’s reprimand (515).
58 Foster 510.
59 Spivack also notes that wedding ceremonies are completed by the masque but sees the ceremonies as empty formalities (54).
60 Foster 519. Indeed, the Cardinal cannot see Bianca as anything other than the Duke’s means of satisfying his “hot lust” (4.3.18) and “adulterous theft” (4.3.36), terms he uses to denounce her just before the wedding.
61 For the chess match as an assertion of Livia’s power, see Dawson 313-14. He argues “that the major reversals come as a result of botched attempts on the part of women to assert their desire and power in the actual world—to move out of the realm of fantasy or the symbolic and into the world of life and death.”
62 Foster 510. She argues that Bianca is conquered both by the Duke and circumstances, “for she is peculiarly vulnerable to certain of the Duke’s appeals”.
63 See Chapter 3.
64 See Christensen 501 for how the play blames male absence for women’s adultery.
65 Dawson also argues that the last two lines of this speech “register an uncontrolled ambivalence” in terms of women’s powerlessness in marriage (311).
67 Dawson 306. –
68 Hotz-Davies 34.
70 Hotz-Davies 35. She argues that Middleton seems unprepared to pursue his argument about the indignities of being in marriage to the further indignities in store for these women after their nuptials. This
failure results in inconsistencies in Isabella and Hippolito, since any alternative dramatic solution would have been more effective such as killing the Ward, killing Fabritio, or an elopement. The argument against forced marriage simply loses momentum when the play shows us that her Isabella’s life is not so bad so long as she can fulfill her sexual desire outside of marriage, even though we still pity her (35).
Conclusion: “As if the gifts we parted with procured/That violent destruction”: the complexity of women’s giving

Gifts mediated everyday relationships in early modern England, across boundaries of rank, gender, and economics. Yet, women’s participation in the gift system was a paradoxical issue; considered “appropriate” female behaviour, women’s gift giving was, simultaneously, an issue of contention, contradiction, and anxiety. Giving allowed women agency, but it also allowed them to refuse, reject, and withhold gifts in an age when obedience was demanded and expected of them. My reading of dramatic representations of women’s use of themselves as gifts, and the various forms of agency that such giving afforded them in courtship and marital negotiations, adds to the increasingly complex understanding that historians and literary scholars have developed of women’s position in early modern England. Cristiana Ziraldo has contended that early modern women who asserted independence did so by leaving the family behind, and even then the state managed to accommodate and co-opt their challenges to this central institution. She asserts that although the activity of early modern women cannot properly be termed feminist, this does not mean that misogynist attitudes and the male-dominated institutions that sought to suppress and subjugate women were not challenged. I have shown that challenges could be mounted without leaving the family behind and institutions such as marriage, and through Mary I and Elizabeth I, Parliament and the Privy Council, were not only challenged, they were manipulated and negotiated by women.

The drama’s negotiation of women’s giving, moreover, suggests that gift giving is more nuanced than currently theorized; women’s use of themselves as gifts not only
collapses the subject/object dichotomy since they are both subject and object in the negotiation, but also undermines the gift/commodity dichotomy of gift theory because when women display agency by metamorphosing themselves into gifts, they become simultaneously a gift and a (self-negotiated) commodity. The gift of themselves is part of an ongoing transaction since companionship and their sexual bodies can be given or withheld at any time. Similarly, the duties they are expected to fulfill as wives, such as obedience, are things to be negotiated within the marriage itself, as in The Taming of the Shrew. Just as gifts can be given, they can be withheld, refused, and redirected when the recipient does not value the gift and/or fails to reciprocate it, and these aspects of gift exchange can be expressions of agency on par with or exceeding that of giving, since early modern culture positioned women as passive and yielding. Likewise, women could decline to engage in gift giving and thus reject a suitor by refusing to bestow a gift. Plays such as All’s Well, ‘Tis Pity, and Women Beware Women that explore the disruptive, negative, and contradictory aspects of women’s use of themselves as gifts reveal gift giving to be a complex cultural practice that does not always benefit the bestower of the gift.

By pursuing the questions and complexities of women and gifts, dramatic form and genre could be transformed. Comedies could become increasingly strained when gift giving was highlighted, since women as gift could not be easily reconciled within its form. Consider the plays in this study. The Taming of the Shrew ends on the question of the state of the marriages—is Kate really tamed? has Bianca turned shrew? The Merchant of Venice similarly ends uneasily—are Lorenzo and Jessica happy? does Portia dominate in her marriage? All’s Well That Ends Well fits uneasily into the comic genre,
and ends on Bertram’s “if”. Tragedies are not neatly tragic either—Annabella and Bianca die, certainly, but the relationships that lead to the tragedies are presented as the best among a bad lot; Giovanni is the only suitable suitor for Annabella, even though he is her brother, and the Duke and Bianca’s relationship is the only one based on mutuality and reciprocation rather than exploitation. In short, the exact nature of the tragedy is elusive in both *Tis Pity* and *Women Beware Women*. Such open and forced endings in plays raising the issue of woman as gift suggest that the issue, along with the concerns, questions, and anxieties it raised, could not be fully contained by traditional generic structure. In turn, genre is used by the dramatist as a comment on the issue of women as a gift. *All’s Well* is a comedy because the tragedy that could easily have occurred is averted; the play highlights its generic uncertainty as a corollary of its focus on gift-giving and thus the very uncertainty of the genre comments on women’s giving as ultimately a positive and procreative force. *Tis Pity* and *Women Beware Women* are tragedies because women’s agency in gift giving cannot be reconciled to the mores of their corrupt societies.

The complicated nature of women’s gifts in early modern drama indicates that while gift theory adds an important dimension to investigating the shifting position of women in early modern England, women’s giving as represented in the drama is not and cannot be fully explained by any current gift theory. Drama is a particularly relevant medium for pursuing these issues of women as gift and women’s gifts. Just as women were simultaneously gifts and commodities in marriage, early modern drama straddled the lines between gift and commodity, so that the division between the two becomes blurred. Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* offers an example of how that interpenetration
takes place with regard to drama; it has two inductions, one for its court audience and one for the commercial theatre. In the court induction, the play is offered to the King as a gift: “The maker doth present, and hopes tonight/To give you for a fairing, true delight” (Prologue 11-12). Here, the fairing works as the play presented to the King and thus is presented as a gift to the King, and of course, a “fairing” is also a gift brought from a fair, a token gift, and thus implies a transaction of gifts between King and playwright. There is a similar transaction in the Induction performed for the theatre audience, but one which is represented explicitly as a contract with a detailed “Articles of Agreement” (Ind. 69). The Articles set out what the playwright will provide and the duties of the theatre goers, and also include the explicitly commercial clause:

…it shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pen’orth, his twelve pen’orth, so to his eighteen-pence, two shillings, half a crown to the value of his place: provided always his place get not above his wit. (Ind. 92-97)

Jonson thus includes a commercial stratification among his audience, who can judge the play only according to their economic means. The theatre was, therefore, alert to issues of gift and commodity and to the rising mercantile trends of society.

Gifts were part of daily life in early modern England, and there was a unique understanding of how gifts and reciprocity worked. Women were able to use and manipulate the gift system to their advantage, particularly with the religious change to Protestantism and the new emphasis on the position of wife. The drama explored the anxieties of women’s gifts both for dramatic purposes and to work through that anxiety. By exploring the dramatic examples of the period, I seek to contribute to gift theory not by emphasizing issues of reciprocity, as has been the previous trend, but by looking at issues of courtship, and specifically where women’s behaviour deviates from set rules of
gift theory. Courtship gifts are, of course, a specific and special category of gift exchange and have to them a performative aspect since they are meant to achieve a certain task.

Yet, I have found that by rejecting, withholding, refusing, and redirecting gifts and themselves as gifts in courtship and marital relations, women in the male-dominated society of early modern England were able to find a new area of negotiation in a society that expected and demanded their obedience and passivity. The rejection of gifts did not, moreover, necessarily lead to cessation of relationships or hostility since, obviously, one important aspect of a social relationship would be brought to an end or significantly changed, but other social relations, such as friendship or business relations, were carried on. The interpersonal nature of courtship relations and women’s gifts within them thus constitutes an area of gift exchange that needs further critical theorization and study, since current gift theory does not adequately elucidate the agency and limitations that courtship gifts and woman as gift afford.
Notes to Conclusion

1 *Duchess of Malfi* (1.1.387-388).


---. “Male Bonding in Shakespeare’s Comedies.” Erickson and Kahn. 73-103.


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