CHALLENGING THE HOMILETIC TRADITION: THE DOMESTIC DRAMA OF THOMAS DEKKER, 1599-1621

By

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation reappraises Thomas Dekker's dramatic achievement through an examination of his contribution to the development of Elizabethan-Jacobean domestic drama. Dekker's alterations and modifications of two essential features of early English domestic drama—the homiletic pattern of sin, punishment, and repentance, which the genre inherited from the morality tradition, and the glorification of the cult of domesticity—attest to a complex moral and dramatic vision which critics have generally ignored.

In Patient Grissil, his earliest extant domestic play, which portrays ambivalently the vicissitudes of marital and family life, Dekker combines an allegorical superstructure with a realistic setting. The tension between homiletic and realistic impulses is also at the heart of The Honest Whore. In Part I, although Dekker provides a trenchant portrait of the afflicted domus, the play's satirical tone clashes oddly with the homiletic schemes. In Part II, however, the marriage code is presented amid intricate plotting and a complex ethical design in which orthodox homiletic paradigms such as the patient wife, the testing of the wife's virtue, and the prodigal husband's reformation are consistently undermined through irony and paradox. Taken as a whole, these three plays reveal Dekker's growing cynicism toward the tidy moral and dramatic schemes of their analogues, and of the
treatises and domestic-conduct books from which domestic dramas took their plots.

Dekker's skillful exploitation of homiletic motifs extends to the comic vision of The Roaring Girl. The play sustains a central tension between the domus and the city, and offers a bold portrait of the heroine, Moll Cutpurse, who scorns marriage, preferring the openness of the city to the confinement of the household. In Dekker's domestic tragedy, The Witch of Edmonton, written shortly after his lengthy imprisonment for debt, the comic optimism that informs The Roaring Girl yields to bitter tones and to the defeat by a repressive society of those protagonists who openly challenge the values imbedded in the marriage code.

The conclusion surveys the development of domestic drama since the Renaissance, and shows how Dekker anticipates the domestic plays of modern dramatists such as Ibsen, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O'Neill.
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INTRODUCTION

Critical appraisal of Thomas Dekker's plays has often been negative and frequently apologetic; even enthusiastic critics usually deem it necessary to qualify their praise. Harold Toliver voices a common sentiment when he writes: "Dekker will not likely share the lot of rediscovered minor figures" as he "had the misfortune of being overmatched by Jonson in satire and overshadowed by Shakespeare in romantic comedy."¹ While Dekker's realistic sketches of London life and his sympathetic portraits of socially unfortunate characters are often praised, the persistent charges levelled against him are his piety, his congenial humor, and his allegedly simple moral vision. Conspicuously lacking is a comprehensive assessment of Dekker's unconventional, passionate, and frequently bitter indictment of easy moral and dramatic solutions. One reason for the absence of such a study of Dekker's plays has been the overriding critical concern with The Shoemaker's Holiday, one of Dekker's earliest unaided works and the one which most easily lends itself to charges of lighthearted treatment of the events of everyday life. The play is the most anthologized of Dekker's works, and critical evaluations of it appear regularly amid sporadic remarks about the merits of other plays, particularly The Honest Whore, II which Hazelton
Spencer in 1933 claimed was "Dekker's masterpiece,"\(^2\) and whose superb dramatic design is equal to the best plays of Dekker's contemporaries. Recent British productions of The Witch of Edmonton and The Roaring Girl\(^3\) will perhaps spark new interest in Dekker's complex dramaturgy, just as recently there has arisen considerable interest in Dekker's career as a pamphlet writer. In his re-assessment of Dekker's craftsmanship as a prose writer, E.D. Pendry has shown that much of Dekker's work "has great survival-value" and deserves to be reconsidered for our age: Dekker is "a grown-up writer who feels pain, and can turn upon it with a sneer; despair, bravado and indignation give an edge to much of his wit. There was for him no easy road to a faith in human goodness."\(^4\) I believe this also holds true for Dekker the dramatist.

Dekker experimented with a variety of dramatic genres, namely, citizen comedy, dramatic allegory, the history play, romantic comedy, and domestic drama. The largest group of extant plays, the domestic dramas, reveals a striking homogeneity of theme and purpose as well as a sustained and persistent challenge of social and moral assumptions. These plays attest to Dekker's enormous contribution to the formation of a specifically English dramatic form which originated toward the end of the sixteenth century. Four major strands compose the genre: the "new" murder play; the homiletic structure which the plays inherited from the morality tradition; the concern with middle-class values.
concomitant with the presentation of the commoner as hero; and most importantly, the dramatization of marital or family conflict staged primarily within the domus. Although Dekker, like the best writers of domestic plays, often aimed at the edification of the large citizen audiences of the public theatres, and while the thrust of his domestic plays is the drama of everyday life, the relationship between audience expectation, social-historical influences, and dramatic conflict in these works is more subtle and complex than has been suggested.

While the consideration of any genre or model based on certain principles of composition must include its relevance to the audiences and writers of its time, a more useful way to begin approaching a genre as dynamic as early English domestic drama is from the writer's perspective, that is, as a traditional pattern or model interacting with the work as it evolves. The finished product will result from a combination of the dramatist's personal experience and the models he inherits. The interaction between an author's experience and pre-existing structures suggests that no one work will embody completely all the features of a given model. "A genre," writes Claudio Guillen, "has stable features, but it also changes, as a precise influence on the work in progress, with the writer, the nation, and the period." At the same time, we will detect in the work an urge toward an established pattern. A genre, in this sense, is a "problem-solving model" that establishes a dialectic
between the artist and the evolving work. The task of the reader consists in formulating an approximate position of influence within the coordinates of the genre. One way to effect this formulation is to examine the relationship between social and ethical influences and the general field of literary conventions from which the writer draws. The "new" work thus becomes "both a deviant from the norm . . . and a process of communication referring to the norm." In this context domestic drama may be viewed as a group of related works that fluctuates around a norm with respect to certain characteristics. Rather than view the genre in terms of ruling formulas, it is best to see it as a "system" or a body of plays that must be understood in relation to one another. I will therefore consider Dekker's domestic drama as a "family" of plays which shares a number of similar characteristics and impulses, the essential features of which each play exploits in a different manner and with different intensity.

After delineating in Chapter One the distinguishing characteristics of Elizabethan-Jacobean domestic drama and drawing together available research in the genre, I will discuss and illustrate Dekker's conceptualization of it. In subsequent chapters I will analyze the plays, Patient Grissil, the two parts of The Honest Whore, The Roaring Girl, and The Witch of Edmonton, in chronological order, in terms of how each transforms conventional themes and paradigms of the genre. Patient Grissil revolves around a
popular motif: the virtues of a faithful wife who performs her duties patiently and successfully under great emotional stress. Ostensibly, the wife's unquestioning submission to her husband, the marquess, fulfills the didactic purpose of Elizabethan domestic drama, that is, to instruct the middle class (which was rising economically and which was beginning to intermarry with the aristocracy) in domestic and social values. However, while the heroine of the main plot is the paragon of the patient and suffering wife, we must take into account the challenges to that formula in the subplot before declaring Dekker's treatment of marriage and the family hopelessly conventional. The play must be considered as a whole unit since the multi-plot structure reveals a central paradox. The structure is based on a set of contrasts between kinds of marital relationships: while the main plot upholds the sanctity of the family unit as a component of the male-female/sovereign-subject hierarchy, the chaotic marriage of Gwenthyan and Sir Owen consistently opposes that ideal. And at the same time that the resolution of the marquess-Grissill, Sir Owen-Gwenthyan actions is based on the married couples' praise of marriage, we must examine why various minor characters' unorthodox assumptions about married life are allowed to remain undiminished alternatives to the happy denouement.

It becomes increasingly clear that Dekker did not produce plays with the intention of giving us neatly ordered
plots and even tones. Instead, the plays are profoundly ambiguous. Dekker's struggle between upholding traditional values and exposing their limitations is perhaps most crudely articulated in The Honest Whore, I, a hybrid domestic comedy marked by an uneasy mixture of genres and a clash between satirical and homiletic overtones. Despite its inferiority to the more dramatically coherent sequel, The Honest Whore, I reformulates a stock motif by replacing the patient wife with an absurdly patient husband, namely, Candido the linendraper, whose virtue is at once venerated and ridiculed. In the Candido action, moreover, Dekker asserts a subtle metaphorical equation between marriage and commerce, and certain nuances in the verse suggest his bitter rebuke of the merchant's unquestioning embrace of a banal morality.

Dekker's exploitation of traditional paradigms through paradox, irony, and contradiction is artfully illustrated in The Honest Whore, II. Candido, the "patient" spouse of the subplot, has an equally unorthodox counterpart in the main plot where the stock figure is transformed into a converted whore struggling to preserve her integrity in a skeptical world. The homiletic superstructure is marked by another fundamental irony: having abandoned the prostitute's trade, Bellafront, without a means of survival, almost fails the test of forbearance. Bellafront, moreover, shares with Dekker's central female characters a strong sense of self
that is often absent in the heroines of lesser domestic plays.

Like the two parts of The Honest Whore, The Roaring Girl makes extensive use of interwoven images of commerce, marriage, and sexuality, and portrays the *domus* as the seat of corrupt values and emotional dissatisfaction. The play forcefully rearticulates the essential ambiguity of the early plays. The Sebastian-Mary action addresses a theme familiar to middle-class audiences at the beginning of the seventeenth century, that is, the problems which arise from forced marriage, a practice that denies the individual's personal claims. But while the Sebastian-Mary plot ends in marriage, Dekker undermines the celebration through the heroine Moll Cutpurse's eloquent denunciation of marriage as a deterrent to a woman's self-sufficiency. The tension is expressed symbolically by means of the opposition between the city (the seat of freedom and independence) and the *domus* (the centre of spiritual malaise).

Dekker's growing disenchantment with orthodox value systems is evident in the progression in his work from comedy to tragedy. The Witch of Edmonton, his only extant domestic tragedy, powerfully dramatizes the impossibility of reconciling personal and social claims. Through the depiction of the spiritual degeneracy of Frank Thorney, the erring husband of the marriage plot, and the thwarted desire of Elizabeth Sawyer, the aged and abused spinster of the supernatural plot, Dekker articulates the complex inter-
relationship between emotional imbalance and a repressive social system.

Dekker's refinement of the marriage code, and his dramatization of conflict surrounding the family transform conventional ethical models in domestic drama into dialectical ones that capture the inherent tensions in the individual's struggle for survival and fulfillment in an age of increasing social and psychological fragmentation.
Notes


2 Hazelton Spencer, ed., Elizabethan Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933), p. 668. Those studies which deal with plays other than The Shoemaker's Holiday are either chiefly biographical or concerned primarily with their orthodox moral and dramatic schemes. Early criticism focused on the relationship between Dekker's biography and the plays' social background. Mary Leland Hunt's Thomas Dekker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911) attempted to give a sympathetic account of Dekker's "life and personality," (p. ix) beginning with his early intellectual environment and his first attempts at writing drama, and moving to the quarrel with Jonson, his imprisonment, and his eventual return to play-writing. While Hunt admired Dekker's realism and his ability to construct complex characters, she was critical of his lack of skill in plot construction. A few years later L.C. Knights, in Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), criticized Dekker for lacking "the artistic conscience" in that he "is never sure of what he wants to do," at the same time that he observed in his plays both a consistent moral vision "that the average decent citizen would find acceptable", and a morality that we "cannot classify . . . as either 'medieval' or 'modern'" (pp. 231-32). The most exhaustive study of Dekker's realism is Marie-Thérèse Jones-Davies' Un Peintre de la Vie Londonienne: Thomas Dekker, 2 vols. (Paris: Didier, 1958), which discusses both the dramatic and non-dramatic works in the context of Elizabethan life and culture. The study is encyclopedic and topical, and the plays are treated as social documents rather than theatre pieces. More recently, two major studies of the plays have appeared, both stressing their formal properties. George Price's Thomas Dekker (New York: Twayne, 1969) provides a useful guide to research opportunities in Dekker's dramatic and non-dramatic works, andcatalogues Dekker's utilization of early Elizabethan dramatic traditions in addition to the influence of contemporary dramatic forms upon him. James H. Conover's Thomas Dekker (The Hague: Mouton, 1969) deals with the structural design of Dekker's independent plays.
Disturbed by the trend in scholarship to censure Dekker for his inability to provide adequate structures for his dramas, Conover examines and evaluates each plot according to traditional categories: "exposition, articulation, the playwright's use of available materials, crisis, climax" (p. 17). Because Conover isolates the plays from one another, and because he excludes for the most part their psychological and social dynamics, his conclusions are questionable: while praising Dekker for his affinities with "playwrights and modes early in the period, with men like Kyd, Greene, Heywood, Marlowe, and Shakespeare," and for having "lived and written beyond his time," (p. 313) Conover regrets "the peculiar lack of development" and growth in Dekker's drama (p. 312). In his ardent praise of Dekker's early but "clearly superior" work, The Shoemaker's Holiday (p. 212), Conover follows a long tradition in Dekker scholarship. A few thoughtful essays have recently dealt with Dekker's complex dramaturgy and these will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

3 The Witch of Edmonton was produced in 1981 by The Royal Shakespeare Company who also produced The Roaring Girl in 1983. The director in both cases was Barry Kyle. (See above, Chapters V and VI.)


5 The theory of a strong correlation between audience expectation and the didactic spirit of early English domestic drama has been based on sociological studies of the public playhouses where the plays were performed. Indeed, much of the non-generic criticism of the plays relies heavily on sociological rather than dramatic criteria. Louis B. Wright, for one, views the plays of Dekker and Heywood in particular as mouthpieces for their large middle-class audiences, whose "growing class consciousness" is viewed as the mainspring of the new drama [Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (1935; rpt. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958) p. 638]. The most recent study, Susan P. Cerasano's "Alleyn's Fortune: The Biography of a Playhouse," Diss. Michigan 1981, deals with the writers, players, and audience of the First Fortune Playhouse (1600-1621), the most influential public theatre of its day. Heywood, Dekker, and Middleton, the chief Fortune playwrights, are portrayed as shrewd dramatists, perceptive of their audience's taste and of its "cultural sophistication: naive, conservative, often complacent in its own ignorance" (p. 144). In order to please this audience, argues Cerasano, the plays were more likely "to create a secure position from which the middle-class viewer could be coaxed to consider alternatives to his own conduct and morality than to openly challenge bourgeois values" (p. 145).
Dekker's plays especially are judged as second-rate because his intent was to teach "the self-satisfied tradesmen" in his audience, a purpose which explains his "obvious, uncomplicated aesthetic" and his avoidance of "parody and social satire" (pp. 144-45). The plays are therefore considered dramatically uninteresting because a mass audience allegedly "dictated to its dramatists what the final scene of a play would hold before the first line had been written" (p. 145).


7 Guillén, p. 61.

8 Guillén, p. 61.

9 In those cases where the plays are collaborations I have selected only those for which there is convincing evidence that Dekker's share was the greatest, or that his was the organizing hand.
Domestic drama originates on the English popular stage in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Its literary roots are native, rather than classical, and its mainspring is the presentation of predominantly English characters, chiefly from the nonaristocratic ranks, engaged in marital or family conflict. Thomas Heywood was the first to consider the genre's conceptual framework. Heywood combined both senses of the term "domestic," that is, pertaining to national as well as to household matters. In An Apology for Actors (1612) Heywood referred to "our domesticke hystories" as plays boldly concerned with contemporary English characters and situations,¹ a definition implied in the Prologue of the anonymous Warning for Fair Women (ca. 1593-1599) where Tragedy describes itself as "home-borne." Heywood further defined domestic comedy as "a discourse consisting of diverse institutions, comprehending civil and domestic things, in which is taught, what in our lives and manners is to be followed, what to be avoided."² In his defense of the new drama, Heywood thus pointed to its distinguishing features, that is, its focus on national and household matters and its didactic purpose. Later critics,
building on Heywood's observations, have proposed more exact definitions of the genre.

While retaining Heywood's description of home-bred drama as primarily concerned with domestic issues and didactic in intent, an early generation of scholars interested in the essential characteristics of early domestic drama narrowed Heywood's term "domestic" to its application to household or family life, and included as an essential component the presentation of the "common" hero. The focus on family relations helped to distinguish between plays depicting predominantly domestic "matter" and citizen drama, which, as we will later see, is more concerned with the presentation of city life rather than the life of the household. A.W. Ward, in his edition of A Woman Killed with Kindness, defined domestic drama as fundamentally concerned with incidents which gain rather than lose force from the frequency of their occurrence in the familiar sphere of daily life . . . [and] the treatment of subjects at once interesting and homely, chosen from the sphere of private or family life, and suggestive of the sympathy which attaches itself to any tale of eventful experiences in accustomed surroundings.

This view was adopted by C.L. Powell, who considered the genre as "that dealing with family life," and by a group of Heywood scholars who drew attention to the importance of subject and setting in Heywood's plays dealing with family conflict. Mowbray Velte, for one, noted that Heywood's and his forerunners' domestic tragedies contain "simple direct accounts of tragic occurrences in the homes of ordinary
citizens," a view reiterated by Otelia Cromwell when she observed that domestic plays concern "the common relations of family life," and by A.M. Clark, who articulated the genre's essential characteristic when he described domestic drama as "that body of plays which centres in the home and the institution of the family."

However, with the publication of Henry Adams' comprehensive study of English domestic tragedy the emphasis shifted to the genre's didacticism, a characteristic that continues to overshadow the importance of setting and the cult of domesticity that informs the plays. Domestic tragedy, according to Adams, is essentially homiletic in that its chief concern is to teach virtue and denounce sin. Seeking to interpret these tragedies as they might have been understood by the spectators who saw them performed in the public theatres, Adams emphasized the religious and moral assumptions which he assumed were held by the average theatre-goer, and based his aesthetic evaluation of the plays on their homiletic impulses:

Elizabethan domestic tragedies inculcated lessons of morality and religious faith in the citizens who came to the theatres by offering them examples drawn from the lives and customs of their own kind of people. The choice of the hero, the moralizing, and the religious technique are the only consistent attributes of all these plays.

Adams considered domestic tragedy "the dramatic equivalent of the homiletic tract and the broadside ballad," the dramatist's chief purpose being to impart "principles
derived from the religious beliefs of the man in the street."\(^9\) Because the humble station of the hero is the only characteristic "not occasionally violated," Adams found it inevitable that these plays should be set in the domestic sphere, "dealing with personal and family relationships rather than with the large affairs of state . . . ."\(^{10}\) The domestic component was therefore considered subordinate to the plays' didactic nature.

Adams' emphasis on the homiletic framework of domestic tragedy led him to perceive the important connection between these plays and the morality tradition. In its portrayal of characters from the common ranks, domestic tragedy develops from Medieval allegorical drama, which conceives of Everyman as a fit subject for tragedy. More specifically, domestic tragedy is distinguishable as didactic drama through the pattern of action which the genre inherited from the morality play, that is, the pattern of "sin, the intervention of Providence, and divine mercy."\(^{11}\) The earliest extant morality, *The Castle of Perseverance* (ca. 1400-1425), established the framework adopted by other moralities and by the writers of domestic tragedy. The principal character, Mankind, yields to temptation by his Bad Angel and falls into sin. Death inevitably takes him, but only after he has repented. In the end, Mercy intercedes on Mankind's behalf, and he is saved from damnation by the Father's forgiveness. A similar pattern occurs in *Everyman*, where, after the protagonist repents his life of sin, divine mercy triumphs
and Good Deeds lives after him. The morality plays anticipated domestic drama by developing a body of serious entertainment for a general audience. By the time the first domestic plays came to be written the allegorical figures had by and large given way to realistic characters, although it is not uncommon to find allegorical figures also included in the **dramatis personae**: A Warning for Fair Women, for example, employs the figures of Chastity and Lust, and Two Lamentable Tragedies (ca. 1594-1601) includes Homicide, Avarice, and Truth. In addition to realistic characters, the new drama or the domestic murder play, as it is sometimes called, was based on the reportage of a contemporary event, usually a murder. A Warning for Fair Women is concerned with the events surrounding the murder in 1573 of George Sanders, a model father and citizen, by his wife and her lover. Similarly, The Tragedy of Mr. Arden of Feversham (ca. 1591-1592) is based on a murder committed around 1550 which continued to attract popular attention forty years later. The event was described with colorful embellishment both in Holinshed's and in Stowe's Chronicles, while the more factual account was recorded in the Wardmote Book of Faversham. Despite the realistic quality of these plays, the essential homiletic superstructure of the moralities remained unaltered. Arden of Feversham, the prototype of the murder play, follows the conventional pattern in the presentation of infidelity and murder. Arden, a husband and gentleman, is married to Ales, an
unfaithful wife who employs various men, including her lover, to slay her husband. After a number of attempts are made on Arden's life, he is brutally stabbed by Ales and her band of thugs. His corpse is dragged to the fields, but the intervention of Providence is implied when the murderers leave their footprints in the snow. Conforming to the "ethical pattern of temptation, sin, repentance, and punishment that domestic tragedy inherited from the morality play," Ales Arden repents before dying at the stake while her accomplices meet violent deaths.

The domestic murder plays were in vogue chiefly between 1590 and 1603, after which they gave way to domestic tragedies which depicted imaginary situations but which retained the homiletic pattern of action. Among these Heywood's A Woman Killed with Kindness (ca. 1603), frequently considered the most eminent example, has been acclaimed for its transformation of the revenge ethic in its sympathetic portrayal of the hero who forgives rather than condemns his wife's adultery.

Adams' discovery of the homiletic basis of domestic tragedy logically led to his discovery of the genre's development from the morality plays. However, Adams did not include the genre's indebtedness to another native dramatic tradition, namely, the Medieval mystery cycles. These contain a considerable amount of domestic matter, and combine symbolic, realistic, and homiletic structures to convey doctrinal truth. With the exception of the
conventional lament associated with the Passion, those mysteries which portray suffering or despair in innocent characters usually involve a domestic relationship. The most notable examples are the Cain plays that depict Adam and Eve's sorrow over the death of Abel, the plays of Abraham and Isaac, and of the Slaughter of the Innocents. In the Chester Abraham and Isaac the emotional interaction between father and child is poignantly dramatized, and the play carefully balances symbolism with realism. Emphasis is as much on the characters' roles of father and child as it is on their symbolic functions as God the Father and Christ. And throughout the play the dramatic focus is both on Abraham's divided loyalty to God and to his son, and on Isaac's pathetic obedience and deference to his parents. (The York cycle, on the other hand, portrays Isaac as a grown man in order to reinforce the symbolic connection with Christ's crucifixion.) The effect of the Chester play is a combination of controlled lyricism and pathos, as evident, for example, in the exchange between father and son leading up to Abraham's sacrifice:

ABRAHAM: My blessing, deere sonne, give I the
And thy mothers with hart so free;

ISAAC: Father, I pray you, hyde myne eyne,
That I se not your sword so kene;

ABRAHAM: My deere sonne Isaac, speak no more,
Thy wordes make my hart full sore.

Thy mekenes, childe, makes me afray;
My song may be 'well awaye!'
ISAAC: O deare father, doe away, do awaye,  
Your making so mickle monel  
Now truly, father, this talking  
Doth but make long tarying,  
I praye you, come and make ending,  
And let me hence gone!  

ABRAHAM: Com hither, my child, that art so sweete:  
Thou must be bounden, hand and feete.  

ISAAC: Father, greete well my brethren younge,  
And praye my mother of her blessinge,  
I come no more under her winge.  

ABRAHAM: My deare sonne, let be thy mones;  
My child, thou greaved me but ones.  
Blessed by thou, bodye and bones, . . . .  

(Play IV, 11. 333-379)\textsuperscript{16}

Pathos is especially pronounced in the Brome Abraham and Isaac where personal interaction between father and son tends to minimize the force of the symbolic content. Abraham's lengthy speech describing his love for Isaac, for example, precedes God's command, and alerts us to the enormous personal loss the sacrifice entails, a theme sustained throughout the play:

I love no thyng so myche, iwysse,  
Excepe thin own selffe, der Fader of blysse,  
As Ysaac her, my owyn swete son.

I have dyverse chyldryn moo,  
The wych I love not halffe so wyll;  
Thys fayer swet chyld, he schereys me soo,  
In every place wer that I goo,  
That noo dessece her may I fell.  

(11. 13-20)\textsuperscript{17}

A strong current of pathos is also discernible in the Towneley play of the Slaughter of Innocents. Compare, for example, Abraham's declaration of his love for Isaac in the
Chester and Brome plays with a speech by a mother who has lost a child in the Towneley *Herod the Great*:

> Alas for shame and syn / alas that I was borne!  
> Of wepyng who may blyn / to se hir chylde forlorne?  
> My comforth and my kyn / my son thus alto torne!  
> Veniance for this syn / I cry, both euyn and morne.

(11. 343-346)\(^{18}\)

Despite the clear homiletic framework of these plays, we detect tragic overtones in the depiction of human suffering. "The parent's lament over a lost child," writes Douglas Cole of the Towneley *Herod*, "stands as one of the more important kinds of suffering displayed in the mystery-cycles, a kind of suffering which, because of its independence from the Passion story, could easily be adapted to the developing needs of secular drama in a later age."\(^{19}\)

The domestic context of various mystery plays is not restricted to those specifically concerned with human suffering. Domestic sentiment is also present in plays that can be loosely described as comic, notably certain English versions of the Noah play. While the Chester play intermittently describes the conflict between Noah and his wife with comic overtones, the dramatist's chief concern is the symbolic meaning of Noah's relationship to God. In the Wakefield version, on the other hand, broad comedy balances the symbolic structures. The play places as much if not greater emphasis on the wife's disobedience of Noah's will as it does on Noah's obedience of the will of God. And
while the wife's rebelliousness conforms to the theological premise of the inferiority and perfidy of woman, the comic energy of the dialogue between husband and wife marks the play's dramatic achievement.  

The best writers of domestic drama are perhaps chiefly indebted to the Wakefield Master for his development of character and his use of realism, which "is a question of dramatic texture rather than subject matter." The Master's ability to portray a dramatic process rather than a static formula, a process crudely initiated by the writers of the Chester, Brome, and Towneley cycles, led to the exploitation of standard paradigms through irony and paradox in Elizabethan-Jacobean domestic drama. For although a close correspondence does exist between the genre's moral and structural schemes and Medieval and Tudor homilies and treatises, and between the plays' ethical pattern of action and that of the morality play, we shall see that the theological component in the best of these plays is often at variance with the dramatic solution. In our evaluation of the domestic play, as in our evaluation of Elizabethan-Jacobean drama in general, we must therefore be careful not to substitute a moral system for a dramatic one. "While it may be true," argues Harriet Hawkins, "that most seventeenth-century English literature does support conventional ideas," it is equally true that "some of the greatest characters in some of the greatest plays are very frequently the ones that challenge orthodoxy."
argument that theatre is sustained by tension applies to the best plays of both the coterie and popular playhouses. Although writers of domestic plays often aimed at the edification of their large citizen audiences, the relationship between the new drama and conventional morality is more complex than Adams and others have suggested. Because Arden of Feversham has the distinction of being the earliest extant and probably one of the finest domestic plays, it is a suitable one against which to test the limitations of the rigid equation between drama and homily.

Adams viewed Arden of Feversham as an illustration of "the providential operation of divine justice," a moral purpose which is discernible in Arden's characterization. Throughout the play Arden remains essentially a sinful character. He demonstrates a lack of caritas through his convetousness of his neighbor's land, which he gains through unscrupulous means, and, when given the opportunity to return the land, he refuses. Arden's death at the hands of his wife and "friends" may be viewed as Providence's way of making all the sinful characters pay for their transgressions: the murderers "appear in the role of the 'scourge of God,' but in accordance with the accepted traditions of the time, this does not prevent them from paying the extreme penalty for murder." The homiletic reading, however, fails to account for the play's moral and dramatic ambiguities. The tragic outcome of the play flows from Ales's faithlessness within
the marriage and from Arden's unethical land deals. Both characters delight in openly disregarding and defying Christian values in an attempt to build a satisfying personal life. Ales desires emotional fulfillment, while Arden pursues wealth and reputation. If we are to view Arden's characterization as morally instructive to a largely middle-class audience, it is difficult to account for the character's unquestioned status as an upstanding citizen, highly respected by the mayor and Arden's servants alike. The tragic stature of both husband and wife is realized through their willful, unbending, and conscious attainment of their desires. Furthermore, only in Ales's case does desire lead to despair and finally to redemption. Arden, on the other hand, never repents—he goes to his grave oblivious of the justice Providence has dispensed. Adams himself was forced to admit that the moral resolution in the play "is far from perfectly executed." The ambiguity is crystallized in the final scene where Bradshaw, an innocent man, is put to death along with Arden's murderers. "There is no explanation," laments Adams, "of this miscarriage of justice." In the denouement human justice and theological judgment are in opposition, suggesting the dramatist's uneasiness with tidy moral conclusions.

A number of critics have proposed a renewed approach to early English domestic drama. Madeleine Doran, while acknowledging the homiletic pattern of domestic tragedy, differentiates between the dramatist's moral and dramatic
purpose. Since many domestic tragedies took as their subject matter contemporary crimes, they "would have a special appeal as thrillers," and would therefore be readily exploited on the popular stage:

On this view, the trace in many of these tragedies of a moral play or homiletic scheme of temptation, sin, repentance, and punishment looks less like the original impulse to the plays than like a conventional moral pattern such subjects would attract. This is not to say that domestic tragedy did not owe a good deal to the morality, but only to shift the emphasis in viewing the relationship.27

However, Doran's emphasis on the audience to whom these plays largely appealed—"a small and fairly well-defined class" of "gentlemen, farmers, merchants"—does little to illuminate the genre's system of organization relating to subject, setting, attitude and theme.

A more systematic approach has been suggested by Peter Ure, who also insists that the dramatist's intention was not necessarily the same as the homilist's: the "playwright, although he accepts the morality from which the treatises proceed, is concerned with more complex problems." Ure also deals exclusively with domestic tragedy, and to the three essential features of the genre noted by Adams, that is, the murder, the citizen or common status of the protagonists, and the predominantly nonaristocratic status of the other characters, Ure adds the relationship between husband and wife, more specifically, how that relationship clarifies the ethical pattern of the action. "While it is a
the code of marriage that lies at their basis, the tragedies . . .
could not have occurred without . . . [the homiletic] order
being disturbed by the aberration of one or other partner. But at the same time that Ure cautions us not
to impose upon these plays a rigid moral system, he insists
upon their schematic nature: the marriage theme, for
example, is deemed crucial to the play's dramatic power,
"yet without any departure from an accepted code."31
Following Ure, Michel Grivelet, in his analysis of Heywood's
domestic drama, notes that these plays deal in a fundamental
way with family life, and are distinguished by their
orthodox morality and the exaltation of married love.32

While the theme of conjugal relations is prominent in
most domestic plays, it is usually inextricable from the
larger concerns of family life. Andrew Clark, in his recent
study of early domestic drama, expands upon the work of the
earlier generation of scholars who classified the genre
according to the setting within the home and its focus on
the middle-class family. In addition to the "homiletic"
criterion, Clark considers the overriding feature to be "the
relations pertaining to the home and family, and the
institution of marriage," a characteristic not exclusive to
the tragedies:

to limit the domestic genre solely to tragedy is
to exclude a number of other plays which have many
of the characteristics of the genre and are
seriously concerned with domestic themes and
relations. These plays, tragi-comedies and
comedies, retain a good deal of the didactic tone
Plays such as Heywood's comedy *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (1601-1602) and Wilkins' tragicomedy *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (ca. 1606) exploit the "fruitful field of domestic doctrine and conduct which they ... evince" and are primarily concerned with marital conflict and its effects on "the home, or family." In his study of specific plays, however, Clark minimizes the important function of conflict, particularly as it manifests itself in the dramatist's attitude toward received morality, and, like Adams before him, relies heavily on the plays' indebtedness to the homilies and domestic-conduct books.

While some disagreement remains over the overriding feature of the early English domestic play, it is generally agreed that the homiletic superstructure and the setting of the action within the sphere of the household distinguish the genre from citizen drama, a broader group of plays which developed syncretically alongside of it. Both domestic and citizen drama portray characters, themes, and situations relating to the life of ordinary citizens; however, citizen drama, in taking the city rather than the *domus* as its fulcrum, includes wider concerns, particularly the world of
trade and commerce and its attendant problems of debt, usury, and corruption. Topical subjects are also common, as is the war between France and England which forms a haunting background in Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday. Loyalty and patriotism are commonly explored subjects (these themes dominate Heywood's Edward IV) as are adventure and political intrigue. Each play normally includes a variety of settings ranging from taverns to London houses, streets, docks, and brothels so that the city itself is continually felt as a compelling force. There are, moreover, two distinct types of cities and citizens represented in citizen drama. One is characterized by the school of Jonson and Middleton, the thrust of which is satire and caricature; the other is represented by Dekker and Heywood whose portraits of London life are generally more sympathetic. Despite these differences, the major concern of both schools is with the quality of life in the city. Each play is normally peopled with a variety of characters representing a broad social spectrum, and no single activity can absorb the action's full attention. The city itself embodies the only true whole. In citizen drama the domestic theme is always subordinate to the representation of city-life and its attendant social conflicts.

However, the emergence of the new genres cannot be fully explained by the literary traditions to which they are related. They also developed out of fundamental changes in the social structure. "The refinement of a literary form,"
writes Paul Ruggiers, "seems, somehow, to be concomitant with caste systems, perhaps, or with sophisticated economic practices of an age expressing itself in the material pleasures of the merchant classes." In an age when merchants and tradesmen were rapidly consolidating their status it was almost inevitable that a new kind of drama should emerge to reflect the concerns of the fledgling class. With the weakening of the intricate feudal system of hierarchy and mutual obligations and rights, the middle-class family assumed an important function in the promotion of social stability and governance. The feudal kindred family and its attendant "communal households," which consisted of several related households "sharing the same hearth and the same board" and which cultivated common land, gradually gave way between 1500 and 1800 to smaller and self-contained households managed by members of a nuclear family and their servants. Between 1530 and 1640 there occurred an accelerated decline of the feudal system of loyalty to lineage and kin as it was replaced by loyalty to the head of state and to a religious sect or church, and subsequently to the head of the family who was instructed to act both as "king and priest" within his household. An effect of the transformation from a kin-oriented to a nuclear family was the narrowing of the physical environment, permitting closer contact between members of the household. A number of social historians have suggested that strong affective ties were still impossible in families formed before 1640, when
the transformation of the family unit was in its embryonic stage: families often lacked privacy due to frequent interference from neighbors and kin, and they were often quickly dissolved by the death of one of the spouses, or of a child. However, recent evidence indicates that despite the risks attending the family's fragility many couples formed intimate relationships and openly mourned when they lost loved ones. By the seventeenth century the family in England formed "an intimate framework" of social activity: "great efforts were made by the State and by local authorities to see that everybody was attached to a household, and the government displayed a strong prejudice against bachelors and masterless men."39

A phenomenon corresponding to the growth of the nuclear family was the proliferation of domestic-conduct books and pamphlet literature proclaiming the sanctity of the family unit and denouncing those who would bring dishonor to their families. Thomas Becon, in his Catechism, recommended that each mother nurse her own baby for "in so doing she shall greatly please God and satisfy the office of a true and natural mother"; moreover, while the children are very young, parents "must provide, that no bodily harm chance to the children, . . . but that they be kept warely and diligently both by night and day."40 Similar suggestions were offered to abusive husbands. Jeremy Taylor considered paternal authority as "not a power of coercion but a power of advice"; and like many of his countrymen he believed a
wife's duty was to bend to the gentle will of her husband. Much domestic advice addressed more mundane matters: family members were advised to avoid quarrelsomeness; jealousy was scorned; and one Puritan treatise writer deemed it necessary to encourage his readers "to avoid using nicknames and terms of endearment, which implied undignified familiarity." "Whether in Anglican or Puritan households," writes Lawrence Stone, "there was, in varying degrees, a new emphasis on the home and on domestic virtues, and this was perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of the Reformation in England." The family increasingly became seen as the seat of order and unity, values symbolized by a well-ordered household. In domestic drama the house itself often assumes various dimensions, at times functioning strictly as locus, at other times as the symbolic extension of the hero or heroine's aspirations. In A Warning for Fair Women, which, as Leanore Lieblein observes, depicts "a familiar domestic situation which people can recognize," the "household and daily life of George and Anne Sanders are richly elaborated at the beginning of the play to clarify the sense of what is disrupted and what is lost." In many domestic plays the domus is carefully delineated, and the effect is a detailed evocation of the material things of everyday life. We enter a world of familiar objects—of a variety of household items, including tables and chairs, cupboards, boxes with compartments, desks, beds, and marriage coffers—a group of items corroborated by recent studies of scenery and
properties in plays staged between 1599 and 1642. In Arden of Feversham Arden's assassins unsuccessfully pursue him within the community at large, but the murder takes place while Arden is seated at a card table within his own home. The situation is profoundly ironic because Arden has tried desperately to make his house the seat of honor and domestic contentment. As we enter the domicile in the opening scene the emphasis is on the home and domestic comfort. We overhear a conversation between Arden and his trusty servant amid ordinary and familiar surroundings. Throughout the play we enter the household intermittently to view Arden's indulgence in creature comforts. Ostensibly trivial domestic details circumscribe the action, enhancing the irony of Arden's forthcoming tragic demise. A recurring motif is the concern with daily meals. Arden discusses time according to its proximity to dinner (III.v.156); his kindness toward his servant is expressed through an invitation to supper (III.iii.41-45); and he proves his loyalty to his wife by promising to be home in time to dine with her (IV.i.34). Arden's relationship with Ales is based chiefly on his role as master of the house and on her domestic role of cook and hostess. To his servant's fear of Ales's resentment over not being included in Arden's social activities, Arden replies, "let vs strain to mend our pace, / And take her vnwares playing the cooke" (IV.iv.72-73). His taciturnity toward Ales in other matters is an effect of his courting convention and social prestige. The dialogue
between husband and wife is as lacklustre as their relationship. Rather than facilitate communication and understanding, their language is thoroughly conventional and prevents communication. Ales, however, shows open defiance of convention in her attempt to create a more desirable personal life. Her attempt to murder Arden by poisoning his broth is consistent with the emphasis on spatial concreteness that informs domestic drama; but here an everyday domestic item becomes the instrument of the heroine's rage against a suffocating domesticity. The tragic confinement of life within the domus is captured in the irony of their final conversation immediately preceding Arden's death:

Ard. Come, Ales, is our supper ready yet?
Ales. It will by then you have plaid a game at tables.

(V.i.233-234)

We may contrast the complex treatment of domestic space in Arden with Heywood's sentimental descriptions of the homes that are the settings of his domestic plays. George Rao, for one, has observed that in A Woman Killed with Kindness Heywood creates an elegant and active domestic atmosphere in the Yorkshire country house with its loyal servants, country dances and sporting games of hawking and hunting, and the ever-popular after-dinner game of cards. The detailed descriptions of household items enhance the portrait of the Frankfords' comfortable domesticity and,
more significantly, Frankford's rectitude, which contrasts sharply with his wife's moral failure. The pathos of Anne's moral weakness is thus appropriately articulated in her apostrophe to the lute, which symbolizes her former domestic happiness: "I know the lute. Oft have I sung to thee: / We both are out of tune, both out of time" (Scene xvi, 11. 18-19).48

The tension between the domus as the seat of pleasure and virtue on the one hand, and as the source of dissatisfaction on the other, is powerfully dramatized in the anonymous Yorkshire Tragedy (ca. 1605), one of the last domestic murder plays. Again, the domus ostensibly functions as the seat of honor and reputation, values desecrated by the Husband's madness. Most of the action transpires within the various rooms of Calverly Hall, and the characters are named according to their role within the household: they include a Husband, a Wife, two young Boys, a maid-servant, and other household members. Of the three scenes set outside the house one is set in the courtyard "before the house,"49 and one takes place "right against" the house (s.d., Scene X) where the husband is arraigned for killing his children and wounding his wife and her servant. Blaming the Husband's crimes on madness and desperation, other characters are deeply disturbed by the consequent loss of reputation and property. The theme of madness is introduced early in the play when the Wife recounts the "voluptuous" and "Ill-beseeming" habits (Scene II.7-8) that
have caused her Husband to become "halfe mad" (Scene II.13), a theme reiterated in the First Gentleman's warning:

Those whom men call mad
Endanger others; but hee's more then mad
That wounds himself, whose owne wordes do proclaym,
Scandalls vniust, to soile his better name:
It is not fit. . . .

(Scene II.113-117)

The Husband himself during one of his raving speeches is able to realize the effects of his madness and loss of honor:

downe
goese the howse of vs, down, downe it sincks.
Now is the name a beggar, begs in me! That name, which hundreds of yeeres has made this shiere famous, in me, and my posterity, runs out. . . .

(Scene V.90-94)

Following the homiletic sequence of sin, repentance, and punishment, the repentant Husband blames his crimes on madness and desperation (Scene X.15-28) and is forgiven by his patient wife before being taken to prison. Thus before the denouement the Husband's malaise, like Ales Arden's, is directly linked to the domicile which functions as the antagonist against which these protagonists hurl themselves, denouncing the confinement it represents. The hero's behavior appears to others as the effect of self-destructive madness and violence, a form of social suicide. At the same time, repentance is deemed essential, for the thread linking hostility and madness in plays like Arden of Feversham and
A Yorkshire Tragedy is the prevalent belief shared by seventeenth-century writers of scientific treatises and clergymen that a person alienated from his or her "household and . . . place in the status hierarchy was socially extinct."50

The domestic drama of the period articulates the paradox inherent in seventeenth-century England's awareness both of the dangers brought about by the intensification of the nuclear family, and of the pleasure and fulfillment that might result from married love. Indeed, a central tension thrown into relief in the best of these plays is between the glorification of marriage and the depiction of the tragic confinement concomitant with the cult of domesticity. The idealization of marriage forms part of a broader literary continuum. Married love first appears as a literary concern toward the end of the sixteenth century, and is linked to the transition from Medieval ascetism and the cult of courtly love to the humanist spirit of the early Renaissance. At this time the classical Epithalamium re-emerges as a form of devotional poetry glorifying the marriage ceremony. The genre, moreover, has undergone a fundamental alteration in that the aristocratic principals have by and large been replaced by their middle-class counterparts.51 George Puttenham, in his remarks on epithalamic verse, emphasizes not only the formal characteristics of the renewed poetic form, but also the poet's duty to teach the sanctity of marriage:
the Ciuill Poet could do no lesse in conscience and credit, then as he had before done to the ballade of birth, now with much better deuotion to celebrate by his poeme the chearefull day of mariages aswell Princely as others, for that hath alwayes bene accompted with euery countrey and nation of neuer so barbarous people the highest & holiest of any ceremomie appertaining to man; a match forsooth made for euer and not for a day, a solace prouided for youth, a comfort for age, a knot of alliance & amitie indissoluble: great reioysing was therefore due to such a matter and to so gladsome a time.52

The poet's mission is to extol the virtues of marriage, which through procreation secures one's immortality. This is high praise in an age obsessed with mutability. At the same time that the Epithalamium was regaining prominence, the sonnet sequence was undergoing substantial modifications in England. Spenser's Amoretti, for instance, absorbs Sidney's transformation of the traditionally unreachable Lady into a flesh-and-blood woman, and redefines the lover/mistress relationship so that it culminates in marriage, a holy union between consenting individuals: "Sweet be the bands, the which true loue doth tye, / without constraynt or dread of any ill."53 The theme is echoed in Book III of The Faerie Queene which, in the words of C.S. Lewis, represents the triumphant union of romantic love with Christian monogamy.54 A subject common to many plays and treatises written between 1600 and 1650 is the contrast between the desirability of marriage based on love and the miseries of forced marriage. Of foremost concern is the abuse of parental authority and the suffering of young
people. The prototype of these plays is George Wilkins' domestic drama *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (ca. 1606), which anticipates Heywood's extensive analysis of the problem in *A Curtain Lecture* (1637) where he passionately denounces marriages of convenience:

> How often haue forced contracts been made to add land to land, not loue to loue? and to unite houses to houses, not hearts to hearts? which hath beene the occasion that men haue turned monsters, and women devills?  

The writer of domestic drama typically strives for the appearance of an ordered world governed by married love. Overtly, the conjugal bond is seen as the early humanists and treatise writers saw it, that is, as the ideal field of action where one practises human virtue. The idea is expressed in a range of schemes which the genre adopted as part of its dramatic conventions: the patient-wife paradigm; the motif of choosing a "good" wife; the punishment and repentance of prodigal or violent husbands; the triumph of constancy.

However, as we saw in those plays based on actual domestic crimes, the genre also reveals a widespread disenchantment with the ideal of married love. The paradox was rooted in the social fabric of Elizabethan and Stuart England, where the view of marriage as a holy bond, with binding mutual obligations that included friendship and companionship, was undermined by numerous case histories of adultery, bigamy, and desertion of spouses as well as more serious domestic
crimes such as murder.\textsuperscript{56} Although the idealization of marriage and family life remains a constant in the genre, the obeisance to conventional morality varies according to the extent of the dramatists' awareness of and interest in paradox and ambiguity. In Heywood's domestic plays, for example, psychological and social conflict remains unalloyed. In these plays the conjugal ideal determines \textit{a priori} the resolution of the action, and the protagonists are frequently morality figures serving as examples of the evils of adultery or of the virtues of constancy. In \textit{How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad} the ill-treated Mistress Arthur is loyal to her husband even though he prefers a whore to his patient wife; in the resolution the wife's virtue is rewarded, and the play ends with a conventional description of the differences between good and bad wives. A similar motif occurs in the anonymous \textit{London Prodigal} (ca. 1603-1605) where Luce, recalling her marriage vow of constancy and obedience, prefers to work toward converting her libertine husband rather than leave him. Complexity and ambiguity are also ultimately buried in Heywood's \textit{A Woman Killed.} Completely disregarding the revenge tradition, the hero Frankford refuses to slay his adulterous wife, and is grateful when restrained from killing an enemy. Frankford further defies a common practice of the period whereby husbands publicly exposed unfaithful wives and denied them further financial support: Frankford's "kindness" spares his wife's shame, continues
her economic support, and offers her Christian forgiveness as she is about to die. Ironically, through the working of Anne's own guilt, Frankford's pious actions cause her more suffering than outright rejection would have done. The play, we have seen, has brought Heywood praise for the sensitivity and virtue of his middle-class hero. Yet the inexplicable facility with which the initially "perfect" wife succumbs to seduction, and the distended kindness of her husband remain psychologically unaccountable, and have been excused as part of a larger ideological framework: "Heywood's contemporaries," writes Martin Day, "deemed women frail creatures, quick to fall if not carefully supervised . . . [and] dwelling on the fall of Frankford's wife would lead the play too far from Heywood's purpose." But the play fails to draw on the full tragic potential of the heroine, not only because it mirrors the misogyny of the age, but because Anne's downfall is mechanically precipitated by her action; it does not result from a conscious act of will. The erring wife's defiance of moral law is incidental to her characterization because Heywood's interest is in her salvation rather than in her tragic inability to live up to society's model of virtuous behavior. At best, our emotional response to her suffering is one of pity; we do not "feel" for her as we do for Shakespeare's tragic heroes, or for the heroes of the domestic tragedies of some of Heywood's contemporaries, notably the heroine of Arden of Feversham and Frank Thorney.
in Dekker and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton*. Ales Arden and Frank Thorney are characters who, by virtue of their emotional strength, are capable of opposing rigid moral and social expectations, thus disturbing the order inherent in the cult of domesticity. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, moreover, we shall see that the tragic consequences of a forced marriage, the instrument of abusive parental power, are artfully portrayed as part of a larger framework of social injustice.

Critical analyses of Dekker's domestic drama, however, have been overshadowed by discussions of Heywood's domestic plays. Having outlined the essential characteristics and the dynamics of the genre, we are now able to evaluate Dekker's substantial dramatic achievement in the area of the domestic play.

II

Dekker's dramatic career may have begun as early as 1594 when he was about twenty-two years of age. Between that time and 1598 he either wrote or collaborated on approximately seventeen plays that spanned a variety of genres. Of these, only a few survive, the most notable being *The Play of Sir Thomas More* (1595-1596?), a probable collaboration with Munday, Chettle, Heywood, and Shakespeare. The four or five probable domestic dramas in which Dekker was involved at this time have all been lost.
The group of plays written between 1599 and 1600 contains fewer lost works;\textsuperscript{59} more importantly, these plays clearly anticipate those themes drawn from everyday life on which many of Dekker's later plays would build. The group includes parts of Old Fortunatus, The Shoemaker's Holiday, and at least three domestic dramas: The Stepmother's Tragedy (with Chettle), The Lamentable Tragedy of Page of Plymouth (with Jonson), both of which have been lost, and Patient Grissil (with Chettle and Haughton). The surviving plays portray in varying degrees the lives of ordinary men and women caught up in the vicissitudes of contemporary society, and in each we may locate a domestic theme. Old Fortunatus combines scenes of ordinary domestic life and morality-like sobriety with scenes of comic spectacle and magic. The aged beggar Fortunatus, upon the urging of the goddess Fortune who offers him one of six gifts (strength, health, beauty, long life, riches, or wisdom), foolishly chooses wealth. In return Fortune bestows on him a magic purse containing ten pieces of gold, which enriches Fortunatus and his two sons. Following a journey filled with danger and illusion, Fortunatus returns home to die, repenting his cupidity and pleading with Fortune to exchange the magic purse for wisdom. The goddess denies his request (a form of providential punishment) and the old man wills the purse and a magic hat to his sons whose lives are made miserable by them. One son dies as a result of his prodigal life, while the other repents and is forgiven for his dissolute past. Although the play falls within the genre of romantic comedy,
Dekker's incipient interest in domestic life is clear. Fortunatus' relationship with his sons is intensely personal and realistic, as is the depiction of the family's poverty which leads them to covet wealth. Moreover, the family theme and Dekker's sympathetic portrait of the fall of the common man are sketched within an homiletic pattern of sin, punishment, repentance, and forgiveness, the pattern developed by the morality play and subsumed by domestic drama.

Domestic themes also inform The Shoemaker's Holiday, Dekker's first and most successful citizen comedy. Although the portrayal of family conflict in the play is subordinate to the presentation of city-life in general, the action contains two marriage plots which, although lightly sketched, include domestic motifs treated more extensively in Dekker's domestic drama. While we see very little of Rose and Lacy during the play (their marriage plans are announced, but we do not view the wedding nor do we see them married) the play adapts two conventions which Dekker will later develop more fully: the prodigal-son paradigm (Lacy is the prodigal nephew and heir of the Earl of Lincoln) and the theme of forced marriage (Lacy's father and uncle oppose the marriage to Rose, a commoner). The Ralph-Jane plot is also a minor one (since the wars between France and England force the couple to separate in the opening scene, they reunite only during the final scene); however, the plot anticipates the theme of loyalty in marriage which Dekker will explore
in depth in *Patient Grissil*, *The Honest Whore, II*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*. Upon his return from the wars, Ralph, who has been maimed, discovers Jane is about to be married to Master Hammon. Accompanied by a noisy band of fellow-shoemakers, Ralph intrudes upon the ceremony demanding the hand of his betrothed. Jane happily realizes her would-be-husband is not dead, and reaffirms her love and loyalty to him:

> Whom should I choose? whom should my thoughts affect,  
> But him whom heauen hath made to be my loue?  
> Thou art my husband and these humble weedes,  
> Makes thee more beautiful then all his [Hammon's] wealth,  
> Therefore I wil but put off his attire,  
> Returning it into the owners hand,  
> And after euer be thy [Ralph's] constant wife.  
> (V.ii.53-59) 

Each of the marriage plots ends with a pair of lovers happily united, and, although marriage is not the central concern of the play, conjugal happiness is linked with personal success and satisfaction. The portrayal of family life, however, is secondary to the larger concern of the main plot which dramatizes Simon Eyre's progression from shoemaker to Lord Mayor of London.

At the same time, the play reveals Dekker's subtle equivocation with regard to prevalent assumptions about social status and success, and a fledgling cynicism toward conventional morality, attitudes which will become increasingly bolder in his domestic plays. A few critics
have noted equivocal patterns of action surrounding the jubilant tone of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Joel Kaplan has observed in the play's main episodes "moral ambiguities that are concealed by the vitality of its surface," and that are particularly striking in the characterization of Simon Eyre, who "clearly wins our approval" even though he "makes his fortune through a rather dubious business venture." Peter Mortenson has also argued in favor of a subtle dramatic texture, noting a tension between Dekker's cheerful celebration of conventional values and the caustic overtones of his critique of social realities, a tension which is never resolved:

> the world of the play is repeatedly at odds with the bounteous old world of festive comedy which Dekker has chosen to utilize, and its commercial ethos contradicts its exploitation of old pastoral romance motifs. . . . while Dekker's . . . characterization and dramatic patterning . . . unquestionably demonstrate his craftsmanship, the play is neither the delightful idyl it pretends to be, nor a coherent critique or intellectually integrated portrayal of the issues it raises.63

Dekker's ambivalence toward orthodox views governing human behavior, which begins to reveal itself in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, contributes to the dramatic energy and complexity of his mature domestic plays. It is also perceptible in the thematic and structural design of *Patient Grissil*, his first domestic comedy to which we will now turn.
Notes

1 Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors (London: J.P. Collier, 1841), PL.

2 Heywood, PL.


9 Adams, p. 185.


11 Adams, p. 55.

12 The factual basis of the play, as well as its domestic nature, are borne out by the title page of the 1601 quarto: Two Lamentable / Tragedies. // The one, of the murther of Mai- / ster Beech a Chaundler in / Thames- streete, and his boye, / done by Thomas Merry. // The other of a young childe mur- / thered in a Wood by two Ruffins, / with the consent of his Unkle. In addition to Arden of Ferversham, A Warning for Fair Women, and Two Lamentable Tragedies the other extant domestic murder plays are Heywood's A Woman Killed with Kindness (1603), the anonymous Yorkshire Tragedy (ca. 1605), George Wilkins' The Miseries of Enforced Marriage (ca. 1606), and Dekker and
Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). Andrew Clark, in "An Annotated List of Lost Domestic Plays, 1578-1624," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 18 (1975), 29-44, includes twenty-six probable domestic plays which have been lost, the greater part of them dating from 1598-1610.


20 In the exchange between Noah and his wife following God's warning of the impending flood, for example, broad comedy overshadows Noah's touching devotion to God:

NOE: Wife, we ar hard sted with tythyngis new.  
UXOR: Bot thou were worthi be cled in Stafford blew;  
For thou art alway adred, be it fals or trew;  
Bot God knowes I am led, and that may I rew,  
Full ill; . . .  
. . . . . . . . . .  
We women may wary all ill husbandis;  
I have oone, bi Mary that lowsyd me of my bandis;  
If he teyn, I must tary, how so ever it standis,  
With seymland full sory, wryngand both my handis  
For drede.  
. . . . . . . . . .  
NOE: We! Hold thi tong, ramskyt, or I shall the still.
UXOR: By my thryft, if thou Smyte I shal turne the untill.

NOE: We shall assay as tyte. Have at the, Gill! Apon the bone shall it byte. [Strikes her.]

UXOR: A, sol Mary, thou Smytis ill!
Bot I suppose I shal not in thi det,
Flyt of this fletti Take the ther a langett To tye up thi hose! [Strikes him.]


23 Recently George Rao, in The Domestic Drama (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University Press, [1978?]), p. 50, has argued that the underlying purpose of the genre is to present, "against the background of ordinary family life, ... an action of deep and commanding moral interest"; domestic tragedy in particular is considered a development of the homiletic tradition in that it is "essentially didactic and the ethical code it inculcates is Christian in spirit."

24 Adams, English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 105.


27 Doran, Endeavors of Art, p. 143.

28 Doran, p. 143.


31 Peter Ure, "Marriage and the Domestic Drama in Heywood and Ford," 203.
More recently, two provocative studies of attitudes toward marriage in early domestic plays have stressed the complexity of the dramatists' attitudes toward inherited morality. Catherine Belsey, in "Alice Arden's Crime," Renaissance Drama, NS XIII (1982), 92, sees in Arden of Feversham "the contest for the control of sexuality in the period," a contest "which throws marriage into crisis and precipitates the instability of the institution which is evident in crimes like Alice Arden's"; and Leanore Lieblein, in "The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590-1610," Studies in English Literature, 23 (1983), 181-82, argues that in contrast to the "unequivocal moral judgments" of the "historical chronicles, journalistic pamphlets, court testimony, underworld narratives, and ballads" which served as sources for the early domestic tragedies, "the plays, while they neither alter nor shirk the morality of their sources, elaborate the social context, examine motives, and suggest the complicity of the victim in a way which changes the audience's perception of events. . . . The domestic drama of the period accepts . . . [traditional morality], but by focusing on marriages in disintegration, it examines the reasons for marital breakdown." Cf. Leonora Leet Brodwin's discussion of Arden of Feversham, in Elizabethan Love Tragedy 1587-1625 (New York and London: New York and London University Presses, 1971), pp. 191-95, which suggests that while the dramatist "sticks closely to Holinshed's account, he develops his own portrait of Alice in such a way that it best explains the desperate quality of her love for Mosbie which drives her to murder for its preservation" (p. 191).


Arthur Brown's essay "Citizen Comedy and Domestic Drama," in The Jacobean Theatre, ed. J.R. Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: Capricorn, 1967), takes the unique view that there is virtually no distinction between citizen comedy and domestic drama. Brown deals almost entirely with comedies by Dekker, Heywood, and Jonson, "the most consistent workers in the field," and suggests that although Dekker and Heywood "represent the popular romantic stream of comedy while Jonson represents the satiric stream," these differences "in method . . . should not be confused with differences of purpose, which, in these three men, often seem to be of degree rather than kind" (p. 63). Among some of the common dramatic concerns and methods, observes Brown, are the London settings, didactic patterns, national loyalty
and patriotism, morality-play elements, and the psychology of Humours. Nevertheless, Brown is forced to admit that differences in plot structure, characterization, and theme ultimately distinguish the two dramatic forms (see pp. 66-69 where Brown differentiates between those plays which include but do not stress domestic or family relations, and those which deal extensively with domestic problems). Cf. Alexander Leggatt, in Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), who includes domestic comedies and tragicomedies in his discussion, but is careful to point out their derivation from a more specific dramatic tradition: "the category 'citizen comedy' cuts across a variety of comic modes... [such as] the satiric, the didactic, and the simply amusing, with everything from lightweight farce to pieces that verge on domestic drama," a genre distinguished by "moral earnestness" and "a seriousness of tone" (pp. 4 and 11).


40 Quoted in MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, p. 81.

41 Quoted in MacDonald, p. 102.

42 Quoted in MacDonald, p. 103.


44 Leanore Lieblein, "The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590-1610," 188.

45 T.J. King, in Shakespearean Staging, 1599-1642 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), offers "a systematic survey of theatrical requirements for 276 plays," by seeking "positive correlations between the external evidence, as provided by contemporary architecture and pictures of early English stages, and the internal evidence, as provided by the texts of plays first performed in the
years 1599–1642" (p. 1). The following domestic items were often used on stage: tables [sometimes "set with meat," as in Dekker's Patient Grissil (King, p. 19)]; chairs and stools; beds [as in Dekker and Ford's The Witch of Edmonton, IV.ii, where Frank Thorney is seen lying in a stupor (King, p. 19)]; canopies; carpets; chests; curtains; hangings; cushions; trunks and hampers; and tiring rooms. For a condensed list of similar items included in a 1598 inventory preserved in Henslowe's papers, see Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 3rd ed. (Boston and London: Allyn and Bacon, 1977), p. 181.


47 George Rao, The Domestic Drama, p. 75.

48 Thomas Heywood, A Woman Killed with Kindness, ed. R.W. Van Fossen. The emphasis on spatial concreteness in domestic drama corresponded to new developments in architecture and interior design. During the reign of Elizabeth I there occurred a widespread increase in domestic comfort, as evidenced by improved methods of construction, and the beginnings of upholstered furniture. Replacing the dark Gothic structures, Tudor architecture favored well-lit open spaces and numerous windows and terraces (see Michel Grivelet, Thomas Heywood et le Drame Domestique Élizabéthain, pp. 19-20). New developments in the creation and design of different kinds of furniture brought about a variety of household effects, among them chairs, cupboards, boxes with compartments, and different types of desks. Draw tables were first used at this time, and in the first decade of the sixteenth century a new type of bed appeared, making the decorated frame an integral part of the design. By the seventeenth century daybeds and armchairs were popular, as were accessory items such as tables and long cases, mirrors, clocks, and fireplaces. Sheila Rowbotham, in Hidden from History, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 1974), p. 3, writes: "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the homes of people who were neither very rich nor very poor grew bigger, became more important, and began to be subdivided. The houses started to have two floors, there was some differentiation of function, new amongst the peasantry. It became common for yeoman farmers ... to have bedrooms, an important move towards the notion of individuality and sexual privacy."

49 A Yorkshire Tragedy, in The Shakespeare Apocrypha, ed. C.F. Tucker Brooke (s.d., Scene VI). All subsequent citations are from this edition.
50 MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, p. 131.

51 See above, Chapter V, where the poetic conventions of the English Epithalamium are discussed.


55 Quoted in Glenn H. Blayney, "Enforcement of Marriage in English Drama (1600-1650)," Philological Quarterly, XXXVIII (1959), 470.

56 See Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, pp. 101ff.; and Catherine Belsey, "Alice Arden's Crime," pp. 89ff. "The existing historical evidence," notes Belsey, "gives no reason to believe there was a major outbreak of women murdering their husbands in the sixteenth century. What it does suggest, however, is a widespread belief that they were likely to do so" (89).


59 I have taken the dates and textual information about Dekker's early plays from George Price, Thomas Dekker, pp. 17-33 and 171-76.

60 Arthur Brown, in "Citizen Comedy and Domestic Drama," 65-69, suggests The Shoemaker's Holiday is concerned with virtue in the civil, domestic, and national spheres; and Andrew Clark, in Domestic Drama, II, notes that in "the thoughtful presentation" of the separation of Ralph and Jane, "and their continued faithfulness, The Shoemaker's Holiday contains serious drama of domestic incident," (311) but while "sound sentiments are in keeping with the morality of the play as a whole," they "are not developed" (311, n. 22).


CHAPTER II

PATIENT GRISSIL

I

Among Dekker's domestic dramas Patient Grissil is the earliest surviving play; it is, moreover, a work that deserves more favorable attention than it has received. At first glance the play strikes many as another tiresome morality that exalts the virtues of the patient and unassuming wife who faithfully and obediently performs her duties under tremendous emotional strain. Harry Keyishian, who has written the only full-length article on the play, condemns the Griselda story as "a piece of sentimentalism at best, an affront to human dignity with pathological implications at worst"; and in accounting for the story's enormous influence and popularity on the Elizabethan stage he concludes: "Audiences of Shakespeare's day could deal with mighty truths, but they evidently also needed the sickly reassurance of the Griselda story as well."¹ This type of response does little to illuminate the reasons for the legend's popularity, nor does it account for the variety of interpretations the story received during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Griselda story originates in folklore and is first articulated in European literature in 1353 in Boccaccio's
Decameron; Petrarch was so impressed with the moral import of the tale that he expanded it in Latin (1373-74), while Giovanni Sercambi retold Boccaccio's *novella* in Italian in condensed form (ca. 1374). A number of Medieval French versions are based on Petrarch's rendition, including the first dramatization of the Griselda story in the anonymous play *L'Estoire de la Marquise de Saluce miz par personnages et rigmé* (1395). The first English version, Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale," which is based on Petrarch's and a French redaction, established a vogue in England. The direct sources of Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton's play are John Phillip's late morality, *The Play of Patient Grissell* (ca. 1558-1566) and Thomas Deloney's ballad "Of Patient Grissel and a Noble Marquess" in *The Garland of Good-Will* (ca. 1593). Versions of the story continued to appear throughout the first half of the seventeenth century: in 1619 a chapbook including a prose narrative of the Griselda story was published, and in 1630 an anonymous tale appeared entitled "The Pleasant / and Sweet History / of patient Grissell." For over three hundred years the legend retained its strong popularity among a variety of audiences.

The story's appeal to both Medieval and Renaissance minds is to a certain extent indicative of the sustained orthodoxy that bridged the two cultures, and of the shared moral assumptions of different audiences, both courtly and otherwise. The exegetical interpretation of the Griselda story was first articulated by Petrarch. In a letter to
Boccaccio, in which he evaluates the Story of Griselda as the finest in *The Decameron*, Petrarch reveals that his own objective in rewriting the tale "was not to induce the women of our time to imitate the patience of his wife," which he believes is "beyond imitation"; rather, his aim was to "lead my readers to emulate the example of feminine constancy, and to submit themselves to God with the same courage as did this woman to her husband." Griselda's trial exemplifies the way in which God tests His subjects in order that they may know their weaknesses. Boccaccio's story has taught Petrarch that "Anyone . . . amply deserves to be reckoned among the heroes of mankind who suffers without a murmur for God, what this poor peasant woman bore for her mortal husband."⁵ All the different versions of the folk tale share an explicit moral purpose, and they all come under the general classification of "saint's legend and . . . allegory."⁶

A similar evaluation of Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton's *Patient Grissil* is possible if we concentrate entirely on the main plot, which is framed by an explicit homiletic design. The superstructure conforms to the moral purpose of the play's Medieval sources, that is, to present the Griselda story as an allegory of the Christian soul which endures hardship and suffering, and eventually unites with its divine lord in heaven. In this context the emotional and physical hardships endured by Grissil at the hands of her husband are providential tests whose purpose is to
strengthen virtue. If we view Dekker's use of the folk-motif strictly as *exemplum*, we are amiss in questioning Gwalter's motivation, a dramatic component which the Medieval sources conspicuously deny. Rather than search for psychological explanations we must look, as Petrarch did in his version, to the moral resolution that teaches forbearance and the triumph of virtue over cruelty. But this reading is not entirely confirmed by the 1599 play as a whole because the exegesis does not account for the strong current of conflict precipitated by the realistic characters in the main plot and in the two minor plots. *Patient Grissil* is neither an homily nor a pure allegory; for while the main plot resembles the allegorical superstructure characteristic of the Medieval versions of the Griselda story, the play registers a high degree of cynicism evident in none of its analogues. The tension centers on conventional attitudes toward the institutions of marriage and the family.

Dekker's and his contemporaries' alterations of the Griselda story reflect the shift, in both the literature and social customs of the period, away from the monastic ideal of chastity to the desirability of married love. The shift was precipitated by the theological ideas and practices of the Protestant Reformation which replaced the ideal of chastity with that of conjugal happiness. During the Reformation marriage was considered the Christian expression of a virtuous life. It was no longer merely a means to
assuage the passions, as it was in the Pauline view: marriage, according to the theologian William Perkins, was "a state in itself far more excellent than the condition of a single life." But while theologians and educators emphasized the spiritual intimacy afforded by marriage, and while the subordination of the wife was deemed essential for maintaining family stability, we have seen that there was widespread disenchantment with the ideal. It is therefore not incidental that the Griselda legend should be reformulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the institutions of marriage and the family were at once idealized and opposed. The title pages of two renditions of the story attest to its appeal as an instruction piece for safeguarding the stability of the family. Phillip's play is described as The Commoditye of pacient and meeke Grissill, Wherin is declared, the good example, of her pacience towards her husband: and lykewise, the due obedience of Children, toward their Parentes, and the 1619 chapbook evaluates the story as a lesson in expediency: "The / Ancient True and Admirable / History of / Patient Grisel, / a Poore Mans Daughter in France: / Shewing / How Maides, By Her Example, In Their Good Behavior / May Marrie Rich Husbands; / And Likewise Wives By Their Patience and Obedience / May Gaine Much Glorie." The Patient Grissil of Dekker and his collaborators contains no statement of didactic intent, and while the play employs various conventions of homiletic drama (particularly the patient-
wife figure and her foil, the shrew, and the theme of marriage based on love rather than convenience), there is no attempt to disguise the problems occasioned by marriage and family life.

While the play condones the marriage of Gwalter and Grissill, it deals uneasily with two fundamental structures of domestic drama, namely, the patient-wife paradigm and the testing of the wife's constancy. The play's multiple-plot structure is based on a set of contrasts between kinds of marital and family relationships, each kind of relationship forming a separate plot. While the main plot dramatizes the virtues of marriage and the family unit based on the male-female hierarchy, the Welsh plot challenges that paradigm in its portrayal of the explosive marriage of Gwenthyan and Sir Owen. And although both plots are resolved when the couples accept the definition of marriage as egalitarian, the other minor plot sustains the misogynist position of Gwalter's sister Julia which opposes the central resolution.

The elements of protest in the 1599 play suggest it has more in common with Elizabethan moralities such as The Tide Tarrieth no Man and All for Money, plays that attempted to deal with contemporary economic and social problems, than it does with allegorical drama. Like these late moralities, the play harbors a moral code that the average theatregoer would find acceptable at the same time that it exposes the problems and conflicts within a hierarchical society that, paradoxically, was torn between the deep respect for insti-
tutionalized relationships and for personal independence. The moral code is expressed ambivalently in the play, and the ambivalence counterpoints the homiletic purpose of the folk tale. Indeed, Patient Grissil stands out as the most innovative of the later versions of the Griselda story in its attempt to grapple with the tensions surrounding domestic life in an age of increasing social and psychological alienation.\textsuperscript{11}

II

The significance of the main plot of Patient Grissil can best be appreciated by examining the action in the context of its analogues. In most of the earlier versions of the Griselda legend, the story opens with the youthful marquess expressing his reluctance to marry. In the Italian analogues the marquess' vassals, and in Chaucer the townspeople, advise their lord to marry so that he may provide an heir to his just rulership. The marquess agrees on the condition that he be permitted to choose his bride. In Boccaccio, Gualtieri makes it clear he is taking a wife in order to please his followers rather than to satisfy any desire to marry, and his selection of the poor maiden Griselda is made with prosaic dispatch:

For some time Gualtieri had been pleased by the manners of a poor young girl who lived in a village near his home, and since she seemed very beautiful to him, he thought that life with her could be quite pleasant; so, without looking any
In Chaucer, Walter decides to marry Grisildis, a poor but virtuous maiden, to ensure that his heirs will inherit God's gift of wisdom and virtue. He also marries with the hope that Grisildis' sense of duty as well as her fortitude and forbearance will be passed on through the generations, thereby guaranteeing the continuation of the community's well-being. None of the Medieval sources suggests that the marquess' choice of bride springs from a romantic interest in Griselda. When the story reaches the Elizabethan period, the source of interest shifts from the *exemplum* of the good ruler and the ideal Christian subject to the presentation of the ideal Christian marriage. The marriage theme is first expressed in Phillip's *Patient Grissell*, a late morality of the type which combines allegorical figures with characters bordering on the human. The play opens with Gautier's protests against Fidence's and Reason's urging him to marry. The marquess bases his objections on St. Paul's preference for the single life, and the scene builds on the debate between the monastic ideal of virginity and the humanist view of marriage until the latter, which combines the practical consideration of legitimate offspring with the joy that is in marriage, wins the debate. Like his Medieval counterparts, Gautier chooses to marry Grissell for her virtues, but although he claims not to be "Venus darlinge"
(l. 664) he admits to loving Grissel deeply: "from profounded hart, doth perfit love procead" (l. 664). Once Fidence and Reason win over Politic Perswasion, the marquess is eager to marry and sanctify that love. Deloney's ballad, written approximately thirty years later, moves rapidly to the meeting between Grissel and the marquess, describing how they fell in love at first sight and dispensing entirely with the political reasons for the marriage. The romantic intrigue is the mainspring of the story. The marquess is attracted to both Grissel's physical beauty and her virtue which are described as a desirable combination:

She sang most sweetly, with pleasant voice melodiously,
  Which set the Lord's heart on fire.
The more he lookt, the more he might,
  Beauty bred, his heart's delight;
  And to this damsel he went.
God speed, quoth he, thou famous flower,
Fair mistress of this homely bower,
  Where love and vertue live with sweet content.14

The courtship is portrayed as an intimate romantic encounter, and the purpose of Grissel's trials is to prove her wifely patience and constancy to the skeptics at court. Deloney's rendition proceeds, in parable fashion, to celebrate the joy that can be found in a truly Christian marriage.

Dekker's version, on the other hand, throws into relief the tensions surrounding the marriage. The first scene opens on the day which the marquess has designated as his wedding day. His brother, the marquess of Pavia, and his
courtiers are anxious that he marry in order to secure political ties:

Lepido. This day your self appointed to giue answer
To all those neighbour-Princes, who in loue Offer their Daughters, Sisters and Allies, In marriage to your hand . . . .
(I.i.22-25)

Pavia and the courtiers are angry because Gwalter has been spending his time hunting rather than seeking a bride. Gwalter defends himself by appealing to his youthful temperament and his distrust of women. He claims to enjoy his youth and "free thoughts," and describes love as a "yoake" (I.i.61) and marriage as a "loade" and a "burthen" under which he reluctantly agrees to "grone" (I.i.62-63) for the sake of political expediency. Ostensibly, he agrees to a marriage of convenience. In subsequent scenes we learn that Gwalter was only pretending to scorn love and marriage, that he has secretly fallen in love with the gracious and virtuous Grissill. Unlike his Medieval counterparts, Gwalter, like the marquess in Phillip's play and in Deloney's ballad, is struck by the maiden's beauty which evokes poetry in him. Entering upon Grissill's abject household, where he has brought Pavia and the court to reveal to them his choice of bride, Gwalter betrays his amorous feelings for the maiden:

See where my Grissill, and her father is, Me thinkes her beautie shining through those weedes,
Seems like a bright starre in the sullen night.
How lovely poverty dwels on her backe,
Did but the proud world note her as I doe,
She would cast off rich robes, forswear rich state,
To cloth them in such poore abiliments. . . .
(I.ii.173-179)

But the courtiers are shocked at Grissill's lowly status, and the anti-Grissill faction becomes the marriage's chief antagonist. Therewith the action in the main plot revolves around the social and psychological conflicts generated by Gwalter's desire to marry the woman of his choice. In the development of the theme of political opposition to a marriage of choice, the main plot enlarges a conflict that was only intimated in Phillip's play and in the ballad. In the Medieval sources there is no public opposition to the marriage; the opposition is an excuse invented by the marquess in order to justify to Griselda his testing of her virtue. In Phillip's play, where the providential nature of the testing is understated, the Vice Politicke Perswasion's objections to the marriage represent public discontent over Grissill's new status, a dissenting force that in the Medieval versions is only a pretext. In rationalizing Gautier's cruelty as an effect of his acquiescence to external pressures, Phillip humanizes the conflict at this point and minimizes its allegorical significance. A similar process occurs in the ballad where the marquess tests his wife in order to prove her patience, hoping that his behavior will make others pity her and "her foes . . . dis-
grace" (l. 62). In neither of the renditions, however, is the human understructure of the conflict fully developed. The opposing factions in both the early play and the ballad are easily persuaded of Griselda's merits, and the marquess is never suspected of willful wrongdoing or malice against his wife.

Phillip's marquess is only reluctantly convinced by Politicke Perswasion to test Grissell's patience, and in bending to public pressure he suffers to think of the consternation the testing will cause:

Oh cruell withtes, that cause my care, oh stonie harts of flint,
Can neuer teares nor dolfull paints, cause rigor for to stynt,
But that ye will procead to worke your curssed will,
A loue all grefes this grefe surmounts, an Infants bloode to spyll.

(11. 1081-1084)

A daughter has already been born to the marquess and Grissell, and the first test is to bear primarily on the child. The crucial dramatic point, however, is Gautier's unequivocal explanation to his wife of his intentions concerning the testing. Public pressure, he acknowledges, makes the tests necessary; but his remorse is sustained throughout the ordeal, and his close rapport with Grissell is never shaken:

Grissell. Shoe to me thy mated wife, the thinge that causeth care,
And I to swage thy pensyue mind will remedye prepare.
Gauter. Thou canst not ad release my deare,  
if I the thinge repeate  
It rather will torment thy minde with painfull  
passions great  
The cause is this: my nobles my weeded state  
disdaine,  
And ether will that I poore wretch, an erill  
shall remaine,  
And lose my rullinge state, my treasure and  
my store,  
Which luckless hap in gushing kind, with teares  
mine eyes deplore,  
Or els that our sweete childe, which from these  
loynes ishude,  
with dirful sword, shold murthed be, which thing  
my hart hath rued  
Now to auoid their wrathfull yre, and fauor  
wynne againe,  
I graunt and yeld that this our Chid with sword  
shall straight be slain . . . .  
(11. 1085-1096)

The psychological ambiguity in the play centres on the role of Politicke Perswasion. Cyrus Hoy has noted the uncertain ground occupied by the Vice in Phillip's play: in a sense, Politicke Perswasion "is the external voice of an inner evil, the overt manifestation of all the Marquess' efforts to deceive himself with specious arguments for Griselda's disgrace." However, the marquess' goodness is never really questioned in the play. As an effect of internal "evil," his cruelty remains obscure. At the same time, Politicke Perswasion "moves independently in the world of Phillip's play . . . and does not exist simply as a dimension of the Marquess' imagination," but as the voice of social opposition. In the presentation of the Vice's public role and Gautier's response to it, Phillip thus
anticipates Deloney's rendition of the marquess' malice as a conscious ploy to win public support for his marriage.

The courtly faction, on the other hand, appears regularly to denounce Grissill in the 1599 play, and the courtiers' importunities have a profound psychological effect on Gwalter. Indeed, for the first time in the literary history of the Griselda story the marquess' cruelty toward his wife suggests psychological depth. The play does not share the equivocation evident in Phillip's portrayal of social antagonism against Gautier's marriage. The opposition is explicitly relegated to the courtly faction, and although the antagonists have been reduced in number (there is never any hint that Gwalter needs to win public assent) their disapprobation is more dangerous and alienating than the public outcry in the earlier play. Lepido and Mario, and Pavia especially, represent the highest authority figures in the world of the play, and Gwalter's marriage to a subordinate represents a challenge to that authorial chorus. Gwalter, in choosing to marry Grissill, denies to participate in a common ideology, and his denial is interpreted as a serious challenge to the hierarchical system which it is his duty to preserve:

Pavia. What will the world say when the trump of fame
Shall sound your high birth with a beggers name?  
(I.ii.279-280)
The controversy surrounding the marquess' choice of bride is the source of his frustration. Unable to withstand being humiliated by Pavia, Gwalter reacts by displacing his critics' hostility onto Grissill. This is evident in the encounter between husband and wife following Gwalter's clash with the courtiers. The attempt to reveal the marquess' inner turmoil is restricted to only one scene; however, the episode is startling in its implications.

Act II, scene ii opens on a conversation between Gwalter and Furio, his only loyal follower. To Furio, the marquess acknowledges his sustained love for Grissill whose womb is now bearing "The joy of marriage" (II.ii.13). The marquess' praise of Grissill continues in the amorous vein that characterized his courtship of her, confirming that romance and passion have been preserved in marriage:

My loue to her is as the heate to fire,  
Her loue to mee as beautie to the Sunne,  
(Inseperable adiunts) in one word,  
So dearely loue I Grissill, that my life  
Shall end, when she doth ende to be my wife.  
(II.ii.14-18)

Yet Gwalter confesses to a heart "burnt up with desires / To trie my Grissils patience" (II. 20-21), suggesting the purpose of the forthcoming tests is not necessarily a moral one. Gwalter's announcement of the testing ends in a rhyming couplet, presumably directed at the audience, establishing the didactic nature of his scheme:
men men trie your wiues,
loue that abides sharpe tempests, sweetly thriues.

(II.ii.32-33)

However, since we have been alerted to the marquess' passionate and inexplicable urge to mortify his wife, his appeal to folk wisdom does not signal the play's capitulation to platitude as justification for human behavior. Rather, the intrusion of the trite, mechanical couplet as a rationalization for cruelty reinforces the equivocation concerning Gwalter's motivation. The ambiguity is sustained chiefly through Gwalter's verbal idiosyncracies.

The first part of the scene contains little action; we perceive the characters primarily through dialogue. Grissill's speeches reveal little more than the responses of the conventional patient wife. Gwalter's language, on the other hand, is highly individualized. Once the testing has begun, Gwalter responds to Grissill's deprecation with spectacular insults:

Gris. Oh chide me not away,
Your handmaid Grissill with vnuexed thoughts,
And with an vnrepining soule, will beare
The burden of all sorrowes, of all woe,
Before the smallest griefe should wound you so.

Marq. I am not beholding to your loue for this,
Woman I loue thee not, thine eyes to mine
Are eyes of Basiliskes, they murder me.

(II.ii.40-47)

Given the absence of Pavia and his faction at this moment, we may well wonder why Gwalter resorts to such epithets,
comparing his wife with a mythological reptile that destroys with its gaze. As the dialogue builds with increasing tension, the unconscious source of Gwalter's cruelty is implied through the rhetorical underpinning of his outbursts.

Grissill. Suffer me to part hence, Ile teare them [her eyes] out, Because they worke such treason to my loue.  

Marg. Talke not of loue. I hate thee more than poysone that stickes vpon the aires infected winges, 

Exhald vp by the hot breath of the Sunne, Tis for thy sake that speckled infamie, 

Sits like a screech-owle on my honoured brest, 

To make my subiects stare and mocke at mee, They sweare theyle neuer bend their awfull knees, 

To the base issue of thy beggers wombe, Tis for thy sake they curse me, raile at me, Thinkst thou then I can loue thee (oh my soule) 

Why didst thou builde this mountaine of my shame, 

Why lye my ioyes buried in Grissills name?  

(II.ii.50-61)

Gwalter is fascinating and exasperating in his cruelty, and in the dramatic crescendo of feeling we perceive a genuine emotional struggle. The verbal syndrome is achieved through the predominance of eruptio, "a sudden and violent discharge of feeling," and excessus—a "departure from a standard in conduct" marked by "protuberance" of speech or action.19

The tone of Gwalter's language is urgent and impulsive; and the ardor of the outburst, which has no equivalent in the play's analogues, highlights the inner dimension of his cruelty: "(oh my soule) / Why didst thou builde this
mountaine of my shame, / why lye my ioyes buried in Grissills name? (ll. 59-61). The operative phrase, "mountaine of my shame," asserts the connection between Gwalter's desire to humiliate his wife and social pressure.

The irrational perseverance with which Gwalter sustains his cruelty moves the action forward. As Grissill quietly acquiesces to his anger, Gwalter becomes more desperate until violent language gives way to sadistic behavior:

Furio. Your gloue my Lord.
Marg. Cast downe my gloue againe,
      Stoope you for it, for I will haue you stoope,
      And kneele euen to the meanest groome I keepe.
Gris. Tis but my duetie: if youle haue me stoope,
      Euen to your meanest groome my Lord ile stoope.
(II.ii.77-82)

This display of cruelty is followed by the order to tie Furio's shoes, which Grissill hastily obeys. The degradation to which Grissill submits when she is reduced to fetching handkerchiefs and tying shoes is underscored by its uniqueness in domestic drama. The convention of the patient wife requires only the wife's quiescence and not her grovelling performance of bizarre tasks. Even in A Yorkshire Tragedy, where the Husband's madness reaches diabolical proportions and his treatment of his wife and children is wild and incomprehensible, the Wife's patience is never tried in the same grotesque fashion as is Grissill's. As the testing progresses, however, Gwalter's feelings vacillate from extreme cruelty to compassion, his
outbursts reiterating that his violent behavior is a defense against the dissent and resentment of the courtiers:

Marc. I have not true power, To wound thee with denial, oh my Grissill, How dearely should I loue thee, Yea die to doe thee good, but that my subjects Vpbraiid me with thy birth, and call it base, And grieue to see thy Father and thy Brother Heau'de vp to dignities. (II.ii.115-120)

The tension between Gwalter's desire to uphold his personal claims and his duty to the court is brought into relief in the latter part of the scene, following Grissill's exit and the entrance of Mario and Lepido:

Marc. . . . what was she that passed by you? Both. Your vertuous wife. Marc. Call her not vertuous, For I abhorre her, did not her swolne eyes Looke red with hate or scorne? did not she curse My name or Furioes name? Mario. No my deare Lord. Marc. For he and I railed at her, spit at her, She burst her heart with sorrow, for I grieue To see you grieue that I have wrong'd my state, By louing one whose basenes now I hate

Enter Grissill with wine. Come faster if you can, forbeare Mario, Tis but her office: what shee does to mee, She shall performe to any of you three. (II.ii.127-138)

Gwalter hopes that by turning Grissill into a servile object for the court's pleasure she will finally be accepted by her detractors. That his cruelty goes beyond the ostensible moral purpose of the tests is confirmed in a moment of dramatic revelation, when the marquess admits "My selfe have
don most wrong, for I did try / To breake the temper of true constancie" (V.ii.204-205).

Dekker's portrayal of the marquess' conflict with the court regarding his marriage to a subordinate aligns the play with the growing tendency to view marriages of convenience as part of a broader power structure that denies the individual fulfillment. The psychological consequences of that denial are brought into relief in the marquess' defense against the courtiers' hostility. At the same time, the alteration of the stock patient-wife figure, which contributes to the "central topic of marriage and the question of male or female dominance,"\(^{20}\) tends toward undermining the marriage code. We have seen that Grissill's progression from quiescence to extreme humility goes beyond the docility normally expected of patient wives. While Gwalter's character suggests interiority, Grissill remains locked within the confines of stock characterization, and the contrast between the two characters highlights the play's exaggeration of the folk motifs. Yet, Grissill does on occasion step out of the patient-wife role to reveal what Mary Leland Hunt long ago aptly described as "flickering signs of sense alien to the monstrous mush of concession long admired by the credulous."\(^{21}\) Grissill has her rebellious moments, as when, for example, she bemoans her status after the marquess has her children taken away:
I must oh God I must, must is for Kings,
And loe obedience, for loe vnderlings.
(IV.ii.142-143)

Similarly, Grissill admits to being wrongfully treated by her husband, and upon being banished from court, in a moment of doubt and conflict, she cries out:

Thus tyranny oppresseth innocence,
Thy lookes seeme heauy, but thy heart is light,
For villaines laugh when wrong oppresseth right.
(IV.i.191-193)

The sharp discrepancy between Grissill's extreme humility and her flashes of anger, however, also reveal Dekker's essential ambivalence toward the patient-wife figure; for while the limitations of patience as a response to marital conflict are artfully exposed, Dekker does not ultimately portray Grissill's suffering as morally unjustified. Her outbursts and her extreme humility notwithstanding, Grissill's fortitude in the face of grave abuse is the character's chief moral attribute, and her numerous speeches on the necessity of the wife's submission to her husband's authority undermine the marginal parody of the patient-wife paradigm in the main plot. The ideology of patience therefore retains its formidable hold on the action's imaginative structure amid a muted current of opposition.

III

The ambiguity in the treatment of male-female relationships extends to the portrayal of family life in general.
The main plot's most extensive modifications of the Griselda story are the additions of Grissill's brother Laureo and the earthy servant-apprentice Babulo, both of whom are Dekker's creations. The characters, along with Janicola's protracted role as the gentle father and master, provide a chorus— at once resentful, comical, and sympathetic—which accompanies and comments on the marriage theme, but which projects the action beyond the marriage debate.

The frequent overlap of scenes depicting Janicola's household and those involving the marquess and Grissill further diminishes the allegorical tenor of the action. In the Medieval analogues the story proceeds quickly to the marquess' proposal of marriage and the meeting with Griselda's family, to the wedding and the trials. Deloney, on the other hand, omits entirely the meeting with the family, preferring instead to dwell on the romance between the marquess and his bride. In Phillip's play, after Grissell and her parents are introduced, there is a brief interlude wherein the dying Mother addresses Grissell in the presence of Indigent Poverty who is ravaging their lives. The Mother entrusts her daughter with the care of her old and lame father and subsequently delivers a lengthy sermon on Grissell's duty to love and obey him (ll. 294ff.). We have little feeling for the family's poverty as a tangible, treacherous reality; nor should we expect to from a play whose purpose, like that of most moralities, is to reveal acceptance of earthly suffering as "a measure of justice
according to natural law and order." Although the characters must undergo extreme hardships the play upholds the "merciful denouement" of the morality play, and the situations it dramatizes are largely a series of abstractions. Dekker, on the other hand, interposes complex family scenes between the Grissill-marquess action, and propels the main plot forward amid a concrete background of everyday domestic life. To Phillip's family scenes Dekker adds the totality of life surroundings, including the material basis of the bond between parents, children, and servants.

In the second scene, Dekker introduces Babulo, the clownish but pragmatic servant-apprentice. Babulo's description of the pains incurred by having to rise early plunges the action into the midst of a workaday domestic environment responsive to the constrictions of time and space:

Olde Master heeres a morning able to make us worke
tooth
and naile (marrie then we must haue victualls the
Sun hath plaid
boe peep in the element anie time these two
hores, as I doe some
mornings when you cal: what Babulo say you:
heere Master say
I an then this eye opens, yet don is the mouse,
lie still: what
Babulo sayes Grissil, anone say I, and then this
eye lookes vp, yet
downe I snug againe: what Babulo say you againe,
and then I start
vp, and see the Sunne, and then sneeze, and then
shake mine eares,
and then rise, and then get my breakfast, and then
fal to worke,
and then wash my hands, and by this time I am ready: heer's your basket, and Grissill heer's yours.
(I.ii.1-11)

Babulo's remarks suggest that the stage props would include common household items. His frequent references to meal time and to the time of day contribute to the atmosphere of mundane reality, as do his intermittent appearances throughout the scene in which we see him performing household chores such as making the fire and scouring the kettle (I.ii.158 and 286). Although Babulo's complaints about the onerous demands of work provide moments of welcome humor, they also reveal that all is not well in the domain of day-to-day living. We learn, for example, that basket-making, Janicola's occupation, is one of many dying trades because it belongs to a former less volatile order:

... if the world doe not ende, we shall not liue one by another: basket making as all other trades runs to decay, and shortly we shall not be worth a butten, for non in this cutting age sowe true stitches, but taylers, and shoomakers, and yet now and then they tread their shooes a wrie too.
(I.ii.84-88)

Babulo is equally blunt in his criticism of the idle rich:

God forgive mee, I thinke I shall not eate a pecke of salt:
I shall not liue long sure, I should be a rich man by right, for they neuer doe good deeds, but when they see they must dye, ....
(I.ii.15-17)
Babulo's frankness places him in the direct line of generations of cynical observant servants from Roman comedy to Shakespeare. Like his Elizabethan counterparts, Babulo's witty cynicism challenges the prevailing view of the master-servant relationship set forth in Tudor homilies and treatises, a relationship considered to be "in many ways like that between parents and their children." It was common practice in the treatises to include both masters and servants in discussions of family conduct. The master's duty was to ensure that the basic needs of his servants and apprentices were met, and "to teach them the skills, manners and morals appropriate to their callings and stations in life," just as they did for their children; servants were expected to be "deferential and obedient, submissive always to the authority of their elders." Babulo's comic insubordination counterpoints the sombre tone of the Grissill-marquess action. Babulo, who is fiercely loyal to Grissill, "knocks" the marquess for trying to "licke at" Grissill's lips (I.ii.328) and admonishes him for following a fad in desiring to marry a subordinate: "I am afraid that this wonder of the rich loving the / poor, will last but nine daies" (I.ii.319). Nor does Babulo hide the fact that in an abject household a royal visit is a grave imposition:

... if he [the marquess] be a Prince, I hope hee is not Prince ouer my tongue, snailes, wherefore come all these: Master heeres not fish enough for vs, Sirha Grissill the fire burnes out. (I.ii.294-296)
Babulo's unsubmissiveness elicits the deferent Janicola and Grissill's reproaches:

Bab. Master I have made a good fire . . .
Ian. Fall on thy knees thou fool: see here's our duke.

(I.ii.286-287)

What Grissill calls Babulo's "intemperate tongue" (l. 325) is part of the mild chorus of cynicism that balances the theme of patience in adversity that informs the main plot.

The tension is sustained in the scenes involving Grissill's brother Laureo. An important contrast between Dekker's and Phillip's portrayal of Janicola's family is Dekker's replacement of the Mother with Laureo. In the earlier play the Mother, although she dies before much of the action takes place, is a dramatic tautology in that she echoes and reinforces the father's sentiments. Dekker's substitution, on the other hand, intensifies the dramatic conflict generated by Babulo's caustic but lighthearted remarks. Laureo, a scholar who has returned home due to lack of money to continue his studies, provides the intellectual sullenness that Babulo's clownishness lacks. With the scholar's aloofness, Laureo logically and persistently challenges Grissill's trials and the ideology that fosters them, until he is forced to cry out against his sovereign during a moment of passionate bitterness:

Oh poore and wretched people are the Pigmies,
Oh rich oppressors the devouring Cranes,
Within my fathers house Ile shew thee Pigmies,
... my sister Grissill shee's a Pigmie.
... . . . . . . .
The Marquesse is the rich deouuring Crane,
That makes vs lesse then Pigmies, worse then wormes.

(V.i.46-56)

However, Laureo's criticism of unjust authority is constantly undermined by Janicola, whose philosophy of resignation--"Art thou poore yet hast thou golden Slumbers: / Oh sweet content" (I.ii.93-94)--tends to muffle his son's harsh judgments. Although a sense of urgency underscores Janicola's humility as he confronts his family's deprivation, the fairy-tale quality of the character's perceptions overshadows the cruel reality described by Laureo:

Ian. . . . . . . . . . though I am poore
My loue shall not be so: goe daughter Grissill,
Fetch water from the spring to seeth our fish,
Which yester day I caught: the sheare is meane,
But be content, when I haue solde these Baskets,
The monie shall be spent to bid thee [Laureo] welcome:
Grissill make hast, run and kindle fire.
. . . . . . . . . .
For when we cease from worke euen in that while,
My song shall charme griefes eares and care beguile.

(I.ii.151-157; 168-169)

The Laureo-Babulo-Janicola action thus sustains the pattern of contradictory messages that informs the main plot. As a father, Janicola is gentle, benevolent and self-sacrificing. In his espousal of caritas he proves himself an ideal parent and master, as well as an ideal subject. As
head of his simple household, Janicola's moral obligations are not dissimilar to those of his sovereign, the marquess. Indeed, the superstructure of the play suggests we are invited to view the family as the kingdom in microcosm. The King's moral obligation towards his subjects, like the father's towards his children, is to guide and comfort them, and to teach them "brotherly affection one towards another, ... in loyaltie to him that is their Soveraigne." The contrast between Janicola (the wise, temperate, and caring father) and Gwalter (the impulsive, punishing, and tyrannical ruler) as characters and as philosophical polarities is an abstract statement on the necessity of benevolent authority. The marquess' tyranny reaches beyond his cruelty as a husband; it extends to Grissill's family as well. In a unique alteration of the Griselda story, Janicola and his family are brought to court with Grissill, and are humiliated and banished with her. Thus Grissill's trials extend to the marquess' subjects as well. Yet the happy resolution in which all the factions are reconciled, and in which Gwalter seems to have learned the lesson of good rulership, is not entirely convincing because it has been achieved largely through Grissill and Janicola's surrender to absolute and tyrannical rule. As a character Janicola, like Grissill, never attains psychological depth and therefore remains an idealized abstraction. That the marquess is more convincing as a character in his inhumanity than are the representatives of virtue strongly suggests it
is impossible for earthly authority to reflect the divine will. The comic resolution therefore does not fully integrate the main plot's divided thought structures.

IV

The ambivalence is sustained in the opposition between the main plot and the two minor plots, both of which contribute to the debate of dominance in marriage and the question of obedience to unjust authority. In the context of the surface action the opposition takes the form of parody. Sir Owen's comical and unsuccessful efforts to tame the shrewish Gwenthyan amount to a parody of Gwalter's cruelty; observing both couples is Julia, who unequivocally rejects what she sees, preferring to "lead Apes in hell" (V.ii.282) rather than marry. A series of intricate parallels at once integrates and divides the plots: Gwalter and Gwenthyan are cousins, their mutual cruelty suggesting psychological parity as well; Julia, the misogynist, is Gwalter's sister, and her counterpart Laureo is Grissill's brother. The marquess' tyranny is foiled by Sir Owen's docility, just as Grissill's humility is opposed by Gwenthyan's rebelliousness. Compare, for example, the marquess' dressing of Grissill in her old rags to humiliate her (IV.i) with Gwenthyan's dressing herself in rags to humiliate Sir Owen and revenge Grissill: "pecause Grissill is made foole / and turne away, Gwenthian mag foole of Sir Owen" (IV.iii.134-135). Critics, however, either ignore or
are uneasy with the parody. Richard Levin disapproves of the structural and thematic incoherence it generates: "the values of the folktale source of the main plot," he argues, "dictate that Grissil's utter self-abnegation be treated as the wifely ideal," but the moral scheme places Gwalter in an ambiguous position, for while his persecution of Grissil . . . is defined by the double structure as a gross distortion of proper husbandly behavior at the opposite pole from Sir Owen, the folk doctrine would have us accept it as the prerogative of his sex (and rank), as well as a justifiable subterfuge designed to demonstrate her worthiness. 30

And while Grissill's forbearance "is meant to win our whole hearted sympathy," Gwenthyan's shrewishness is "not judged in ethical terms . . . but simply as a comic extreme"; because the plots clumsily combine two polarities

the comedy of the subplot actually works at cross-purposes with the idealization of the main-plot heroine, whose claim to perfection is undercut both by its reductio ad absurdum in the henpecked Sir Owen and by Gwenthyan's spirited refusal to emulate 'such ninny pobby fool as Grissil.' 31

Levin's censure of the dramatic inconsistencies in the play's multiple-plot structure is an attempt to make coherent a system that is essentially ambiguous. The lack of equivalence between plots, however, does not constitute dramatic failure. What Levin regards as inconsistency is the play's essential statement that truth is not absolute but paradoxical. The homiletic design of the play's
superstructure, afforded by the popular legend, is undermined by internal tensions and contradicted by the force of the parody in the minor plots. Moreover, while the multiple-plot structure appears to achieve unity through elaborate interconnections of characters and scenes, the plots remain isolated from each other even after the resolution where Gwalter and Gwenthyan reveal they were merely trying their mates, with whom they now can be reconciled. The separate resolutions are presented as parallel, but the analogy is "only verbal."\textsuperscript{32} Gwenthyan announces in the final scene that just as the marquess has tried Grissill, so she has tried Sir Owen (V.ii.262), but the humility that Sir Owen has shown, unlike Grissill's, is not a virtue of his sex and is discarded once the resolution occurs. And while Gwenthyan, as a consequence of the test, informs all that she "shall no more be call'd Gwenthian but patient Grissill" (V.ii.272), in the main plot Grissill herself does not renounce the ethic of extreme humility after her restoration at court, and the marquess remains in control of the marriage. "The archaic morality of the folktale," observes Levin, "cannot be assimilated to the contrast of extremes posited by this double-plot formula."\textsuperscript{33}

The homiletic pattern is further disturbed by the intrusion of the Julia action, which reaches a separate conclusion from that of the other two plots. The marquess' sister's decision to remain unmarried contrasts sharply with the resolutions we have witnessed:
Marg. Our ioyes are compleate, forward to our feast,
    Patience hath won the prize and now is blest.
Iul. Nay brother your pardon awhile: besides our selues there are
    a number heere, that haue behelde Grissils patience, your owne tryals, and Sir Owens sufferance, Gwenthians frowardnes, these Gentlemen louertine, and my selfe a hater of loue: amongst this company I trust there are some mayden batchelers, and virgin maydens, those that liue in that freedome and loue it, those that know the war of mariage and hate it, set their hands to my bill, which is rather to dye a mayde and leade Apes in hell, then to live a wife and be continually in hell.
    (V.ii.273-283)

Julia is justifiably suspicious of the peace that has been won; marriage, she suggests, is an ongoing war. That Julia knows she is not alone in her preference for "freedome" underscores her dissent. And Gwenthyan's reply, while it hardly provides an inspiring motivation for marriage--"wedlocke increases / peobles in cities" (V.ii.289-290)--confirms the permanence of conflict:

    Gwen. . . . discord's
    mag goode musicke, and when louers fall out
        is soone fall in, and
    tis good you knaw: pray you al be maried, . . .
        . . . awl you then that haue husbands that you would
    pridle, set your hands to Gwenthians pill, for
        tis not fid that poore womens should be kept alwaies vnder.
    (V.ii.287-292)

The marriage debate has no clear victory for either side, and no epilogue is added to resolve the contradictions.
The tension between the preservation of orthodox structures on the one hand, and the opposition of conventional views of family life on the other, is expressed in more bitter overtones in *The Honest Whore, I*, a hybrid domestic play that attests to Dekker's interest in the satirical trend that characterized the drama of the early 1600's.
Notes


2 Petrarch's Latin translation appeared in a letter the poet wrote to Boccaccio praising the tale. In his prefatory remarks, Petrarch wrote: "At the close [of The Decameron] you have placed a story which . . . so delighted and fascinated me that . . . I was seized with a desire to learn it by heart, so that I might have the pleasure of recalling it for my own benefit, and of relating it to my friends in conversation. When an opportunity for telling it offered itself . . ., I found that my auditors were delighted . . . So one fine day . . . discontented with myself and my surroundings, I suddenly sent everything flying, and snatching my pen, I attacked this story of yours" [Mark Musa and Peter E. Bondanella, trans. and eds., Giovanni Boccaccio: The Decameron (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 186-87].


8 Stone, p. 137, et passim; and Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, passim.

For a discussion of late moralities of the non-allegorical kind, see Alan Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy (n.p.: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 12, 21, and passim.

Before discussing the play's status as a domestic drama, a few words must be said concerning the question of authorship. The extent of Dekker's share in the play is no longer the puzzle it was earlier in the century. Scholars now agree that Dekker contributed more lines than either Chettle or Haughton; however, as Cyrus Hoy wisely concludes, although each dramatist's contributions are "reasonably clear-cut for most of the play, . . . it would be foolish to suppose that no one of the three . . . ever contributed a touch to the work of one of his fellows" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, I, 146). About the main plot two authorial details are undisputed: 1) both Dekker and Chettle's styles are evident in the Grissill-marquess action; 2) Dekker alone was responsible for those scenes depicting Grissill with her family: Grissill's father Janicola, her misogynist brother Laureo, and the earthy servant Babulo all bear Dekker's stamp in that as early as this play Dekker's portrait of everyday life contains the indictment against poverty and human suffering characteristic of his pamphlets and later plays. The most difficult authorial problem concerns the Gwenthyan-Sir Owen plot and its enigmatic Welsh characters. There are two schools of thought concerning the authorship of the minor plot. One holds that because Dekker was fond of Welsh (there are Welsh characters in Satiromastix and Northward Ho) and because Dekker's "is the most idiomatic as well as the most entertaining Welsh-English on the Elizabethan stage," he could have been responsible for the Welsh scenes in Patient Grissil, which contain a unique blend of Celtic and English dialect [Mary Leland Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 16]. On the other hand, W.L. Halstead, in "Collaboration on Patient Grissil," Philological Quarterly, 18 (1939), 381-94, and D.M. Greene, in "The Welsh Characters in Patient Grissil," Boston University Studies in English, 4 (1960), 171-80, claim Dekker did not write these scenes because the Welsh here is more refined than that in either Satiromastix or Northward Ho. Cyrus Hoy concurs with Greene in assigning the Gwenthyan-Sir Owen plot to Haughton, at the same time cautioning that "the attribution is as secure as such things can ever be" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, I, 144). We cannot know for certain on the basis of linguistic evidence alone whether Dekker had a hand in the Welsh scenes; however, I believe that in these scenes are discernible attitudes and themes that recur in Dekker's later domestic plays, as well as similarities in the handling of multiple-plot construction. Structurally, Patient Grissil is designed in such a way that together the
minor plots function as a critique of the action of the main plot, a technique Dekker will finely hone in his mature plays, *The Honest Whore, II*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*. There is, moreover, a close resemblance between Gwenthyan's headstrong assertiveness and strong desire for freedom within marriage and the strong sense of self of many of Dekker's heroines, namely, Bellafront and Infelice in *The Honest Whore, II*, Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, and Moll in *The Roaring Girl*, although Moll resembles Julia more than she does Gwenthyan. Like Julia, Moll unequivocally denounces marriage for herself. Even more startling is the fact that neither character is forced to renge her choice. The similarities between Patient Grissil and Dekker's later plays lead me to conclude that Dekker may have had a hand in the minor plots; if indeed the Welsh scenes are Haughton's alone, it is nevertheless clear that Dekker's dramatic sensibility was finely attuned to that of his collaborators, and that the play is an example of a close and harmonious venture.


15 Thomas Dekker, *Patient Grissil*, in *Dramatic Works*, ed. Fredson Bowers, I. All further citations from the play are from this edition.


17 Hoy, 141.

18 Hoy, 141.


20 Hoy, 143.

21 Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 60. Hunt attributes Grissill's rebelliousness to Dekker (pp. 60ff.).

22 See above, n. 8.

23 Hoy, 143.
The equation between King and pater familias became a commonplace during the reign of James I. In 1609 James declared that "The state of monarchy is the supremist thing upon earth," a view he supported on the basis that "Kings are compared to fathers in families: for a King is truly parens patriae, the politic father of his people" (quoted in Stone, p. 152). Dekker, like many of his fellow writers, was fond of the analogy. In a plague pamphlet (1609) Dekker describes the universe as a series of families, with God at the head: the "Praier for the Court" begins with the invocation, "O Lord, bee thou a father unto that familie, and keepe them (as children) both in thy feare and love," and continues with the supplication for rectitude at court: "Let thy word bee of such power in this place, that it may rather seem the Temple of the everlasting king of Heaven, then the dwelling house of a king upon earth" [Foure Birds of Noahs Arke, ed. F.P. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924), pp. 124-25].

Foure Birds of Noahs Arke, p. 125.


Levin, p. 50.
CHAPTER III

THE HONEST WHORE, I

Between the publication of Patient Grissil and The Honest Whore, Part I Dekker appears to have written two domestic plays, The Tragedy of Page of Plymouth (with Jonson, ca. 1599) and A Medicine for a Curst Wife (ca. 1602), both of which have been lost. The Honest Whore, I (ca. 1604) has no direct source; its analogues are a group of domestic comedies performed in the public theatres between 1600 and 1608. These comedies retain the convention of extolling the wife's patience within a turbulent marriage, and "are concerned . . . with contrasting seeming and actual virtue, chiefly in sexual matters." Plays like Heywood's How a Man May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad (1601-1602), the anonymous Fair Maid of Bristow (1603-1604) and The London Prodigal (1604) systematically articulate these themes within a typical homiletic superstructure. Michael Manheim has outlined the salient features of these domestic comedies:

The heroine . . . is a patient and long-suffering wife, whose trials are frequently dramatized in detail. The hero is a prodigal husband, an irrepressible and irresponsible young man who falls through his inability to cope with incredible streaks of bad luck. (He is always a gambler and occasionally keeps a whore.) Two of these plays also contain a third major character, a youth who is overcome with lust for the patient
wife. All three of these character types are tested: the youth by his lust, the husband by his bad luck, and the wife by the abuses of her husband... and [by] the advances of the youth... Only the wife successfully withstands the trials. The youth and the husband repent at the end, and the wife receives her rewards with great humility.

A peripheral figure in the action is usually one who wields at least some authority (a father or a magistrate, for example) and who functions as the wife's protector, ensuring a just resolution. In How a May May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad, the prototype of these comedies, Mistress Arthur is subjected to the cruelty of her husband who poisons her in order to please his whore. The wife is rescued by her admirer who offers to marry her and alleviate her misery. The wife remains loyal to her marriage, and her exemplary action, together with Justice Reason's protective influence, secure a happy ending.

The Honest Whore, I resembles its analogues only marginally. The play combines a loose blend of genres within three separate plots, each of which reverses one or more structures central to the analogues. The romance plot presents a hostile Duke determined to prevent the marriage between his daughter and her suitor, thereby altering the stock situation which sees a benign authority-figure encourage domestic harmony. The morality or Bellafront plot takes the whore rather than the virtuous wife as its heroine and follows her conversion from prostitution to chastity to her marriage with the gamester who originally seduced her. The marriage code, however, is relegated almost entirely to
the Candido action, which, like the morality and romance plots, functions as a separate plot with its own complications and resolutions.\textsuperscript{5} The Candido plot modifies the major paradigm of the genre by transforming the patient wife into a patient "mad-man" (IV.iii.29-30)\textsuperscript{6} flouted by a shrewish wife who commissions rather than flees from a lusty youth in order to satisfy her longing to thwart her husband's patience rather than test his virtue.

Taken as a whole, these disparate plots make for a weak dramatic structure marked by loose narrative and thematic connections between and within the three separate actions. Hippolito's situation in the romance plot, for instance, which is only loosely tied to the morality plot through his role as Bellafront's instructor in virtue, is obscured by his dual function as whore-reformer and mad lover. Similarly, in the morality plot the homiletic impulse underlying Bellafront's progression from sin to reformation is contradicted by her sustained passion for Hippolito and by the nature of her marriage to Matheo, a marriage based not on love but on expediency. The Candido action, which, as the play's title suggests, is about "The Humours of the Patient Man," contains an explicit homiletic superstructure that clashes oddly with humor comedy: at the same time that the linendraper is held up as a veritable "mirror of patience" (I.iv.15) he is subjected to a series of bizarre tests exposing his compulsive opportunism and limited understanding of the virtue he represents. "Candido's
humour," writes Peter Ure, "makes him seem ridiculous and touchingly good at one and the same time; we look up to him with one auspicious and one dropping eye." The dramatic incongruities, however, are not the product of carefully sustained counterpoint but of a central thematic opposition in which a firm homiletic framework collides with, rather than balances, a satirical portrait of domestic and city life, so that characters who serve as norms or models of ethical conduct are at once venerated and exposed as either fools (Candido) or madmen (The Duke and Hippolito).

The play's satirical tone suggests Dekker was influenced by "the growing disillusionment which characterized the Jacobean age." The disillusionment partially effected the shift toward satirical drama in the private playhouses following the reopening of the theatres in 1604 (all playhouses had been closed during the major outbreak of plague in 1603). The tendency toward satire peaked between 1600 and 1613 when most plays written for the coterie theatres were satirical comedies. Few tragedies were staged here and virtually no chronicle plays or romances. "In all but a few of the plays," writes Alfred Harbage, "the theme is sexual transgression, coupled in tragedy with treachery and murder, and in comedy with cupididity and fraud"; the new drama is "preoccupied with lust and murder or lust and money, and with the exhibition of the foolish and the foul." Dekker's satirical purpose in The Honest Whore, I distinguished the play as one of the first
to convey the satirical temper of the private theatres through an adult company and a popular playhouse.\textsuperscript{10} The play's tonal and structural incongruities, therefore, although dramatically problematic, might be due in part to Dekker's desire at once to satisfy his audience's expectations and to expose the folly of those expectations.

Although the satirical elements in \textit{The Honest Whore, I} have not been examined in detail, critics have generally attributed the satirical tone to the influence of Middleton, who collaborated with Dekker on the play.\textsuperscript{11} Middleton's influence has been discerned in the play's pessimistic tone and in the portrayal of abusive power and moral degeneracy, particularly in sexual matters. \textit{The Honest Whore, I} in many ways is a blueprint of Middleton's mature satires which share the realistic urban settings common to domestic drama, but which can be distinguished from domestic comedy by their caustic portraits of moral aberration and by the virulence of their language. Middleton's characters are often grotesque caricatures of power and appetite (one thinks of Dampit and Sir Walter Whorehound, whose heinous pursuits of power lead to moral and social dissolution). Since Dekker's portraits of family and social life have been heretofore more compassionate and prone to sentimentality, as in the portrayal of Janicola's family in \textit{Patient Grissil}, the absence of these tendencies in \textit{The Honest Whore, I} has been viewed as evidence of Dekker's obeisance to Middleton's satirical temper. Neil Rhodes, who offers a rare but brief
analysis of the play's satirical details, observes Dekker striving to portray the courtesan scenes realistically by capturing Bellafront's nervousness and belligerence while suggesting moral degeneracy: Bellafront "alternately curses and coos at her pimp . . . while the longer outbursts are a cynical characterisation of her own trade . . . ."12 The courtesan describes a miserly customer, for example, as

... made like an Aldermans night-gowne, fac' st all with conny before, and within nothing but Foxe: this sweete Oliuer, will eate Mutton till he be ready to burst, but the leane-lawde slaue wil not pay for the scraping of his trencher. (I.i.105-109)

Noting that Dekker's language has been "checked and stiffened" since Patient Grissil, Rhodes suggests the change might be attributable to Middleton's influence.13 While the extent of Middleton's collaboration in The Honest Whore, I was probably minimal in number of lines, it is clear that many of the themes of Patient Grissil and of the domestic comedies popular between 1600 and 1608 are re-examined in The Honest Whore, I in the cynical tone we associate with Middleton's satirical drama.

Yet the view of Middleton as a staunch realist whose plays offer only cynical portraits of urban and domestic life is not entirely accurate. R.B. Parker, in his analysis of Middleton's comic vision, has observed "At the heart of Middleton's . . . comic style . . . a tension between skill
in the presentation of manners and a desire to denounce immorality." The acerbic tone of Middleton's comedies, suggests Parker, with their "ingenious intrigue, verbal wit, and vivid representation of contemporary London scenes and behavior, is apt to obscure his concern with deprecation" in those plays "where moral judgement is played down," a tension that centres on Middleton's "struggle between satiric observation and determined moralizing." I believe this opposition is also at the centre of The Honest Whore, which is at once a satirical drama with alternating tragic and comic perspectives, and a domestic comedy espousing the virtue of Patience and the transformative power of repentance. The fluctuations in tone, rather than simply Middleton's satirical temper or his limited contribution, point to the possible nature of his influence in The Honest Whore, at the same time that the play reveals Dekker's experimentation with a popular dramatic form.

Since the conflicting dramatic modes in The Honest Whore are never fused, the tensions the play dramatizes do not clearly articulate a theme. As well, weak plotting and an oblique dramatic perspective, together with character inconsistencies, often result in melodrama. For these reasons The Honest Whore has received only cursory scholarly attention as most critics merely refer to the play's shortcomings before proceeding to the more satisfying sequel. However, the play is worth studying in the context of Dekker's development as a writer of domestic drama. In
The Honest Whore, I we see Dekker struggling with a growing ambivalence toward orthodox structures that is crystallized in the play's formal antitheses. Moreover, in its treatment of the marriage code and the cult of domesticity The Honest Whore, I forms a significant link between Patient Grissil and Dekker's comic masterpiece, The Honest Whore, II.

In Patient Grissil Dekker anticipated the domestic comedies popular between 1600 and 1608 by including characters like Grissill and her father Janicola who unequivocally represented values and ideals of family life, and who at least partially succeeded in mitigating the serious opposition to the stability of marriage and the family posed by those who challenged those institutions. In The Honest Whore, I instead of an ideal father like Janicola, or a protector like Heywood's Justice Reason, characters who represent a centre of virtue in their society, Dekker introduces a malevolent Duke whose determination to prevent his daughter's marriage sets the play in motion. At the outset of the play, the romance plot establishes a tragic rather than a comic tone. Duke Trebatzi with the help of his physician drugs Infelice and pronounces her dead; the play opens on the macabre funeral procession that follows from the Duke's malicious trick. The setting evokes a vague Milanese environment whose remoteness enhances the archaic quality of the Duke's values. As defender of a rigid feudal ethic, Trebatzi's
chief preoccupation is with the protection of his lineage. While staging Infelice's mock funeral he orders an attack on Hippolito "for my bloods sake" (I.ii.12), that is, for the sake of his family and nobility. Trebatzi's antagonism against Hippolito stems from a long-standing enmity between their respective families:

Duke
   . . . I must confesse,
   Hippolito is nobly born; a man,
   Did not mine enemies blood boile in his veines,
   Whom I would court to be my sonne in law?
   (I.iii.26-29)

The Duke shows no sympathy for the love ethic; he views marriage strictly in terms of convenience. Although he acknowledges Hippolito's aristocratic heritage, Trebatzi wishes to preserve the purity of his clan; Hippolito's "blood" belongs to a rival clan and would therefore render his own impure.

The Duke's political reasons are thus confirmed as he sets out to prevent his daughter's marriage of choice. Yet the convention that sees an obdurate parent attempt to impede a love marriage assumes a complex dimension in that the Duke seems determined to deny Infelice any suitor. To all intents and purposes, the first scene has all the makings of a preamble to a tragedy and reveals a sophisticated attempt on Dekker's part to portray the cruel father as psychologically complex. The psychological dimension is brought into relief in the association between the Duke's aristocratic blood values and his revulsion.
against the body which is expressed in language more virulent than that of Bellafront and her bawds. Throughout the scene the Duke's imagery underscores a perverse obsession with degrading the body. Trebatzi's cruelty in attempting to stop Infelice's marriage knows no bounds, and in order to protect the purity of his clan he is prepared to go beyond the pretext of killing Infelice by actually murdering her: "Ile starue her on the Appenine / Ere he shall marrie her" (I.ii.25-26). Lashing out at Hippolito's accusation that the cruel Duke has murdered Infelice, Trebatzi orders his followers to "seeke out [Hippolito's] bowells" with their swords (I.i.15-16) if the count should dare to intrude upon the funeral. The obsession is reinforced in the mock elegy to Infelice, whose former "beautie" the Duke describes as "but a coarse" (I.i.55) and a prey to "sand dust," the enemy of "earths purest formes," (1. 56) which renders "Queenes bodies . . . but trunckes to put in wormes" (1. 57). The Duke knows his daughter is not dead, yet the force of his necrophagous imagery suggests a blurring of distinctions between life and death. His revulsion from what is natural and generative is the source of his attraction to excessive purity, a disorder reflected in his language. While awaiting Infelice's awakening from her drug-induced sleep, the Duke wonders whether the drug could have defiled his daughter's body, while his tawdry versification highlights his obsession with her virginity:
Duke. . . . Doctor Benedict, does your Arte speake truth?

Art sure the soporiferous streame will ebbe,
And leaue the Christall banks of her white body
(Pure as they were at first) iust at the houre?
(I.iii.5-9)

The Duke regularly describes Infelice as a symbol of purity. That his perception of Infelice is based on stereotypical notions of feminine beauty is further suggested by his response to Hippolito's disbelief in Infelice's death, a response uttered in staid Petrarchan conceits:

... If to behold
Those roses withered, that set out her cheekes:
That paire of starres that gaue her body light,
Darkened and dim for euer: All those riuers
That fed her veines with warme and crimson streames,
Froxen and dried vp: If these be signes of death,
Then she is dead.
(I.ii.22-28)

The idealization of Infelice's purity culminates in scene iii in a cluster of imagery revealing the father's desire that his daughter deny sexuality and fertility altogether:

A coach is ready, Bergamo doth stand
In a most wholesome aire, sweete walkes, theres diere,
I, thou shalt hunt and send vs venison,
Which like some goddesse in the Ciprian groues,
Thine owne faire hand shall strike; sirs, you shall teach her
To stand, and how to shoote, I, she shall hunt . . . .
(I.iii.75-80)

By dispatching Infelice to a "most wholesome aire" where she is to emulate the cold and virginal Goddess Diana, Trebatzi
reveals his fantasy of a sexless Infelice, a fantasy that lies behind his political rationalization for preventing a marriage of choice.

The tragic perspective, however, is obscured in scene iii by the narrative trick which allows the spectator to know Infelice's death is only a pretense, so that Hippolito can rescue the fair maiden in Act five, thereby securing a comic ending. The tragic tone is also eroded by the broad humor in scene ii, set in the linendraper's house, where Viola and Fustigo arrange their plan to bait Candido, a scene interposed between Infelice's funeral and our discovery that the funeral is only a trick. The romance plot itself, however, continues to vacillate awkwardly between a vaguely tragic and satirical tone, marking the absence of carefully controlled counterpoint.

Hippolito, the hero of the romance and morality plots, is a character fragmented by Dekker's disparate dramatic impulses. Hippolito, who does not learn of the Duke's trick until the end of Act four, is at once presented as a quasi-tragic hero and satirized as a mad lover before being upheld as a whore-rescuer. Ironically, Hippolito is unable to perceive Infelice as a flesh-and-blood woman, and his idealization of her approaches the Duke's distorted perceptions. Trebatzi's mock paean with its stale conceits (I.ii.22-28) shares verbal similarities with Hippolito's stylized lamentation for Infelice whom he presumes dead:
Hippolito's traditional catalogue of his lady's perfections, reinforced by an elegant anaphora, reduces Infelice to an aesthetic object. The objectification of the beloved through a stylized conceit recalls Trebatzi's grammatical idiosyncracies as when, for example, the Duke resorts to the pronoun "it" in reference to Infelice upon her awakening: "Oh ho, it speaks, / It speaks" (I.iii.17-18). More significantly, perhaps, Hippolito's grief over the beloved's death is articulated in language reminiscent of tragedies of blood: there are striking verbal correspondences, for instance, between Hippolito's cynical attitude toward the decorum surrounding death,

What fooles are men to build a garish tombe,  
Onely to saue the carcasse whilst it rots,  
To maintein't long in stincking, make good carion,  
(IV.i.71-73)

followed by his observation that the corpse's "colours / In time kissing but ayre, will be kist off" (II. 79-80), and Hamlet's use of similar imagery in his meditations on death. Hippolito's apostrophe to the skull also bears similarity to Vindice's worship of his beloved's skull in The Revenger's Tragedy. Infelice's death induces in
Hippolito an ascetic denial corresponding to the contempt of
the body and of the world prevalent in both Jacobean tragedy
and satirical drama:

> Hip. If henceforth this adulterous bawdy world
> Be got with childe with treason, sacrilege,
> Atheisme, rapes, treacherous friendship,
> perjurie,
> Slander, (the beggars sinne), lies, (sinne of
> fooles)
> Or anie other damned impieties,
> . . . let em be deliuered . . .
> (I.i.115-120)

The imagery harbors a distortion of the body and of the
world, which hovers between the ideal and the grotesque.

The count's pledge to meditate "On nothing but my
Infelice's end" (I.i.126) and to love no woman "Saue her
thats dead" (I. 133) is a product of affected grief,
affected because it is not borne out by a deep emotional
interaction with the beloved. The excessive grief
essentially reveals a mental imbalance: Hippolito, observes
a courtier, "betraies his youth too grosly to that tyrant
melancholy" (II.i.204), a disorder acknowledged by Hippolito
himself when he notes the appropriateness of an asylum for
the insane as the location of his wedding:

> Hip. At Bethlem monasterie: the place well fits,
> It is the scoole where those that lose their
> wits,
> Practise againe to get them: I am sicke
> Of that disease, all loue is lunaticke.
> (IV.v.101-104)

Dekker portrays Hippolito's melancholy as an effect of a
false apprehension of love, which is amplified by a distorted view of the world. The condition is grounded in the Renaissance theory of melancholy as sometimes rooted in excessive sorrow: "A great sorrow," writes Lawrence Babb, "because it engenders the melancholy humor, leads to lethargic misery." Hippolito thus only ostensibly displays the order and integrity which the Duke should represent.

The pathological syndrome expressed in the Duke-Hippolito action is Dekker's attempt to capture a complex and contradictory world, a "world vpside downe" (IV.iii.63) where order and reason have been displaced by madness. The syndrome, however, is not sustained in a pattern of action which provides the assurance of either tragedy or satire. The potentially dynamic configuration between the two characters is obscured by the melodramatic order of the plot impelling the clandestine marriage of Hippolito and Infelice, and by the intrusion of homiletic impulses. At the same time that Hippolito's grief is revealed as pathological, the count's success in reforming Bellafront represents the play's central didactic episode.

Critics who see The Honest Whore, I essentially as a critique of prostitution rightly point to Hippolito's conversion of Bellafront as evidence of the play's homiletic pattern of "sin, discovery, [and] repentance." Harry Keyishian, who finds the conversion scene grossly sentimental, claims that in the success of "the earnest,
rational, puritanical Hippolito" who "not only resists temptation but converts his tempter . . . Dekker gives victory to traditional morality." This view is based on Hardin Craig's original explanation of Hippolito's diatribe against prostitution in II.i as based on Renaissance forensic practice. According to Craig, Bellafront's abrupt reformation attests to Dekker's formalization of the use of rhetoric and psychology in that the play upholds "the belief that persuasion, the truth having once been put home in the mind of the hearer, is absolutely compelling and irresistible"; Hippolito induces remorse in Bellafront "by presenting to her a true picture of her trade, and her conversion follows as matter of necessity." Craig, however, claims Dekker's use of forensic oratory is naive, while Michael Manheim suggests "considerable sophistication in its use." The confusion over Dekker's manipulation of forensic oratory, I believe, results from overlooking the contradictory messages the spectator receives in the conversion scene. While forensic oratory depends for its effects upon the application of reason to suggestion and disputation, we shall see that Hippolito's diatribe is presented as the product of intense emotion rather than logic, and that rhetoric throughout the scene is as much an effect of a disturbed mind as it is "a series of conventional figures presented with great vigor." In the scene we observe Dekker struggling to forestall the sentimental effect of Bellafront's sudden conversion by
persisting in the ironic portrait of Hippolito. The attempt, however, results in further dramatic incongruity whereby heavy-handed moralizing clashes oddly with the presentation of irrational behavior. The incongruity is striking, and can be appreciated only in the context of the entire scene in which the conversion occurs.

The scene opens with Hippolito willingly accompanying Matheo to Bellafront's "house of vanity" (II.ii.178). Upon his introduction to the courtesan the count becomes inexplicably nervous and distracted:

Bell. Pray sit forsooth. 
**Hipp.** I'm hot. 
If I may use your roome, ile rather walke. 
Bell. At your best pleasure--whew--some rubbers there."

(II.i.242-245)

If Dekker wished us to view the would-be-virtuous count as someone in complete control of his faculties, it is unlikely he would have led up to Bellafront's conversion by showing Hippolito in a hot distemper. In both Medieval and Renaissance physiology, to be hot meant to have an "intensity of feeling" aroused either by anger or sexual desire (O.E.D.); the sensation of heat, if caused by humoral imbalance, was also considered a symptom of madness. As the scene progresses Hippolito's distemper shows signs of all three symptoms. Refusing Bellafront's offer of towels, Hippolito engages the courtesan in awkward conversation. He begins by revealing considerable interest in Bellafront's
relationship with the gamester Matheo, who ironically is the count's best friend. Upon learning that Matheo is a frequent guest at Bellafront's house, Hippolito ardently flirts and pleads with the courtesan, leading her to believe he desires her:

_Hip._ . . . would you let me play Matheos part?
_Bell._ What part?
_Hip._ Why imbrace you: dally with you, kisse:
_Faith._ tell me, wull you leaue him, and loue me?

(11. 255-258)

From the point of view of dramatic coherence there is no reason for Hippolito to entice Bellafront since both he and the spectator already know she is a whore. The vignette is therefore ironic in that we are invited to view Hippolito's declamation as a defense against his own lust. As Hippolito's discomfort increases, his speeches become increasingly hyperbolic. Upon hearing that Bellafront is "in bondes to no man" (1. 259) he pleads his case like a possessive suitor:

_Hip._ Why then
   Y'are free for any man: if any, me.
   But I must tell you Lady, were you mine,
   You should be all mine: I could brooke no sharers,
   I should be couetous, and sweepe vp all.
   I should be pleasures vsurer: faith I should.

(11. 259-263)

The rhetorical bravura overwhelms Bellafront, who is led to believe her romantic notions have been fulfilled:
Bell. O fate!
Hip. Why sigh you Lady? may I knowe?
Bell. T'has neuer bin my fortune yet to single
Out that one man, whose loue could fellow mine,
As I haue euer wisht it: o my Stars!
(11. 263-267)

Suspecting Bellafront's sincerity, Hippolito begins to inveigh against her, accusing her of tempting him with her "Art" and comparing himself with an innocent child:

Hip. This were well now, to one but newly fledg'd
And scarce a day old in this suttle world:
Twere prettie Art, good bird-lime:
cunning net:
But come, come, faith--confesse: how many men
Haue drunke this self-same protestation,
From that red tycing lip?
Bell. Indeed not any.
Hip. Indeed? and blush not!
Bell. No, in truth not any.
(11. 276-285)

The delay in Bellafront's conversion is psychologically coherent in that it stems from the alternations in the count's tormented mind rather than from a recognition of moral transgression arrived at through a logical thought process. Although at the close of the forthcoming diatribe Hippolito will wish that "all the Harlots in the towne had heard me" (1. 426), his sermon has a particular target: throughout the scene he remains obsessed with Bellafront's feelings for other men, especially his friend Matheo. Forensic oratory is further undermined by the qualification that Hippolito's arguments are often in the form of false
syllogisms, as in his attempt to prove that "Our sins by custome, seeme (at last) but small" (l. 295) by informing Bellafront that he has "seene letters sent from that white hand, / Tuning such musicke to Matheos eare" (ll. 295-296). The obsession with Matheo obscures the theological premise. To Bellafront's reassurance that "mine eyes no sooner met you, / But they conueid and lead you to my heart" (ll. 301-302), Hippolito responds by couching his passion in grotesque images of voluptuousness and disease:

Oh, you cannot faine with me, why, I know Lady, This is the common fashion of you all, To hooke in a kind gentleman, and then Abuse his coyne, conueying it to your louer, And in the end you shew him a french trick, And so you leaue him, that a coach may run Betweene his legs for breth.

(ll. 303-309)

The count's sanctimoniousness begins to reveal itself in the fantasy of himself as the "kind gentleman" who is left pox-ridden by a pernicious whore. The image, however, startles Bellafront who vows to be faithful to the count, convinced that he is testing her love:

Bell. O by my soule! Not I: therein ile porue an honest whore, In being true to one, and to no more.

(ll. 310-312)

The irony of the scene is enhanced by the suggestion that Bellafront's conversion to the virtuous life is incited by her erotic attraction to her reformer.
Determined to distrust Bellafront's oath, Hippolito proceeds to "teach" her "how to loath" herself (1. 316). In a fine touch of dramatic irony, Hippolito sets out to persuade Bellafront "mildly" and "not without sense or reason" (1. 316); his sermon, however, is characterized by the absence of logic and the predominance of emotion. His vision is the traditional Christian ascetic morality expressed with a new violence and with a new particularity. The prostitute's body is compared to a sewer that "receiues / All the townes filth" (11. 325-326) and to a plague that "maym'd and dismembred" as many men "As would ha stuft an Hospital" (11. 332-333). The images of excrement and mutilation evoke complementary allusions to anal intercourse and disease:26

A harlot is like Dunkirke, true to none,  
Swallowes both English, Spanish, fulsome Dutch  
Back-door'd Italian, last of all the French,  
And he sticks to you faith: giues you your diet,  
Brings you acquainted, first with monsier Doctor,  
And then you know what followes.  
(11. 354-359)

Hippolito's language debases and degrades its object, and achieves a particular vehemence through recurring bestial imagery:

Methinks a toad is happier than a whore,  
That with one poison swells, with thousands more  
The other stocks her veines . . . .  
(11. 360-363)
O y'are as base as any beast that beares,  
Your body is ee'ne hirde, and so are theirs.  
(11. 335-336)

Like Beares and Apes, y'are bayted and shew tricks  
For money; but your Bawd the sweetnesse licks.  
(11. 369-370)

The overstrained metaphor and similes strip the prostitute  
of her humanity. In so doing they underscore her  
detractor's emotional decadence, and help to explain the  
lifelessness of his vision of Infelice.

Dekker's ambiguous use of forensic oratory in the  
conversion scene suggests his uneasiness with pure rhetoric  
as an effective tool for influencing behavior. The  
diminished power of rhetoric in II.i. is consistent with  
recent critical evidence of Dekker's use of rhetoric in his  
pamphlet literature.27 The prose pamphlets reveal Dekker's  
sustained regard for Ramian logic and method, a system that  
views logic as the only "art which asserts truth": opinion  
and the art of persuasion, on the other hand, "belong to  
rhetoric and are merely decorative and ornamental."28  
Rhetoric, according to a sixteenth-century logician, is the  
"arte of speaking finely,"29 and can be employed only after  
a premise has been logically proved: in the Ramian system  
logic "appeals to reason, rhetoric to the emotions . . .  
logic is for reasoning, rhetoric for embellishing."30  
Similarly, Bacon observes the "duty and office of rhetoric,  
is to apply Reason and Imagination for the better moving of
the will." The absence of reason in Hippolito's diatribe prevents us from receiving the sermon as an effective piece of moralizing; however, the questionable motives and methods of Bellafront's reformer are obscured by the subsequent melodramatic portrait of Bellafront's persistence in her reformation.

In the conversion scene itself, Bellafront is a stylized character. Her "shift in the scope of a single scene," observes Larry Champion, from a practising whore, "bandying words of the trade with her servant Roger and with several of her best customers, to a repentant ('honest') whore replete with sermonettes, tears, and a dagger with which to end her shame is indeed so shockingly sudden as to be comic . . . ." However, once Bellafront has been drawn as a comically stylized character, Dekker follows up her conversion with three scenes (III.ii; III.iii; IV.i) which highlight her rectitude. Hippolito does not end his sermon with Christian forgiveness of Bellafront's sins; instead he leaves her despairing over his cruelty and disdain (II.i.448-456). Resolute in her conversion, Bellafront thereupon is flouted successively by her former pimp and Mistress Fingerlock, by her former customers, who are highly skeptical of her conversion, by Matheo, her original seducer, who is shocked at her proposal that they marry to preserve her virtue: "How, marry with a Punck, a Cockatrice, a Harlot? mary / foh, Ile be burnt thorow the nose first" (III.iii.116-117), and by Hippolito, who mocks her offer of
love. After Hippolito's final rejection of her in Act four, Bellafront announces her intention to leave the city in order to ask her father's forgiveness for her profligate life. Instead, she turns up at Bethlem hospital, still pursuing Hippolito amid the lunatics until she is reconciled with Matheo in marriage. Our perspective on the character thus constantly shifts so that emotional involvement with the courtesan's situation is never attained. Bellafront's conversion and repentance, moreover, are only marginally rewarded through marriage. Bellafront and Matheo do not marry for emotional fulfillment but to satisfy their moral obligation to one another:

Bellafront is eager to satisfy an orthodox morality by marrying her original seducer, and although she cannot be happy with her choice, she makes the best of a bad situation. The resolution is therefore surprising, for while Dekker has manipulated the plot in order to ensure a melodramatic ending, complex characterization at this point severely undercuts the sentimentalism of the marriage code.
The marriage between Bellafront and Matheo receives only minimal attention; for a fuller treatment of the marriage theme we must look to the Candido plot. A weak thread linking the Candido action with the morality plot is the taming of the "waspish" (I.i.141) Viola by Candido's patience, an accomplishment that reverses the resolution of the Matheo-Bellafront action whereby Matheo is subdued enough to marry the reformed whore. Like the Bellafront plot, the Candido action sustains an overt homiletic design: Candido, who is constantly ridiculed for his patience, undergoes a series of tests that culminate in his wrongful incarceration in Bethlem hospital. After his ordeal, Candido emerges a model of virtue for his entire community, a male version of Patient Grissill. The linendraper's patience is generally viewed as Dekker's code of exemplary behavior in a husband and tradesman, a code that contrasts with the spiritual and social dissolution represented by the world of panders and bawds in the Bellafront plot.\(^{33}\) The view of Candido as Dekker's ideal husband and merchant is based in part on the linendraper's encomium on patience at the end of the play (V.ii.488-509) which receives high praise from the Duke. In the resolution Dekker was eager to satisfy the popular audience for whom he was writing;\(^{34}\) in the Candido scenes themselves, however, we shall see that Dekker undermines popular moralizing through irony and satire.

From the outset the banality of Candido's trials, rather than revealing the struggles of the soul against the
enemies of virtue, exposes the merchant as a comic butt. Candido's patient resolve in the face of adversity does not result from his intoxication with virtue but from an obsession with wealth and reputation, and the linendraper is as much a tight-fisted merchant as he is a model of stoicism:

\[
\text{Fustigo. Troth sister I heard you were married to a verie riche chuffe, [that is, miser]. . . . (I.ii.30)}
\]

His miserliness, together with his absurd behavior, suggest Candido is less wholesome than he appears. From the outset Candido's patience is linked with his sharp business sense. The linendraper's understanding and practice of the virtue he embodies is so limited to its application to the business of selling linen that before the resolution it is virtually impossible to differentiate between Candido the successful merchant and Candido the patient man. During the first test Candido eagerly complies with the gullers' request of a "pennyworth of lawne" cut from the centre of a seventeen-yard piece (I.v.63-68). Viola's incredulous remark, "What will he spoile the Lawne now?" (1. 87), is calmly reproached by Candido in his reply, "Patience, good wife" (1. 88). His rationale for patience is that by allowing one customer to get away "We get by many" (1. 123); "Deny a pennorth," he warns his wife, "it may crosse a pound" (1. 126). Candido's supplication of his customers underscores his opportunism:
'Pray Gentlemen take ... [Viola] to be a woman
Do not regard her language.--O kinde soule:
Such words will driue away my customers.
(I.v.92-95)

Unruffled even by his journeyman's warning that these customers are "some cheating companions" (I.98), Candido implores the courtiers to bring him further business: "I haue your mony heare; pray know my shop, / Praye let me haue your custome / ... Let me take more of your money" (ll. 100-103). The scene builds in such a way that it emphasizes Candido's primitive understanding of Patience rather than his exemplary behavior. The linendraper's "quiet sufference" (I.v.218) is undercut by the virtue's reductio ad absurdum in Candido's motto, "he that meanes to thriue, with patient eye / Must please the diuell, if he come to buy" (I.v.127-128). In pleasing "all customers, / Their humours and their fancies" (ll. 121-122) one finds the way to wealth.

Candido's selfish ends make him susceptible to deceit. In his study of deception as a common motif of Elizabethan comedy, John Curry observes that the degree of susceptibility to deception depends on the extent of the victim's intelligence:

At the lowest level lie the fatuous and the lumpish; then come those who are not stupid but who, because of lack of education and culture, are ignorant and superstitious; above these are victims who, while not entirely stupid or ignorant, are egoistic or self-deceived with respect to some particular phase of their own character or powers; we find next some who are not
justly classified with any of the above groups, but are shown as unwary and overtrusting; and finally there are those who are rather cunning and deceitful and quite experienced.  

Candido's opportunism excludes him from Curry's third category of blind trust; his vulnerability to deception is an effect of self-deception linked to a weak understanding. As the testing progresses, Candido's obsession with money becomes increasingly distasteful and his limited understanding becomes more dramatically focussed. The tests culminate in Act four where the word "mad" permeates the dialogue. Viola, who has been unsuccessful in inciting her husband's passion, has locked away his senate gown, which he has patiently substituted with a fine table cover cut through the middle so that it may fit over his head. Exasperated with Candido's resolve, Viola cries out in disbelief:

Grit about him like a mad-man: what: has he lost his cloake too: this is the maddest fashion that ere I saw.  

(IV.iii.29-30)

Viola's waspish pronouncement that her husband is mad would be less convincing were it not for the fact that Candido's ludicrous garb is unnecessary. Candido has himself admitted he could have attended the senate meeting without the silly table cover had he been willing to pay a higher fine:

Out of two euils hee's accounted wise,  
That can picke out the least; the Fine imposde
For an vn-gowned Senator, is about Forty Cruzadoes, the Carpet [table cover] not 'boue foure. Thus haue I choosen the lesser euill yet, Preseru'd my patience . . . . (III.i.202-207)

The linendraper's boast that his patience has been sustained through his wise choice of a minor evil exposes his feeble understanding of the very concepts he addresses, namely, wisdom and evil. Wisdom, according to the mercantile ethic, is not the spiritual capacity of judging rightly in matters pertaining to moral conduct or soundness of judgment which, according to a Tudor homily, "can not be atteyned, but by the direction of the spirit of God"; instead, it is sound sense in practical affairs. Evil, by the same token, is anything that disrupts those affairs.

Candido's behavior, while overtly upheld as a model of stoic virtue, is also a trenchant portrait of self-indulgence. Candido's inability to distinguish between spiritual and mercantile values crystallizes Dekker's cynicism toward the merchant code. If Candido furthers stability and order, he does so by embracing a system of questionable values, so that his exemplification of patience is severely undermined by his portrayal as a self-satisfied tradesman. The ambiguity partially forestalls any sentimental effect by calling into question Candido's understanding, and by exposing the effects of a money economy on the character. The ironic admixtures of the Candido plot are directed at the stock homiletic paradigms

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and melodramatic tone that inform domestic comedy: we note in the presentation of Dekker's patient "madman" the impulse Northrop Frye ascribes to "ironic comedy," that is, a "tendency ... to ridicule and scold an audience assumed to be hankering after sentiment, solemnity, and the triumph of fidelity and approved moral standards." Dekker's bold satirical portrait of a tradesman is perhaps his major accomplishment in The Honest Whore, I. But just as in the romance and morality plots our perspective is blurred by the clash between satire and heavy-handed moralizing, Dekker's insistence upon solemn parable detracts from the irony in the Candido episodes. This is particularly evident during the linendraper's tests, in which the clash between Dekker's cynicism and his obeisance to audience expectation once again reveals itself.

Dekker's struggle to capture the tension between psychological and ethical structures in the presentation of character is most explicit in those episodes involving Viola's shrewishness, where we are led to infer that Candido's marital problems are the result of sexual dissatisfaction. In an early exchange between Viola and her brother Fustigo, Candido's sexual impotence is intimated. Viola's "strange / longing" (I.ii.81-82) to make her husband "horne mad" (I. 91) is not entirely whimsical; rather, it is partly a manifestation of sexual frustration. Viola complains, for instance, that while she lacks none of the material comforts a citizen's wife may desire, her husband
"haz not all things / belonging to a man" (11. 58-59). Responding to the sexual innuendo, Fustigo proceeds to belittle his brother-in-law through an explicitly sexual metaphor: "Gods my life, hee's a verie mandrake, or else (God blesse vs) / one a these whiblins" (11. 60-61), a "whiblin" being an "impotent creature; a term of contempt."40 That Viola commissions Fustigo to play her lover in order to dupe her husband into believing he is being cuckolded points to Dekker's clever manipulation of a stock situation in domestic comedy that requires the patient wife to be pursued by a lusty youth, whose advances she piously scorns. Dekker comes close to making the wife adulterous, a complication for which he has already implied a credible motivation, that is, sexual longing. But by having Viola's brother pose as the lover, the complication is averted. The trick in all likelihood represents Dekker's compliance with the general rule of decorum in the public theatres never to play a comedy of adultery. In comedies performed on the public stage, observes Harbage, "A number of wives are a trial to their husbands, . . . but they are not unfaithful."41 Dekker, moreover, immediately buries the reference to Candido's impotence in Viola's confession that she loves her husband "most affectionately" (1. 80) despite his faults. We hear no more of sexual frustration, and in the resolution Dekker clarifies the issue by insisting Candido's marital difficulties are the effect rather than the cause of Viola's shrewishness:
"In thinking about Candido," writes Peter Ure, "it seems necessary to keep in mind both the transforming power of his ethic--its capacity to change lives--and also the role of the dramatic character in what is advertised as a comedy of 'the humours of the patient man.'" Yet despite Ure's insistence that in the portrait of Candido's humor Dekker's treatment of Patience is an original one, a potentially complex set of ambiguities dissolves into striking inconsistencies. Although it is possible to concede that while "Candido remains true to his humour . . . unruly, violent stage-fun proceeds even from the triumph of the peculiar virtue to which he is so humourously true," the equation between virtue and humor is inherently illogical. Ure himself is forced to admit that a humor "is not normally a virtue" in Jacobean satirical drama, where humor comedy "achieves its effect by repetition, by a continuous reversal of the victim's expectations." A humorous character's dramatic function is to be obsessed by his humor. The linendraper, as a character whose humor is to want quiet and order, meets with perpetual discord. But to practise patience in the face of cruelty and ridicule does not mean one is overwhelmed by a humor; it suggests one is persisting in Christian steadfastness. The dramatic incongruity
It has been suggested that thematic unity in the play might consist of the ways in which the Candido plot opposes the Bellafront action. R.J. Palumbo argues for a "thematic contrast between Candido and Bellafront" on the basis that Candido's role as ideal tradesman enhances the social order while Bellafront's "function--prostitute--is part of a custom that brings social disorder."46 Because the contrast is dramatically conspicuous, it obscures the ironic correspondences between the two plots. Both Candido and Bellafront, for instance, ply a trade, and both consider human interaction in terms of how it furthers their economic ends. The prostitute's trade is similar to the merchant's in that Bellafront must comply with the sexual demands of her customers, and in order to prosper would please the devil himself "Could the dieul put on humane shape" (II.i.341), just as Candido would "please the dieull, if he come to buy" (I.v.128). The scene following Candido's sale of a "pennyworth of lawne" introduces Bellafront who is described by a courtier in terms of linen: "A skin, your satten is not more soft, nor lawne whiter" (II.i.172). The verbal parallels create a tentative ironic configuration linking the sale of cloth with the sale of flesh, a qualification that undermines Candido's virtue.
Thematic unity between the play's separate lines of action is more carefully worked out in the context of the general deterioration of domestic life captured in the portrayal of the domus as the seat of conflict and dissatisfaction. We have seen that in domestic drama the domus clarifies the quality of life of its occupants. In domestic comedy, the desire for an upstanding household often deflects from the adversity the heroine experiences at the hands of a cruel husband. In How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad the ill-treated Mistress Arthur is eager to maintain an elegant and efficiently-run household despite her husband's refractory behavior. As she prepares for a dinner party, her chief worries are that her "guests will come / Ere we be ready," and that a servant "cannot keep his fingers from the roast."47 Mistress Arthur busily prepares for her company by gently admonishing her servants when they are cheeky, and praising them when they behave—"There was a curtsy! let me see't again; / Ay, that was well" (Scene III, p. 54). The house becomes the wife's chief source of pleasure, and its appearance diminishes the emotional upheaval in her marriage:

MRS ART. Come, spread the table; is the hall well-rubb'd?
The cushions in the windows neatly laid?
The cupboard of plate set out? the casements stuck
With rosemary and flowers? the carpets brush'd?
MAID. Ay, forsooth, mistress.
MRS ART. Look to the kitchen-maid, and bid the cook take down the oven-stone, lest the pies be burned . . . .
MAID. Yes, forsooth, mistress.
MRS ART. Where's that knave Pipkin? bid him spread the cloth.
Fetch the clean diaper napkins from my chest,
Set out the gilded salt, and bid the fellow
Make himself handsome, get him a clean band.

(Scene III, p. 54)

Open-handed hospitality, like Mistress Arthur's, shown to friends and family or to casual passers-by is a common motif in domestic drama. Its symbolic function is the preservation of one's moral refinement through the display of good will. Through hospitality, the household maintains its status in the community. In Patient Grissil we saw that Janicola's caritas is manifested in his eagerness to be hospitable despite his poverty:

... though I am poore
My loue shall not be so: goe daughter Grissill,
Fetch water from the spring to seeth our fish,
... the sheare is meane,
But be content, when I haue solde these Baskets,
The monie shall be spent to bid thee [Laureo] welcome ....

(I.ii.151-157)

The home of Candido, on the other hand, is tainted by the merchant's obsession with wealth. Fustigo's cynical question to Viola's Porter--"art / sure thou wentst into a true house?" (I.ii.10-11) --alerts us to the ambiguity surrounding Candido's domestic life. The guests who visit the house do so for the purpose either of duping Candido or taking his money; at the same time, Candido extends invitations only to those who might aid his economic advancement. We hear, for example, that the linendraper has
"vpon a time inuited / home to his house certaine
Neapolitane lords of curious taste, / and no meane pallats"
(I.v.25-27), but we never see his hospitality extended to the
less fortunate. After selling the "pennyworth of lawne"
Candido invites the courtiers to dine with him (I.v.230-231),
but his determination to deny nothing even to the devil
himself for the sake of a profit undermines his hospitality.

Immediately following Candido's invitation of the
courtiers we are introduced to Bellafront seated at her
make-up table preparing for the evening's entertainment. The
scene depicts a mock ritual of household activity as the
courtesan and her servant-pimp Roger make ready to receive
their "guests":

Bell. Wheres my ruffe and poker you block-head?
Rog. Your ruffe, and your poker, are ingendring
together vpon
the cup-bord of the Court, or the Court-cup-bord.
Bell. Fetch'em: Is the poxe in your hammes, you
can goe no faster?

. . . . . . . . . . .
Rog. Thers your ruffe, shall I poke it?
Bell. Yes honest Roger, no stay: pry thee good
boy, hold here,
    Downe, downe, downe, downe, I fall downe, and
    arise I neuer shall.
Rog. Troth Mistris then leaue the trade if you
    shall neuer rise.

. . . . . . . . . . .
Bell. Vds life, Ile sticke my knife in your Guts
    and you prate to me so . . .

. . . . . . . . . . .
Pox on you, how doest thou hold my glasse?
Rog. Why, as I hold your doore: with my fingers.

. . . . . . . . . . .
Bell. Gods my pittikins, some foole or other
    knocks.
Rog. Shall I open to the foole mistresse?
Bell. And all these bables lying thus? away with it quickly, I, I, knock and be dambde, whosoeuer you be. So: giue the fresh Salmon lyne now: let him come a shoare, hee shall serue for my breakefast, tho he goe against my stomack. (II.i.15-56)

The exchange between Bellafront and Roger lacks the sentiment that marks the dialogue between Mistress Arthur and her lacklustre servants. Roger's rebelliousness is not mechanical but hypocritical; at the same time that he mocks his mistress's trade, her occupation furthers his own selfish ends. Like Candido, the courtesan entertains in order to meet her material needs; unlike Candido, Bellafront feels revulsion against her trade and against the "guests" upon whom she depends for her livelihood. The domus is no longer a fixed point of virtue and stability; it has become a bawdy house.

The homes of Bellafront and Candido are never contrasted with an idealized setting like the Janicola household or the home of Mistress Arthur. In the Duke-Hippolito plot the convention of receiving guests into a decorous home amid a comfortable domesticity is recast in a grotesque configuration amid mundane images of everyday life. Matheo, wanting to humor Hippolito who believes Infelice has been killed by her father, makes a series of disturbing associations between daily routine and death:
Math. ... is it in your stomacke to goe to
dinner?
Hip. Where is the body?
Math. The body ... is gone to be
wormed.
Hip. I cannot reste, ile meete it at next turne,
.......
What day is to day, Matheo?
Math. ... this is an easie question: why today
is, let me
see, thursday.
Hip. Oh, thursday.
.....
She died on monday then.
Math. And thats the most villainous day of all the
weeke to die
in: and she was wel, and eate a messe of water-
grewel on monday
morning.

(I.i.64-94)

The necessities of everyday life, such as the concern with
time and the observation of daily routines, are colorfully
juxtaposed by Matheo with the impermanence of the temporal
world. Hippolito responds in kind with a grotesque
distortion of the cult of hospitality:

Hip. On thursday buried! and on monday died,
Quicke haste birlady: sure her winding sheete
Was laide out fore her bodie, and the wormes
That now must feast with her, were even bespoke,
And solemnly inuited like strange guests.
Math. Strange feeders they are indeede my lord,
and like your
easter or yong Courtier, will enter vpon any
mans trencher without bidding.

(I.i.101-108)

Hippolito's macabre imagery vitiates the familiar activity
of entertaining visitors by reducing it to a feast of death—a
banquet of vermiculation—to which the awesome "guests" have
been engaged beforehand through "solemne" or ceremonious
invitation, while Matheo's personification of vermin as a parasitic guest—such as a jester or courtier—extends the configuration to the entire social spectrum.

The alliance between household and shop, and between household and brothel, together with the dissolution of the cult of domesticity expose a mutable and corrupt world. These configurations form an assault not only on the sanctity of the body, which underlies grotesque imagery in general, but also on the sanctity of domestic life. Moving rapidly from household to household the plots converge in Bethlem Monastery, a hospital for the insane ironically described as a "house" (V.ii.108) and wherein Bellafront is referred to as "huswife" (l. 300). All the couples are here reunited in marriage, a happy ending severely undermined by the setting. The couples solidify their marriage vows here because, as Matheo observes, "none goes to be married till he be starke mad" (l. 35). As a portrait of a world gone mad, however, the Bethlem scenes lose their satirical force during the resolution. The Duke, whose irrational behavior has heretofore been the source of so much misery, reappears in order to be purged of madness by the wisdom of Friar Anselmo so that he may be reconciled with his daughter and Hippolito. Beseeching Trebatzi to pardon those who tricked him into thinking Hippolito dead, Friar Anselmo initiates the melodramatic tone that undercuts the satire:
Praising the Friar's ability to "make madmen tame," (l. 388) the Duke announces he will "yeeld vnto" Hippolito and Infelice's "happiness, be blest / Our families shall henceforth breath in rest" (ll. 391-392). The Duke's transformation from madness to sanity has not come about as a result of inner development but as an effect of a melodramatic solution.

Once the Duke's madness has been subdued the final scene yields to the taming of Viola by Candido's patience. The exemplum of Patience contained in the final thirty lines, however, is presented amid contradictory and ambivalent messages. Just as in the analogues the action ends with the patient wife receiving with great humility praises for her fortitude, The Honest Whore, I ends with an encomium on Candido's patient endurance. But rather than assign the panegyric to another character, Dekker gives it to the linendraper himself, who in the course of praising his virtue makes a startling reference to himself as a Christ-figure:
Patience my Lord; why tis the soule of peace:  
Of all the vertues tis the neerest kin to heauen.  
It makes men looke like Gods; the best of men  
That ere wore earth about him, was a sufferer,  
A soft, meeke, patient, humble, tranquill spirit,  
The first true Gentleman that euer breathd; ....  
(V.ii.489-494)

Given Candido's obsession with mercantile values, his confusion of himself with "The first true Gentleman" is ironic. The clash between satirical and homiletic tones is borne out by the mock-heroic element in Candido's speech. Candido's grand, admirable, and exemplary panegyric in praise of Patience as "the sap" of spiritual "blisse" (1. 506) is dulled by its reductio ad absurdum as "the hunny gainst a waspish wife" (1. 509). The mock-heroic tone extends to the end of the play in the Duke's pronouncement that while a "calme spirit" such as Candido's "is worth a golden Mine" (1. 515), "Twere sinne all women should such husbands haue. / For every man must then be his wife's slaue" (11. 512-513). The polarity at the heart of the play between an overt homiletic design and the satirical exposure of an irrational world is thus never bridged.

A more carefully structured plot informs The Honest Whore, II, Dekker's unaided sequel, where the paradoxical nature of experience is captured within a more intricate and coherent comic vision.
Notes

1 George Price, Thomas Dekker, pp. 170-76.


3 Earlier in the century the play was considered anonymous, but scholars now generally attribute the authorship to Heywood; see Michel Grivelet, Thomas Heywood, pp. 166-74, and Andrew Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 249, n. 36.

4 Manheim, 365.

5 Larry Champion, "From Melodrama to Comedy: A Study of the Dramatic Perspective in Dekker's The Honest Whore, Parts I and II," Studies in Philology, 69 (1977), 194. Champion has been the first in recent years to reject the prevalent view of the Candido action as the subplot. In essence and in the amount of time it receives, the Candido plot is equivalent to the two other plots: the Candido scenes total 859 lines, compared with 669 lines given the Bellafront plot and 605 to the romance plot.


7 Peter Ure, "Patient Madman and Honest Whore: The Middleton-Dekker Oxymoron," Essays and Studies, NS 19 (1966), 26. Cf. Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p. 143, who claims Dekker's "long-suffering husband . . . is an absurd figure" although his absurdity is couched in "an aura" of idealized humility. More recently, Larry Champion has suggested that if the Candido action is not "played broadly, . . . the spectator would understandably begin to question not only Viola's motivation in her determination to infuriate her husband but also Candido's willingness to be mocked and bludgeoned in the name of patience which by any realistic standard smells either of cowardice or of stupidity" ("From Melodrama to Comedy," 195).

Harbage, p. 71.


Early criticism could not distinguish Middleton's part, prompting some to doubt whether his share went beyond "a few suggestions on the general groundwork of the play" [quoted in M.L. Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 95]. R.H. Shepherd in his edition, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Middleton (London, 1873), I, p. xxiii, found Middleton's contribution to be minimal, an opinion shared by A.H. Bullen, who, in his edition, The Works of Thomas Middleton (London: Bullen, 1885-1886), I, p. xxvii, claimed Middleton's role in The Honest Whore, I, was "inconsiderable." Samuel Schoenbaum, in "Middleton's Share in 'The Honest Whore, Parts I and II," N&Q, 197 (1952), 3, has also found Middleton's participation to be "negligible" on the grounds that because his name does not appear on the title-page his contribution must have been slight, otherwise Dekker, who in the same year (1604) had scrupulously acknowledged Middleton's single speech in Magnificent Entertainment, would have named Middleton as his collaborator. Cyrus Hoy, on the other hand, contends the omission indicates "either that the fact of a collaboration was not duly noted by the printer . . . or Middleton's name was omitted because his share in the play is not as great as Dekker's"; what is certain, according to Hoy, is that The Honest Whore, I, "is largely Dekker's" although the collaboration "was obviously very close" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker' Edited by Fredson Bowers, II, 10, n. 2). Hoy echoes other recent conjectures regarding Middleton's share. Peter Ure, for one, argues that Candido "the wonderful linendraper also has his likely counterparts in other Middleton plays" such as The Phoenix (ca. 1602) and Anything for a Quiet Life (1621), a point originally made by Hunt in 1911 (Thomas Dekker, p. 100). The evidence based on these analogies, however, is shaky given the uncertainty of the precise date of The Phoenix, and the fact that Anything for a Quiet Life was written much later than The Honest Whore, I. George Price, in Thomas Dekker, p. 60, also conjectures that Middleton's contribution consists "mainly of the shopkeeper scenes,"
although Middleton's collaboration is "unusually limited in number of lines." Another group of scholars, convinced that Middleton was a distressing influence on the drama of the time in general and on Dekker in particular, pointed to Middleton's fondness for presenting courtesans receiving their clients on stage, and claimed he influenced Dekker into doing the same in The Honest Whore, I (for a survey of the early commentary on Middleton's "negative" influence on Dekker see Cyrus Hoy, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 6-12). More recently, Ure has suggested "It may well have been Dekker who started courtesan-scenes, 'questionable' scenes in which courtesans are depicted . . . running their households" ("Patient Madman and Honest Whore," 19).


13 Rhodes, p. 77.


15 Parker, p. 179.


17 Hoy compares Hippolito's reference to "good carion" (1. 73) to Hamlet's "good kissing carrion" in II.ii.182, "where 'good,' the reading of Q2 and F1, is sometimes emended to 'god,'" and Hippolito's "these coulours . . . kist off" to Hamlet, V.i.191-192: "'O, that that earth which kept the world in awe / should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 51-52).

18 Hoy (p. 52) notes the parallel between Hippolito's "heres a fellow . . . alters not complexion" (11. 81-82) and Vindice's "Here's a cheek keeps her color, let the wind go whistle" (III.v.60).

19 Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951), p. 105. Michael MacDonald, in Mystical Bedlam, p. 154, observes that grief itself was not necessarily equated with "pathological sadness," a syndrome which was "unprovoked or far surpassed the normal ratio of 'grief' to gloom, of cause to effect . . . . Many instances of sadness had legitimate occasions in the
death of loved ones and were revealed to be the sign of melancholy delusion by their unusual intensity and duration."

20 G.N. Rao, *The Domestic Drama*, p. 44.


23 Craig, p. 258; Michael Manheim, "The Thematic Structure of Dekker's *2 Honest Whore*," 376, n. 10.

24 Manheim, 376.


26 "Back-door'd Italian" (l. 356): This is Alexander Dyce's original emendation in *The Works of Thomas Middleton* (London, 1840), which Cyrus Hoy accepts as correct, claiming that "Professor Bowers' emendation of Qq 'Blacke-door'd . . . is certainly wrong" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 37). Dyce's conjecture that "back-door'd" might mean "'sly'" or "'devious'" has, however, been discredited by Hoy on the basis of R.K. Turner's supposition in Notes & Queries, 205 (January 1960), 25-26, that "Dekker wrote 'Back-door'd,' . . . referring to anal intercourse," a supposition based on a citation from Marston's *The Insatiate Courtesan*, III.iii.29-31 (ed. H.H. Wood):

*Thais.* But you meane they shall come in at the back dores?
*Abig.* Who, our Husbands? nay, and they come not in the fore-dores, there will be no pleasure in't.

As further recent evidence, Hoy cites Richard Levin's argument in *Notes and Queries*, 208 (Sept. 1963), 338-40, supporting Turner's conjecture on the basis that "there are passages in other Jacobean plays," namely, Middleton's *Michaelmas Term and A Game at Chess*, and Middleton's or Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Nice Valor*, "which indicate that Englishmen of the time did believe the Italians were especially given to this particular perversion." Hoy puts forth "a considerable body of further evidence" drawn from the drama and prose of the period, evidence "which puts the
matter beyond any doubt" (p. 38). For a complete survey of the evidence supporting Turner's conjecture see Hoy, 37-40.


28 Schwartz, p. 38.

29 Dudley Fenner, The Arte of Logike and Rhetorike (Middleburg, 1584), sig. D1v; quoted in Schwartz, p. 38.

30 Schwartz, p. 38.


32 Larry Champion, "From Melodrama to Comedy," 198.


34 The Honest Whore, I was performed at the Fortune Theatre by Prince Henry's Men (Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 347).

35 The portrait of Candido reveals significant parallels with that of Simon Eyre, the tradesman-hero of The Shoemaker's Holiday. Joel Kaplan, in "Virtue's Holiday: Thomas Dekker and Simon Eyre," has observed that Eyre "is as much merchant as madcap," and that his "opportunism and madness are most often inseparable" (113). While in the early play Dekker created a character whose vitality obscures morally questionable behavior, in the Candido episodes of The Honest Whore, I the merchant's opportunism clashes with Dekker's idealization of the character, suggesting a growing cynicism on Dekker's part toward a world that is becoming thoroughly corrupted by madness.


37 Charlotte Spivack, in "Bedlam and Bridewell: Ironic Design in The Honest Whore," Komos, 3 (1973), 12, observes
that "Part I contains over twenty references to madness prior to the madhouse scene in the last act."

[38] Quoted in O.E.D.


[49] My analysis of the Bethlem scene is obviously at odds with George Price's statement that "Setting the denouement in Bedlam permits Dekker to entertain his audience with a show of madmen, which has but little relation to his drama" (Thomas Dekker, p. 63).
CHAPTER IV

THE HONEST WHORE, II

Part II of The Honest Whore belongs entirely to Dekker and could have been written as early as one year within the completion of Part I. It is impossible, of course, to determine why Dekker wrote the sequel. Some critics suggest he may have been "specifically commissioned to continue the story," and that it was only natural to seek "to repeat a successful formula." Another possibility is that Dekker may have been inspired by Shakespeare's Measure for Measure which bears striking similarities to The Honest Whore, II, but textual uncertainties have made it difficult to conclude which play was written first. A further supposition is that "the narrative possibilities haunted . . . [Dekker] as he considered the abrupt conclusion [of Part I] in which Bellafront . . . tricked Matheo for the sake of an honor which could hardly be regained in name only to the first of her many bed partners." While it is unlikely we will ever know what spurred Dekker to write Part II, the play achieves what Part I lacks—a firmly controlled plot structured around a central subject, the marriage code, supported by a complex ethical design.

The play's analogues are those domestic comedies from which The Honest Whore, I took its themes, although in Part
II the marriage code is brought into high relief. In Part I marital conflict was the subject of the Candido plot; at the conclusion of the play Bellafront and Matheo, like Infelice and Hippolito, had just been married and neither marriage had been realized. The Honest Whore, II focuses more consistently on the wife's behavior, the chief source of interest in most English domestic comedies of the time, particularly in relation to the husband's progression from prodigal to punished sinner to reformed man. As Peter Ure notes, the "ethical basis" of domestic plays of this kind is "the doctrine, reiterated everywhere in the treatises, that the wife should win her mate with mildness." In How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, the prototype of these comedies, Mistress Arthur, even after her husband's adultery, bigamy, and an attempt to murder her, pursues him with love and humility, qualities that in the end reclaim the profligate husband. A similar pattern informs The London Prodigal: Flowerdale, the young wastrel, is finally deserted by everyone except his loyal wife, Luce, whose patient suffering schematically opens the path to penitence and reformation. The Honest Whore, II shares with the analogues an explicit homiletic framework perceptible in the development of the patient-wife and prodigal-husband paradigms. The thoroughly reformed Bellafront is now the patient wife of the spendthrift Matheo, who has sunk from carefree swaggering to the depths of vulgarity and cruelty. In accordance with the homiletic formula Matheo squanders
everything, pawning even the gown from Bellafront's back. Although urged by Matheo to return to prostitution to earn money, Bellafront remains loyal to her marriage. She is rescued from economic destitution by the intervention of her aging father, just as the wives in the analogues are aided by benevolent authority-figures. To heighten Bellafront's trials Dekker replaces the lusty youth of the genre, who desires to marry the patient wife, with the married and middle-aged Hippolito, Bellafront's original reformer who is now obsessed with seducing her. The action of the main plot is complicated by Hippolito's dual function as Bellafront's tempter and as prodigal-husband to Infelice, whose patience is also tested by Hippolito's transgressions. Bellafront resists Hippolito's advances, and in the end the wives are reunited with their husbands. Bellafront's final words conform to the didactic formula requiring the wife's patience to be held up as exemplary: "women," she declares, "shall learne of me, / To loue their husbands in greatest misery" (V.ii.468-469).  

The Candido action, which in Part I functioned as a double plot with separate conflicts and resolutions, now functions as the subplot and serves "as a broadly comic parallel to the more complex issues of the main plot." Thematic correspondence between main plot and subplot is achieved in the extension of the marriage code to the Candido action in which the linendraper's patience and his taming of a shrewish bride form a comic reversal of the main
action, and in which Candido's humiliation in Bridewell parallels Bellafront's. At the conclusion of the linendraper's trials the Duke praises Candido's patience as a veritable "Patterne for a King" (V.ii.497).

Whereas in The Honest Whore, I satirical observation clashed with the homiletic design of the play, in Part II the ethical paradigms are modified by paradox, which replaces satire as the dominant rhetorical principle. The comedy builds on a series of ironies that dramatically enlarge or strikingly reverse commonplace structures and themes. In the Bellafront-Matheo action the tests of the patient wife become the trials of a converted prostitute struggling against economic deprivation. In the Infelice-Hippolito action marital conflict is only tentatively resolved, and whatever harmony is regained comes not through the wife's patience but through her lack of it. The quintessential homiletic pattern of sin, punishment, discovery and redemption dramatized in the prodigal-husband action is de-emphasized in that Hippolito's punishment for his transgression goes awry, and neither he nor Matheo is given the prodigal's stock public-apology speech for reprobate behavior. The subplot magnifies the essential ambiguities of the main plot by presenting incidents in such a way that they require absolute judgments, while exposing the shallowness of absolute moral prescriptions. The sustained tension between the homiletic superstructure and Dekker's sensitivity to paradox captures the vicissitude of
domestic life without the uneasiness of tone and the
startling dramatic incongruities that characterized The
Honest Whore, I.

I

The main plot of The Honest Whore, II focuses, as do
the play's analogues, on the plight of the wife, and does so
within two corresponding actions: both Infelice and
Bellafront are tested for their patience and for their
fidelity to their prodigal husbands, whose backsliding
necessitates interaction between the characters.

The play opens on Hippolito's and Infelice's active
household as the couple prepare to ride to court. Infelice
and Hippolito are no longer the remote young lovers of Part
I; they are now older and thoroughly familiar with one
another. Evoking an everyday domestic atmosphere, the
dialogue between Hippolito's friends and his footman reveals
that Infelice desires her husband's company, while the
footman's comic double-entendres resulting from his
mispronunciations sustain our interest during the expository
conversation:

Lodovico. How now, is thy Lord ready?
Bryan. No so crees sa mee, my Lady will haue
some little Tyng
in her pelly first.
Carolo. Oh, then they'le to breakefast.
Lod. Footman, does my Lord ride y' th Coach
with my Lady, or
on horsebacke?
Infelice is no longer the retiring maiden she was in Part I; she has acquired a considerable degree of assertiveness and is not acted upon by anyone. In the opening vignette of household life Dekker, through Infelice's actions, introduces the theme of patience which he develops with sustained irony. Infelice's and Hippolito's departure is interrupted by Bellafront who has come to petition Hippolito to intercede in Matheo's impending execution for killing someone during a brawl. It is not clear whether Bellafront's presence immediately arouses Hippolito's passion, but Hippolito stays to hear Bellafront's supplication and in so doing defies Infelice's wishes. The scene ends abruptly as Infelice, revealing an uncharacteristic lack of patience for a rebuked wife in a domestic comedy, rides away without her husband.

Dekker's manipulation of the patient-wife paradigm is especially sharp in the confrontation scene between husband and wife after Infelice has learned of Hippolito's passion for the former courtesan. Infelice's instinctual response is to greet Hippolito with derogatory epithets:

Inf. Are you so close, you Bawd, you pandring slaue?

Hip. How now, why Infelice? what's your quarrell?

Inf. Out of my sight, base varlet, get thee gone.

(III.i.101-103)
Once she regains her composure Infelice succeeds with the aid of reason and rhetorical virtuosity in exposing her husband's hypocrisy. Infelice's rhetorical weapon is the riddle, a type of metaphor which depends on "descriptive containment: the subject is not described but circumscribed, a circle of words drawn around it." In Infelice's riddle the central image is the clock, and Hippolito is gradually compelled to equate the absence of synchronism with discord in his marriage:

**Hip.** prethee what's the matter?  
**Inf.** If you'll needs must know, it was about the clocke:  
How workes the day, my Lord, (pray) by your watch?  
**Hip.** Lest you cuffe me, Ile tell you presently:  
I am neere two.  
**Inf.** How, two? I am scarce at one.  
**Hip.** One of vs then goes false.  
**Inf.** Then sure 'tis you,  
Mine goes by heavens Diall, (the Sunne) and it goes true.  
**Hip.** I thinke (indeed) mine runnes somewhat too fast.  
**Inf.** Set it to mine (at one) then.  
(III.i.107-115)

The riddle increases in complexity as Infelice exposes Hippolito's betrayal through an emblematic rendition of their conflict, bringing into high relief the balance between the refinement of her language and the depth and range of her emotions:

**Hip.** Y'are very pleasant, Madam.  
**Inf.** Yet not merry.  
**Hip.** Why, Infelice, what should make you sad?  
**Inf.** Nothing my Lord, but my false watch, pray tell me,
You see, my clocke, or yours is out of frame,
Must we vpon the Workeman lay the blame,
Or on our selues that keepe them?
(11. 119-125)

Puzzled by his wife's words, Hippolito attempts to subdue
her with amorous pleas:

I read
Strange Comments in those margines of your lookes:
Your cheekes of late are (like bad printed Bookes)
So dimly charactered, I can scarce spell,
One line of loue in them. . . .
(11. 127-131)

Infelice enhances her eloquence when she joins language with
gesture to achieve her desired effect. Admitting "All is
not well indeed, my dearest Lord" (1. 132) Infelice kneels,
pleading with Hippolito to "thinke me not thy wife" (1. 136)
as she shrewdly tells her false story about her love affair
with Hippolito's footman. Hippolito, believing the story,
becomes enraged and proceeds to inveigh against women's
infidelities (11. 157-180). When asked how Bryan seduced
her, Infelice shows Hippolito the letter and gifts he had
sent to Bellafront and responds with an eloquent parody of
his tirade, securing his admission of guilt:

Inf.
You were created Angels, pure and faire,
But since the first fell, worse then Deuils you are.
You should our shields be, but you proue our rods.
Were there no Men, Women might liue like gods.
Guilty my Lord?
Hip. Yes, guilty my good Lady.
(11. 186-192)
Shaken by Hippolito's sudden mocking tone, Infelice commands him from her:

Nay, you may laugh, but henceforth shun my bed,  
With no whores leauings Ile be poisoned.  

(11. 193-194)

Infelice's anger and self-assertion contrast sharply with the extreme humility normally expected from wives in domestic comedy. Her rhetorical skill is also anomalous; her eloquence is superior to her husband's, and she does not yield to his clever importunities.

The latitude Dekker allows Infelice is only partially attributable to verisimilitude with respect to class. Cinthio Giraldi, the sixteenth-century critic and playwright, observed that it was common theatrical practice for young ladies to be humble and timid, and matrons chaste and "solicitous"; no woman of humble birth should show special intelligence, but aristocratic women, who are "less constricted by household duties and more familiar with the world," may show more sagacity than their less sophisticated counterparts. Dekker's portrayal of female sagacity breaks completely with the general rule of decorum when he makes Bellafront, a former whore from the ranks of the Jacobean underworld, Infelice's equal in intellectual astuteness. Ironically, both women reveal their unyielding natures in their eloquent resistance to Hippolito, whose formal training in forensic oratory gives him a decided advantage in debate. In The Honest Whore, I Dekker subjected
Bellafront to a piece of oratory from Hippolito who turned her into a reformed prostitute; Bellafront's reformation, however, was accomplished amid contradictory messages. In Part II Hippolito's moral lassitude is no longer merely implied, for his hypocrisy is artfully exposed by Infelice and the former courtesan. Dekker initiates the Bellafront-Hippolito debate in Part II with Hippolito's invitation to Bellafront to be his mistress. A Jacobean audience familiar with the popular motif of the wife's temptation in domestic drama would perceive Hippolito's invitation as the prelude to one of two complications. If the play were a tragedy, the spectator would anticipate Bellafront's fall. Anne Frankford, the heroine of *A Woman Killed*, is a prototype of the fallen wife. Anne is a model wife before her seduction, but she falls through natural inferiority and weakness of will when she yields quickly and easily to Wendoll, whom she hardly knows. In domestic comedy, on the other hand, the spectator would expect the wife to reject her suitor with piety and humility, a response followed by a series of platitudes on the necessity of constancy in marriage. Mistress Arthur, in *How a Man May Choose*, does not yield to her admirer's offer to marry and rescue her from her cruel husband; however, the wife never relies on eloquence as a weapon. She consistently and meekly rejects Anselm's advances with pious replies, reiterating frequently her disbelief in her husband's criminal activities. Heywood can easily be accused of suspecting his own heroine's resolve.
because the seduction scenes never show Anselm and Mistress Arthur alone on stage; either Fuller or another character is invariably present when the lusty youth woos the patient wife. Yet the ambiguity is buried, for we are never seriously permitted to question how Mistress Arthur would have behaved had another character not been present. Mistress Arthur's response is typical of heroines in domestic comedies where the wife's conduct is "not only of vital importance to the play's professed didactic intention," but is subordinated to "the influence of the conduct books and other literature on domestic relations." Characterization in plays like How a May May Choose is two-dimensional because it depends for its effect on a reductive body of knowledge that does not allow for fully realized characters. Though like Heywood Dekker does not allow his comic heroines to fall, he does not restrict their intellectual horizons. Both Bellafront and Infelice are unique as heroines in a domestic comedy in that Dekker matches their eloquence against Hippolito's. Bellafront's rejection of her suitor, moreover, is dramatically unorthodox not only because it claims for her a heretofore male prerogative, but because it arises from the force of her emotional life, which balances the superimposed demands of doctrine and decorum.

In his analysis of the Bellafront–Hippolito debate in The Honest Whore, II Michael Manheim observes that Bellafront's use of rhetoric, though not as sophisticated or
learned as Hippolito's, is persuasive because of her "choice of images and the nature of her exemplum"; her imagery is "more concrete than Hippolito's at every turn," and the "story she tells is not based on legend but on her own experience . . . ." The exemplum, I believe, claims for Bellafront rhetorical virtuosity because it unifies the subjective content with an abstract rhetorical design, engaging fully the audience's sympathy:

Like an ill husband (tho I knew the same, To be my vndoing) followed I that game. Oh when the worke of Lust had earn'd my bread, To taste it, how I trembled, lest each bit, Ere it went downe, should choake me (chewing it?) My bed seem'd like a Cabin hung in Hell, The Bawde Hells Porter, and the lickorish wine The Pander fetch'd, was like an easie Fine, For which, me thought I leas'd away my soule, And oftentimes (euen in my quaffing bowle) Thus said I to my selfe, I am a whore, And haue drunke downe thus much confusion more. (IV.i.351-364)

In isolation these twelves lines constitute an epigram, a poetic form expressed in couplets and characterized by pithiness of language, the tone of which is usually either ironic or gnomic. Through Bellafront's exemplum Dekker offers a trenchant and compassionate description of the emotional effects of prostitution. "What distinguishes the . . . epigram . . . from platitude," writes Northrop Frye, "is very frequently rhetorical wit," the effect of which is the fusion of "emotion and intellect." The axiomatic tone of Bellafront's response is intensely personal in its conception: in the initial couplet the repetition of the
first person pronoun sustains the simile introducing the theme of spiritual "ill[ness]." The personal pronoun is repeated three times in the second independent clause (ll. 353-355). Interposed between the first and second couplets line 353 ("Oh when the worke of Lust had earned my bread") is thrown into high relief by its isolation, which emphasizes the alienating effect of the whore's trade. The theme of the dissolution of the self is poignantly captured in the final independent clause (ll. 356-364) through metaphors drawn from Bellafront's former trade and from the worlds of law and commerce. The terse and forcible line, "My bed seem'd like a Cabin hung in Hell," like line 353, is lodged between two couplets, highlighting spiritual degeneracy: the simile harbors the Elizabethan association between "cabin" and death, cabins being temporary burial sites for victims of the plague, and between "cabins" and harlots.17 Significant metrical variation occurs in the subsequent couplet,

The Bawde Hells Porter, and the lickorish wine
The Pander fetched, was like an easie Fine,

where tension between spondaic, iambic, and pyrrhic impulses alternately weighs down and lightens the rhythm as anguish gives way to ostensible relief, only to intensify despair: the wine of oblivion is "like an easie Fine," spurring Bellafront to "lease away" her "soule" (l. 359). The term "Fine" refers in the first instance to "exemption
from punishment . . . by means of payment" or simply to payment, but other meanings of "cessation" or "death" (O.E.D.) are also implied. In the final couplet we overhear Bellafront during the moment of self-confrontation when she admits to her "selfe" she is a "whore," the courtesan's burdened spirit revealing itself in the spondaic substitution of the final line: "And haue drunke downe thus much confusion more." The operative word "confusion" is a complex term signifying at once moral and psychological stasis: its ethical denotation is the "discomfiture" of moral purpose; in Renaissance psychology the term refers to "mental perturbation or agitation such as prevents the full command of the faculties,"18 a predisposition to madness.

Bellafront's language enhances her individuality and the complexity of her moral choices. Her transition to the virtuous life, moreover, has not been a mechanical one. Her candid response to Orlando's feigned cruelty, for instance, indicates her awareness of the precariousness of her situation:

If as you say I'm poore, relieue me then, 
Let me not sell my body to base men. 
You call me Strumpet, Heauen knowes I am none: 
Your cruelty may drive me to be one: 
Let not that sinne be yours, let not the shame 
Of common Whore liue longer then my name. 
That cunning Bawd (Necessity) night and day 
Plots to vndoe me; drive that Hag away, 
Lest being at lowest ebbe, as now I am, 
I sinke for euer.

(IV.i.129-138)
Once again Dekker avoids the bland and fluent verse of the stock patient wife. Bellafront's resolve is buttressed by her eloquence and self-assertion. Her sustained admonition of her father—as in her question, "Is this your comfort, when so many yeeres / You ha left me frozen to death?"—deviates sharply from the self-effacement of her counterparts, and her frequent rebukes of Matheo contravene the rule of decorum requiring the wife to submit humbly and serenely to her husband's will:

Thou art a Gamester, prethee throw all,
Set all vpon one cast, we kneele and pray,
And struggle for life, yet must be cast away.
Meet misery quickly then, split all, sell all,
And when thou hast sold all, spend it, but I beseech thee
Build not thy mind on me to coyne thee more . . . .
(III.ii.64-70)

Dekker's manipulation of conventional dramatic paradigms expresses his challenge of certain orthodox philosophical notions of woman. In Marian literature and in many Renaissance theological and philosophical writings about women, there were a few domains in which woman was deemed superior to man. Certain virtues, like "longsuffering, humility, patience, compassion and public charity" were frequently "associated more with women than men,"19 but in other domains woman was considered naturally inferior to man. A commonplace of Aristotelian doctrine was that "woman is associated with the passive and man with the active."20 Following Aristotle, a number of Renaissance commentators
considered woman's passivity an impediment to moral behavior. In 1552 Robortello declared woman's inferiority to man on the basis of her "tendency to vice" and her "less impulsion to virtue because of weaker powers of reason and judgment," an imperfection which suited her to the "natural" condition of marriage, wherein she "must bend her will to the will and authority of her husband . . . ."21 Other humanists, both English and continental, granted woman the ability to act morally within the terms of her natural obedience to her husband. Woman, according to Montecatini,

possesses the virtues of temperance, liberality, justice and all others but of a different class (species) and in a different way (modus) from man. Her role in life causes them to be expressed differently: the same perfection of virtue is possible to the person who must obey, if it is appropriately adapted.22

Although male and female virtue were identical for many neo-Aristotelians, the manifestation of virtue invariably differed according to gender: whereas man perfected his virtue through command and eloquence, woman perfected hers through obedience and silence. The duality was upheld by conservative and non-conservative thinkers alike. Moral philosophers such as Erasmus, Agrippa and Vives retained woman's theological subordination to man, arguing that because male and female capacity for virtue in genere is different, men and women "should practise different virtues which are often complementary in character (silence, eloquence; obedience, command)."23 Similarly, the neo-
platonists, who claimed men and women have identical capacities for virtue, and "should practise identical virtues," often qualified their view, concurring that "woman's different domestic and social function imposes on her the practice of certain virtues not required in man (modesty, silence) and releases her from the need to cultivate others which relate especially to man's role in society and the household (courage, eloquence)." This view was shared by Castiglione (The Courtier, 1528) and by Nicholas Faret (L’honnête homme, 1630) who claimed for women equal capacity for virtue while affirming the orthodox view of woman's marital subservience and the husband's duty to command. In the English homilies and treatises, both Elizabethan and Jacobean, a common source of interest was the extent of the wife's submission to her husband and the question of the husband's duty to exert his authority. The general consensus was that harmony should serve as the natural solution for all marital disputes, a view that characterized the shift in emphasis from scholastic to Renaissance writings on the question of the wife's status in marriage. According to Renaissance humanists woman "is created to be not [man's] servant or his mistress but his companion; for this reason she is created from his rib, not his foot or his head." However, when compromise failed it was the husband's responsibility to rule, a responsibility based on his natural superiority. Many domestic comedies exploited for the purpose of didactic instruction the dictum
that a wife should submit to the authority of her husband. How a Man May Choose, for example, ends with the reformed prodigal's advice to would-be-husbands on how to choose between a good and bad wife: "A good wife," we learn, will quietly "do her husband's will," but "a bad wife" will be "cross, spiteful and madding" (p. 96). Once again, the solution is based on platitude rather than on the wife's character.

The Honest Whore, II is a rare play in which women overcome a man in debate, and a rare domestic comedy because the heroines defend their virtue with command and courage. In allowing Bellafront and Infelice recourse to eloquence rather than bombast as the weapon with which they assert their virtue, Dekker undercuts the prevalent stereotype of woman's inferiority based on weakness of intellect. While Bellafront's longsuffering is consistent with the moral and theological view of women's patience and endurance as the area where female virtue equalled and often surpassed that of men, Bellafront and Infelice's rejection of silence alters the ethical paradigm that deemed eloquence and command to be the exclusive provinces of the male.

II

That Dekker rescues the patient-wife model from a reductive literary and philosophical tradition has been ignored by those critics who see Bellafront's persistence in
virtue as part of Dekker's overriding concern with "didactic theatricalism." Alexander Leggatt sees the reformed whore as the "norm of the play and of others of its kind," and argues that Bellafront and the characters with whom she interacts are only "machines to illustrate moral points," an effect achieved "with a coldness of temper that is finally self-defeating." Yet while the climax of the play consists of Bellafront's readmission into her father's household after tremendous hardship and only after society has accepted her reform, Bellafront's patience is portrayed with unsparing realism and sustained ambiguity. In addition to endowing his heroine with intellectual integrity, Dekker transforms the patient wife into a converted whore struggling for social approval and economic survival. The whore is a stock figure in contemporaneous plays such as How a Man May Choose, A Fair Maid of Bristow, and Marston's The Dutch Courtesan, but in these plays she is a thoroughly sinister force and her villainy and mercenariness almost destroy the hero. In The Honest Whore, II she is the heroine enduring the suspicions of a skeptical world. Nor, we have seen, does Bellafront persist in her virtue without difficulty. The tension between Bellafront's exemplary patience and the desperate condition of her life is sharpest in the scenes depicting her household life. Bellafront must face the irony that, having given up prostitution, she has become the slave of necessity. Before her conversion, Bellafront was the victim of her own trade and of the abuse.
of others, but she could boast economic independence. After her conversion she is confronted not only with her husband's cruelty but with near starvation.

The irony is accentuated in the contrast between Bellafront's comfortable life in Part I of *The Honest Whore* (II.i.1-239) and her abject existence in Part II (II.i.1-139). That the description of Bellafront's household begins at precisely the same point in each play suggests the parallel may have been intentional. In Part I the courtesan's residence, albeit morally corrupt, is ornately furnished, and Bellafront herself is elegant and stylish: she has the means to buy "Hypocras" (l. 78), an exotic wine, and "manchet" (l. 81), a fine expensive bread, and she has all the personal amenities—"cushion," "looking-glasse," "chafing dish" (l. 43), "ruffe and poker" (l. 13), "fall" and "gown" (l. 49)—which no fashion-conscious woman of her day did without. In Part II Bellafront's household has been ravaged by poverty, and her beauty has been eroded by suffering, an observation made early in the play:

> Lodovico. . . . I scarce know her [Bellafront], for the beauty of her cheeke hath (like the Moone) suffred strange Eclipses since I beheld it . . . .

(I.i.96-98)

Emphasis on Bellafront's impoverished household is sustained throughout the play. In the fourth act Orlando provides a
cynical and detailed description of the shabbiness of his daughter's home:

what, are all your Subjects gone a Sheepe-sheating? not a Maid? not a Man? not so much as a Cat? you keepe a good house belike, iust like one of your profession, every roome with bare walls, and a halfe-headed bed to vault vpon (as all your bawdy houses are.) Pray who are your Upholsterers? Oh, the Spiders, I see, they bestow hangings vpon you.

(IV.i.44-49)

Orlando's comparison between Bellafront's household and the whore's quarters is undercut by the material well-being Bellafront knew as a whore. Bellafront's response, "She that's a Whore, / Liues gallant, fares well, is not (like me) poore" (11. 58-59) makes explicit the complication inherent in her conversion. The irony is especially poignant in the scene where Matheo, who has lost his cloak and sword during a gambling session, strips from Bellafront's body the only remnant of her former life—her silk gown—in order to pay his debts (III.ii.34-35). Bellafront, whose supplications of heaven have so far gone unheard, verges on despair:

    Matheo. Ile pawne you by 'th Lord, to your very eye-browes.
    Bell. With all my heart, since heauen will haue me poore,
      As good be drown'd at sea, as drown'd at shore.  

(III.ii.40-42)
Bellafront's potentially tragic outcome, however, is averted by the comic order of the plot. Orlando, who as comic redeemer rescues his daughter from destitution, articulates the play's didactic point of view. His choric pronouncements form a litany on the action:

Orl. He that makes gold his wife, but not his whore,
He that at noone-day walkes by a prison doore,
He that 'ith Sunne is neither beame nor moate,
He that's not mad after a Petticoate,
He for whom poore mens curses dig no graue,
He that is neither Lords nor Lawyers slaue,
He that makes This his Sea, and That his Shore,
He that in's Coffin is richer then before,
He that counts Youth his Sword, and Age his Staffe,
He whose right hand carues his owne Epitaph,
He that vpon his death-bead is a Swan,
And Dead, no Crow, he is a happy man.
(I.ii.54-65)

As "comic controller," writes Larry Champion, Orlando ensures "not only that a benevolent authority stands behind the action to prevent disaster from striking but also that this power is directing the action to a conclusion both pleasant and beneficial." Like his forerunner Janicola in Patient Grissil Orlando embodies the principle of caritas. Orlando's comparison of himself with the Pelican, whose nature is to "picke her owne brest to nourish her yong ones" (I.ii.174) and whom Dekker elsewhere calls "the bird of
Charity,"\(^{32}\) recalls Janicola's determination to provide for his own destitute family regardless of the suffering it causes him.\(^{33}\) Unlike Janicola, however, Orlando is not poor; he is the only figure in the play who dispenses bounty, in the end rewarding Bellafront and Matheo with all the benefits of his household:

\begin{verbatim}
Orl. . . . play
  thou the Whore no more, nor thou the Thiefe
  agen,
  My house shall be thine,
  My meate shall be thine,
  And so shall my wine,
  But my money shall bee mine,
  And yet when I die,
  (So thou doest not flie hie)
  Take all, yet good Matheo, mend.
\end{verbatim}

\(\text{(V.ii.477-485)}\)

Bellafront's spiritual regeneration elevates her to a new world that contrasts remarkably with the abject one she formerly inhabited. "Domestic comedy," writes Northrop Frye, "is usually based on the Cinderella archetype, the kind of thing that happens when . . . virtue is rewarded, the incorporation of an individual very like the reader into the society aspired to by both, a society ushered in with a happy rustle of bridal gowns and banknotes."\(^{34}\)

While Orlando in essence functions as an earthly minister of providence who makes possible Bellafront's admission to a better world, there are moments when the old man's personal limitations are exposed so that the character does not completely lack interiority. Initially, Orlando is presented as a crusty and disillusioned old man whose
penchant for finely honed platitudes surpasses his ability to forgive. Within moments of his lackluster verse description of happiness (I.ii.54-65) Orlando describes that same "true picture" (l. 49) in prose, while his prolixity exposes his self-righteousness:

After this Picture ... doe I strive to have my face drawn: For I am not covetous, am not in debt, sit neither at the Dukes side, nor lie at his feet. Wenching and I have done, no man I wrong, no man I fear, no man I fee; I take heed how far I walke, because I know yonders my home. I would not die like a rich man, to carry nothing away saue a winding sheete: but like a good man, to leave Orlando behind me. I sowed leaves in my Youth, and I reap now Bookes in my Age. I fill this hand, and empty this, and when the bell shall toll for me, if I prove a Swan, and go singing to my nest, why so? If a Crow! throw me out for carrion, and pick out mine eyes.

(I.ii.67-77)

We also learn that despite Orlando's carefree exterior the aged father has suffered as a result of his bitterness toward his daughter since rejecting her seventeen years earlier, a feeling detected in the bitter tone of his words:

I have a little, have all things; I have nothing; I have no wife, I have no child, have no chick, and why should not I be in my Iocundare?

(I.ii.80-82)
Yet he has difficulty seeing beyond the narrow scope of platitude. He relates the cause of Bellafront's rejection, for example, through a parable of Youth and Age:

... this old Tree had one Branch, (and but one Branch growing out of it) It was young, it was faire, it was straight; I pruinde it daily, drest it carefully, kept it from the winde, help'd it to the Sunne, yet for all my skill in planting, it grew crooked, it bore Crabs; I hewed it downe.

(I.ii.89-93)

Dekker portrays an old man who has difficulty accepting the mutability of life and who perceives human behavior as a series of static images which he imposes upon his immediate reality. While Orlando's disguise as Pacheco allows him to penetrate beneath the surface of everyday life, he undergoes no inner development of character and attains no added self-knowledge.

The essential ambiguity inherent in Bellafront's social promotion reveals itself in the opposition between Orlando, the benevolent father, and the Duke, who rules the desirable "new" society which Bellafront inherits, and on whom Dekker transfers the dark side of authority. The Duke becomes involved in the action when he issues a decree to close the brothels and to round up the whores of the city and suburbs, a decision which directly parallels Orlando's determination to restore order to his daughter's household. Just as Orlando tests the moral worth of Bellafront and Matheo, the Duke assembles his court in Bridewell to judge the
prisoners. Yet a crucial distinction separates the two authority-figures. Whereas Orlando has no hidden motive for purging Bellafront's household of corruption, the Duke's decree arises from an entirely selfish reason: cleansing the state is not what chiefly concerns him; he orders the arrest of all whores in order to detain one particular woman, Bellafront, whose arraignment he hopes will shame his son-in-law Hippolito for lusting after her. Although the Duke wishes to reform Hippolito, Bellafront's repentance does not interest him, and his extemporaneous warrant undermines his credibility as a just ruler. The strong objections of a courtier suggest the Duke's behavior is cruel and irrational:

Carolo. But what's your Graces reach in this?  
Duke. This (Carolo). If she whom my son dotes on,  
  Be in that Muster-booke enrold, he'll shame  
  Euer t'approach one of such noted name.  
Caro. But say she be not?  
Duke. Yet on Harlots heads  
  New Lawes shall fall so heauy, and such blowes  
  Shall glue to those that haunt them, that  
  Hippolito  
  (If not for feare of Law) for loue to her,  
  If he loue truely, shall her bed forbeare.  
Caro. Attach all the light heeles i'th Citty, and  
  clap em vp? why,  
  my Lord? you diue into a Well vnsearchable ....  
(IV.ii.96-106)

But the Duke is impervious to reason, and his application of the law is petulant and self-serving:

The fish being thus i'th net, our selfe will sit,  
And with eye most seuere dispose of it.  
(11. 113-114)
Carolo's exasperated response, "Araigne the poore Whore" (1. 116), evokes our sympathy for the prostitutes and leads us to question the efficacy of the Duke's rigid enforcement of the law for the sake of family honor and reputation. Dekker's portrait of the Duke contains a vestige of the sinister force he represented in The Honest Whore, I where his actions were entirely motivated by personal ends. In contrast to Orlando, whose benevolence functions as the ethical norm of the play, the Duke's arbitrary judgments highlight the opposition between Bellafront's new (idealized) world and the Duke's real (repressive) world. The opposition extends paradox, the play's supporting structure, to the comic resolution where the tension between real and ideal worlds is only marginally resolved.

III

The contrast between an idealized figure like Orlando and a sinister counterpart is a common technique through which Dekker captures paradox within the ethical design of the plot. In Patient Grissil we observed a tension between orthodox moral structures and the play's antinomian current, a tension arising from the split between sets of separate characters. The exemplum of Patience was embodied in Grissill and the antithetical element was transferred wholly to the shrewish Gwenthyan and the misogynist Julia, while in the presentation of authority Janicola's caritas
foiled the marquess' cruelty, a technique based on the *psychomachia* conflict typical of the Elizabethan moralities. A similar pattern was discernible in the opposition between purity and promiscuity captured in the Infelice-Bellafront configuration in *The Honest Whore, I*. In that play we also witnessed Dekker's unsuccessful attempt to integrate duality within one character (Hippolito) whose madness clashed unconvincingly with his role as whore-reformer. In *The Honest Whore, II* Dekker approaches the integration of conflicting drives and emotions in a single character in the depiction of Bellafront's struggle against necessity, and in the portrayal of virtuous but self-assertive heroines, two contradictory elements according to orthodox Renaissance notions of woman. However, paradox within the Infelice-Bellafront configuration remains essentially an ethical complication. In the characterization of Hippolito and of Matheo especially paradox extends beyond the ethical field to become the expression of ambiguity in a particular character, a tension captured in the contrast between seeming and being, appearance and reality.

Dekker initiates the prodigal-husband action through Hippolito's pursuit of Bellafront, which in turn affects Matheo's reprobate behavior. Although Hippolito's rationalization of his lust for Bellafront on the basis that "wisest men turne fooles, doting on whores" (IV.i.401) indicates a lack of self-insight and self-discipline, Dekker
instills a certain amount of grace and sincerity in the character. His desire for Bellafront, for example, is not based entirely on her sexual attraction. Dekker has already suggested through Lodovico's crude perceptions that Bellafront's indigent life has coarsened her appearance (I.i.96-98), an observation reiterated elsewhere (II.i.9-10), suggesting Bellafront's hardened features should be emphasized in production. Hippolito also notes Bellafront's changed appearance at the same time that he perceives an enduring beauty in her:

The face I would not looke on! sure then 'twas rare,
When in despight of griefe, 'tis still thus faire.  
(I.i.161-162)

Hippolito's lust is on occasion tempered by compassion, a response which ironically propels the plot forward. Compassion, for example, induces Hippolito to intercede on Matheo's behalf in order to save his friend from the gallows:

I'm sorry
These stormes are fallen on him, I loue Matheo.  
And any good shall doe him, hee and I  
Haue sealed two bonds of friendship, which are strong  
In me, how euer Fortune doe him wrong; . . . .  
(I.i.117-121)

Perhaps Hippolito's most striking accomplishment is his success in softening Orlando's rejection of his daughter.
The old man's fledgling acceptance of Bellafront is greeted with genuine enthusiasm by the count:

**Hip.** I'm glad you are wax, not marble; you are made
Of mans best temper, there are now good hopes
That all those heapes of ice about your heart,
By which a fathers loue was frozen vp,
Are thawed in these sweet showres fetcht from your eyes . . . .

(I.ii.117-121)

Hippolito instructs Orlando that human beings "are ne'r like Angels till our passion dyes" (l. 122), a comment revealing his understanding of the folly of absolute moral judgments. His perception is consistent with the resolution where Dekker neither punishes Hippolito nor insists on his repentance. In the final scene, where the Duke and his court have assembled in Bridewell to dispense justice, Hippolito does not atone for his pursuit of Bellafront; he merely defends her innocence against her detractors:

Against that blacke-mouthed Deuill [Matheo],
against Letters, and Gold,
And against a iealous Wife I doe vphold,
Thus farre her reputation, I could sooner
Shake the Appennine, and crumble Rockes to dust,
Then (tho Ioues shoure rayned downe) tempt her to lust.

(IV.ii.173-177)

Hippolito's defense of Bellafront's virtue falls short of the stock public-conversion speech of the wayward husband; nor is it at all clear that, as Manheim would have it, "Hippolito is cured" by the "false accusations made against
Hippolito never explicitly repents his lust, and his reunion with Infelice is only tentative. After Hippolito has vindicated Bellafront, he and Infelice say nothing more to one another on stage so that the resolution of their marital conflict remains ambiguous.

Dekker, it would seem, is allowing the production the liberty of either reinforcing or downplaying Hippolito's tenuous reformation. If sustained ambiguity is preferred, Hippolito and Infelice would not interact during the remaining three hundred and twenty lines; if a more didactic resolution is desired, the couple would interact amicably through gesture. Either interpretation would depend on how the actor delivers Hippolito's reply to Matheo's final statement:

Duke. Your Father has the true Phisicion plaid.  
Math. And I am now his Patient.  
Hip. And be so still,  
'Tis a good signe when our cheekes blush at ill.  

(V.ii.191-194)

Clearly, Dekker is here employing a commonplace regularly found in the success-formula of the prodigal-husband action: there is, for instance, a striking verbal agreement between Hippolito's reply and the hero's repentance speech in The London Prodigal:

... wonder among wives!  
Thy chastitie and vertue hath infused  
Another soule in mee, red with defame,  
For in my blushing cheekes is seene my shame.  

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Dekker, however, manipulates the convention so that Hippolito articulates the commonplace not to his wife, and not necessarily in reference to himself, but to another prodigal. If uttered in such a way that it suggests humility, Hippolito's repentance would be implied. On the other hand, a firmly reproachful tone, permitted by the imperative "And be so still," would only reinforce Hippolito's pleasure in seeing Matheo under Orlando's care. The latter choice would seem to be the logical extension of Hippolito's denunciation a few moments earlier of Matheo as the "blacke-mouthed Deuill" (V.ii.173) who has falsely accused Bellafront, without reference to his own sins, underscoring the equivocation suggested elsewhere in Hippolito's characterization. Dekker, in other words, permits the audience to make a reductive moral judgment of the prodigal while undermining its viability.\(^\text{39}\)

Dekker's paradoxical rendition of the prodigal-husband paradigm is developed with even greater intensity in Matheo's progression from wastrel to redeemed comic hero. The prototypes of the character, Young Arthur in *How a Man May Choose*, Mat Flowerdale in *The London Prodigal*, and young Vallenger in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, are wastrels and profligates who reject their wives from the outset, and whom Providence punishes with insurmountable ill fortune. The plots of these comedies follow a tight linear progression from the husband's backsliding to his punishment and repentance. Matheo's prodigal habits are as boorish as his
counterparts', but his dissoluteness is not commonplace. At the same time that Matheo's behavior is opprobrious, he is capable of sympathetic feeling, a quality emphasized during his reunion with Bellafront after his release from prison. The episode marks Matheo's first appearance on stage, and an audience familiar with the initial encounter between prodigal and patient wife would expect Matheo immediately to abuse Bellafront. Instead we witness a jaded couple, who have had enough of "scarres" (II.i.16), eager to pursue a new life. The sentiment evoked in the first forty lines or so of their dialogue suggests the marriage has grown beyond the moral pact it was at the end of The Honest Whore, I. Matheo and Bellafront now reveal fondness for one another as they coo various terms of endearment:

Bell. Oh my sweet Husband . . .
(1. 1)

Math. . . . sweetest villaine, I am here now, and I will talke with thee soone.

Bell. And glad am I th'art here.
Math. Did these heeles caper in shackles? I my little plumpe rogue, Ile bear vp for all this, and fly hye . . . .
(11. 7-10)

Bell. Good Loue, I would not haue thee sell thy substance
And time (worth all) in those damned shops of Hell.
(11. 30-31)
Math. Bellafront, Bellafront, I protest to thee, I sweare, as I hope for my soule, I will turne ouer a new leafe, the prison I confesse has bit mee . . . .

(11. 43-45)

Matheo's pledge to "turne ouer a new leafe" (1. 44) is soon broken by his enslavement to vice, which plunges his household into such destitution that he and Bellafront are reduced to begging for meat (II.i.234-235; IV.i.161-189). Yet Matheo's fall into the depths of cruelty is not entirely the product of moral lassitude; it is partially a defense against a just suspicion of Hippolito's passion for Bellafront and against a wrongful suspicion of his wife's loyalty. Although Dekker portrays the complications of the Matheo action with solemn pathos, the sentiment averts a formulaic representation of the prodigal-husband structure.

In two of the analogues the prodigal husband keeps a whore whose villainy adds to the trials of the patient wife; in no other domestic comedy does the husband have cause to suspect his wife's virtue. In The Honest Whore, II Matheo's prodigality is complicated by the irony that his patient wife is a former whore who is being pursued by a man she once loved. Hippolito's transgression, moreover, is a source of anguish for Matheo because Hippolito breaks two sacred bonds: the bond of friendship and that between host and guest. Matheo apprehends Hippolito's betrayal immediately following the reunion with Bellafront, when the count's arrival disrupts Matheo's homecoming. Matheo,
noting how his friend dotes on his wife, manages graciously to sustain his gratitude and to maintain his role of host:

Hip. Not now, I'll visit you at other times. Y'are come off well then?
Math. Excellent well, I thanke your Lordship: I owe you my life, my Lord; and will pay my best blood in any seruice of yours.
Hip. I'll take no such deare payment, harke you Matheo,
I know, the prison is a gulfe, if money Runne low with you, my purse is yours: call for it.
Math. Faith my Lord, I thanke my starres, they send me downe some; I cannot sinke, so long as these bladders hold.

(II.i.157-166)

The pathos accorded Matheo's betrayal by Hippolito extends to Matheo's subsequent progression in villainy. Shocked by his friend's hypocrisy, Matheo thereupon denies friendship altogether, his mistrust later revealing itself in a callous response to Lodovico's gift of a new suit of clothes:

Math. It's a generous fellow,—but--pox on him . . . .
Bell. This is your fault to wound your friends still.

(IV.i.17; 22)

Once again Matheo suspects a friend is being generous because Bellafront has made advances.

Matheo's disposition toward friendship, which is shattered by Hippolito's betrayal, challenges the homiletic formula denying the prodigal any capacity for sympathetic
feeling until his repentance. The denial was in keeping with the presentation of prodigality in the pamphlets and treatises wherein those who indulged in reprobate behavior were judged to be incapable of friendship: "Wilde menne," according to one treatise, "could by no gentilnes be allurred to friendshipp." James Conover suggests that "psychologically, Matheo's distrust [of Hippolito and Bellafront] explains all his subsequent actions—his riotous activities, his attacks on Bellafront, and even his ultimate accusation in Bridewell." The play, I believe, does not accentuate the psychological explanation; rather, it balances it with the character's moral blindness and with social influences. Bellafront, in an important soliloquy, attributes Matheo's "wilde ... behauiour" (II.i.49) to his having been "spoyld by prison" where "he's halfe damned comes there" (1. 50). Her indictment of prison anticipates Dekker's description in The Roaring Girl of Bedlam and the Counters (the two city prisons):

Alex. Bedlam cures not more madmen in a yeare,  
Then one of the Counters does, men pay more deere  
There for their wit than anywhere.42

A similar indictment occurs in Dekker's prose pamphlet English Villainies Discovered by Lantern and Candlelight (1616) where jail is depicted as a "fly-boate" where "the greatest courages are . . . wrecked," where "the noblest wits are . . . confounded," and where poor men are left
Matheo, it would appear, has tasted the "degrees of torments in hell" which Dekker described as the prisoner's daily lot. However, the character is not conceived mechanistically. Matheo is the product of both a hostile environment and a lack of self-discipline; he is sensitive and highly emotional, yet he has little moral integrity and no practical sense.

Through the complexity of Matheo's actions Dekker reinforces the ambiguity inherent in his portrayal of the prodigal-husband formula. A number of critics have noted with satisfaction that although Matheo suffers as a direct result of his prodigality, and although he is redeemed in the end by Orlando, Dekker alters the homiletic formula by omitting to give Matheo the prodigal's stock public-repentance speech. After proclaiming himself Orlando's "Patient" (V.ii.192) Matheo is silent during the remaining three hundred or so lines of the play. Yet Matheo achieves the same kind of success as the virtuous Bellafront. What has been ignored is the correspondence between Hippolito's tenuous reformation and the absence of Matheo's apology for wrongdoing. Both Hippolito and Matheo are pardoned for their prodigality, but something of the ruthless remains in these characters, a significant parallel that throws into high relief the ambiguity of the resolution.
While Dekker's dramatization of domestic conflict through the employment of the patient-wife and prodigal-husband models rests on traditional ideas of virtuous behavior, and the inspiration that virtues such as patience and fidelity are supposed to provide for marital harmony, we have seen that his portrayal of conventional paradigms is sensitive to the role of contradiction in human behavior. The individual's responsibility in marriage, for example, as articulated in the Hippolito-Infelice and Bellafront-Matheo actions is shown to extend beyond simple prescriptions; it is a complex issue that cannot be resolved by tidy moral axioms. In the play's analogues the question of marital responsibility receives mechanical treatment in that the action follows a rigid homiletic pattern in order to reach didactic conclusions. In *The Honest Whore, II* the marriage code is treated mechanically only in the subplot where simplistic orthodox solutions are undermined through parody and farce.

The action of the subplot partially recalls the Candido episodes in *The Honest Whore, I*; several incidents in which Candido's patience is tested parallel similar episodes in the earlier play. However, the discrepancies of tone that characterized the Candido action in Part I are absent in Part II where farce rather than satire is the principal comic vehicle. Here, the complex issues of the main plot are counterpointed through predominantly physical action,
gross exaggeration of character, and unpredictable behavior. Viola, Candido's wife in Part I, has died and we meet the linendraper on the day of his wedding to a new wife whom Dekker never names (in the list of *dramatis personae* she is merely called "Bride" and throughout the play she is referred to as "Wife"). The wedding scene is interposed between I.i, where we are introduced to the Hippolito-Infelice conflict, and II.i showing the Bellafront-Matheo reunion and its complications. Depicting a lively celebration amid abundant food and drink, the wedding scene forms a sharp contrast to the abject poverty of Bellafront's household and the general domestic conflicts of the main plot. Candido welcomes Lodovico and the courtiers to the feast, and jests with them about fashion in hats. The bantering leads to Candido's serious encomium on degree, which delineates an ideal world devoid of tension and conflict (I.iii.38-71). The orderly and festive celebration is suddenly interrupted when the bride cuffs a servant for serving her sack instead of claret. Candido hurriedly makes excuses for her, while she leaves the celebration in anger. The confusion surrounding the wine draws immediate attention to the wife's shrewishness, although Dekker also pokes fun at Candido. The distinction between claret and sack was well known at the time: sack was associated with old men, claret with younger, more discriminating palates. Candido drinks the sack intended for his bride because "'tis for an old mans backe, / And not for hers" (I.iii.85-86), a remark
confirming the disproportion in age between the merchant and his bride, a stock-in-trade of low comedy. Whereas in the main plot marital harmony is shattered by serious complications, Candido's wedding feast is structured around a farcical oxymoron: the scene opens amid a serious celebration that leads to a comic "brawle" (I.iii.133).

Candido's marital difficulties serve throughout the play as a broadly comic link to the main plot. The central incident in the subplot appropriately echoes the theme of responsibility in marriage. Lodovico's disguise as Candido's apprentice, a role he assumes in order to coach Candido in taming his rebellious wife, directly parodies Orlando's disguise which eventually restores order in the main plot. These two parallel incidents are of central dramatic importance because they address the conventional formula for a harmonious marriage, that is, the wife's duty to be submissive and the husband's responsibility to assert authority. In the main plot we noted that Dekker's attitude toward marital responsibility frequently deviates from conventional literary and philosophical solutions. In the Candido action comic theatricality leads to a simplified solution: marital reconciliation occurs when the wife genuflects in willing submission to her husband, vowing to let him be her master. The wife nimbly submits after an argument during which Candido exchanges blows with her upon Lodovico's instruction to assert his mastery:
Lod. . . . This wench (your new wife) will take you downe in your wedding shooes, vnless you hang her vp in her wedding garters.
Cand. How, hang her in garters?
Lod. Will you be a tame Pidgeon still? shall your backe be like a Tortoys shell, to let Carts goe ouer it, yet not to breake? This Shee-cat will haue more liues then your last Pusse had, and will scratch worse, and mouze you worse: looke toot.

(I.iii.100-107)

Lodovico's use of barnyard imagery to describe women's behavior underscores his misogyny, and his advice to Candido to "Sweare, swagger, brawle, / fling; for fighting it's no matter, we ha had knocking Pusses enow" (II. 109-110) exposes a primitive understanding of human conflict. His assertion that wives must be kept under control because "a woman was made of the rib of man, and that rib was crooked" (II. 111-112) echoes the traditional theological and scholastic view of woman's imperfection. Lodovico's platitudes are acted out by Candido who, albeit in jest, agrees to master his wife:

Cand. A curst Cowes milke I ha drunke once before, And 'twas so ranke in taste, Ile drinke no more. Wife, Ile tame you.

(II.ii.72-74)

As Alexander Leggatt observes, the battle between Candido and his wife "is conducted on the level of slapstick, with symbolic overtones: they prepare to fence, he with a yard and she with an ell. 'Yard' being a common term for the
male sex organ, its use here suggests an elemental sexual conflict.\textsuperscript{46} The crude symbolism is sustained in Lodovico's warning that Candido's "yard is a plaine Heathenis weapon; 'tis too short, / . . . you'l not reach her" (II.ii.91-92), to which the linendraper confidently replies, "Yet I ha the longer arme, come fall too 't roundly, / And spare not me (wife) for Ile lay't on soundly" (ll. 93-94). Persuaded by her husband's resolve, the wife learns the lesson of humility, warning "If me you make your master, I shall hate you" (l. 113). Only after the wife vows to accept her husband's mastery over her does Candido reveal Lodovico's identity, admitting his anger was in jest. However, aggression and not patience has brought about the reconciliation. The exaggerated and mechanical behavior of husband and wife in the subplot thus invites an equally mechanical and oversimplified resolution. The farcical behavior parodies conventional paradigms and contrasts sharply with the dynamics of the main plot where Bellafront's eloquence and frankness are as admirable as her patience, and where Infelice's virtues include a strong will and independence of mind. When Infelice kneels to Hippolito, a gesture that directly parallels the wife's kneeling in submission to Candido, Dekker exploits a conventional gesture in order to challenge stereotypical behavior. In the subplot Candido learns that women desire their husbands to exert their authority, but farce and parody expose the folly of the platitude.
The broad humor creates a tension between the simple morality of the subplot and the complex solutions of the main plot. The parodic function of the subplot is also visible in the action surrounding Bots and Mistress Horseleach. We first meet the pander and bawd immediately following Candido's victory over the bride, when the opposition between main plot and subplot is brought into strong relief. Carolo and Lodovico, determined to "ha some sport" (III.iii.26) by cuckolding the "patient Linen Draper" (1. 19) and flouting his "fine yong . . . Mistris" (1. 20), seek the services of Bots and Mistress Horseleach, whose business is the sale of flesh. These characters' names ("bots" is "a disease of horses caused by parasitic worms or maggots") and actions echo the grotesque associations found in The Honest Whore, I between the body and saleable flesh:

Bots. We haue meates of all sorts of dressing; we haue stew'd meat for your Frenchmen, pretty light picking meat for your Italian, and that which is rotten roasted, for Don Spaniardo.  
(Honest Whore, II, III.iii.12-14)

Bots agrees to procure Candido's wife for Lodovico, while the other courtiers distract the linendraper by introducing Mistress Horseleach as a gentlewoman. The incident is interposed between two episodes in the main plot in which Bellafront is tempted to return to prostitution: in the first, to relieve her husband's desperation (III.ii), and in
the second to satisfy Hippolito's passion (III.iv). Like earlier scenes in the subplot, Bots' harassment of the wife provides a farcical parallel to the incidents it complements: whereas Bellafront is almost compelled by necessity to submit to Matheo's demands, Candido's wife rejects the pander with commonplace revulsion. The comedy arises from the contrast between Bots' bawdy double-entendres and the wife's demure responses during the seduction scene. The humor builds on the wife's misunderstanding of the word "Aunt," a slang term for "bawd":

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**Bots.** A word, I pray, there is a waiting
Gentlewoman of my
Ladies: her name is Ruyna, saies she's your
Kinswoman, and that
you should be one of her Aunts.
**Wife.** One of her Aunts? troth sir, I know her not.

**Bots.** If it please you to bestow the poore labour of your legs at
any time, I will be your conuoy thither?
**Wife.** I am a Snaile, sir, seldome leaue my house,
if 't please her to visit me, she shall be welcome.

**Bots.** Doe you heare? the naked truth is: my Lady hath a yong
Knight, her sonne, who loues you, y'are made,
if you lay hold
vpont: this Iewell he sends you.

**Wife.** Sir, I returne his loue and Iewell with scorne; let goo my hand, or I shall call my husband. You are an arrant Knaue.

(III.iii.45-57)

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Bots' offer of the jewel directly echoes Hippolito's gift of diamonds to Bellafront as a token of his passion, an offer Bellafront refuses with eloquent and unorthodox defiance. The wife's response, on the other hand, is entirely
predictable so that the essential comic butt of the incident becomes the schematic presentation of virtue.

The activities of pander and bawd further undermine Candido's behavior in the episode involving the linendraper's arrest for stolen goods. Drawn to Matheo's house to purchase linens from the gamester, Candido finds himself in the middle of a wild party of gallants who force him to drink, dance, and sing bawdy songs. Appalled by the liquor forced upon him and by a kiss from Mistress Horseleach, the bawd whose "breath stinkes worse then fifty Polecats" (IV.iii.79), and by Bots' insistence that he "pledge this health, 'tis to my Mistris, / a whore" (ll. 93-94), the linendraper musters no effective defense when the Constable, surprised that a citizen of Candido's stature should be "Consort[ing] thus, and reuelling in such a house," (l. 165) proceeds to arrest him after searching the house for stolen goods. The slapstick arising from the horseplay overshadows Candido's opportunism. After being cajoled and insulted, Candido was about to leave but was detained by his eagerness to haggle with Matheo over the goods which he should have suspected were stolen (IV.iii.118-121). Candido's opportunism is thus partially responsible for his arraignment in Bridewell, a responsibility implied in Hippolito's remark to the linendraper, "Your Credit's crack'd being here" (V.ii.210). Candido is forgotten in Bridewell until the other characters have been dealt with,
after which he is recalled by the Duke and praised for his patience:

_Duke._ these greene yong wits
(We see by Circumstance) this plot hath laid,
Still to prouoke thy patience, which they finde
A wall of Brasse, no Armour's like the minde;
Thou hast taught the City patience, now our Court
Shall be thy Spheare, where from thy good report,
Rumours this truth vnto the world shal sing,
A Patient man's a Patterne for a King.

(V.ii.490-497)

The Duke's observations would be more convincing had Candido's misfortunes not arisen in part from his greed for linen and had his patience unequivocally resolved his marital problems.

V

A complex set of configurations informs the structure of the final scene. While Bellafront's social elevation and Candido's favor with the court provide the focus for the final moments of the resolution, the scene for the most part sustains a shift in focus from main plot to subplot so that the whores' arraignment in Bridewell and the pander's guilt become the central points of interest. A number of critics complain that the Bridewell scene lacks proportion because it ends without appropriate attention to the central characters, who "are almost lost in the crowd of prisoners brought in on the warrant."49 Conover, on the other hand,
observes that "the 'whores' are vital, lively, and interesting," and defends Dekker's concentration on the Bridewell inmates on the basis that it permits him to end the play "in a strong, theatrical manner, appropriate in mood, if not in terms of action, to the play which has preceded that ending." Arthur Sherbo is even less apologetic about his defense of the Bridewell scene, suggesting that the obtrusion of the inmates serves to counteract and weaken the sentimental effect of the fifth act with its reformations and its reconciliations. Had Dekker wished to emphasize the sentimental possibilities in the story of Bellafront and her father . . . he could have done so by cutting out the Candido plot, the 'Bridewell' scene, all unnecessary characters, and all comedy and bawdry.

The Bridewell episode, I believe, counteracts not only the solemn tone of the previous scene but also Bellafront's elevation to an idealized world. Bridewell, with its emphasis on repression and toil, is an inversion of the ideal world to which Bellafront is promoted, and the dramatic purpose of the final scene is to cast doubt on the possibility of total regeneration in a fallen world. In counterpoint to Bellafront's new and desirable world, Bridewell reveals a world of repression and chance, a world where justice is whimsically and irrationally dispensed (as evident in the Duke's decree which has brought all the characters together), and where those whose only crime is to
be poor and idle are forced to perform dehumanizing tasks for their livelihood.

Historically, Bridewell was intended from its inception as a training centre for the poor. Three "classes of poor" were regularly found in this notorious house of correction; these were

- the children of the poor who did not show themselves apt for anything other than manual work, invalids who were sufficiently recovered to undertake light employment, and sturdy rogues and loose women convicted in the courts.

Dekker prefaces the Bridewell action with the First Master's detailed portrait of the workhouse and its inmates: "All here are but one swarme of Bees," we are told, "and striue / To bring with wearied thighs honey to the Hiue" (V.ii.35-36). The image of weariness and toil extends to the description of the type of inmate housed in Bridewell:

**I. Master.** The sturdy Begger, and the lazy Lowne, Gets here hard hands, or lac'd Correction.
The vagabond growes stay'd, and learns to 'bey,
The Drone is beaten well, and sent away.
As other prisons are, (some for the Thiefe,
Some, by which vndone Credit gets reliefe
From bridled Debtors; others for the poore)
So this is for the Bawd, the Rogue, and Whore.
(11. 37-44)
In Carolo's response, "An excellent Teeme of Horse" (1. 45), we overhear Dekker's cynicism toward the reduction of the prisoners to the status of animals. In addition to the inmates' labor, Bridewell provided the state with ready recruits during times of war:

I. Master.  

Warre and Peace

Feed both vpon those Lands: when the Iron doores
Of warres burst open, from this House are sent
Men furnisht in all Martiall Complement.
The Moone hath thorow her Bow scarce drawn to 'th head,
(Like to twelue siluer Arrowes) all the Moneths,
Since sixteen hundred Soldiers went aboord:
Here Prouidence and Charity play such parts,
The House is like a very Schoole of Arts,
For when our Soldiers (like Ships druven from Sea,
With ribs all broken, and with tatterd sides,)
Cast anchor here agen, their ragged backes
How often doe we couer? that (like men)
They may be sent to their owne Homes agen.  

(11. 22-34)

As a correction centre for the Elizabethan underworld, Bridewell epitomized the concept of punishment as an ethical obligation. The house of correction in the early seventeenth century, observes Michel Foucault, "does not have the appearance of a mere refuge for those whom age, infirmity, or sickness keep from working"; it has "not only the aspect of a forced labor camp, but also that of a moral institution responsible for punishing, for correcting a certain moral 'obeyance' which does not merit the tribunal of men, but cannot be corrected by the severity of penance.
alone." The prisoners of Bridewell, the maimed soldiers and beaten beggars and vagabonds such as those described by Dekker's jailer, are released upon their demonstrated willingness to bend and obey, indicating they have internalized the ethic of punishment.

During the procession of obstreperous whores before the Duke, a sober note is sounded in the jailer's response to Infelice's pronouncement that Bridewell "should make euen Lais honest" (V.ii.255). Confessing doubt about the universal efficacy of prison, the First Master exposes the failure of punishment as a remedy for moral transgression:

Some it turnes good,
But (as some men whose hands are once in blood,
Doe in a pride spill more) so, some going hence,
Are (by being here) lost in more impudence . . . .
(11. 256-259)

The Master's reservations directly echo Bellafront's earlier claim that Matheo has been ruined by prison (II.i.49-50). In the play only Bots' severe punishment fails to win our sympathy because the pander represents a depraved force of power and appetite that victimizes others. His depravity contrasts sharply with the poverty for which other inmates have been incarcerated, underscoring the contradictions prevalent in Bellafront's "new" world. The Duke's pronouncement that the city has learned the value of patience, a standard comic rendering of an old society being replaced with a renewed and healthier one, has a hollow ring both in the context of the previous scene and of the
repressive and unjust society he rules. The play ends with this essential paradox unresolved.

The Honest Whore, II is one of Dekker's most successful domestic comedies. Domestic themes and motifs are here combined within a firmly controlled comic vision that captures the complexity of everyday life. Dekker's particular fascination in both parts of The Honest Whore with characters from the Jacobean underworld—the idle rogues, the vagabonds, and the poor—reunites with his interest in the marriage code in The Roaring Girl, a hybrid domestic comedy co-authored with Middleton, in which the tensions of domestic life are once again comically reformulated before giving way to the darker vision of The Witch of Edmonton.
Notes

1 The play was entered in the Stationers' Register on 29 April 1608, but it may have been written earlier. George Price assigns the dates "1605-1607?" (Thomas Dekker, p. 173) and Cyrus Hoy conjectures the play was composed "not longer after the completion of Part One, either in the fall of 1604 or early in 1605" (Introductions, Notes and Commentaries, II, 68).

2 Larry Champion, "From Melodrama to Comedy: A study of the Dramatic Perspective in Dekker's The Honest Whore, Parts I and II," 207.

3 Price, p. 65.

4 F.G. Fleay originally observed that both Measure for Measure and The Honest Whore, II make use of a contemporaneous statute "closing the suburb houses" [A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1599-1642 (1891; rpt. New York: B. Franklin, 1962), I, 132]. Michael Manheim, in "The Thematic Structure of Dekker's 2 Honest Whore," 364, noting thematic similarities, argues that like Marston's The Dutch Courtesan, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure and Dekker's Honest Whore, II study "in detail the problem of corruption in seemingly virtuous individuals," a point reiterated by Cyrus Hoy who observes Orlando's discovery "that the seeming virtuous Hippolito, son-in-law to the Duke of Milan, is seeking to seduce Bellafront . . . is to 2 Honest Whore what the discovery of Angelo's treacherous and lustful designs on Isabella is to Measure for Measure" (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 72). Peter Ure argues that Orlando "conducts an experiment, not always an openly benevolent one, on Bellafront and Matheo, much like the Duke's in Measure for Measure" ("Patient Madman and Honest Whore," 36-37). Among other similarities, Larry Champion observes the portrayal in both plays of "a benevolent figure of power and authority who in disguise manipulates the action . . . in order to send several individuals through a series of moral tests": both plays, moreover, "utilize a subplot featuring a prostitute and pander which sardonically parodies the principal action"; at the same time, Champion warns that the "entire relationship could . . . be coincidental" since "many Elizabethan comic plots do after all share at least some of these features" ("From Melodrama to Comedy," 208).
Champion, 207.

Andrew Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 244.


Thomas Dekker, The Honest Whore, Part 2, in Dramatic Works, ed. Fredson Bowers, II. All further citations from the play are from this edition.

Champion, 201.


Cinthio Giraldi, Discorsi . . . intorno al comporre de i romanzi, delle comedie, e delle tragedie (1549); quoted in Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art, p. 221.

Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 251; cf. Michel Grivelet, Thomas Heywood, passim.

Both Madeleine Doran, p. 222, and M.-T. Jones-Davies, in Un Peintre de la Vie Londonienne, II, 198-99, have noted Dekker's accomplishment in portraying Hippolito being overcome by Bellafront in debate.


Hoy, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 110.

Lillian Feder, Madness in Literature, p. 102.


Maclean, p. 51.

Maclean, p. 51.

Antonio Montecatini, In politica progymnasmata (1587); quoted in Maclean, p. 52.

Maclean, p. 56. "When writing in contexts other than moralistic literature," observes Maclean, "humanists such as Erasmus argue that customs can be changed to allow,
for example, for women to be learned; . . . but they do not seem to want to abandon the divine ordering of household and society which severely restricts woman . . . ." (pp. 56-57).

Virtue, we must remember, originally meant the quality of manliness ("vir" being Latin for "man").

24 Maclean, p. 55.

25 Maclean, p. 55.

26 Maclean, p. 19. "In scholastic writing," observes Maclean, "woman is generally considered to have been naturally inferior to man before the Fall" because woman was made from the rib of man, a signal of her imperfection (p. 18).

27 Alexander Leggatt, Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare, p. 91.

28 George Price, Thomas Dekker, p. 69; cf. Una Ellis-Fermor, who objects to Bellafront on the basis that the character is "a piece of sentimental and cheap idealism" [The Jacobean Drama, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1953), p. 125]. Alexander Leggatt, although conceding that "Dekker's . . . ideas on the subject ['of the whore's problems'] are more humane and intelligent than we often find," argues the courtesan scenes are "marred by an overconscious striving for effect, particularly when we are called upon to admire . . . [Bellafront's] repentance" (Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare, p. 115).

29 Leggatt, p. 37.


31 Larry Champion, "From Melodrama to Comedy," 207.

32 Thomas Dekker, Foure Birds of Noahs Arke, pp. 164-65.

33 See Patient Grissil, I.ii.151-157.

34 Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 44.

35 Hoy notes the parallel in Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 71.

36 Manheim, 379.
37 Cf. J.H. Conover, in Thomas Dekker: An Analysis of Dramatic Structure, p. 95, who notes the reconciliation between Hippolito and Infelice is "only implied."


39 The most recent record of the play's performance is its adaptation for the American stage toward the end of the eighteenth century by the dramatist and entrepreneur William Dunlap. Cyrus Hoy observes that in his Diary, "Dunlap records how on 9 December 1798 he read the play in Dodsley and determined on writing a comedy from it, which he set about doing the following day" (Hoy, II, 74). Dunlap changed the play's title to The Italian Father, under which he produced the play at the Park Theatre in New York on 15 April 1799. Dunlap's alterations reveal his frustration with Dekker's sustained ironies. He retained "only the central plot of Orlando Friscobaldo (renamed Michael Brazzo) and his relations with . . . Bellafront (now named Astrabel) and son-in-law Matheo (now named Beraldo). Hippolito . . . and Infelice (now named Beatrice) are on hand, but Hippolito is not lusting after Astrabel/Bellafront; he makes overtures to her only at the request of her father, who wishes to test the sincerity of her repentance. . . . The character of Beraldo/Matheo is much ennobled. When he believes that Hippolito is trying to seduce his wife, he challenges him to a duel and the two young men are on the verge of bloody combat when the father intervenes and explains that Hippolito has acted at his bidding. In the end, . . . [Orlando] reproaches himself for having doubted [his daughter's] truth for so long, and begs her forgiveness" (Hoy, II, 75; italics are mine).

40 Certain Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of the Late Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory (London: Printed for the Prayer-Book and Homily Society, 1852), p. 41.

41 Conover, Thomas Dekker, p. 89.


44 English Villainies, p. 257.

Alexander Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 92.

Hoy, II, 76.


J.H. Conover, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 109. Cf. Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, pp. 100-01: "The closing scenes in each part ... are an appeal to the gallery, but to the present-day reader both are terrible rather than comic; and perhaps they were to Dekker, too ...." George Price, in *Thomas Dekker*, p. 69, wishes Dekker "had sacrificed some of the didactic theatricalism of the Bridewell scenes for more of Matheo in action."

Conover, p. 110.


CHAPTER V

THE ROARING GIRL

I

Between the publication of *The Honest Whore, II* and *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), Dekker's last domestic play, Dekker collaborated on three plays which do not qualify for admission into the canon of "regular" domestic drama but which incorporate certain elements of the genre. The three plays are *Westward Ho* (ca. 1604) and *Northward Ho* (ca. 1605), both of which are co-authored with Webster, and *The Roaring Girl* (1605-1611)\(^1\) with Middleton.

*Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho* are citizen comedies of intrigue in which domestic themes such as the testing of the wife's virtue and the denunciation of adultery are only casually presented. With its shifting tones and thin plotting *Westward Ho* resembles *The Honest Whore, I* where the clash between satiric and moral elements confuses the exposure of folly and corruption. In its treatment of adultery the play sets an "uncertain dramatic pace" as it moves "uneasily from satire to melodrama."\(^2\) The complication linking the two plots is the Italian merchant Justiniano's anger at his wife's alleged infidelity and his determination to expose the immoral behavior of all the wives of the city. While one plot depicts Justiniano's wife defending her chastity, the comic plot sees the merchant,
disguised as a writing-master, procuring the wives of three London merchants for three gallants who are only too eager to cuckold the citizens. The wives, responding with an eagerness confirming Justiniano's suspicion of their honor, agree to spend the night at Brainford with the gallants. The audience's expectation that the adultery will transpire is thwarted in the fifth act when we learn that the wives, although willing to flirt with their pursuers, never intended to compromise their chastity; instead, they have locked the doors of their chambers. The result is the comic exposure of the lecherous gallants and the lighthearted preservation of virtue:

Mist. Tenterhook. They shall know that
Cittizens wiuies haue wit enough
to outstrip twenty such guis; tho we are
merry, lets not be mad:
be as wanton as new married wiuies, as
fantasticke and light headed
to the eye, as fether-makers, but as pure
about the heart, as if we
dwelt amongst em in Black Fryers.
(V.i.159-163)³

The wives' "peculiar view of chastity," writes Alexander Leggatt, "might not please a strict moralist, . . . but the authors seem to feel that the women can play with fire and not be burned."⁴

The lighthearted attitude toward conventional morality extends to the wives' relationships with their husbands, through which Dekker once again de-romanticizes the marriage code.⁵ The wives' pleasure in seeing their
would-be-seducers frustrated is not entirely the product of wifely affection, as indicated by their often flippant and condescending remarks about their spouses:

Mist. Tent. . . . Our honest husbands
they (silly men) lie praying in their beds now, that the water vnder vs may not be rough, the tilt that couers vs may not be rent, and the strawe about our feete may keepe our pritty legs warme. I warrant they walk vpon Queen-hiue (as Leander did for Hero) to watch for our landing, and should we wrong such kind hearts? wud we might euer be trobled with the tooth-ach then.

(V.iv.117-124)

Ironically, the "patient" husbands, rather than waiting meekly at home, are journeying toward Brainford guided by Justiniano, whose indignation they share. Upon their arrival the husbands meet the same fate as the gallants'. Not only are their suspicions exposed as flagrant, but their own surreptitious visits to a bawdy house are uncovered. As in the case of the gallants' lust, the husbands' adultery is exposed and ridiculed, "but with no particular moral severity"; the wives' response, for instance, is one of amusement rather than disapproval:

All 3. Women. Haue we smelt you out foxes. Mist. Tent. Doe you come after vs with hue and cry when you are the theeues your Selues.

(V.iv.236-238)
While adultery is casually and even jokingly treated, we note that the moral transgression is the husbands' and not the wives'; the latter's virtue, although somewhat shallow, remains intact.

The treatment of adultery in the plot involving the lecherous Earl's unsuccessful attempts to seduce Justiniano's wife is only ostensibly more serious. A serious complication is suggested in the events leading to the first seduction scene: Mistress Justiniano, abandoned by her irate husband and faced with imminent starvation, ponders the possibility of yielding to the Earl in order to avoid economic destitution. However, a potentially dangerous compromise is averted by its *reductio ad absurdum* in the wife's revulsion from the Earl's old age—"I wonder lust can hang at such white hairs" (II.ii.83)—that leads to her rejection of him. The plot capitulates to farce when the Earl, as he is about to seduce the masked Mistress Justiniano, discovers upon removing the mask that she is a hideous old woman; the disguised woman, however, turns out to be Justiniano himself. The husband informs the Earl that he has killed his wife in order to prevent her shame, and reveals the body. Although the Earl discovers that the wife is only pretending to be dead, the knowledge that she would have stabbed herself rather than yield to his lust is enough to make him repent:
Thus the pattern of sin, discovery, and repentance remains only lightly sketched in the play, and ethical judgment is undermined by the obtrusion of farce and melodrama.

In *Northward Ho* Dekker and Webster returned to the domestic intrigue that had been made popular in *Westward Ho*. The cast once again comprises citizens and their wives, lecherous gallants, a whore and her companions, and the action again centres on a journey from London involving attempted seduction. The intrigue, however, is theatrically superior to its predecessor in its combination of "ingenious patterns of reversal" and firmer control. The action, observes Cyrus Hoy, is informed by a complex dramaturgy "with surprises regularly discharged, with the result that things do not always proceed in quite the predictable way an audience might expect." Although Greenshield and Featherstone, the two gallants, inform Master Mayberry that they have both seduced his wife, the husband is clever enough to believe his wife when she denies the accusation, thereby altering the stock gullible-husband figure. Audience expectation is again thwarted when one of the
gallants succeeds in installing his clandestine wife in Mayberry's house, where ironically she is seduced by her husband's friend Featherstone, whose chamber she enters while pretending to be sleepwalking. A similar surprise ensues when Doll the prostitute falls in love with the aging poet Bellamont, who scorns her.

Moral judgment in *Northward Ho*, however, is straightforward and conventional, the comic resolution being completely taken up with Mayberry's revenge on Greenshield. "The gallant's offense," notes Leggatt, "has been that of trying to disrupt a marriage, and the punishment is, appropriately, the disruption of his own." And while adultery has been committed by Kate Greenshield, the citizen wife preserves her chastity. The obeisance to citizen morality in the Ho plays has drawn considerable criticism from those who would like to have seen the marriage code treated more satirically. Muriel Bradbrook, for one, has complained that while "the cheating game of easy virtue in Dekker's city comedies, *Westward Ho* and ..., *Northward Ho*, becomes more savage than farcical ..., at the end, adultery is avoided, the citizen wives remain honest, and a general Act of Oblivion covers all faults." The casual treatment of domestic conflict in these plays, I believe, can be partially attributed to the broader concern with city life, which essentially becomes the focal point of interest. The plays reveal Dekker's fascination with the atmosphere and vitality of the city, a concern that overshadows the
deprecation of vice. Both plays draw our attention to the
great variety and color of London life: the excursions to
the Three Pigeons at Brentford, to Staines, Ware and Hoxton,
provide occasions for the gallants to tempt citizen wives,
and for the inhabitants of London's underworld—punks,
thieves, and prostitutes—to conduct their trades. We also
glimpse a variety of shops, bawdy houses, and the citizens'
garden retreats in Moorfields. The domus, which in domestic
plays assumes a central and often symbolic role, is here
completely subordinated to the role of the city. The names
of streets and districts of the city abound in both plays
(there are about forty references in all), as do
references to taverns and inns. In Westward Ho, observes
Brian Gibbons,

there is an insistent use of the prefix 'city': we
find 'Citizens wives', 'City Mercers and
goldsmiths', 'City bawds', 'a good Citty wit',
'high wit from the Citty', . . . 'Citty dames . . .
proper persons for a comedy'. . . . In Northward
Ho similarly 'our young sonnes and heires in the
Citty', 'custome of the Citty', . . . 'neare a
Gentleman of them all shall gull a Citizen'—such
references frequently have no other function than
to insist that the play is set in the city of
London.12

The creation of atmosphere rather than the serious depiction
of conjugal life seems to be the primary theatrical aim in
these plays.

The Roaring Girl is concerned with intrigue similar to
that of the Ho plays, but here the lecherous gallants'
pursuit of citizens' wives is dramatized alongside the
serious portrayal of female chastity embodied not in a virtuous wife but in Moll Cutpurse, whose bawdy language and familiarity with the underworld might seem more appropriate to a conventional prostitute. What little has been written about the play's dramatic merits has focused almost exclusively on Moll Cutpurse as an intriguing representation of virtue. T.S. Eliot was the first to praise the play as "one comedy which more than any Elizabethan comedy realizes a free and noble womanhood," an achievement which he felt compensated for the play's rough plotting: "we read with toil through a mass of cheap conventional intrigue, and suddenly realize that we are, and have been for some time without knowing it, observing a real and unique human being." After Eliot's assessment the play remained neglected until the 1970's when some interest in Moll resurfaced. In his study of Thomas Middleton, Norman Brittin observed that the heroine of *The Roaring Girl* "is interpreted . . . according to the romantic predilections of Dekker as an upright, goodhearted girl of great size and strength who, like a questing knight, helps her friends and whose bad reputation is undeserved." And more recently Cyrus Hoy, like Eliot, has lamented the conventional comedy in the play, "with its seemingly compliant citizens' wives and the impecunious gallants who would like to seduce or live off them," but has praised "the bold and often brilliantly original" portrait of Moll. The most significant recent contribution has been the 1983 production
of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Company, "probably the first since its première in 1611," followed by the publication of a full-length article on Moll's indebtedness to Renaissance representations of the hermaphrodite figure. Still missing is a detailed inquiry into the play's intricate structures and its achievement as a hybrid domestic comedy.

II

The Roaring Girl is a hybrid domestic drama because it balances the genre's emphasis on household life with an equally prominent treatment of the city, particularly the open streets and fields around London. Indeed the play's superstructure is informed by the opposition between the domus and the city, an opposition invested with symbolic value. The multiple-plot action sustains a central tension between the domus as the seat of emotional stasis and subservience to the single pursuit of materialistic values, and the city as the hub of multi-fariousness and freedom. The tension is developed through a symmetrical arrangement of scenes which interweave between household and city: the whole of Act one is set within Sir Alexander Wengrave's house, and the remainder of the play moves back and forth between household and street so that altogether six scenes transpire within the domus and six outside it. The world of the money-hungry social climbers—Sir Alexander Wengrave,
Sir Davy Dapper, and Sir Adam Appleton—and of the sycophantic gallants and self-satisfied citizens is a world ruled by rapacious materialism. This world is portrayed through realistic vignettes of household life which evoke the repressive nature of the cult of domesticity. The characters are invariably either in their shops accumulating wealth or at home flaunting its fruits. The younger generation—Sebastian Wengrave and his betrothed, Mary Fitzallard—are for the most part removed from the world of their elders; they are associated neither with the domus nor the city, but stand apart in their romantic idealism. Mary and Sebastian are foiled by another set of characters also representing the younger generation, namely, the roarers Moll Cutpurse and the wastrel Jack Dapper, both of whom reject the unregenerate world of their elders and the idealism of their counterparts, and whose vindication symbolizes the overthrow of a repressive materialistic society. Neither Moll nor Jack Dapper has or wants a home—their space is the street, the world of thieves, beggars, and drifters. That Moll and Jack's unorthodox behavior is portrayed as admirable has disturbed strict moralists; one reviewer of the 1983 production of the play, for example, has found it surprising that in The Roaring Girl "the sympathy is entirely on the roarers' side." However, at the same time that Moll Cutpurse rejects for herself the traditional values associated with domestic life she promotes Mary and Sebastian's marriage because it is based on love. Moll's
contradictory behavior embodies the play's essential paradox; for we shall see that the resolution upholds both the cleansing of the domus through Mary and Sebastian's love marriage and the rejection of the domus by the roarers in favor of the polymorphism of the city.

The repressive sphere of domestic relations is represented for the most part by Sir Alexander Wengrave's household. From the outset a disquieting atmosphere of spiritual and emotional degeneration saturates the detailed vignettes of Wengrave's family life. The initial conflict is a familiar one: Wengrave, the obdurate parent, wishes to impede his offspring Sebastian's marriage of choice. Although Wengrave and Guy Fitzallard, Mary's father, are both recently-dubbed knights, Wengrave considers Mary's wealth insufficient to make her an appropriate catch for his son:

Sebastian. . . . he [Sir Alexander] reckond vp what gold
This marriage would draw from him, at which he swore,
To loose so much bloud, could not grieue him more.
(I.i.78-80)

Scorning Mary's "dowry of (fiue thousand) Markes" (1. 84) and Mary herself as "but a beggars heire" (1. 83), Wengrave has threatened to disinherit his son if he should marry her. While the expository details are being introduced the Wengrave household forms an obtrusive setting. As in pure domestic plays, the domus here clarifies the tensions

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underlying the complication. The house is an extension of the social-climbing Wengrave's self-image. His house plan alone reveals Wengrave's successful climb to the landed gentry. The first act is structured in such a way that it emphasizes the house's subdivisions, a fairly recent architectural phenomenon: our attention is drawn to the separate dining area (I.ii.6) and "Parlour" (I.ii.7), to the "hall" (I.i.17) where the servants reside, and to the "buttry" (I.i.21); there are also spacious "galleries" (I.ii.14) containing expensive art collections and furniture, which, Wengrave informs his guests, "Cost many a faire gray groate ere it came here" (I.ii.12). That Wengrave's wealth has been accumulated rather than inherited explains his need to be ostentatious about his possessions. Dekker uses setting to expose the character's cupidity, a technique used skilfully and effectively in that both audience and guests are subjected to an unsettling tour of Wengrave's house. The two scenes that make up Act one are carefully aligned so that we enter the interior of the house in scene two from the foyer, which is the setting for scene one. The movement from outer to inner rooms is one from relatively open space to the closeness of the interior of the house: we proceed from "Th'inner roome" (I.ii.6) where the guests have dined, a room which "was too close" (I.6), to the parlour; the closeness intensifies as we are drawn nearer to the claustrophobic centre of the house--the
ostensibly more spacious "galleries" where a grotesque art collection graces the walls:

Alex. . . . when you looke into my galleries,

How brauely they are trim'd vp, you all shall sweare

Y'are highly pleas'd to see whats set downe there:

Stories of men and women (mixt together
Faire ones with foule, like sun-shine in wet wether)

Within one square a thousand heads are laid
So close, that all of heads, the roome seemes made,

As many faces there (fill'd with blith lookes)
Shew like the promising titles of new bookes,
(Writ merily) the Readers being their owne eyes,

Which seeme to moue and to giue plaudities,
And here and there (whilst with obsequious eares,
Throng'd heapes do listen) a cut purse thrusts and leeres
With haukes eyes for his prey: I need not shew him,

By a hanging villanous looke, your selues may know him,

The face is drawn so rarely. . . .

(I.ii.14-29)

The parody of an art collection such as Wengrave's occurs elsewhere in Dekker, suggesting his particular revulsion against the practice, common chiefly in aristocratic houses, of adorning rooms with garish art pieces and of hanging them "so close together as to make a mosaic covering the wall entirely." Since Wengrave's house is not a palace, the effect of his hideous art display is all the more oppressive. The result is a bold caricature of a status-hungry man. After taking in the room "that all of heads . . . seemes made" (1. 20), our attention is drawn below where
The very flowre (as twere) waues to and fro,
And like a floating Iland, seemes to moue,
Vpon a sea bound in with shores aboue.

(I.ii.30-32)

The trompe-l'oeil effect of the "floating Iland" that
decorates the floor is a nauseating vision of a world
distorted by illusion.

Wengrave's friends are all money-grubbers like himself.
In their thirst for wealth some, like Sir Davy Dapper, have
thoroughly internalized their social roles, while others
like Goshawk have degenerated to the point where they no
longer behave like men but like animal predators. Davy
Dapper's language is as affected as his manners--"When
bounty spreades the table, faith t'were sinne, / (At going
of) if thankes should not step in" (I.ii.3-4)--and Goshawk
is true to his name when he remarks that of all the
excellent features of his host's house he "like[s] the
prospect best" (1. 9).25 The guests' fawning appreciation
of Wengrave's house--"A very faire sweete roome" (1. 9);
"These sights are excellent" (1. 33)--acknowledges the host's
status as a man of wealth and open-handed hospitality. The
adulteration of the once sacred bond between host and guest
is suggested by Wengrave's calculating advice to Greenwit,
the youngest of the guests, upon learning of his desire to
take his leave sooner than decorum permits:
Alex. Your loue sir, has already giuen me some
time,
And if you please to trust my age with more,
It shall pay double interest: Good sir stay.
(I.ii.37-39)

Wengrave's metaphor from commerce is a signal to the young
man of the ethic that now rules the host-guest relationship,
its function being to make manifest the exercise of
Wengrave's patronage over those who enhance his pride. In
the subsequent vignette Wengrave dispenses wine during post-
dinner formalities and grandly directs the seating
arrangements, while his makeshift hospitality and the
guests' false decorum are revealed through vicious innuendoes
and double-entendres:

Alex. You varlets stirre,
   Chaires, stoolees and cushions: pre'thee Sir
   Dauy Dapper,
   Make that chair thine.
Dauy. Tis but an easie gift
   And yet I thanke you for it sir, I'le take it.
Alex. A chaire for old sir Adam Appleton.
Neatfoot. A backe friend to your worship.
Adam. Mary good Neatfoot,
   I thanke thee for it: backe friends sometimes
   are good.
Alex. Pray make that stoole your pearch, good
   Maister Goshawke.
Gosh. I stoope to your lure sir.

   . . . . . . . . . . . .
Alex. Nay maister Laxton--furnish maister Laxton
   With what he wants (a stone) a stoole I would
   say,
   A stoole.
Lax. I had rather stand sir.
   (I.ii.45-60)

The persiflage about chairs and stools concludes with
Wengrave's reference to his guests as a "messe of friends"
(l. 62), an image which throws the tensions underlying the feast into high relief, the word "mess" signifying both "a company of persons eating together" and "a dirty, disagreeable mixture, a concoction of food fit for worms" (O.E.D.).

In many domestic plays food imagery is part of a cluster of images associated with the domus which evokes an atmosphere of everyday life. In The Roaring Girl, however, the frequent use of meals does not paint a sentimentalized picture of domestic contentment. Focusing on the domus as primarily the centre of food-giving and lust, Act I portrays the Wengrave household as an odious place. Characters like Wengrave, who have embraced corrupt values, persistently use food imagery to debase friendship, loyalty, and love, values which are irrelevant in a money economy. The image syndrome, moreover, transcends class lines. Trapdoor, posing as a trusty servant, reveals his duplicity to the audience through a food metaphor:

Trap. A letter from my Captaine to your Worship.
Alex. ... tis to preferre thee into my seruice.
Trap. To be a shifter vnder your Worships nose of a clean trencher,
when ther's a good bit vpon't. [Aside.]
(I.ii.189-192)

Similarly, the reptilian Laxton evokes an image of a fallen world in his soliloquy on women's deceitfulness:
Rarely, that wile
By which the Serpent did first woman beguile,
Did euer since, all womens bosomes fill;
Y'are apple eaters all, deceiuers still.

(III.ii.247-250)

The irony, of course, is that Laxton, the arch-deceiver in the play, occupies a central place among the "apple-eating" company.

The fallen and depraved world of these characters is captured through a technique derived from the moralities. The pattern of food imagery is particularly striking in the frequent equations between food and sexual appetite. The association between eating and lust recalls the allegorical technique of the moralities where gluttony and lechery are usually depicted as a pair: in _The Castle of Perseverance_, for example, the player "Caro" (Flesh) is accompanied by "Gula" (Gluttony) and "Luxuria" (Lechery). "The association of the two carnal sins, Lust and Gluttony, a medieval commonplace," writes Margaret Bryan, "occurs throughout the literature and iconography of the Middle Ages" and persists into the Renaissance. The association of food and lust in _The Roaring Girl_ is introduced at the very beginning of the play where the disguised Mary Fitzallard, who has come to Wengrave's house to seek out Sebastian and reaffirm her love for him, is received by the wily servant Neatfoot who greets her "with a napkin on his shoulder, and a trencher in his hand as if from table" (s.d.) and who, amid an onslaught of sexual word play, equates her with Sebastian's food:
Neat. ... I will (fairest tree of generation) watch when our young maister is erected, (that is to say vp) and deliver him to your most white hand.

Mary. Thankes sir.

Neat. [Aside]. And withall certifie him, that I haue culled out for him (now his belly is replenished) a daintier bit or modicum then any lay vpon his trencher at dinner . . . . (I.i.6-12)

Sebastian, who is familiar with Wengrave's thinking, cleverly manipulates his father by making him believe he will marry Moll Cutpurse, and does so by equating feeding with love:

Seb. ... give me Fitz-Allards daughter.
Alex. Ile give thee rats-bane rather.
Seb. Well then you know What dish I meane to feed vpon.
Alex. Harke Gentlemen, He swears to haue this cut-purse drab, to spite my gall.

(I.ii.172-175)

It is significant that Mary Fitzallard and Moll Cutpurse, both of whom embody values (chastity, loyalty, love) demeaned by Wengrave and company, refuse invitations to eat with them. Mary spends a good deal of time refusing Neatfoot's lusty offers of food (I.i.10-21), and Moll rejects Laxton's invitation "to sup at Braineford" (II.i.271), an invitation concomitant with his offer of sex (II.i.243-170). The food-lust configuration, then, is fundamental to the play's moral scheme, which treats the domus as the seat of appetite and concupiscence.
The frequent use of "feeding" as an erotic metaphor reaches beyond the Wengrave-Sebastian action to the citizen plot where feeding, bawdy word-play, and sexual inadequacy form an intricate configuration. The tensions underlying Prudence and Master Gallipot's marriage, for example, are highlighted during the dinner-party scene (III.ii) where the pattern of food imagery and the proliferation of sexual double-entendres parallel the salacious atmosphere of Wengrave's feast in Act one. "In The Roaring Girl," writes Andor Gomme, "the punning and word-play are so constant and intricate that it is often as if two conversations are going on simultaneously using the same words;" often the exchanges "are extended pieces of bawdry in which the scarcely concealed sexual dialogue sits on top of a perfectly consistent conversation about something quite innocent," that is, food. The dinner-party scene in the citizen plot opens upon a domestic squabble between husband and wife, which has disrupted the festive atmosphere. Prudence enters "as from supper, her husband after her" (s.d.), and proceeds to inveigh against Gallipot's uxorious behavior. The exchange tends toward farce, but broad comedy is restrained by the urgency of the language which alerts us to the characters' anxiety. The dialogue captures the dissatisfaction in the marriage chiefly through food imagery. Prudence is angry because her husband dotes on her like an infant dotes on its mother: "I thinke the baby would / haue a teate it kyes so, pray be not so fond of me, . . . /
I'm vexed at you to see how like a calf you come / bleating after me" (III. ii. 2-5). Oblivious to his wife's complaint, Gallipot continues to whine as he thinks of his dinner companions who have witnessed his wife's discourteous behavior: "Nay hony Pru: how does your rising vp before all / the table shew? and flinging from my friends so uncivilly, fye Pru, / fye, come" (ll. 6-8). Prudence, however, flagrantly defies conventional behavior, and her reply—"Then vp and ride ifaith" (1. 9)—exposes her unsatisfied sexual desire. The portrayal of the Gallipots' marriage alters the stock situation in which marital conflict is simply attributed to the wife's shrewishness. The complication here approaches psychological subtlety, particularly in the depiction of the husband's uxoriousness. Gallipot, whose virility is dubious—"Vp and ride, nay, my pretty Pru, that's farre from my / thought, ducke" (ll. 10-11)—expresses his concern with his wife's frustration through a series of food metaphors: "thy minde is nibbling at something, / what ist, what lyes upon thy Stomach?" (ll. 11-12); "I smel a goose, a couple of capons, and a gammon / of bacon from her mother out of the country, I hold my life" (ll. 70-71). Throughout the exchange Gallipot's need for oral gratification is strongly implied. His inability to distinguish between feeding and love, his consummate delight in infantile behavior—"the baby would / have a teate it kyes so"—and his dependence on non-sexual
affection suggest sexual inadequacy, a disorder confirmed by Prudence's reproach:

Mist. Gal. . . . I cannot haue a qualme come vpon mee but your mouth waters, till your nose hang ouer it. Maist. Gal. It is my loue deere wife. Mist. Gal. Your loue? your loue is all words; giue mee deeds I cannot abide a man thats too fond ouer me, so cookish; thou dost not know how to handle a woman in her kind. (III.ii.19-24)

The food-lust equation thus goes beyond its allegorical significance in the citizen plot and suggests psychological depth. Gallipot's disorder is fully realized in his response to Prudence and Laxton's trick, whereby the gallant poses as the wife's original suitor who has come to reclaim her. Gallipot's disquietude over the prospect of having to relinquish his source of gratification to a rival, a prospect which he equates with being deprived of a choice dish of food, is remarkably coherent as an aggressive infantile reaction:

Haue you [Laxton] so beggarly an appetite When I vpon a dainty dish haue fed To dine vpon my scraps, my leauings? ha sir? Do I come neere you now sir? (III.ii.229-232)

Gallipot's importunities on behalf of his wife mask his sexual inadequacy. With Prudence, Gallipot is passive and mealy; but to his rival and to society at large he wishes to appear sexually aggressive, a pretense which he twice
asserts in public. On the first occasion Gallipot bolsters the lie with bawdy innuendo:

Maist. Gal. Would you not scorne to weare my cloathes sir?
Laxton. Right sir.
Maist. Gal. Then pray sir weare not her, for shee's a garment
So fitting for my body, I'me loath
Another should put it on, you will vndoe both.
(III.ii.232-236)

Gallipot's reduction of his wife to a passive recipient of his lust contrasts sharply with his behavior in private. The second lie occurs during the reconciliation scene where Gallipot forgives the gallant for tricking him, and sustains his aplomb in an affected reproach of Prudence for having withheld sex from him:

Maist. Gal. . . . sir I am beholden (not to you wife)
But Maister Laxton to your want of doing ill, Which it seems you haue not. Gentlemen, Tarry and dine here all.
Maist. Open. Brother, we haue a iest, As good as yours to furnish out a feast.
Maist. Gal. Wee'1 crowne our table with it; wife brag no more, Of holding out: who most brags is most whore.
(IV.ii.318-324)

Gallipot's infantilism, however, is not Dekker's central interest, and the citizen plot is rather hastily concluded. Yet the Gallipots' conjugal problems have reinforced the essential theme that the repressive nature of family relations affects both the gentry and the citizens. The food-lust syndrome in the citizen plot is sustained in
the resolution where we witness Gallipot's bombastic
invitation to dinner and his reproach of Prudence, a
resolution which strongly suggests the marriage will never
be free of conflict.

The Gallipots' conjugal dissatisfaction is contrasted
with the more genial marriage of their counterparts,
Mistress and Master Openwork. The largely orthodox and
sentimental portrayal of conflict in the Openworks' marriage
no doubt attests to Dekker's consciousness of the large
citizen audiences that frequented the Fortune Theatre where
the play was performed. The central concern is Openwork's
exposure of Goshawk's lechery, which preserves the general
rule of decorum in the public theatres requiring lusty
gallants who attempt the seduction of citizen wives
generally to "come off badly." Openwork dupes Goshawk by
pretending to be tired of his wife's shrewishness—"I cannot
endure the house / when shee scolds, sh'has a tongue will be
hard further in a still / morning then Saint Antlings-bell"
(II.i.272-274)—and by admitting he keeps a whore in the
suburbs. Openwork lies in order to test the gallant's
loyalty as a friend, not to test his wife's fidelity of
which he is certain. The wife's virtue, moreover, counter-
points Prudence's lust in that Mistress Openwork's apparent
lechery is finally exposed as another pretense to dupe the
unsuspecting Goshawk and to teach him to "deale vpon mens
wijues no more" (IV.ii.217). There are moments when the
marriage is exposed as less than satisfying, as when the
wife complains that she is often left alone by her husband to make what "shift" she can (II.i.204) by handling her sexual parts herself, a barren activity for which she may as well "shut up shop," (I. 205) since when she opens it she receives nothing. However, the action generally confirms the couple's compatibility. Although half-believing Goshawk's lies, Mistress Openwork remains true to her name when she challenges her husband openly about his whore, and the two are easily reconciled when the wife rebukes the gallant (IV.ii.189-195) and secures his apology. The resolution neatly asserts that deception and trickery are universal occurrences that can always be "unmasked by plain truth." However, the uneasy tone which underlies the reconciliation undermines the message. Goshawk's admission of guilt is followed by Master Openwork's wistful reflection on the world's imperfection—"On fairest cheeks, wife nothing is perfect borne / . . . What's this whole world but a gilt rotten pill?" (II. 204-206)—ironically implying that no one should be trusted, a quip followed by a somewhat self-satisfied gesture of forgiveness and an invitation to dinner:

Maist. Open. Make my house yours sir still.
Gosh. No.
Maist. Open. I say you shall:

Seeing (thus besieg'd) it holds out, 'twill neuer fall.

(IV.ii.217-219)
Openwork's remarks cast doubt on the apparent harmony, and the Openworks' plain dealing is shown to be naive and simplistic when juxtaposed to the conflict in the Prudence-Gallipot action, where plain dealing has unmasked a more complex truth. Prudence's frenzied pursuit of Laxton is a rare achievement in the public theatres where citizen wives were not portrayed as adulterous. Unlike the conventional complication in the Mistress Openwork-Goshawk action, Prudence Gallipot's lust for Laxton is never uncovered as a pretense. The affair, moreover, is never consummated because the gallant has been deceiving the wife, not because the wife realizes how much more worthy her husband is than Laxton.

III

The debased domus of Alexander Wengrave, and the psychologically disturbed world of the citizens are counterpointed by the Mary-Sebastian action. The world of the young lovers is suffused with an aura of sacredness evoked by the abstract quality of their language which portrays their secret betrothal not as a grotesque extension of eating, but as a "knot" tied in heaven:

Mary. . . . in one knot
Haue both our hands byt'h hands of heauen bene tyed, . . . .

(I.i.68-69)
The dialogue between the lovers is saturated with devotional imagery. Mary distinguishes between love which is "wouen sleightly" (1. 29) and a nobler love like hers, which "being truely bred ith soule . . . / Bleeds euen to death, at the least wound it takes" (11. 31-33). She further declares that a betrothal is a holy act sanctioned by heaven; it is "a bond fast sealed, with solemne oathes, / Subscribed vnto . . . with your soule: / Deliuered as your deed in sight of heauen" (11. 51-53). And Sebastian, whose "eyes / Are blessed" by Mary's (11. 60-61), proclaims their secret vows to be "in heauens booke / Set downe" (11. 73-74). The solemnity evoked by the repetition of "bands" (11. 14; 15; 39), "bond" (11. 51; 54), "soule" (11. 31; 52), and "heauen" (11. 53; 69; 73; 108) contrasts sharply with the bawdy dissimulation and desultory banter transpiring simultaneously in Wengrave's inner rooms, and later between the citizens and the gallants.

The private conversations between Mary and Sebastian mark those rare moments in the play when sexual innuendo is entirely absent, the elimination of double-talk reinforcing the idea of marriage as the field where one ought to practise human virtue. The resolution, in which Sebastian and Mary reiterate their marriage vows with the blessing of their elders and of society at large, marks another hiatus in the jugglery of word play. Indeed, the language is so transformed that it becomes epideictic. Whereas the world of the elders has been depicted through realistic vignettes
of household life, Dekker, through Mary and Sebastian's union, attempts to resolve the tensions within the domus by distancing the lovers from the realistic setting and elevating them by means of symbolic associations. The symbolic structures combine elements from epithalamic poetry with those of New Comedy.

In tone and structure the final one hundred lines or so of the play recall the celebration of marriage in epithalamic verse. Mary, dressed as a "Bride," is ushered in "twixt two noble friends" (V.ii.168), and the ceremony is attended by characters representing the entire social spectrum: there are lords, gentlemen, ladies, "Cittizens and their wiues with them" (s.d.) as well as roarers from the underworld. The aristocratic milieu, which is a standard topos of the classical epithalamium, is here modified as it is in Spenser's Epithalamion in order to embrace the whole of society. Wengrave, acting as master of ceremonies, has a function similar to that of the epithalamist, who calls "into being the ideal event which the wedding must be, the ideal as defined partly by convention, partly by the particular society, partly by the poet." Repenting his former blindness, Wengrave praises the marriage as a sacred occasion: "Blessings eternall, and the ioyes of Angels, / Beginne your peace heere, to be sign'd in heauen" (V.ii.173-174). Having abandoned the "wilfull rashness" (V.ii.193) which had prevented him from seeing clearly "the
brightnesse" of Mary's "worth" (1. 195), Wengrave has become an exponent of sacred values.

Alex. Heauen giue thee a blessing . . ., the best ioyes,
That can in worldly shapes to man betide,
Are fertile lands, and a fair fruitful Bride, . . . .
Of which I hope thou'rt sped.
(V.ii.202-205)

Come, worthy friends, . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . .

And you kind Gentlewomen, whose sparkling presence,
Are glories set in marriage, beames of society,
For all your loues giue luster to my ioyes,
The happinesse of this day shall be remembred,
At the returne of euery smiling spring:
In May time now 'tis borne, and may no sadnesse
Sit on the browes of men vpon that day,
But as I am, so all goe pleas'd away.
(11. 257-266)

In the end, the once obdurate parent has become a proponent of marriage and procreation, although his command that Sebastian receive "fertill lands, and a faire fruitfull Bride" (1. 203) ironically points to the order of his priorities, and renders him a somewhat flawed representative of the values embodied by the lovers. Wengrave's commands and invocations characterize the union primarily as a social event, although sexual and religious elements are also present: he hopes Sebastian is "sped," that is, sexually potent, and he asks for heaven's blessing of the couple. The wedding is also related to the natural world and thus becomes a cosmic event. Other elements in the panegyric and in the theatrical details of the vignette are typical of
spousal verse. There is the standard spring *topos* which recalls the setting of Spenser's *Prothalamion*:

Calme was the day, and through the trembling ayre,
Sweet breathing Zephyrus did softly play
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
Hot Titans beams, which then did glyster fayre . . . .

Wengrave also articulates the conventional praise of the wife's beauty (V.ii.130-132; 187-195), and implies the bedding of the couple in the injunction to break off the revelry—"as I am, so all goe pleas'd away" (l. 266). Spenser celebrates marriage both for conjugal chastity and procreation; the familiar request for offspring is also imparted to Sebastian and Mary (l. 204), procreation being secondary in importance only to the marital bond itself. George Puttenham, in his discussion of epithalamic verse, articulates the idealization of marriage and procreation that characterized his age:

As the consolation of children well begotten is great, no lesse but rather greater ought to be that which is the occasion of children, that is honorable matrimonie, a loue by al lawes allowed, not mutable nor encombrd with such vaine cares & passions, as that other loue, whereof there is no assurance, but loose and fickle affection occasioned for the most part by sodaine sights and acquaintance of no long triall or experience, nor vpon any other good ground wherein any suretie may be conceiued . . . .

The use of elements from epithalamic poetry in the resolution enhances the contrast between an ideal union,
represented by Sebastian and Mary's wedding, and the degenerate world of the elders. As well, Sebastian and Mary's victory, symbolic of a new order, places the play clearly in the tradition of New Comedy. From its origins in Greece through the plays of Plautus and Terence to the Renaissance, the basic structure of New Comedy remained consistent. "What normally happens," observes Northrop Frye, "is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is restricted by some opposition . . . and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will." The young hero's problems, which are settled in the resolution, form the basis of the action. The opposition normally includes the young man's father or "someone who partakes of the father's closer relation to established society: that is, a rival with less youth and more money." Like the victory of the protagonist in New Comedy, Sebastian's marriage at the end of The Roaring Girl represents the essential achievement in New Comedy, that is, the symbolic replacement "of a harsh, restrictive society" with one "which is freer, more accepting, and more inclusive." In the tradition of New Comedy, The Roaring Girl dramatizes a symbolic conflict "between forces associated with death and sterility and ones associated with life and fertility." The idealized portrayal of marriage which concludes the play confirms our expectation, established at the outset, that the plot will move toward an already anticipated orthodox conclusion. "As complex as the
details of comic plots often seem" in New Comedy, writes G.E. Rowe,

the overall structure and movement of those plots is totally conventional. Once we realize that the work before us is in the tradition of conventional comedy . . . we immediately know that our sympathies should lie with youth and that all will come out well for the protagonists. At the end of the play we applaud a state of affairs which we have recognized since the beginning of the drama to be both beneficial and inevitable.46

Mary and Sebastian's marriage represents the negation of a society whose obsession with money and sex as prized commodities has rendered it sterile and wasteful. Yet, in its veneration of conjugal love and of the privileges of wealth and status (Sebastian, after all, inherits a considerable amount of property and a title) the resolution, as in New Comedy, does not overthrow the established order; it merely transforms it. That orthodox values have not been rejected outrightly is implied when Sebastian asks his father's forgiveness for the sorrow his prodigal actions have caused him (V.ii.170-173). In order to enjoy the benefits of his new life, Sebastian, like the prodigals of New Comedy, must be forgiven by his elders. His new status, therefore, represents both an alteration and a reaffirmation of the world which he had renounced.

But just as in Patient Grissil and the two parts of The Honest Whore the resolution sustained an unresolved tension between real and ideal worlds, The Roaring Girl, although following a typical comic pattern in the Sebastian-Mary
plot, paradoxically denies us the familiar comic ending in the Moll Cutpurse-Jack Dapper action. The ambivalence is manifested chiefly in the contradictions embodied in Moll Cutpurse, who is at once the defender of the values upheld by Mary and Sebastian and the arch-opponent of convention. Ironically, Moll's rejection of social claims denies the promise implicit in the conventional resolution of the Mary-Sebastian plot. Through the portrayal of Moll's self-realization the play upholds irreconcilable elements which resist the "normal comic movement toward moderation and harmony." 47

IV

Moll Cutpurse is based on a real-life model, Mary Frith (commonly called Moll Cutpurse), a notorious woman who frequented the Fortune Theatre in man's apparel, and who was described by a contemporary as "a very Tomrig or Rumpscutle" who "sported only in boy's play and pastime," scorned girlish endeavors such as "sewing or stitching," and showed "rude inclinations." 48 Although Mary Frith stood out in her eccentricity, the Prologue to The Roaring Girl is quick to point out that "many" such women (1. 16) could be found in the suburbs and the city:

One is shee
That roares at midnight in deepe Tauerne bowles,
That beates the watch, and Constables controuls;
Another roares i' th day time, sweares, stabbes,
giues braues,
Yet sells her soule to the lust of fooles and slaues.
Both these are Suburbe-roarers. Then there's (besides)
A ciuill Citty-Roaring Girle, whose pride,
Feasting, and riding, shakes her husbands state,
And leaues him Roaring through an yron grate.  
(11. 16-24)

In the play Moll Cutpurse does many of the things her real-life counterparts did: she wears men's clothes, carries a weapon, and mixes in taverns with members of the underworld; yet she also champions virtue, a quality that does not suggest a portrait from life:

None of these Roaring Girles is ours: shee flies With wings more lofty. Thus her character lies, . . . .  
(Prol., 11. 25-26)

Ostensibly the accent is noble and Moll's character appears unequivocal. Dekker's roaring girl is clever and quick-witted, and her skill in sword-fighting is a means to shame lechers. Moll's "determination to act her own part in keeping up virtue and tracking down vice," writes Gomme, is what makes her "so attractive and unusual a figure in the drama of the time or indeed any other." Moll's virtuous behavior extends to her promotion of love marriages. Her participation in Sebastian's scheme to dupe his father promotes the comic ending; as Wengrave notes, the happy union between his son and Mary could not have come about without Moll's help (V.ii.243-250). Moll's function as comic promoter is part of the fullness of her character.
Recently, Patrick Cheney has argued that Moll's multifariousness enables us to view her as a symbol of wholeness. Noting that Moll "combines in her person both feminine and masculine traits, and uses her remarkable powers to unite other couples in love," Cheney argues the character is essentially an hermaphrodite, "a supreme symbol of two souls becoming one--particularly within the context of married love." However, through Moll the play, I believe, only ambiguously upholds chastity, marriage, and fertility, and only marginally embraces the idea of wholeness implicit in the hermaphrodite figure. Essentially Moll chooses, like Jack Dapper, to remain a social outcast. Her personal morality, furthermore, reveals a fundamental discrepancy between her personal life and the absolute values she promotes.

Moll's personal concept of freedom and independence seems inconsistent when juxtaposed with her role in furthering the festive order of the plot. Although Moll helps bring about the conjugal happiness of others, she resolutely renounces marriage for herself, for reasons which are both complex and contradictory. On the one hand, her view of marriage is in keeping with the Christian ascetic tradition: in her refusal to submit not only to men but to her own physical nature, she associates the idea of independence with ascetic denial, a belief articulated in a soliloquy immediately following her rejection of Laxton's lusty advances:
... shee that has wit, and spirit,
May scorne to liue beholding to her body for meate,
Or for apparell like your common dame,
That makes shame get her cloathes, to couer shame.
Base is that minde, that kneels vnto her body,
As if a husband stood in awe on's wife,
My spirit shall be Mistresse of this house,
As long as I haue time in't...
(III.i.131-140)

Moll here associates her spirit with the husband, and implies its opposition to her body (the wife), so that the impulse is toward the world of the spirit away from the world of desire. Moll's reference to time is significant because ideals reside outside of time; they have no place in the fallen mutable world Moll rejects, the world where identity is governed by "apparell" (I. 133) and where marriage is not the union of opposites but the handmaiden of desire. However, on another occasion Moll renounces marriage and the pleasures of the flesh for less lofty reasons:

... I haue no humor to marry, I loue to lye aboth sides ath bed myself; and againe ath'other side; a wife you know ought to be obedient, but I feare me I am too headstrong to obey, therefore Ile nere go about it ....
......
... I haue the head now of my selfe, and am man enough for a woman, marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden looses one head, and has a worse ith place.

(II.ii.35-43)
Here Moll does not reject marriage in favor of asceticism but because marriage denies a woman freedom to act as she pleases in the world. Moll, whose sense of self is highly individualized, views marriage as a threat to a woman's self-realization, marriage being the exchange of one "head" for another in that a wife replaces her maidenhead (a symbol, to Moll, of independence) with the sovereignty of her husband.

Yet Moll realizes the loss involved in her renunciation of marriage and sex. Moll's dream, which reveals the tension between denial and desire, suggests we are viewing not so much a symbol of virtue as a complex individual. The dream is divided into two parts. The first part concerns a woman who delights in doing unwomanly things such as squandering money and mixing with vulgar company:

I dreame there is a Mistresse,  
And she layes out the money,  
Shee goes vnto her Sisters,  
Shee neuer comes at any.  
... ... ... ...  
Shee sayes shee went to' th Bursse for patternes,  
You shall finde her at Saint Katherens,  
And comes home with neuer a penny.  
(IV.i.99-106)

The woman in this dream does not buy "patternes" to sew dresses, sewing being the quintessential stereotypical occupation of women. Instead she prefers, like Moll, the dockside district in the east end of London, a district notorious for its alehouses and taverns. The second part of the dream is about sex and adultery:
Here comes a wench will braue ye,
    Her courage was so great,
Shee lay with one o'the Navy,
    Her husband lying i'the Fleet.
Yet oft with him she cAuel'd,
    I wonder what shee ailes,
Her husbands ship lay grauel'd,
    When her's could hoyse vp sailes,
Yet shee beganne like all my foes,
    To call whoore first: for so do those,
A pox of all false tayles.
(11. 109-119)

That Moll equates herself with the adulteress in the dream, despite her defensive posture, is confirmed in her response to the sexual fantasy:

Hang vp the viall now . . .: all this while I was in a dreame;
one shall lie rudely then, but being awake, I keepe my legges
together . . . .
(11. 122-124)

Through her attire, Moll has adopted the more forceful male role in order to escape subordination. However, she has done so by sacrificing her sexual desires, a compromise which her dream reveals to us. The complexity of her choices is what makes Moll so substantial a character. Proud to be "the head now of my / selfe," Moll cannot tolerate the loss of personal autonomy which marriage and sexuality entail, a loss which, by implication, will follow even Mary's entrance into the domus. In the final scene, Moll opposes the comic ending with a riddle prophesying she will marry only when various impossibilities take place:
When you shall heare,  
Gallants voyd from Serieants feare,  
Honesty and truth vnslandered,  
Woman man'd, but neuer pandred,  
Cheaters booted, but not coacht,  
If my minde be then not varied,  
Next day following I'le be married.  
(V.ii.117-124)

Lord Nolan's alarmed response—"This sounds like domes-day" (l. 125)—is countered by Moll with yet another disturbing quip:

    Then were marriage best,  
    For if I should repent, I were soone at rest.  
    (11. 126-127)

Moll's equation of marriage with death nullifies her role as an hermaphrodite figure representing the totality of human love. Her misogamy also denies the epithalamic vision of marriage and fertility as means of creating order and continuity. Moll will bear no offspring who will carry on her heritage. Indeed, her concept of independence suggests a lack of responsibility and the absence of a sense of tradition.

Moll's expression of independence may be compared with Julia's misogamy in Patient Grissil: Moll's pronouncement that she would rather die than marry directly recalls Julia's assertion that she would rather "lead Apes in hell" (V.ii.282) than marry. The difference in stature between the two characters attests to Dekker's growing sympathy with the values these women espouse; for whereas Julia's part was that of a minor character in a minor plot, the fiercely
independent woman has become the heroine in *The Roaring Girl*. Like Julia, Moll is never forced to renounce her choices in order to gratify the spectator's expectations. Dekker's striking achievement is the presentation, in the popular theatre, of so sympathetic a treatment of a heroine's desire for self-realization.

Moll's dual role as the embodiment of chastity and as champion of independence makes her a representative of the dramatist's artistic purpose. Moll's range is as vast as the play's. The essence of Moll's nature is expressed symbolically in the opposition between the two "houses" she inhabits:

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Trapdoore. . . . pray let me know what house you'r off.
Moll. One of the Temple sir.
Trap. Masses so me thinkes.
Moll. And yet sometime I lye about chicke lane.
      (III.i.163-167)
```

Moll is equally "at home" in the sacred world as she is amid thieves and prostitutes, the traditional inhabitants of Chick Lane. The character's duality extends to her proficiency as a musician (indicative of harmony, refinement, and felicity) and her mastery of thieves' cant (V.i). Her protean ability to bend and shift from the imaginary heights of the immutable world to the depths of the fallen world makes her rich in variety and contradiction. Moll's protean spirit cannot be understood by those whose understanding is faulty or who conceive of
the world two-dimensionally, as does Alexander Wengrave, her enemy until "the eyes of judgement, now so cleere," permit him to "see the brightnesse" of truth (V.ii.194-195).

Moll's strangeness, like truth itself, is disturbing and everywhere draws mistrust. To those who fear her, she is "madde Moll" (Prologue, 1. 30; I.i.94), a "flesh fly" and a "scuruy woman" (I.ii.127-128), a "codpiece /daughter" (II.ii.11) associated with perversity and monstrosity:

Alex. . . . It [Moll] is a thing
One knowes not how to name, her birth began
Ere she was all made. . . .
. . . . . . . . .
The Sunne giues her two shadowes to one shape,
Nay more, let this strange thing, walke, stand or sit,
No blazing starre drawes more eyes after it.
Dauy. A Monster, tis some Monster.
(II.ii.131-138)

To the nefarious Trapdoor Moll's shiftiness is confusing and detestable because it disrupts expectation: "I like you the worse because you shift your lodgings so often" (III.i.168).

Even the truth-obsessed Mistress Openwork denies Moll her "house and shop" (II.i.211) on the basis of Moll's outrageous appearance. Before the resolution, only Moll is concerned with the truth beneath appearances, as expressed in her judgment of Trapdoor: "he seemes / A man without; I'le try what he is within" (III.i.147-148). The world of the Davy Dappers is unable to judge identity as anything
other than a matter of appearance or, more specifically, of clothes.

Moll's identity as a heroine who embodies truth parallels the play's identity as a work of art. Just as in Moll's society clothes often make the person, play-making is frequently only a matter of ornamentation. Middleton's witty address "To the Comicke Play-readers" that prefaces the quarto describes the prevalent taste for adornment as it applies to "The fashion of play-making" (I. 1) through an extended metaphor of clothes. Fashionable plays are those which cater to popular taste and are compared to "the alteration in apparell: For in the time of the / Great-crop-doublet, your huge bombasted plaies, quilted with / mighty words to leane purpose was onely then in fashion. And as / the doublet fell, neater inuentions beganne to set vp" (II. 2-5). The fashion now is neat symmetrical plotting padded with clever, elaborate "conceits" and "lecherous jests," all "drest vp in hanging sleeues" (II. 5-8). Ironically, Middleton does not completely extricate The Roaring Girl from such "light-colour Summer stuffe" (I. 9) because play-making after all must entertain as well as instruct: "you shall finde this published Comedy . . . good to keepe you in an / afternoone from dice, at home in your chambers; and for venery / you shall finde enough, for sixpence" (II. 10-12). At the same time, Middleton claims the play he and Dekker have written goes beyond popular fashion because it frustrates expectation and is subject to censorship: "For
Venus being a woman passes through the play in doublet and breeches, a braue disguise and a safe one, if the Statute vnty not her cod-piece point" (11. 13-15). The statute in question is the law forbidding women to wear male dress, which arose from "the controversy then raging over women's role and rights, their wearing men's hats or masculine dress ... be[ing] one of the signs of moral degeneration." The purpose of poetry, argues Middleton, is to expose truth, even if it might not always be "fit for the Times" (1. 8). The Roaring Girl counters false opinion, including secular law, by demonstrating that Moll's disguise is a "safe one" (1. 14), that is, "morally sound and mentally sane" (O.E.D.). Thus it is only at the end of the play, when the "common voyce"--the real "whore, / That deceiues mans opinion; mockes his trust, / Cozens his loue, and makes his heart vnjust" (V.ii.248-250)--has been exposed, that Moll, like the "brightnesse" (V.ii.195) of truth itself, is judged according to her worth.

The condemnation of false opinion goes beyond the traditional distinction between appearance and reality in its challenge of certain fundamental homiletic tenets. Moll's transvestism, for example, defies the morality invested in gender distinction as defined in Deuteronomy (22.5): "No woman shall wear an article of man's clothing, nor shall a man put on woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God," a dictum which is directly at odds with Moll's personal sense of virtue: "I
pursue no pitty, / Follow the law, and you can cucke mee, spare not" (V.ii.252-253). The contradiction is crystallized in Moll's participation in the prodigal-son action. Moll bears more than a passing resemblance to Jack Dapper, the other prodigal of the play; indeed Moll's masculine nickname, Jack, suggests that the prodigal functions partly as Moll's double. Jack is a notorious spend-thrift who lives on credit, lavishing his money on tobacco, wine, and whores. He is a consummate gambler and associates with profligates and catamites:

_Daun._ Bring him abed with these: when his purse gingles, Roaring boyes follow at's tale, fencers and ningles, (Beasts Adam nere gaue name to) these horse-leeches sucke My sonne, he being drawne dry, they all liue on smoake. (III.iii.61-64)

The father's solution is to cure his son's prodigality by having him arrested and sent to Bridewell, the notorious house of correction that Dekker had already denounced in *The Honest Whore, II.*

_Daun._ Thinke you the Counter cannot breake him? _Adam._ Breake him? _Daun._ Yes and break's heart too if he lie there long. _Adam._ I'le make him sing a Counter tenor sure. _Daun._ No way to tame him like it, there he shall learne What mony is indeed, and how to spend it. _Daun._ Hee's bridled there. (III.iii.73-77)
Jack's arrest is to be carried out by Sergeant Curtilax, a blusterer whose name and primitive understanding render him a disturbing defender of the law:

\begin{quote}
Curtilax. ... all that liue in the world, are but great fish and little fish, and feede vpon one another, some eate vp whole men, a Seriant cares but for the shoulder of a man, ... .
\end{quote}

(III.iii.134-136)

Curtilax pursues Jack Dapper as though the latter were hunter's prey, and the pursuit is complete with hunting cries and references to the quest for game (III.iii.156-170). Moll's intervention, however, impedes the arrest. Moll forcibly takes Jack out of the sergeant's custody, an offense which was considered "very serious, and which could bring a heavy prison sentence."\(^5\) Neither Jack nor Moll ever repents the crime; instead, Moll describes her part as her "perfect one good worke" (III.iii.212) of the day. The next time we see Moll and Jack together, during the canting scene (V.i),\(^5\) they mingle freely among cutpurses and delight in their unabashed knowledge of the underworld.

The canting scene, which has been described as "an almost complete irrelevance to the remainder of the play,"\(^5\) is crucial to Dekker's thematic purpose in that it reaffirms the antinomian ethic set forth in Middleton's preface. The scene is interposed between IV.ii, where the resolution of the citizen plot takes place, and V.ii, which depicts the glorious epithalamic ending. Before the canting actually
begins in V.1 Moll, Jack and their friends engage in a lighthearted reminiscence of the day's events, and Jack ridicules his father's attempt to have him imprisoned. In direct counterpoint to Sebastian's request for his father's forgiveness (V.ii.170-172), which in the end permits him to inherit a new status quo, Moll and Jack Dapper renounce the ethic of repentance:

Moll. What saies my little Dapper?

... ...

Iac. Dap. Sirra Captaine mad Mary, the gull my owne father (Sir Day Dapper) laid these London boote-halers the catch poles in ambush to set vpon mee.

Omn. Your father? away Iacke.

Iac. Dap. By the tassels of this handkercher'tis true, and what was his warlicke stratageme thinke you? hee thought because a wicker cage tames a nightingale, a lowsy prison could make an asse of mee.

Omn. A nasty plot.

Iac. Dap. I: as though a Counter, which is a parke, in which all the wilde beasts of the Citty run head by head could tame mee.

(V.i.27-41)

The company will celebrate Jack's freedom by feasting at "Pimlico"--"that nappy land of spice-cakes" (11. 49-50) described elsewhere in Dekker as a mad world frequented by revellers and crammed with "Bawdy houses"55--and by carousing in the London streets and taverns. The celebration contrasts sharply with the wedding feast in the subsequent scene set in Wengrave's house.
After Moll and Jack reaffirm their loyalty to the city rather than the domus, they engage Trapdoor in the labyrinthine obscurities of thieves' cant (ll. 137ff.). The canting episode opposes the conventional speeches and rituals that inform the resolution by imposing an unconventional and virtually impenetrable language upon reality. Only after Moll paraphrases the secret code do we realize we have been listening to an ode to freedom:

L. Nol. Mol what was in that canting song?
Moll. Troth my Lord, onely a praise of good drinke, the onely milke which these wilde beasts loue to sucke, and thus it was:
A rich cup of wine, oh it is iuyce Diuine, More wholesome for the head, then meate, drinke, or bread, To fill my drunken pate, with that, I'de sit vp late, By the heelles wou'd I lie, vnder a lowsy hedge die, Let a slaue haue a pull at my whore, so I be full Of that precious liquor . . . .
(V.i.232-240)

Unlike Sebastian and Mary, Moll and Jack Dapper renew neither their families nor society. While the play's epithalamic ending calls attention to the promise of rebirth, Moll's affirmation of another "order" undermines the significance of that celebration and opposes to it another set of values.

The contradiction implicit in the resolution shows Dekker reworking the ambiguity of The Honest Whore, II as it pertains to the prodigal's reformation. In that play Matheo
does not repent his prodigality, but his reunion with Bellafront is enough to secure him the full benefits of Orlando's household. Unlike Matheo, neither Moll nor Jack Dapper makes a symbolic journey "home"; each remains firmly committed to the city. Moll thus goes beyond Matheo in rejecting Orlando's world altogether:

\begin{quote}
Moll. Perhaps for my madde going some reproue mee, I please my selfe, and care not else who loue mee.
\end{quote}

(IV.ii.318-319)

Moll's renunciation of convention is a necessary choice which promotes her self-realization and self-esteem. Her fierce individuality counterpoints the comic archetype of the return home, making for a protean ending that is rich in complexity.

In the world of Dekker's domestic comedies the individual's personal victory over repressive social claims is sometimes treated as heroic; more importantly, it is treated as possible. However, in Dekker's only extant domestic tragedy, \textit{The Witch of Edmonton}, written late in his career, personal and social claims are irreconcilable. As Leonora Leet Brodwin notes, \textit{The Witch of Edmonton} is "unique" as a domestic tragedy because it permits a prodigal husband "to have a tragic ending."\textsuperscript{56} There is no adjustment here between Frank Thorney's personal desires and social claims, and there is no symbolic journey home either for Frank or for Elizabeth Sawyer, a victim of social prejudice.
and fragmentation. That these protagonists are executed in the same manner reinforces the tragic impossibility of spiritual regeneration.
Notes

1 The conventional date of The Roaring Girl is 1605, but see P.A. Mulholland, "The Date of The Roaring Girl," Review of English Studies, 28 (1977), 18-31, who prefers the date 1611.

2 Cyrus Hoy, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, II, 248.

3 Thomas Dekker, Westward Ho, in Dramatic Works, ed. Fredson Bowers, II. All further citations from the play are from this edition.

4 Alexander Leggatt, Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare, p. 130. For much of what I have to say about Westward Ho I am indebted to Leggatt's analysis of the play's casual treatment of virtue.

5 The most widely accepted opinion of the play's authorship is Peter B. Murray's attribution of "all of Acts I and III and the first scene of Act IV" to Webster, and the remainder of the play to Dekker" ["The Collaboration of Dekker and Webster in 'Northward Ho' and 'Westward Ho,'" Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, 56 (1962), 482-86; 485].

6 Leggatt, Citizen Comedy, p. 131.


8 Hoy, II, 249.

9 Leggatt, p. 133.
Muriel Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), p. 127. Cf. M.-T. Jones Davies, in *Un Peintre de la Vie Londonienne*, I, 131-32, who states: "On découvre, comme dans les scènes secondaires de *The Roaring Girl*, que les bourgeois sont honnêtes, les galants dupes, les maris confondus et la procureuse Birdlime honnie; puis tout le monde se rembarque pour Londre." Cf. Arthur Brown, in "Citizen Comedy and Domestic Drama," p. 72, who writes: "The theme of conjugal relations is dealt with . . . satirically in *Westward Ho* . . . and Northward Ho . . . but the satire is not pushed to the bitter end . . . ."; and Andrew Clark, *Domestic Drama*, II, 318, who agrees with Bradbrook's estimation of the Ho plays, but who notes that "in these later collaborative works, Dekker seems to have given over the older type of traditional bourgeois drama like *The Shoemaker's Holiday* in favour of the new fashion for plays about the city where the attitude towards the citizen is one of ridicule and contempt."

The laxity shown by the dramatists toward vice might be attributable in part to the fact that both *Westward Ho* and Northward Ho were performed at Paul's. See Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, pp. 196-97, who notes Dekker and Webster "wrote amiably of commercialized vice for Paul's" whereas Dekker "provide[d] exposes and denunciations for the Fortune."


Norman Brittin, *Thomas Middleton* (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 77. For other commentaries in books see George Price, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 142, who refers to *The Roaring Girl* and Northward Ho as evidence that "Dekker had little inclination for satire of the social classes or for comedy of manners"; David Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton*
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 100-10, who summarizes the plot; Anthony Covatta, Thomas Middleton's City Comedies (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), who assesses the play as "much overrated" (p. 10) and too "sentimental and topical" (p. 137) without stating why; and Dorothy M. Farr, Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), p. 3, who observes that The Roaring Girl, like The Honest Whore, is "concerned not only with citizen life but with the struggles and perplexities of recognisable human beings in a society as harsh as it was lively."

15 Cyrus Hoy, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, III, 9.

16 The play was performed at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon, beginning 13 January 1983; it was later performed at the Barbicon Theatre, London, beginning 21 April 1983.


20 I have based my analysis of Dekker's collaboration in The Roaring Girl chiefly on Cyrus Hoy's investigation of the play's authorship. "Dekker's unaided work," according to Hoy, "is most apparent throughout the whole of Act I; in II. ii; and in V. i. Middleton's unaided work is most evident in II. i and III. i. For the rest . . . the work of both dramatists is present," although Dekker's hand is usually pronounced (Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, III, 13).


Cf. Wonder of a Kingdom where Dekker provides a sharp satirical portrait of the social-climber Signior Torrenti by means of his taste in home decoration:

I'll pauie my great hall with a floare of clowdes, 
Wherein shall move an artificiall Sunne, 
Reflecting round about me, golden beames, 
Whose flames shall make the roome seeme all on fire, 

. . . . . . . . . . . then over head, 
A rooife of Woods, and Forests full of Deere, 
Trees growing downwards, full of singing quiers, . . . .

(III.i.16-26)

(Thomas Dekker, Dramatic Works, ed. Fredson Bowers, III).


A "goshawk" is "a large short-winged hawk" which approaches its prey "sideways" (O.E.D.).

Margaret Bryan, in "Food Symbolism in A Woman Killed With Kindness," Renaissance Papers, n.s. (1974), 10, observes that the "most striking aspect of Heywood's artistry is the double use he makes of the food symbol: meals in the play provide important structural focal points; eating imagery thematically reinforces these structural marks." Meals provide focal points in other domestic plays such as How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad and Arden of Feversham.

Bryan, 10; see also Morton W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins (East Lansing, Michigan: State College Press, 1952), p. 57.


Gomme observes that "'Ride' was standard English for sexual intercourse," and suggests Mistress Gallipot is "picking up a sexual suggestion in her husband's last word [i.e., 'come'] and possibly in 'hony' as well" (The Roaring Girl, p. 64, n. 9).

Understood psychoanalytically, Gallipot's excessive passivity, his dependence on non-sexual affection, and his delight in "baby-talk" are manifestations of an oral compulsion. "Because the oral phase occupies the earliest period when self and object are still not clearly differentiated," writes Norman Holland, "this . . . phase is
important for establishing our abilities to do nothing, to be passive" [The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 36].

31 Edward H. Sygden suggests Mistress Gallipot's use of "kyes" indicates "baby-talk": "she imitates the jargon talked by nurses to infants" [A Topographical Dictionary of the Works of Shakespeare and his Fellow Dramatists (Manchester, 1925)].

32 David Holmes, in The Art of Thomas Middleton, p. 109, proposes that the citizen plot was hastily concluded in order to allow time for the lengthy canting scene in V.i.

33 It is important, however, to note that the play differentiates between the two couples, and the differentiation must be stressed in production. If it is ignored, the citizen plot will appear tautological and tiresomely conventional. Such was the effect of the portrayal of the citizens in the 1983 production by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Irving Wardle, writing for The London Times, 27 April 1983, p. 14, observes the "effect" of the citizen plot "is one of vertical tourism" and John Russell Taylor, in Drama: The Quarterly Theatre Review, 3rd Quarter (Autumn, 1983), 40-41, complains that "the way minor characters change nature completely at the drop of a hat soon loses audience involvement" (p. 40). That virtually no change occurs in the Gallipots' marriage was apparently ignored in this production.

34 Alexander Leggatt, Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare, p. 135.

35 I am indebted to Andor Gomme's decipherment of Mistress Openwork's obscure double-entendres in this speech (The Roaring Girl, p. 36, n. 205-9).

36 Gomme, p. xxiv.

37 Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 249. For the exception, see Chapter III above, n. 52.

38 I take issue here with Andor Gomme's pairing of Mistress Openwork and Mistress Gallipot: "the wives," he claims, "realize how much more solidly worthwhile their husbands are than the gallants whom they can, it seems, trap so easily" ("Introduction," The Roaring Girl, p. xxx). While Mistress Openwork is aware of her husband's virtue, there is no indication that Prudence either realizes or cares to realize Gallipot's "worth."


42 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 163.

43 Frye, pp. 164-65.


45 Rowe, p. 3.

46 Rowe, pp. 5-6.

47 Rowe, p. 6.


49 Gomme, ed., The Roaring Girl, pp. xxxi-xxxii. Some debate still continues as to whether Moll Cutpurse is Dekker's or Middleton's creation. Eliot (Elizabethan Dramatists, pp. 89-93) claimed the character for Middleton, as did Una Ellis-Fermor in Jacobean Drama, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1953), p. 150. Muriel Bradbrook, in The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, implied the character is Middleton's although she observed that both "Middleton and Dekker brought upon the stage an actual personage, Moll Frith" (p. 162). Andor Gomme ("Introduction," The Roaring Girl) acknowledges Moll's "occasional gentleness . . . may be due to Dekker," but claims Moll's "intellectual and moral originality" is "far beyond Dekker's range" (p. xxxiv), failing to take into account characters like Bellafront and Infelice in The Honest Whore, II and Mother Sawyer in The Witch of Edmonton. Margot Heinemann, in Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), also fails to mention Dekker's unorthodox portraits of women when she states: "The unassailable virtue of Moll within the play, despite her bawdy conversation, may owe something to
Dekker's more romantic and sometimes sentimentalizing style: but the searing attack on male chauvinism is unarguably Middleton's" (p. 100). One need only recall Gwenthyan and Julia's similar attacks in Patient Grissil, as well as Bellafront and Infelice's eloquent arguments against double standards imposed upon women, in order to discount Heinemann's conjecture.

The Dekker camp has a number of supporters. Hunt argued that it is Dekker who "makes [Moll] a big, athletic, courageous woman, honest in all senses of the word, endowed with the hawk's eye and the alert mind of a born detective, rather contemptuous of both men and women, preferring the comradeship of men, but resolved to remain 'the head of herself'" (Thomas Dekker, p. 113). R.H. Barker, in Thomas Middleton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), has suggested Middleton "was apparently content to fill in the outlines of Dekker's plan" for a play which "is not really [Middleton's] work at all" (pp. 76-77), the "Roaring Girl herself" being "another exercise in the sentimental manner of Bellafront" (p. 171). Norman Brittin considers Moll Dekker's creation on the basis that she is an "idealized portrait of a girl of independent and completely fearless spirit who scorns anything ignoble" (p. 79); and George E. Rowe, in Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition, argues The Roaring Girl "contain[s] Middleton's work but predominantly reflect[s] the vision of another author," i.e., Dekker (p. 23). One of the most persuasive arguments concerning Dekker's probable creation of the character is Barry Kyle's observation that it is "deeply significant . . . that in both The Witch of Edmonton . . . and The Roaring Girl working-class women are the leading characters, which would have been unthinkable at the beginning of Shakespeare's time" ("Francesca Simon talks to Barry Kyle about the RSC's Roaring Girl," The Sunday Times 24 April 1983, p. 42e). Since Moll's conspicuous roles in the play are, as in Mother Sawyer's case, her ties to the lower classes and her rejection of bourgeois ideals (for which both heroines are persecuted by society), it is reasonable to assume Moll owes much of her originality to Dekker.


51 Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre, p. 100. See also Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, pp. 481, 483, and 429ff.; and Cyrus Hoy, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries, III, 15, n. 14.


53 Critics unanimously attribute this scene to Dekker.
54 Gomme, p. xxx.


CHAPTER VI

THE WITCH OF EDMONTON

I

The Witch of Edmonton (1621) has the distinction of being not only Dekker's last domestic play but "the last of the extant domestic murder plays."¹ The play is a collaboration with John Ford and William Rowley although Dekker's role has been deemed "of central importance in the play's compositional scheme."² Written toward the end of Dekker's dramatic career, the play was conceived during a time of extreme hardship, those years following the publication of The Roaring Girl when Dekker suffered severe financial problems, ending in a long incarceration for debt in King's Bench Prison (1613-1619). Dekker's imprisonment, which George Price has characterized as "the saddest affliction known to have befallen any Elizabethan dramatist,"³ was preceded by a painful disillusionment with those who had betrayed their promise of patronage.⁴ In the dedication of If This be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is In It (1612) Dekker writes half-sarcastically to his "Loving and Loved Friends and Fellowes,"

Knowledge and Reward dwell far a-sunder. Greatnes lay once betweene them. But (in his stead) Couetousness now. An ill neighbour, a bad Benefactor, no paymaister to Poets. By This Hard-
Houskeeping, (or rather, Shutting vp of Liberalities Doores,)Merit
goes a Begging, and Learning starues. Bookes, had wont to haue
Patrons, and (now,) Patrons haue Bookes. The Snuff that is Lighted,
consumes That which Feeds it. A Signe, the World hath an ill Eare,
when no Musick is good, vnles it Strikes-vp for Nothing. I haue
Sung so, but wil no more. A Hue-and-Cry follow, his Wit, that
sleeps, when sweete Tunes are sounding. But tis now the Fashion.
Lords, look wel; Knights, Thank well; Gentlemen, promise well;
Citizens, Take well; Gulles, Swear well; but None, Gie well.

If This be not a Good Play, a social satire, along with the tragedy of The Virgin Martyr (ca. 1620) and the tragicomedy Match Me in London written shortly after, were the only other plays written during this period, a paucity no doubt related to Dekker's personal struggles. M.L. Hunt has observed that after The Roaring Girl Dekker's work reveals "an undertone of pain and bewilderment; and its total effect . . . is a piercing sense of the tragedy of life not found elsewhere in Dekker's writings except fragmentarily." If This be Not a Good Play exposes the corruption of three levels of society: the church, the court, and the citizenry. The greed and abusive power of the clergy and court counsellors, and the avarice of merchants are exceeded only by the King's opportunism and his abuse of political power when he neglects the scholars, soldiers, and seamen, "the defenders of civilization." The play's final scene, which "may be regarded as an adequate summation of Dekker's view
of the corruption in English society and, substantially, in all human society,\textsuperscript{a} sees traitors, hypocrites, extortionists, and false worshippers devoured by hell fire, a conclusion which Dekker regards as a lesson for the nation:

\begin{quote}
Much Labour, Art, and Wit, make vp a Play  
As it does a Ship, yet both are cast away,  
(When brauely they haue past the humorous Seas)  
At landing, What black fates curseth both these?  
Sayle it, or sinck it, now tis forth, and nere  
The Hauen at which it longs t'ariue: if there  
It suffers wrack, the spitefuller Rockes shoote forth,  
Yet non may bring it home laden with much worth.  
By wonted gentle gale, (sweete as the Balme,)  
Or by extending your faire liberall Palme,  
To fan away all stormes, if you see it lowers,  
The ayre shall ring thankes, but the glory's yours.
\end{quote}

\textit{(Epilogue, 11. 7-18)}

Despite the theatricalism of the hell scenes, the play is a complex treatment of evil. The evil spirits are not easily outwitted by goodness, but, like Harpax in \textit{The Virgin Martyr}, are clever and successful. Yet that success is accompanied by spiritual weariness, as evidenced by the merchant's punishment which requires him to stretch out his hand for gold, only to find it has become "air, shadows, things imaginary" (V.iv.231). As Hunt observes, "even the devils rather condemn the sins of the damned than rejoice in their fall."\textsuperscript{b} \textit{Match Me in London}, written almost immediately after Dekker's release from prison, lacks the biting cynicism of \textit{If This be Not a Good Play}, revealing instead a quiet resignation even on the part of the more
admirable characters. Cordolente, whose wife has been abducted by the King, replies despondently when asked by the monarch what will please him:

Nothing, nothing, why Sir the powers above cannot please vs, and can kings thinke you? when we are brought forth to the world, we cry and bawle as if we were vnwilling to bee borne; and when we are a dying we are mad at that.

(IV.i.48-51)

A similar tone pervades The Witch of Edmonton, a play which marks a departure for Dekker in the area of domestic drama. Unlike his earlier contributions to the genre, all of which are comedies, The Witch of Edmonton is a domestic tragedy concerned with the defeat of those values which in the comedies preceding The Roaring Girl were upheld ambivalently, that is, the exaltation of marriage based on choice and the presentation of the domus as the seat of joy and virtue. In the early comedies we saw that conjugal happiness and a spiritually healthy domus are presented as remotely attainable. Even in The Roaring Girl, where the heroine unequivocally rejects marriage and the cult of domesticity, the glorious epithalamic conclusion of the Sebastian-Mary action invites the audience to share the promise of happiness implied in Sebastian and Mary's wedding. The Witch of Edmonton does not offer a promise of renewal through marriage because romantic love and the family are no longer able in themselves to promote the
individual's self-realization, a failure poignantly expressed in Frank Thorney's description of the elusive nature of joy: "All life is but a wandring to finde home: / When we are gone, we are there" (IV.ii.31-32.)

Discussions of *The Witch of Edmonton*, however, have concentrated chiefly on the conventional schemes which the play shares with its analogues. With the exception of Leonora Leet Brodwin's appraisal of the marriage or Frank Thorney plot as "probably the most sophisticated treatment of domestic tragedy in the whole of the Elizabethan-Jacobean drama," critics have largely ignored the play's deep structures. *The Witch of Edmonton* combines two subjects common to domestic drama: the theme of forced marriage is explored in the Frank Thorney plot, the prototype of which is George Wilkins' *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1606), while the Mother Sawyer action shares with earlier domestic murder plays the reportage of a contemporary event, in this case the execution of Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft on 19 April 1621. The play was written shortly after this topical event was recorded in its principal source, a pamphlet entered in the Stationers' Register on 27 April describing Henry Goodcole's visits with Elizabeth Sawyer shortly before her execution. The subject of witchcraft was not new in domestic drama. As G.N. Rao notes, the "popular beliefs in 'black magic' and 'white magic' and of their banal or beneficial influence on the family affairs of the people" provided dramatic material for a number of domestic
plays which "make full dramatic use of these popular superstitions." The double plots of The Witch of Edmonton are loosely integrated by the supernatural element. The marriage plot combines domestic dissolution with the effects of black magic: Frank Thorney, who has secretly married Winnifride, yields to his father's demands and marries Susan, the daughter of a rich yeoman, consoling himself with the thought that a wise woman, "Known and approv'd in Palmestry," (II.ii.116) has foretold he would have two wives. In a sudden demonic impulse, attributed by society to the evil influences of the "Witch" Sawyer (V.iii.21-27), Frank ruthlessly kills his second wife. The supernatural component has been viewed as a melodramatic device which undermines the tragic potential of the events dramatized. Rao, for one, claims the play's melodramatic tone is discernible in the way "the supernatural influence is closely interwoven with the domestic life and . . . is shown to be the root-cause of domestic mischief," just as it is in earlier domestic witch plays. Until Act III.iii, he suggests,

the plot of Mother Sawyer is worked out independently and her diabolic potentialities to create mischief are sufficiently indicated. Frank's sudden impulse to kill his wife Susan is attributed to the evil effects of the witch's damned traffic. The devil comes in the form of a 'dog' and 'rubs' against Frank. Thus the popular belief in witchcraft is made one of the chief reasons for the domestic crime. . . . The witch of Edmonton . . . is shown as the source of mischief.
The Dog who paws Frank and who for the most part functions as Mother Sawyer's "Familiar" is usually taken as the symbolic incarnation of the devil, a symbol reinforcing the play's alleged melodramatic scheme. "The action," writes George Herndl, "is so presented that the motive of the 'sin' is hardly felt to lie within the will of the sinner, which is paralyzed by the power of evil"; Frank Thorney, moreover, "dies repentant and in hope of heaven, religious piety providing . . . some reconciliation to the otherwise intolerable suffering of a man we cannot blame." In the Mother Sawyer plot, argues Herndl, "tragic emotions dwindle into sentimentality" when Elizabeth is driven to witchcraft and later "dies contrite and pitiful." 16

Others have suggested that the melodramatic effects clarify the play's homiletic design. Henry Adams originally referred to the development of the double-plot action in The Witch of Edmonton in order to illustrate the impulse of domestic tragedy toward the realization of divine grace through a sequence of "sin, discovery, repentance, punishment." 17 The "most noteworthy characteristic of The Witch of Edmonton," he claims,

is its careful adherence to the customary practices of homiletic drama. . . . the authors employed, in both plots, sin and Providence as dramatic devices. The repentance of Frank Thorney follows all the conventional steps and is greeted by every member of the cast with the orthodox response of Christian forgiveness. The story of Mother Sawyer is unusual because it leaves the impression . . . that mortal, or unpardonable, sin has been committed and that she is, therefore,
condemned for all eternity. The Black Dog, who helps to tie the two parts of the play together, obviously descends from the Vices of the sixteenth-century morality plays. In contrast with this prolongation of an old-fashioned dramatic practice, Mother Sawyer's well-chosen words against the court anticipate a development many generations in the future.  

While Adams acknowledges Dekker's atypical employment of the redemption scene in the Mother Sawyer action, he insists the play's homiletic superstructure is not disturbed because the Frank Thorney plot concludes with the implication that "God may substitute mercy for His justice," so that "the main story of The Witch of Edmonton varies in no essential respect from its prototypes." However, upon closer scrutiny, we note that beneath the play's conventional framework both the marriage plot and the Mother Sawyer action articulate a deep-seated doubt about the capability of secure moral conclusions to mitigate tragic events.

The play is essentially a powerful study of the inter-relationship between social and psychological fragmentation, in which homiletic impulses are deflected by the portrayal of Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer's moral degeneracy as an effect of their thwarted wills. Frank and Elizabeth's defeat harbors a trenchant critique of those conformist values that deny the individual self-fulfillment. Together Frank and Elizabeth demonstrate the tragedy that, in Dekker's world, awaits those who attempt to defy social expectations. The dramatic fates of the two protagonists,
however, are not products of the same forces. Elizabeth is overcome by the external social conditions of poverty and class, which prevent her from attaining the love and respect of her community, while Frank is defeated primarily from within. His tragedy is the result of an unresolved tension between personal desire and capitulation to social claims. That both protagonists meet similar ends underscores the inability of human justice to reconcile the conflict between individual desire and social demands.

II

The play's complex structure is clarified if we compare the separate plots with their chief sources. Although the Frank Thorney action and the tragic parts of Wilkins' Miseries of Enforced Marriage contain verbal and structural parallels, the Frank Thorney plot modifies considerably Wilkins' melodramatic conflicts. Parental cruelty is a catalyst in Frank's demise, but his tragedy is essentially the product of a divided self.

Both plays open upon a pair of lovers promising to honor the contract *per verba de praesenti*, by means of which they have secretly agreed to be husband and wife in the eyes of God, and both plays trace the husband's fall from bridegroom to bigamist to repentant sinner. Wilkins is chiefly concerned with portraying the evil effects of arranged marriages, and his interest in character is
everywhere subordinated to the didactic plea "for a more humanitarian relationship between the sexes and in marriage." The result is the whitewashing of character, as evidenced by the tidy division between those who defend marriages of choice and those who obstinately continue to favor marriages of convenience. The two young lovers, William Scarborow and Clare Harcop, are essentially mouthpieces for marriages based on love. The betrothal scene establishes the view of marriage as an irrevocable commitment sanctioned by heaven,

Clare. Those betwixt whom faith and troth is given, 
Death only parts, since they are knit by heaven . . . ,

and the couple's vows are articulated only after a long litany on the marital obligations of each spouse, prescriptions echoing the treatises and sermons of the time. The wife's duties must include her dedication to "virtue, obedience," (p. 479) meekness, and "chastity" (p. 480), and a readiness to submit to her husband's will:

Scarborow. Their [wives'] very thoughts they cannot term their own. 
Maids, being once made wives, can nothing call Rightly their own; they are their husbands' all . . . .

(p. 480)

Husbands are obliged to provide and care for their wives, and, although retaining mastery over them, are cautioned to command mercifully:

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Clare. Men must be like the branch and bark of trees,
Which doth defend them [their wives] from tempestuous rage,
Clothe them in winter, tender them in age:

. . . . . . . .

If it appear to them they've stray'd amiss,
They only must rebuke them with a kiss . . . .

(p. 480)

William's subsequent bigamy, followed by Clare's suicide, are portrayed strictly as the tragic consequences of evil guardianship. Falconbridge, William's guardian, in attempting to protect his young ward from the temptations "of single life" (p. 483), plans to marry him to Katherine (Falconbridge's niece) in order to protect the family name and to bring the family "fair increase" (p. 484). Upon being informed by William of the clandestine marriage to Clare, Falconbridge threatens to ruin his ward, forcing him to marry Katherine "as the law permitted him to do."23 William articulates the message of the play in his anticipation of the tragic results of his guardian's cruelty:

Fate, pity me, because I am enforc'd:
For I have heard those matches have cost blood,
Where love is once begun, and then withstood.

(p. 488)

Clare's suicide precipitates William's desertion of Katherine and his total abandonment to a profligate life. He reaches the point where he contemplates murdering Katherine and his children, but a last-minute repentance is
brought on by his recognition of his wife's virtue and forbearance, and by the news of his guardian's timely death. Before dying, Falconbridge had realized his cruelty and made appropriate amends by doubling William's inheritance. In the hastily contrived conclusion William and Katherine are reunited, and the play ends in praise of the workings of providence:

**Scarborow.** Is heaven so gracious to sinners then?  
**Butler.** Heaven is, and has his gracious eyes,  
   To give men life, not life-entrapping spies.  
(p. 575)

In the marriage plot of *The Witch of Edmonton* the characters' behavior is not determined by formula but by paradox and ambiguity. The opening vignette, in which the lovers pledge their troth, evokes a tension between marriage as a desirable prospect and as a social obligation. Like William and Clare, Frank and Winnifride vow never to "falsifie that Bridal Oath / That bindes" them together (I.i.62-63), and like their counterparts they view marriage as a bond sanctioned by heaven:

**Win.** My resolution  
   is built upon a Rock. This very day  
   Young Thorney vow'd with Oaths not to be doubted,  
   That never any change of love should cancel  
   The bonds in which we are to either bound,  
   Of lasting truth. And shall I then for my part  
   Unfile the sacred Oath set on Record  
   In Heaven's book?  
(I.i.195-202)
Frank and Winnifride also stress the religious and moral foundation of their marriage of choice, and of the binding nature of the *per verba de praesenti* contract. Like the complication in Wilkins' play, the marriage is threatened by parental opposition. The wedding must be kept secret until Frank has obtained his bankrupt father's consent to a union which is financially inexpedient. The underlying causes of the conflict, however, are more complex than Wilkins' formula. Unlike William and Clare, whom Wilkins takes pains to portray as given to "virtuous thoughts / By genuine disposition" before their marriage (p. 483), Frank and Winnifride enter into their clandestine marriage as full-fledged sinners. Both have been employed in Sir Arthur Clarington's household where they have been lovers for some time; moreover, the occasion of their wedding is not the desire to sanctify their love through marriage, but the need to legitimize Winnifride's unborn child. Winnifride has been Sir Arthur's mistress, and the child's paternity is never made explicit. From the outset a tone of resignation informs the dialogue, especially on Frank's part, as the lovers set out to do what is honorable:

Franc. Come, Wench; why here's a business soon dispatch'd.
Thy heart I know is now at ease: thou needst not
Fear what the tattling Gossips in their cups
Can speak against thy fame: thy childe shall know
Who to call Dad now. 

(I.i.1-5)
The opening lines throw into relief Frank's eagerness to yield to social pressure: marriage is a necessary "business" that will protect Winnifride's reputation and secure the honor of her offspring. During the couple's pledge of their troth the language continues to be stiffened by formality and affectation, suggesting a more calculating view of marriage than that expressed by Wilkins' sentimentalized lovers.

Win. You have discharg'd
The true part of an honest man; I cannot
Request a fuller satisfaction
Then you have freely granted . . .
(I.i.11-14)

At the same time, the lovers express sincere regret over their approaching severance: Winnifride laments that "'Tis an hard case, being lawful man and wife, / We should not live together" (11. 15-16), and Frank consoles her by reminding her,

Had I fail'd
In promise of my truth to thee, we must
Have then been ever sundred . . .
(11. 17-19)

The marriage contract seems to be a mere formality to which Frank has yielded. Had Winnifride not been pregnant, he would have been content to continue loving her without regard for social or moral claims.

Yet the desire to do what is morally correct is buried deep within Frank's nature. Just as his marriage has been arranged for the sake of honor and reputation, his motive
for returning home to his father underscores a need to do what is honorable: he will return home, he declares, in order that Winnifride's child "may not have cause / To curse his hour of birth" (I.i.21-22). Frank is eager to protect the heir from the "misery of beggary and want; / Two Devils that are occasions to enforce / A shameful end" (I.i.23-25). Frank harbors a strong sense of shame, and long before Old Thorney persuades him to marry Susan Carter we observe the split between the man Frank is and his self-ideal, or what he would like to be. The tension is brought into full relief in the portrayal of Frank's relationship with Susan.

In Wilkins' plot William Scarborow does not meet Katherine until he is forced to marry her. Frank, on the other hand, has already won Susan's love, and stands practically engaged to her before the play opens. That the engagement had not been forced is confirmed by means of Old Carter's jubilation over his daughter's choice of bridegroom:

I like young Frank well, so does my Susan too,
The Girl has a fancy to him, which makes me ready in my Purse. There be other Suitors within that make much noise to little purpose.
If Frank love Sue, Sue shall have none but Frank. (I.ii.20-23)

Carter is promoting what he and Susan believe is a love match, and although Old Thorney desires the marriage
primarily for financial reasons, he too believes Frank and Susan are in love. The father is therefore shocked when he hears the rumor of the marriage to Winnifride, and sets out to test his son's honor:

O. Thor. You have already us'd
Such thriving protestations to the Maid,
That she is wholly yours. And speak the truth,
You love her, do you not?
Frank. 'Twere pity, Sir,
I should deceive her.
O. Thor. Better y'had been unborn.
(I.ii.147-151)

Unlike the evil guardian in Wilkins' play, who offhandedly dismisses his ward's de praesenti contract, Old Thorney appears to be more scrupulous about honor:

O. Thor. O thou art a Villain!
A Devil like a Man. Wherein have I
Offended all the Powers so much, to be
Father to such a graceless godless Son?
(11. 155-158)

The exchange between father and son poignantly illustrates Frank's ambivalent feelings toward honor and reputation, values which he sees embodied in his father. On the one hand, Frank views his father as an impediment to his personal claims, an antagonist who must be carefully manipulated:

Fathers are
Wonne by degrees, not bluntly, as our masters,
Or wronged friends are; and besides, I'll use
Such dutiful and ready means, that ere
He can have notice of what's past, th'inheritance
To which I am born Heir, shall be assured:
That done, why let him know it; if he like it not,
Yet he shall have no power in him left
To cross the thriving of it.

(I.i.24-32)

On the other hand, Frank loves his father and is eager to please him. Whereas in Miseries of Enforced Marriage William informs his guardian of his secret marriage, Frank is deeply shamed by his father's accusation that he is a "godless Son," to which he passionately replies, "To me, Sir, this? / O my cleft heart" (I.ii.159). Rather than confess to his clandestine marriage, Frank produces a letter from Sir Arthur Clarington confirming the falsity of the rumor, and submits to one inescapable compromise after another, indulging in a painful web of lies in order to retain his father's and the world's respect:

Frank. What do you take me for? an Atheist?
One that nor hopes the blessedness of life
Hereafter, neither fears the vengeance due
To such as make the Marriage-bed an Inne,

Am I become so insensible of losing
The glory of Creations work? My soul!

(11. 172-180)

Yet the lies weigh heavily on Frank's conscience, and he is aware that he has "waded deeper into mischief, / Then virtue can avoid" (11. 192-193). After he has convinced Old Thorney of his "innocence" (l. 183) and "unperish'd conscience" (l. 184) the two are happily reconciled, and Frank takes comfort in his father's tender words:
O. Thor. Forgive me, Frank. Credulity abus'd me.
   My tears express my joy: and I am sorry
   I injur'd innocence.
Frank. Alas! I knew
   Your rage and grief proceeded from your love
   To me: so I conceiv'd it.
O. Thor. My good Son,
   I'll bear with many faults in thee hereafter.
   Bear thou with mine.
Frank. The peace is soon concluded.
   (I.ii.196-202)

Ironically, "peace" is as elusive as Frank's obeisance to filial duty—"On every side I am distracted" (1. 191)—and despair is close at hand.

The episode, however, does not exonerate Old Thorney, whose overriding concern is with a family honor defined by wealth and social status. Taken together, he and Old Carter represent the elder generation's inability to secure the individual's personal claims. The values associated with the elder generation are clarified during Old Thorney and Frank's stay in Carter's household. Carter is a rich Hertfordshire yeoman who has not capitulated to the destructive ethic of a money economy. His rugged manner, together with his open, trusting, and carefree nature, contrast sharply with Old Thorney's affectation and mistrust. The remarkable difference between the two men's personalities is painted with bold strokes during their initial exchange on the issue of Susan's dowry:

O. Thor. You offer, Mr. Carter, like a Gentleman,
   I cannot finde fault with it, 'tis so fair.
O. Cart. No Gentleman, I, Mr. Thorney; spare the Mastership,
call me by my name, John Carter; Master is a
      title my Father, nor
his before him, were acquainted with. Honest
Hertfordshire
Yeomen, such an one am I; my word and my deed
shall be proved
one at all times. I mean to give you no
security for the Marriage-money.
O. Thor. How? no security?
      Although it need not, so long as you live;
Yet who is he has surety of his life one hour?
Men, the Proverb says, are mortal: else, for my
      part,
I distrust you not, were the sum double.
O. Cart. Double, treble, more or less; I tell
      you, Mr. Thorney,
I'll give no security. Bonds and Bills are but
the Tarriers to catch
Fools, and keep lazy Knaves busie; my security
shall be present
      payment. And we here, about Edmonton, hold
present payment as
sure as an Alderman's Bond in London, Mr.
Thorney.
O. Thor. I cry you mercy, Sir, I understood you
      not.
      (I.ii.1-18)

Old Carter expounds the conventional differences between
rural and city values, and proudly asserts the superiority
of the former. Yet we also detect a profound class-
consciousness beneath Carter's bombast, and a defensive
posture against Old Thorney's condescension. During the
remainder of the scene, the yeoman sets out to impress his
city guest with country hospitality. The families celebrate
Frank and Susan's betrothal with a flurry of domestic
activity which paints the Carter household as the seat of
creature comforts. The yeoman at every opportunity
expresses his delight in the pleasures of his household: he
articulates his approval of his prospective son-in-law, for
example, by hoping he can welcome him "to Bread, Beer and Beef, Yeoman's fare" (I.ii.30), and his essential world-view is that life is not worth living without "full Dishes, whole belly-fulls" (1. 31). He wishes to sanction Susan's betrothal during "an household Dinner" (1. 28), and his concern with family conflict is aroused only when it disrupts household ritual. His pride and self-satisfaction, for instance, make him impervious to the tensions between Old Thorney and his son: noting the fervent discussion between them, Carter approaches them with false humility, urging them to be decorous: "Gentlemen . . . , there's within a slight Dinner ready, if / you please to taste of it" (11. 116-117); "Why Mr. Thorney, d'ye mean to talk out your dinner? / . . . What must it be, Mr. Frank, / or Son Frank?" (11. 204-206); "Shall's to Dinner now?" (1. 221). Carter's rugged charm, moreover, harbors a primitive attitude toward marriage, as evidenced by his crude directive to Frank:

Marry and much good may it do thee, Son. Take her [Susan] to thee. Get me a brace of Boys at a burthen, Frank. The nursing shall not stand thee in a pennyworth of Milk. Reach her home and spare not. . . .

(I.ii.211-214)

The urgency of Carter's solicitations and his stereotypical view of male-female relationships attest to the trappings of
social convention that will play a subtle part in his daughter's tragic death.

The underlying conflict between personal and social claims surfaces on Frank and Susan's wedding night. Ironically, Susan's sensitivity to her husband's internal suffering leads to the altercation that precipitates her murder:

Sus. Why change you your face, sweet-Heart?  
Frank. Who? I?  
   For nothing.  
Sus. Dear, say not so: a Spirit of your  
   Constancy cannot endure this change for  
   nothing.  
   I have observ'd strange variations in you.  
Frank. In me?  
Sus. In you, Sir. Awake: you seem to dream,  
   And in your sleep you utter sudden and  
   Distracted accents, like one at enmity  
   With peace. Dear loving Husband, if I may dare  
   To challenge any interest in you,  
   Give me the reason fully: you may trust  
   My brest as safely as your own.  
   (II.ii.61-71)

Frank is deeply moved by Susan's trust in him—"The poor Girl," he exclaims in an aside (l. 125)—and determines to leave her after an embrace, but her importunities are so passionate that in a flash of desperation he kills her. The power of the scene was captured in the 1936 production of the play at the Old Vic Theatre in London. Edward Sackville West, in his review, noted that "the stage action assists the spectator's understanding of the deeper significance" of the marriage scene:
For a close observation of the action reveals that the gesture with which Frank at last takes Susan into his arms ... is essentially the same as that with which he later attempts to put her out of his life for ever. (In vain, of course; for that look of pure affection, which had originally illumined the cleft in his nature, continues to regard him from the open coffin brought by Old Carter to confront his tortured eyes. By which time the cleft has been widened, by the scratchings of the Dog, until it is big enough to receive not only Susan's coffin but his own.)

Frank's brutality, argues Sackville West, has been aggravated by his sense "of Susan's moral superiority." Her loyalty and candor are qualities he has sacrificed, a failure to which he heavyheartedly admits shortly before his death:

To please a Father, I have Heaven displeas'd.  
Striving to cast two wedding Rings in one, 
Through my bad workmanship I now have none.  
(IV.ii.102-104)

Yet a subtle ambiguity informs Susan's murder. Although Susan is yielding, compassionate, and morally superior to her husband, Frank accuses her of having willed her own death (III.iii.39), an accusation which does not stem from Frank's perception of his wife's inimitable virtue, but from her human frailty. The suggestion is worth exploring in the context of Susan's function in the play. Although Susan has had many suitors before Frank, she is young and inexperienced, and her views of life are based on dreams rather than reality. Like the conventional patient wife of domestic drama, Susan believes a wife's duty is to
be passive and solicitous, and above all adaptable to her husband's will:

Sus. 'Las, Sir, I am young,
Silly, and plain; more, strange to those contents
A wife should offer. Say but what I fail,
I'll study satisfaction.

Frank. Come, in nothing.

Sus. I know I do. Knew I as well in what,
You should not long be sullen. Prithee Love,
If I have been immodest or too bold,
Speak't in a frown: if peevishly too nice,
Shew't in a smile. Thy liking is the glass
By which I'll habit my behaviour.

(II.ii.79-88)

Susan's notions of wifely perfection lead her to blame herself for Frank's discontent. Her reaction is based on a set of romantic conventions concerning conjugal behavior. Ironically, when Susan finally thwarts convention by asserting her human desires she meets with Frank's derision for daring to undermine his perception of her as a "perfect Embleme of . . . modesty":

Sus. You, Sweet, have the power
To make me passionate as an April-day:
Now smile, then weep; now pale, then crimson red.
You are the powerful Moon of my bloods Sea,
To make it ebb or flow into my face,
As your looks change.

Frank. Change thy conceit, I prithee:
Thou art all perfection: Diana her self
Swells in thy thoughts, and moderates thy beauty.
Within thy left eye amorous Cupid sits
Feathering Love-shafts, whose golden heads he dip'd
In thy chaste brest. In the other lies
Blushing Adonis scarft in modesties.
And still as wanton Cupid blows Love-fires,
Adonis quenches out unchaste desires.
And from these two I briefly do imply
A perfect Embleme of thy modesty.
Then, prithee Dear, maintain no more dispute,
For where thou speakest, it's fit all tongues be mute.

(II.ii.89-106)

Susan's passionate words, through which she asserts her sexual attraction to her husband, startle and confuse Frank. He responds by affirming the two quintessential conventions governing male-female relationships: he denies Susan's sexuality by elevating her to the status of an emblem of chastity, and upholds the husband's duty to command by instructing his wife how to behave. Before Susan reveals what to Frank is human weakness, Frank cannot even contemplate her death:

Frank. ... thou art so rare a goodness,
As Death would rather put it self to death,
Then murther thee. But we, as all things else,
Are mutable and changing.

(II.ii.138-141)

As an emblem of modesty, Susan is exempt from mutability; as a real woman, she pays dearly for her humanity. Not heeding her husband's command to be silent, Susan persists in her importunities:

Sus. Come, come, those golden strings of flattery
Shall not tie up my speech, Sir; I must know
The ground of your disturbance.

(II. 107-109)

Finally, a sudden moment of vanity secures Susan's doom. Confused by her husband's equivocation concerning his
departure, she imagines he is planning a duel with Warbeck, her former suitor, in defense of her honor. Susan's fatuityprovokes Frank's resolve. He scoffs at her suggestion that "Y'are not so kinde indeed as I imagin'd," (l. 163) and, as if relieved by her weakness, replies: "And you more fond by far then I expected" (l. 164). Susan's foolishness renders her an easy victim: "till this minute," Frank charges, "You might have safe returned; now you cannot: / You have dogg'd your own death" (III.iii.37-39).

Susan dies because she does not conform to Frank's expectations of female virtue. Those expectations belong to a set of conventional attitudes governing human behavior which Frank has internalized. Indeed, his perception of his two wives suggests he is operating from both sides of the traditional virgin/whore duality. Frank's mental image of Susan and Winnifride evokes a psychological configuration which is at odds with the women's dramatic reality. While Winnifride appeals to and expresses his compelling sense of freedom, for she seems to him uninhibited by social taboos, he murders Susan for ceasing to function as a symbol of chastity. Because Frank considers Winnifride a kindred spirit he is himself with her, and takes comfort in her earthy nature which allows her to understand Frank's weaknesses. When he promises to visit her "Once every month at least" (I.i.44) after their wedding, Winnifride is shrewd enough to be skeptical:
I, I, in case
No other Beauty tempt your eye, whom you
Like better, I may chance to be remembred,
And see you now and then. Faith, I did hope
You'ld not have us'd me so . . . .
(11. 46-50)

As Leonora Leet Brodwin remarks, if Winnifride's perception
of Frank's inconstancy "had discomfited him, it had released
him from guilt." But just as he idealizes Susan, he
thinks Winnifride more unprincipled than she is. He is
shocked, therefore, when Winnifride, who loves him deeply,
betrays his responsibility for Susan's murder (IV.ii.181-
186).

Winnifride, more than anyone else in the play, succeeds
in balancing personal and social claims. Like Bellafront
before her, Winnifride is a reformed "whore" whose personal
qualities belie society's enduring skepticism of her. At
the same time, Winnifride, like Bellafront, refuses to
succumb to conventional assumptions about wifely humility
and patience. As she implies in the Epilogue, her primary
duty is to seek happiness:

I am a Widow still, and must not sort
A second choice, without a good report;
Which though some Widows finde, and few deserve,
Yet I dare not presume, but will not swerve
From modest hopes. All noble tongues are free;
The gentle may speak one kinde word for me.
(11. 1-6)

Our applause is as much for Winnifride's request as it is
for her desire to survive. Frank, however, is unable to
reconcile the tensions that divide him, and, weary with living, goes eagerly to his execution.

Frank's demise is hastened by the presence of the Dog, the demonic agent whom critics of the play generally view as an intrusive melodramatic device. In the marriage plot the Dog is present during Susan's murder and later appears in IV.ii, "shrugging as it were for joy, and danc[ing]" (s.d., p. 546) as Katharine begins searching for a knife to give Frank so that he may eat his meal; the Dog appears again, "pawing softly at Frank," (s.d., p. 548) while Katharine and Old Carter whisper their suspicions about Frank's guilt. The Dog, I believe, does not minimize the psychological significance of the tragic events because in these scenes we feel his presence as a projection of Frank's overwrought imagination. This interpretation was substantiated by the 1936 and 1981 productions of the play. A program note for the former stated the "dog should be accepted as the symbol of mental and emotional conflicts which can still torment us today," a suggestion borne out by the production's interpretation of hell as "a Hell of the mind, far more than a Hell of superstition . . . ."27 The Royal Shakespeare Company's production also downplayed the folk element by portraying the Dog as "a projection by the community" of the inexplicable problems of "their lives."28 In the marriage plot we have seen that long before the Dog's entrance in Act four Frank's "sins" have lain within his will, which has been paralyzed by his duality. Certain verbal qualifications,
moreover, imply the Dog is the projection of that inner confusion. At the beginning of Act III.iii the Dog enters alone, and informs the audience of Frank's psychological condition immediately prior to Susan's murder:

Dog. The minde's about it now. One touch from me Soon sets the body forward. (11. 2-3)

And Frank himself, during a heightened moment of self-awareness, rejects the Dog's role as an agent of the devil:

[to Susan]. I did not purpose to have added murther; The Devil did not prompt me . . . . (III.iii.36-37)

The Dog's psychological significance is reinforced by the creature himself when he quips about the sources of evil: demonic spirits, he claims, exist wherever there is a desire for evil, but when "evil purposes / . . . come to act," (V.i.131-132) it is because malice is "within thee" (1. 135).

Lying seriously ill as a result of the self-inflicted wound designed to make others believe he was attacked by Susan's murderers, Frank is overcome by remorse and guilt. He sleeps badly, eats little, and hallucinates about death, for which he longs. At his bedside he sees Susan's spirit, which he describes as "my Fancy. / Some Wind-mill in my brains for want of sleep" (IV.ii.83-84). Unable to envision a better life, Frank muses on the possibility of suicide.
while Katharine's religious objection forces him into serious introspection:

Troth, Sister, thou sayst true:
For when a man has been an hundred yeers,
Hard travelling o're the tottering bridge of age,
He's not the thousand part upon his way.

(11. 27-30)

Frank's speech, observes Brodwin, shows us "a man torn between intimate knowledge of his own weakness and the need for faith in salvation, torn equally by his despair at achieving personal satisfaction and the greater despair of faithlessness":29

All life is but a wandring to finde home:
When we are gone, we are there. Happy were man,
Could here his Voyage end; he should not then
Answer how well or ill he steer'd his Soul,
By Heaven's or by Hell's Compass; how he put in
(Loosing bless'd Goodness shore) at such a sin;
Nor how life's dear provision he has spent:
Nor how far he in's Navigation went
Beyound Commission. This were a fine Raign,
To do ill, and not hear of it again.
Yet then were Man more wretched then a Beast:
For, Sister, our dead pay is sure the best.

(11. 31-42)

In prison, Frank is forced to realize that he cannot escape divine justice; his repentance speech, which brings about society's forgiveness, conforms with the stock "scaffold" situation in domestic tragedy.30

Frank.

Let me beseech you, Gentlemen,
To comfort my old Father; keep him with yee;
Love this distressed Widow; and as often
As you remember what a graceless man
I was, remember likewise that these are
Both free, both worthy of a better Fate,
Frank's repentance speech shares with conventional scaffold confessions the recognition of "the justice of earthly punishment." It also includes a typical didactic address to the audience: "Oh that my Example, / Might teach the World hereafter what a curse / Hangs on their heads, who rather chuse to marry / A goodly Portion, then a Dowr of Vertues!" (V.iii.107-110). The address, however, is inappropriate in the context of the preceding action.

Frank's repentance is undermined by the qualification that he is too weak to go on living, and by the irony that it is only the certainty of imminent death which gives him the inner strength to face his punishment. The essential ambiguity in Frank's spiritual reformation is reinforced by the absence of a "final vision which can integrate the cleavage between what [Frank is] and what [he] would wish to be;" his "final desire is that death may extinguish the despair which [his] ultimate self-recognition has brought."32

The final scenes, moreover, do not end in praise of the mysterious workings of Providence, as do The Miseries of Enforced Marriage and other typical domestic comedies and tragedies. Instead, the play expresses a profound uneasiness with society's role in the tragic event we have witnessed. The terse scene preceding the resolution boldly
depicts the limitations of earthly justice. The point at issue is the discrepancy between Frank Thorney's punishment and that of Sir Arthur Clarington, Winnifride's former lover who lied to Old Thorney about Frank's marriage. The Justice notes "the Bench hath mildly censur'd" Sir Arthur's "Errours," (V.ii.1-2) even though Sir Arthur has "been the Instrument that wrought all / their mis-fortunes" (ll. 2-3). His punishment is a small fine. Overhearing the Justice's remarks, Old Carter instinctively condemns Sir Arthur, alerting the audience to the arbitrary claims of the rule of law:

... if I should speak my conscience, you are worthier to be hang'd of the two, all things considered; and now make what you can of it ... .

(V.ii.6-8)

The reason for Sir Arthur's mild punishment is never made explicit, leading us to assume his social status has shielded him from the severity of the law. Sir Arthur's punishment engenders Old Carter's pity for Frank, and leads the old man to search for the abstract causes of Frank's tragic end.

On his way to Frank's hanging, Old Carter, confused and grief-stricken, meets Elizabeth Sawyer, who is being executed simultaneously for witchcraft. Without reason, Carter blindly accuses Mother Sawyer of having bewitched his son-in-law:
The Witch, that instrument of mischief! did not she
witch the Devil into my Son-in-law, when he kill'd
my poor
Daughter? . . .
. . . . . . . . .
Did not you bewitch Frank to kill his wife?
he could never have don't without the Devil.
(V.iii.21-27)

In the forgiveness scene, however, Carter, now face to face with Frank, more perceptively points to society's responsibility:

. . . I forgive thee with all my heart; if thou had'st not had ill counsel, thou would'st not have done as thou didst: the more shame for them.
(V.iii.116-118)

For a brief moment Old Carter penetrates the layer of superficiality that defines his life to the underlying tensions that have contributed to his family's disintegration. Yet he seems eager to evade his own share of responsibility in the conflict. His blind optimism, for example, suddenly resurfaces when he elects to blame the tragic events on the workings of fate:

O. Cart. Mr. Thorney, chear up, man; whilst I can stand by you, you shall not want help to keepe you from falling. We have lost our Children both on's the wrong way, but we cannot help it: better or worse, 'tis now as 'tis.
O. Thor. I thank you, Sir; you are more kinde then I Have cause to hope or look for.
(V.iii.145-150)
Carter's justification for his and Old Thorney's loss is inadequate and self-serving, its dramatic function being to throw into relief Carter's sustained antipathy for his social rival. His forgiveness of Old Thorney is accompanied by a condescending offer of emotional support, and the concern with the children is subordinated to his apparent delight in revealing his moral superiority over his counterpart. Carter has finally defeated his rival, an ironic achievement reinforced by Old Thorney's remorse and by his gratitude for the yeoman's benevolence. In significant contrast to Old Thorney, Carter's suffering is attenuated by pride and self-righteousness. Carter never condemns himself, and to the very end he remains comfortably smug in his rectitude.

The resolution emphasizes the family's and society's failure to recognize and enhance the individual's personal claims, a theme which was previously obscured by the dramatic interest in Frank's divided mind. In the Mother Sawyer plot, Dekker, in a vehement and impassioned critique, deals fully with the failure of human institutions to promote the individual's self-realization.

III

The Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer plots are loosely integrated by two significant links: the influence of the Dog and Sir Arthur Clarington's role in facilitating
the executions of both protagonists. The two links are thematically significant in that taken together they represent the interaction between personal and social demands that leads to the protagonists' executions. In the marriage plot Frank Thorney's personal dilemma is aggravated by outer forces; in the Mother Sawyer action social abuse, epitomized by Sir Arthur's role in Elizabeth's condemnation, is the overriding cause of Elizabeth's capitulation to evil.

In the dramatization of the historical execution of Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft, Dekker makes a bold and unorthodox statement about the real sources of witchcraft: Mother Sawyer is not a victim of supernatural powers, but of an entrenched social prejudice that relegates old and poverty-ridden spinsters to the devil's company. Dekker's portrayal of Mother Sawyer is unconventional because he unequivocally insists she is innocent of the evil ascribed to her by her detractors, a view that was considered seditious during the reign of James I when "it was not wise to profess a disbelief in witches." While literary criticism of The Witch of Edmonton has ignored Dekker's unique treatment of witchcraft, contemporary productions have stressed Dekker's achievement by portraying Mother Sawyer as a fully realized character rather than as a demonic agent. "It is Dekker's eternal credit," wrote Edward Sackville West, "that he should have realized--rather surprisingly in that age--the underlying causes of witchdom," an observation reiterated by the reviewer of
the 1981 production who noted Dekker "subversively . . .
show[s] her [Mother Sawyer] as a wretched old woman shunned
by the community who force the role of witch on her before
she has done anything more than steal firewood."35 When
Elizabeth does summon the "Familiar" in the play, her
capitulation to revenge is a coherent psychological response
to abuse she can no longer endure.

Dekker's sophisticated treatment of the events leading
to Elizabeth Sawyer's execution is borne out by his major
alterations of Henry Goodcole's pamphlet which records
Goodcole's "interviews" with Elizabeth Sawyer shortly before
her execution. Goodcole's flat question-and-answer scheme
is essentially a tract against the evils of witchcraft.
Elizabeth's answers form a conventional catalogue of
superstitions about the consequences of demonology, and
reveal little about the personality of the woman. Her
replies, like Goodcole's questions, are mechanical and
contrived, and lack the nervous energy that informs the
language of Dekker's character. In Goodcole's account of the
witch's covenant with the devil, for example, we read:

Question. What sayd you to the Diuell, when hee
came vnto you and spake vnto you, were you not
afraide of him? if you did feare him, what sayd
the Diuell then vnto you? Answere. I was in a very
greate feare, when I saw the Diuell, but hee did
bid me not to feare him at all, for hee would do
me no hurt at all, but would do for mee whatsoever
I should require of him, and as he promised vnto
me, he alwayes did such mischiefes as I did bid
him to do, both on the bodies of Christians and
beastes: if I did bid him vexe them to death, as oftentimes I did so bid him, it was then presently by him so done.\textsuperscript{36}

The pamphlet lacks any scrutiny of Elizabeth's mind, and her guilt is reinforced by the plain, matter-of-fact tone of her language. Dekker, on the other hand, initially portrays Mother Sawyer as knowing nothing of witchcraft. Unlike her predecessor in Goodcole's account, moreover, Dekker's heroine is invested with a powerful eloquence that undermines the cruel accusations of her enemies. During her first appearance on stage we observe Mother Sawyer gathering "a few rotten sticks" (II.i.21) from Old Banks' property; her soliloquy, which elicits the audience's sympathy, combines a swiftness at repartee with sensitivity and courage:

And why on me? why should the envious world
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
'Cause I am poor, deform'd and ignorant,
And like a Bow buckl'd and bent together,
By some more strong in mischiefs then my self?
Must I for that be made a common sink,
For all the filth and rubbish of Men's tongues
To fall and run into?

(II.i.1-8)

By having the character describe with rhetorical sophistication the cruelties which have rendered her a social outcast and which have flamed her resentment, Dekker elevates and dignifies Elizabeth. In doing so, he enhances the audience's respect for her, at the same time that he
makes us take note of a world which has been corrupted by
pride, hypocrisy, and greed.

Sawy. A Witch? who is not?
   Hold not that universal Name in scorne then.
   What are your painted things in Princes Courts?
   Upon whose Eye-lids Lust sits blowing fires
   . . . . . . .
   Upon whose naked Paps, a Leachers thought
   Acts Sin in fouler shapes then can be wrought.
   . . . . . . .
   Have you not City-witches who can turn
   Their husbands wares . . .
   To sumptuous Tables, Gardens of stoln sin?
   . . . . . . .
   Are not these Witches?
   . . . . . . .
   Why then on me,
   Or any lean old Beldame? Reverence once
   Had wont to wait on age. Now an old woman
   Ill favour'd grown with yeers, if she be poor,
   Must be call'd Bawd or Witch. . . .
   . . . . . . .
   The Man of Law
   Whose honeyed hopes the credulous Client draws,
   (As Bees by tinkling Basons) to swarm to him,
   From his own Hive, to work the Wax in his;
   He is no Witch, not he.
   (IV.i.101-132)

Dekker further engages our sympathy for the old woman by
showing her physically abused by her enemies. The first
instance of cruelty involves Old Banks, the landlord, who
beats Elizabeth when she refuses to return the sticks she
has gathered, an incident not recorded in Goodcole. The
incident is significant because it alerts us to the
psychological basis of Mother Sawyer's revenge:

O. Bank. Cursing, thou Hag! take that, and that.
Exit.
Sawy. Strike, do, and wither'd may that hand and arm

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Whose blows have lam'd me, drop from the rotten Trunk.
Abuse me! beat me! call me Hag and Witch!
What is the name? where and by what Art learn'd?
What spells, what charms, or invocations,
May the thing call'd Familiar be purchas'd?
(II.i.30-36)

The second incident involves the burning of the "Thatch," a ritual designed to prove whether someone is a witch. Even Goodcole recognizes that the custom is irrational, although he is careful not to disparage it:

A Great, and long suspition was held of this person [Sawyer] to be a witch, and the eye of . . . a worthy Justice of Peace . . . was watchfull over her, and her wayes, and that not without just cause; still having his former long suspition of her, by the information of her neighbours . . .: from suspition, to proceed to great presumptions, seeing the death of Nurse-children and Cattell, strangely and suddenly to happen. And to finde out who should bee the author of this mischiefe, an old ridiculous custome was vsed, which was to plucke the Thatch of her house, and to burne it, and it being so burned, the author of such mischiefe should presently then come: and it was observed and affirmed to the Court, that Elizabeth Sawyer would presently frequent the house of them that burnt the thatch which they pluckt of her house, and come without any sending for.

On the one hand Goodcole considers the practice of thatch-burning "old" and "ridiculous," and the community's suspicions as "great presumptions"; on the other hand, the custom works "presently." Dekker, however, exposes the villagers as vindictive and superstitious. In the play, Mother Sawyer's thatch is also burned for specific reasons: a villager has caught his wife and a servant with stolen
corn, a theft attributed by the wife to her bewitchment by Mother Sawyer (IV.i.5-9); Old Banks' horse has contracted a fatal disease which Banks has blamed on "this Jadish Witch, Mother Sawyer" (1. 4); and Banks has been plagued by an uncontrollable urge to raise his cow's tail and "kiss . . . / my Cow behinde" (ll. 55-56), a habit which has made the community of Edmonton "ready to be-piss themselves with laughing" (1. 57). The broad comedy of Banks' predicament (an episode not recorded in Goodcole) exposes the folly of the accusations. The thatch-burning, moreover, is accompanied by the frenzied chant of the villagers--"Burn the Witch, the Witch, the Witch, the Witch" (1. 15)--and Mother Sawyer on her arrival is greeted by the equally chilling refrain, "Hang her, beat her, kill her" (1. 29), intended no doubt to make even the most superstitious of spectators pity the old woman.

Mother Sawyer is momentarily spared by the intervention of a Justice who arrives on the scene accompanied by Sir Arthur Clarington. In a significant departure from his source, Dekker invests the Justice with the wisdom and compassion to reprehend the villagers for their violent actions, which are "against Law" (IV.i.51).

Just. Come, come; firing her Thatch? ridiculous:
    take heed Sirs
    what you do: unless your proofs come better arm'd, instead of
    turning her into a Witch, you'll prove your selves starke Fools.

     (IV.i.40-42)
The villagers' fury subsides when the Judge insists on treating Mother Sawyer with mildness. Elizabeth's bold and frank answers to the Judge's questions reaffirm the psychological basis of her situation: "if every poor old Woman be trod on thus by / slaves, revil'd, kick'd, beaten, as I am daily, she to be reveng'd had / need turn Witch" (11. 76-78). Her essential error is to reveal an insubordinate attitude toward her social superiors. The Judge himself had implicitly alerted Elizabeth to his and Sir Arthur's social status when he attempted to subdue her anger with the observation that "Here's none now, Mother Sawyer, but this Gentleman, my / self and you" (11. 69-70). Elizabeth, however, has little regard either for the merits of class distinctions or for Sir Arthur's gentlemanly façade. Indeed, when Sir Arthur joins the interrogation Elizabeth's replies become increasingly truculent:

Sir Art. And you to be reveng'd have sold your Soul to th' Devil.
Sawy. Keep thine own from him.
Just. You are too sawcie, and too bitter.
Sawy. Sawcie? by what commission can he send my Soul on the Devil's Errand, more then I can his? is he a Landlord of my Soul, to thrust it when he list out of door?
Just. Know whom you speak to.
Sawy. A Man: perhaps, no Man. Men in gay clothes, whose Backs are laden with Titles and Honours, are within far more crooked then I am; and if I be a Witch, more Witch-like.

(IV.i.79-88)
Elizabeth's spirited insubordination, rather than her alleged crimes, assures her punishment; for she is arraigned only after she challenges Sir Arthur's false rectitude and ridicules a concept of honor based on social status.

Sir Art. By one thing she speaks, I know she's a Witch, and dare no longer Hold conference with the Fury. (11. 145-147)

Elizabeth Sawyer's declamation against a society that relegates poor elderly women to the status of witch or whore directly recalls Moll Cutpurse's eloquent rejection of society's double standards as they pertain to women of the lower classes. There are explicit verbal parallels, for instance, between Elizabeth's assertion that "Now an old woman / Ill favour'd grown with yeers, if she be poor, / Must be call'd Bawd or Witch" (IV.i.121-123) and Moll's rebuke of a would-be-seducer:

How many of our sex, by such as thou Haue their good thoughts paid with a blasted name That never deserved loosly or did trip In path of whoredome, beyond cup and lip. (The Roaring Girl, III.i.77-80)

Women who happen to fall into prostitution, Moll observes, are usually driven to it by necessity:

In thee I defye all men, their worst hates, And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts, With which they intangle the poore spirits of fooles, Distressed needlewomen and trade-fallne wiues.
Fish that must needs bite, or themselues be bitten,
Such hungry things as these may soone be tooke
With a worme fastned on a golden hooke.
Those are the lechers food, his prey . . . .
(III.i.88-95)

The essential difference between Mother Sawyer and Moll
Cutpurse lies in the nature of their responses to abuse and ridicule. While Moll channels her anguish into an ardent pursuit of freedom and independence combined with a rejection of conventional values, Elizabeth Sawyer internalizes her community's abuse—"Some call me Witch; /
And being ignorant of my self, they go / About to teach me how to be one" (II.i.8-10)—and through desperation becomes what she was unjustly accused of being. Feeling "shunn'd /
And hated like a sickness: made a scorn / To all degrees and sexes" (II.i.96-97), Elizabeth resolves to "Abjure all goodness" (1. 107) and to take her revenge against a cruel world since "'Tis all one, / To be a Witch, as to be counted one" (II. 113-114).

Elizabeth Sawyer's fate epitomizes what Frank Thorney, speaking about the material conditions into which Winnifride's child will be born, perceives will await those who "feel / The misery of beggary and want; / Two Devils that are occasions to enforce / A shameful end" (I.i.17-20). Elizabeth's specific target of revenge is her landlord, Old Banks, whom she describes as a "black Cur, / That barks, and bites, and sucks the very blood / Of me, and of my credit" (II.i.111-113). The "devil" who appears immediately
following the curse manifests itself in the shape of a black
cur who will do to Elizabeth precisely what she accuses
Banks of doing, with the significant exception that the
Dog's "sucking" of her blood is a pleasurable and satisfying
experience. The irony of the "devil's" shape is fundamental
to our understanding of Dekker's purpose in the supernatural
plot. On the psychological level, the Dog, as was the case
in the Frank Thorney plot, is a mental projection, this time
of a wonderful rarity, one who loves Elizabeth and who
soothes her suffering and anger:

Dog. Come, do not fear, I love thee much too well
To hurt or fright thee. If I seem terrible,
It is to such as hate me. I have found
Thy love unfeign'd; have seen and pitied
Thy open wrongs, and come out of my love
To give thee just revenge against thy foes.
(II.i.119-124)

Sawy. I am dri'd up
With cursing and with madness; and have yet
No blood to moysten these sweet lips of thine.
Stand on thy hind-legs up. Kiss me, my Tommy,
And rub away some wrinkles on my brow,
By making my old ribs to shrug for joy
Of thy fine tricks. What hast thou done?
Let's tickle.
(IV.i.152-158)

Dekker's conception of the Dog as a demon lover was
emphasized in the 1962 production of the play by the Mermaid
Theatre in London, which depicted Elizabeth as "a pitiable
old woman who turns to the Devil because no one else will
have her, and whose contract is undisguisedly a love
relationship."38 That the Dog appears in the form of Mother
Sawyer's mental image of Old Banks reinforces the presentation of an alienated old woman whose chief desire is to be accepted by her community. As an erotic configuration, however, the parallel also suggests Elizabeth's desire to seduce Banks. The erotic wish, like Elizabeth's longing for social acceptance, can never be fulfilled because she is old and deformed; had she been young and beautiful, she could have seduced Banks, thereby gaining sexual power over him. On the moral level, the symbolic link between the Dog and Old Banks implies the Dog may also be taken as an exterior form of evil. In this context, the Dog is not so much an agent of supernatural powers as a symbol of the malevolence that lies at the heart of the community. When the supernatural enters the plot, therefore, it does so "as another aspect of the natural world." Through the Dog "the dark side of rural England is brought fully into view," a theme only implied in the marriage plot.

Although Old Banks, Sir Arthur, and the villagers share moral responsibility for their abuse of Elizabeth Sawyer, no one is punished through the intervention of Providence. Only Elizabeth is tried and found guilty of the charges brought against her, and, although she is contrite--"Bear witness, I repent all former evil; / There is no damned Conjurer like the Devil" (V.iii.50-51)--there is no real or symbolic intervention by an Absolute force who substitutes divine mercy for human justice. The universe, it appears,
has become indifferent to human action. Perhaps this is what Henry Adams implied when, speaking of the unorthodox ending of the supernatural plot, he observed that Elizabeth Sawyer's tragic end "anticipate[s] a development many generations in the future."42

Dekker's denial of the stock homiletic conclusion in the Elizabeth Sawyer action reinforces his ironic treatment of the conventional scaffold situation in the Frank Thorney plot. The integration of the two plots is striking in the context of Dekker's earlier domestic plays where the tendency was toward opposition between the various levels of action. In _Patient Grissil_ the ideal of wedded love in the marquess-Grissill action was challenged by the Gwenthyan-Sir Owen marriage and by Julia's misogamy. When the husband's prodigality was a central issue, as it was in _The Honest Whore, II_, the action allowed for the redemption of the hero (Matheo) and for his return to the _domus_ and to the society which he had formerly rejected, although the return was portrayed amid contradictory messages. The ambiguity was sustained in the Hippolito-Infelice plot where there was no reconciliation between husband and wife. In _The Roaring Girl_ the epithalamic conclusion of the Sebastian-Mary action was severely challenged by the roarer's renunciation of traditional values. Taken together, the domestic comedies revealed an increasing number of plots which denied the conventional comic ending, suggesting Dekker's growing dissatisfaction with orthodox moral and dramatic solutions.
In *The Witch of Edmonton* conventional values completely thwart the protagonists' desires. For Elizabeth Sawyer the conflict is between individual autonomy and a repressive society, while for Frank Thorney the struggle is essentially an inner one that ultimately leads to despair. The separate conflicts are equal in dramatic importance and tone, suggesting a thematic correspondence between the two subject matters: the protagonists are united through their suffering in a brutal and unharmonious world. The structural equivalence reveals not only Dekker's complete disillusionment with orthodox homiletic solutions to human conflict, but also his perception of the interrelationship between personal and social forces that prevents the individual from achieving either the satisfaction of individual autonomy or of conventional domesticity, a perception that has guided his progression from domestic comedy to tragedy.
Notes

1 Henry H. Adams, *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy*, p. 132.

2 Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries*, III, 237. Scholars generally agree that Dekker conceived the Mother Sawyer plot, and recently Dekker has been deemed responsible for much of the Frank Thorney action. See Hoy, III, 236-37; Sidney Homan, Jr., "Shakespeare and Dekker as Keys to Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore," *Studies in English Literature*, 7 (1967), 270; and Leonora Leet Brodwin, "The Domestic Tragedy of Frank Thorney in The Witch of Edmonton," *Studies in English Literature*, 7 (1967), 324ff., who concludes that "Dekker conceived the characters and contributed to the writing of the Frank Thorney portion of the play" on the basis of "Frank's economic concern, coupled with his almost total lack of romanticism," qualities not found in Ford's characters (327).


4 Mary L. Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 147.

5 Thomas Dekker, *If This be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is In It*, in *Dramatic Works*, ed. Fredson Bowers, III, 11. 1-12. All citations from *If This be Not a Good Play, The Virgin Martyr*, and *Match Me in London* are from this edition.

6 Hunt, p. 160.

7 Price, p. 78.

8 Price, p. 78.

9 Hunt, p. 152.


12 Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Elizabeth Savvyer a witch, late of Edmonton, her conviuction*
and condemnation and death. Together with the relation of the Diuells accesse to her and their conference together (London, 1621).

13 G.N. Rao, The Domestic Drama, pp. 80-81. The plays include the anonymous Merry Devil of Edmonton (ca. 1599-1604), The Wise Woman of Hogsdon (ca. 1604), and Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches (ca. 1612-1634).


17 Adams, English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 7.

18 Adams, p. 141.

19 Adams, p. 137.

20 Henry Swinburne, in Treatise of Spousals (ca. 1600), writes: "Albeit there be no witnesses of the Contract, yet the Parties having verily (though secretly) Contracted Matrimony, they are very Man and Wife before God; neither can either of them with safe Conscience Marry elsewhere, so long as the other party liveth" (quoted in Peter Ure, "Marriage and the Domestic Drama in Heywood and Ford," 213, n. 34.) Lawrence Stone, in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, p. 32, writes that the "Church courts . . . declared a marriage in church to be adulterous and of no validity if there could be proved a prior oral contract per verba de praesenti by one of the pair with another person . . . ."

21 Andrew Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 228, n. 11. Cf. George Blayney, in "Wardship in English Drama (1600-1650)," Studies in Philology, LIII (1956), 472, who notes The Miseries of Enforced Marriage "makes its point in Wilkins' intention to portray the evils of the social system."

22 George Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, in Robert Dodsley, ed., A Select Collection of Old English Plays, IX, 480. All citations from the play are from this edition.

23 Clark, II, 229.

Sackville West, 29. If the marriage plot is to be viewed as more than a warning of the dangers of forced marriage, Frank's duality must be emphasized, as it was in the 1936 production and in the 1981 production by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Both productions stressed that "in the hands of Dekker and co.," the "well-worn theme [of forced marriage] blossoms into a highly developed psychological drama" (Irving Wardle, "The Witch of Edmonton: Other Place," The Times, Thursday 17 September 1981, p. 9). The 1981 production, especially, portrayed Frank Thorney as "a man driven mad by conscience," (James Fenton, "When the devil drives," The Sunday Times, 20 September 1981, p. 41a) while the "ominous ironies" of his situation took the spectator "every inch of the way up to the act of murder" (Wardle, p. 9).


Audrey Williamson, Old Vic Drama (London: Theatre Book Club, 1950), pp. 66 and 68. A reviewer for The Times, on the other hand, while finding the interpretation of the dog as a mental projection "a reasonable suggestion," cautioned, without substantiating the claim, that "it leads to difficulties of subjective and objective interpretation if it be pursued too far"; it would have been "better," argues the critic, if the play had been performed "as a plainly melodramatic morality which here and there has given Dekker an opportunity to say that the wicked are not always as guilty as the fortunate suppose, but are sometimes driven to a second wrong by the very remorse that arises from the first" (Wednesday, 9 December 1936, p. 12). The 1962 production by the Mermaid Theatre in London portrayed the Dog strictly as a figure from folk-lore, "part Mephistophelian" and "part Robin Goodfellow, . . . inspir[ing] in one aspect and . . . terror[izing] . . . in the other" ("Fascinating Rag-Bag of Dramatic Idioms," The Times, Thursday 22 November 1962, p. 15).


Adams, English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 136.

Adams, p. 136.


Irving Wardle, "The Witch of Edmonton: Other Place," p. 9. The reviewer of the 1921 production by the Phoenix Theatre lamented that Sybil Thorndike, who played Mother Sawyer, "made the mistake of dressing and acting the witch like something out of Macbeth or the Irving Faust, instead of . . . dressing and acting the part within that contemporary, tragi-comical convention which . . . Russell Thorndike . . . cleverly preserved in his acting of the Devil-Dog" (The Times, Wednesday 27 April 1921, p. 10).


Goodcole, A4-A4V (quoted in Hoy, III, 258).

"Fascinating Rag-Bag of Dramatic Idioms," p. 15.

The 1981 production of the play clarified the Dog's complex role as a natural form of evil. "Visually," wrote James Fenton, the Dog "is a mixture of canine and human"; he is "temperamental, and there are parts of his job which he clearly dislikes. For instance, he does not enjoy putting his head under . . . [Mother Sawyer's] 'coats.' He does, on the other hand, enjoy a tickle" ("When the devil drives," p. 41a).

Fenton, p. 41a.


Adams, English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 141.
During the years between the publication of *The Witch of Edmonton* and his death in 1632 Dekker wrote mainly prose works. Among the plays of this period only three lost works seem to have been based on domestic themes. *The Late Murder in Whitechapel, or Keep the Widow Waking*, a collaboration with Ford, Rowley and Webster, also known as *A Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother*, was licensed in September 1624 as "A new Tragedy."\(^1\) The central episodes apparently concerned a well-known murder of 9 April 1624, while the underplot dealt with the enforced marriage of an old and wealthy widow. However, the play was withdrawn from the stage when the authors were threatened with legal proceedings.\(^2\) Two other lost collaborations with Ford, *The London Merchant* (ca. 1624) and *The Bristol Merchant* (1624), have been suggested as possible domestic plays.\(^3\) Although the evidence is hypothetical, *The Bristol Merchant* may have been based on Dekker's prose pamphlet, *Penny-Wise, Pound-Foolish* (published 1631), the subject of which is a Bristol merchant's progression from infidelity and profligacy to repentance.\(^4\) The homiletic structure and domestic theme of the prose work suggest what the focus of the central episodes of *The Bristol Merchant* might have been. The pamphlet's subtitle, *A Bristol Diamond Set in Two Rings, and Both Cracked. Profitable for Married Men,*
Pleasant for Young Men, and Rare Example for All Good Women, introduces the domestic interest, while the plot is based on a formula intrinsic to domestic comedy: the merchant is a prodigal husband, who, after falling into crime, is ransomed and forgiven by his patient wife whom he has twice betrayed. The wife's forgiveness is instrumental in bringing about the husband's repentance, but his redemption is delayed until he is duly punished for his former sins. The merchant's household is reduced to poverty, and the couple is forced to live in a small shop until the wife's penny, the only money she had entrusted to her husband during his "pound-foolish" days, and which he had given away, ironically returns with an enormous increment and restores prosperity to them.

Dekker applies to the pithy didactic folk-tale that is the source of Penny-Wise, Pound-Foolish a dramatic impulse that obscures the simple morality of his source, an impulse we have noted repeatedly in his domestic plays. To begin with, Dekker, as E.D. Pendry observes, "is not greatly interested in the folk wit so important to the structure of his source"; instead, he "reduces the wit bought for a penny to a mere moral warning, and saves up his account of the husband's stratagem until the occasion calls for it." Dekker refrains for a long time from informing the reader about the penny, nor does he include the protracted scene in the source showing the wife making an enormous profit on her money. The second half of the story, which concerns the second voyage, the second mistress, second repentance, and
second redemption, is not a mechanical repetition of the homiletic sequence found in the Medieval version. Dekker makes of the merchant's moral weakness a "personal destiny" which he is unable to escape, a fate counterbalanced with a form of "secular grace, the grace being to some extent a force for good that Ferdinand himself has set in train and that he can avail himself of if he chooses." 7

The repetition of the structural pattern in the second part deflects the thematic focus away from the choice between the two women (one a devoted and faithful wife, the other an impudent but generous courtesan) toward the paradoxical relationship between an incorrigibly weak husband and a spirited wife who resolve to remain together despite the realization that the marriage will never be free of conflict: "We must all die one day," says Ferdinand to his wife, "let us shuffle and cut in the world as well as we can." 8 The achievement of the prose piece depends on the same Dekkerian quality that marked the success of The Honest Whore, II: the juxtaposition of a practical morality with a sustained delight in "flying high."

The Bristol Merchant, then, in all likelihood dealt with similar themes explored in Dekker's earlier domestic drama. During the years immediately preceding Dekker's death, domestic drama, which had been in decline for some time, virtually disappeared from the stage. Surviving documents include evidence of only sporadic revivals of the form after 1610, and two hybrids after 1625. 9 The decline
in the genre's popularity coincided with widespread changes in dramatic fashion and taste, which reflected the increasing social differentiation in the drama. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century domestic content frequently merges with romantic tragedy and comedy, and those plays specifically concerned with the conflict between husband and wife increasingly conform to the popular drama of manners with its emphasis on the illicit love duel. "A tragic-comic vogue," writes Clark, "established by Beaumont and Fletcher also meant that domestic drama was now frequently limited to a portion of the dramatic action. Authors, for the sake of variety or fashion, introduce material extraneous to the genre."¹⁰

In Restoration drama domestic themes are subsumed within the satirical treatment of the game of love. The dramatist's purpose is to expose the selfishness and hypocrisy beneath the veneer of social pretension, and the exposure usually focuses on marriage as the centre of moral and spiritual degeneracy. The principal character, the rakish hero, is a distant relative of the prodigal husband in early domestic drama: the rake scorns convention by determining to satisfy his sexual appetite outside the constraints of marriage, but he usually has the good sense to know when the game must be abandoned. Indeed, conventional values are sustained beneath the intrigue. In Dryden's Marriage à-la-Mode (ca. 1672) the main plot explores with typical wit and humor the implications of
contemporary attitudes toward sex, marriage, and morality. Rhodophil's wife is Palamede's mistress and Palamede's fiancée is Rhodophil's mistress; yet through careful plot manipulation all the characters remain technically virtuous. In the resolution we witness an agreement between the central characters to revere conjugal loyalty, a solution which is both wise and practical. Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (ca. 1673) differs from the general pattern of Restoration comedy in that the play ends with the seducer Horner triumphant, the jealous husband Mr. Pinchwife deluded, and the wife tormented with the prospect of a bleak future. Beneath the acerbic tone of the satire we sense Wycherley's moral outrage against a society which has become thoroughly corrupted by affectation.

A different type of domestic play appears with English Sentimental Drama. In reaction against the code of illicit love reflected in the drama of manners, which, in the words of Jeremy Collier, in his celebrated attack on the English stage, "rewarded debauchery," "ridiculed virtue and learning," and was "disserviceable to probity and religion," English Sentimental Comedy resorted to preaching virtuous behavior chiefly through sentimental vignettes of family life. Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) is a prototype of the new domestic comedy: the hero is conscientious and morally faultless; he scorns cupidity and is kind to his servants, always thanking them for paid services. He is guided by an unfailing sense of
honor and is above earthly passions, as evidenced by his sacrifice for the sake of his family's reputation. Although he loves the heroine Indiana, in order to please his parents he resolves to marry Lucinda, a decision agreed to by the equally noble Indiana. The genre, which is related to the French *comédie larmoyante*, consistently sacrifices dramatic conflict in its effort to instruct through sentiment. Sentimental Comedy coexisted with the new domestic tragedies of Edward Moore, George Lillo, and Nicholas Rowe, who, like the early English domestic dramatists, extended the conventional range of tragedy by making persons of the middle class the protagonists of their plays. Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), which inspired G.E. Lessing in Germany to write *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) in an attempt to liberate German theatre from neoclassicism and to inspire middle-class tragedy, contains a dramatically rich portrait of Millwood, the scornful but generous and attractive whore who recalls Dekker's spirited heroines. Millwood's pronouncements, like those of Bellafront and Moll Cutpurse before her, on the determining force of necessity upon personal desire undercut the homiletic framework of the play and anticipate the courageous choice of a modern heroine such as Nora in *A Doll's House*.

During the French Enlightenment the same extension of tragedy led to a reformulation of the genre in the plays and dramatic theories of Denis Diderot. Diderot applied the term "tragédie domestique et bourgeoise" to
his plays and to those of his predecessors, Moore and Lillo, whom he praised for heralding the new drama. According to Diderot, three characteristics distinguish eighteenth-century domestic drama. To begin with, it must be serious, its subject morally significant, and the intrigue simple, domestic, and close to real life. Secondly, character must always be subordinate to plot. This applies particularly to comedy which, in neoclassical drama, observes Diderot, treats plot as the accessory of character. Thirdly, it must express great pathos and inspire sentiment. Diderot translated Moore's *The Gamester*, praised Lillo's *London Merchant* for incorporating his dramatic principles, and applauded the manner in which middle-class social and domestic problems in these plays were treated in didactic sentimental scenes leading to a happy ending. The genre's function, according to Diderot, is to perpetrate bourgeois values, the measure of a dramatist's success being his ability to flatter his audience. In an essay on dramatic language he writes:

\[ \text{Tout doit être clair pour le spectateur. Confident de chaque personnage, instruit de ce qui s'est passé et de ce qui ce passe; il y a cent moments où l'on n'a rien de mieux à faire que de lui déclarer nettement ce qui se passera.} \]

Diderot's is not the kind of drama that seeks to expose the folly of simplistic judgments: "que les spectateurs s'avancent au dénouement sans s'en douter." At the same time that Diderot wishes to flatter his middle-class
audience, we detect a note of condescension toward the spectator who must be clearly and unequivocally instructed in the values of the Enlightenment.

When Diderot calls his drama domestic and bourgeois he therefore has in mind a more narrowly conceived ideological theatre than early English domestic drama; indeed, in his discussion of his English predecessors Diderot is conspicuously silent about the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers of domestic plays. Michel Grivelet, for one, has observed that Diderot's theatre is much less domestic than it is bourgeois. Diderot's rigid defense of marriage and the family, as seen in his intention to permeate the stage with "fathers, husbands, sisters, brothers," does not spring from a desire to explore family conflict but to portray characters and sentiments which have hitherto been absent from the stage.

... la situation domestique n'a pas plus de valeur intrinsèque que l'exercice de telle profession, que tel 'état' rempli dans la société. Et, de fait, il n'ennumère ces 'relations' que pour compléter la liste des 'conditions' qui, les premières, se sont présentées a son esprit: 'l'homme de lettres, le philosophe, le commerçant, le juge, l'avocat, le politque, le citoyen, le magistrat, le financier, le grand seigneur, l'intendant.'

Diderot's intention in dramatizing domestic situations is essentially to instruct the class that now exerts power and influence in moral and social conduct. The dramatic situation consequently plays a secondary role to Diderot's
didactic purpose to extol absolute morality and bourgeois values. What Diderot's melodrama does question is the legitimacy of the aristocratic order which his audience is engaged in challenging. In the best of the early domestic plays, on the other hand, we saw the dramatists grappling with the new institutions of marriage and the nuclear family in such a way that they consistently undermined the genre's abstract moral design by exposing the inadequacy of those institutions. Dekker, we have seen, persistently exploits dramatic and homiletic formulas through irony, inversion, and paradox.

Dekker's complex dramaturgy and his distaste for tidy moral and dramatic solutions align him more closely with the theatre of Ibsen and Arthur Miller than with English Sentimental Drama or the reductive theatre of Diderot. In his domestic plays Dekker, like Ibsen and Miller in theirs, is not portraying scenes from real life so much as he is dramatizing their complex significance for a repressive and fragmented society. Bellafront and Infelice's eloquent declamations against society's double standards in The Honest Whore, II, and Moll Cutpurse's bold rejection of them in The Roaring Girl, anticipate Nora's defiance of her hypocritical marriage in A Doll's House as both dramatists anatomize the tensions of domestic life. A Doll's House shows the development of a woman who, like many of Dekker's heroines, challenges the subjugation imposed upon her by shallow social conventions. In Patient Grissil Dekker was
beginning to formulate a theme which he would refine in The Honest Whore, II and which Ibsen, with his modern consciousness, would bring to its logical dramatic conclusion, that is, the realization that it is impossible for a marriage to be fulfilling when one individual refuses to recognize the other as a socially responsible human being with an independent mind. Hippolito in The Honest Whore, II is in a sense the precursor of Torvald Helmer in that both characters believe women are their intellectual inferiors and therefore easily subjugated. Torvald's marriage breaks down when Nora realizes her life as a dutiful and patient spouse, like her life as a "doll-child" to her father, has been a counterfeit one in which her worth as a human being has been ignored. The theme of patience is brought into relief in Act one when we learn of Nora's struggle to keep up the secret payment to Krogstad:

Nora... It has been by no means easy for me to meet my commitments punctually... there is something that is called, in business, quarterly interest, and another thing called payment in instalments, and it is always so dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had to save a little here and there, where I could,... I haven't been able to put aside much from my housekeeping money, for Torvald likes good food. I couldn't let my children be shabbily dressed; I have felt I must use up all he gave me for them... . . .

. . . . . . .
Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Often I was desperately tired; but
all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.

(Act I, pp. 14-15)

Nora's struggle has taught her to value not patience but activity and independence, values traditionally associated with men. Nora's selfless forbearance is the essential female "virtue" which she comes to realize she must reject. During the revelation scene, when Nora informs her husband he has not proved to be the man she had thought him to be, her reproach attests to that rejection: "I have waited so patiently for eight years; for goodness knows, I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day . . . .

As I am now, I am no wife for you" (III, pp. 70-71). Nora rejects Torvald's definition of her as "Before all else, . . . a wife and a mother" (III, p. 68) and, in her perception "that before all else I am a reasonable human being," (III, p. 70) we hear an echo of Infelice and Bellafront's defiance of a misogynistic tradition that requires a woman to submit to the will of her husband, and denies her the capability of reason. In The Honest Whore, II Infelice does not shut the door on her marriage, but she does renounce the ideology of patience; and in the resolution Dekker undercuts the tendency to generalize from the reunion of Bellafront and Matheo by avoiding a reconciliation scene between Infelice and Hippolito. The limitations of patience as a wifely virtue are also exposed in Miller's Death of a Salesman: Willy Loman, a distant counterpart of the erring husband
in early English domestic drama, is married to a dutiful and solicitous wife whom he has betrayed. The ethic, however, is shown by Miller to be as destructive as Willy's dream of success; and Linda's importunities, like Susan's in The Witch of Edmonton, cannot in the end redeem her husband from himself.

The affirmation of one's self-worth, which Miller sees as "the underlying struggle . . . of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society,"\(^{20}\) is at the heart of the finest tragedies, including those whose protagonists are from the common ranks. "No tragedy," writes Miller, "can come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable."\(^{21}\) In domestic drama the site of that struggle is the family, from which, as evidenced by plays such as Death of a Salesman, The Witch of Edmonton, and The Wild Duck, it "extends itself . . . into society, . . . broach[ing] those questions of social status, social honor and recognition, which expand its vision and lift it out of the merely particular toward the fate of the generality of men."\(^{22}\) That struggle, moreover, is not set against a two-dimensional background of scenes from everyday life; rather, it gains universality chiefly through the interplay of realistic and symbolic elements, a technique which penetrates decorum and engenders psychological depth. The domestic tragedies of Dekker, Ibsen, and Miller share a
fundamental symbol, the home, which is at once the centre of everyday life and the antagonist against which the protagonist measures his or her self-worth. In The Wild Duck Hjalmar Ekdal's psychological struggle derives from the tension between a comfortable life of illusion, symbolized by the house in which he lives, and one of art and freedom, symbolized by the wild duck. Smug, well-fed, and complacent in his domestic comfort, Hjalmar fills his inner void with the vague and unsubstantial dream of being a great inventor, from which he awakens into despair. In Death of a Salesman Miller also fuses realistic and symbolic elements in order to bring into relief the essential conflict between truth and illusion. The world of everyday life, represented by Willy Loman's tiny frame house, is juxtaposed with non-realistic elements, and the lack of fusion between these two levels is an abstract statement of Willy's tragic inability to realize himself. "The stark visual contrast between a highly symbolic set and the behavior of highly realistic characters," writes Enoch Brater,

is what adds such a dramatic resonance to the themes Miller pursues. What happens here on the level of everyday life is performed on a set that has been delicately built to play a metaphorical supporting role. The actions and reactions of the Loman family, therefore, gain a density of meaning above and beyond what we normally expect from the conventions of fourth-wall realism. The play carefully builds its conflicts from the interaction of its two separate levels of stage presence, the symbolic and the naturalistic. The careful orchestration of this scenic device prepares us for the thematic conflicts that will
Ibsen and Miller, of course, are not the only modern dramatists who have explored domestic drama. Other writers such as Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill have also contributed to the genre's development in our century. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* especially warrants discussion here because the interplay between symbolic and realistic structures is also responsible for the dramatic power of the tragedy. The pervasive symbol here is the fog, an image of the characters' inability to understand or realize themselves. By Act III the fog threatens to swallow the family's living room as it presses thickly against the windowpanes. A foghorn is heard at intervals, symbolizing the family's situation and alerting us to its fate. The symbolic element is juxtaposed with the realism of the interior set. The play opens on the "living room of the Tyrones' summer home / 8:30 A.M. of a day in August, 1912"; at the rear of the set are two double doorways with portières. The one at right leads into a front parlor with the formally arranged, set appearance of a room rarely occupied. The other opens on a dark, windowless back parlor, never used except as a passage from living room to dining room.

The action of the play transpires before the doorways, in the shabby living room which holds a "small bookcase" (s.d., Act I, p. 11) lined with the titles of important books. The
Tyrone family acts out their despair in the mid-region between the bright and formal exterior which is the front parlor, and the darkness of the inner room. The characters confront themselves and one another, gradually wearing away at the protective veneer of their lives until each faces his own tragic destiny and that of the others with a measure of tolerance and pity. The mother, Mary Cavan Tyrone, describes the tragic fate of those who cling to idealism and illusion: "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever" (II.i., p. 6l).

Although Dekker is working within a different tradition of stage decorum, a similar pattern of interaction between realistic and symbolic elements informs his domestic tragedy, The Witch of Edmonton, where the episodes involving the Black Dog, a composite symbol of Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer's thwarted wills and of the community's repressive values, occur against a realistic background of family and village life. Frank Thorney, like Mary Cavan Tyrone, Willy Loman, and Hjalmar Ekdal, is torn between personal and social claims in a tragedy whose achievement lies in an authentic exploration of what Miller calls "the balance between what is possible and what is impossible."25
In reviewing Dekker's contribution to a specific dramatic tradition, and in appraising his dramatic vision, I wish to acknowledge my debt to the words of Mary Leland Hunt who long ago suggested that Dekker's dramatic works should be considered serious and intelligent contributions to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama:

Many and varied gifts go to the making of a great dramatist, and from the fame of every one of Shakespeare's contemporaries large deductions have had to be made; from Dekker's too they must be made. But his best work has remained unhurt by changing tastes and manners. Whatever he wrote is touched with the artistic and spiritual grace of sincerity, . . . [rendering him] the most poetical . . . of the group that surrounded the master.26

Hunt rightly pointed out Dekker's value in his time and implied his value for ours. The facility with which we are able to determine Dekker's anticipation of a dramatic tradition as vital and complex as that of Ibsen, Miller, and O'Neill suggests there is much to recommend him to the age in which we live. I have only touched upon modern dramatists' affinities with Dekker and early English domestic drama; a more comprehensive study is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it would include virtually most of the content of modern popular culture.
Notes

1 See Henry Adams, English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 203; and Andrew Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 433.

2 The subplot, which dealt with the rich widow's forced marriage, apparently treated its subject matter farcically and the authors were judged to be "scandal-mongering" (Clark, II, 433).


4 The conjecture was originally made by W. Bang, in Materialen zur Kunde des alteren Englischen Dramas, XXII (1908), VI, 185ff.; cf. M.L. Hunt, Thomas Dekker, p. 187; E.D. Pendry, Thomas Dekker, p. 317; and Clark, Domestic Drama, II, 432.

5 Pendry notes that there are "two medieval manuscript versions of the tale A Pennyworth of Wit (the later being entitled How a Merchant Did His Wife Betray), which is related to Continental folk-tale [sic] and probably derives from a French original . . . . In England the story had a popular currency for centuries in chapbook form; but although it was entered on the Stationers' Register on 14 August 1560 . . . it is not found in print before Dekker" (Thomas Dekker, p. 317).

6 Pendry, p. 16.

7 Pendry, pp. 16-17.


9 Clark cites Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches (1634) and The Wise Woman of Hogsdon (ca. 1638) as late examples of the domestic play (Domestic Drama, II, 382). On the decline of domestic tragedy see Adams, pp. 160-83; and on the decline of both domestic tragedy and comedy see Clark, II, 323ff.

10 Clark, II, 325. Plays such as Fortune by Land Sea, Women Beware Women, The English Traveller, The Vow Breaker, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, observes Adams, "illustrate the
debility of the genre and . . . its imminent disappearance from the stage" (English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, p. 160).


13 Diderot, "Entretiens sur Le fils naturel," passim.

14 Diderot, "De la poésie dramatique," in Le Drame Bourgeois, 368: "All must be clear to the spectator who must be confident of the fate of each character and instructed in all that has passed and all that shall come to pass on stage. There must be many moments in which he has nothing better to do than to anticipate what shall happen" (translation mine).

15 "De la poésie dramatique," 368: "the spectator must proceed to the resolution without ever doubting his own judgment" (translation mine).

16 M. Grivelet, Thomas Heywood et le Drame Domestique Élizabéthain, p. 346.

17 Diderot, "Entretiens sur Le fils naturel," 150 (translation mine).

18 Grivelet, p. 345: "The domestic situation has less intrinsic value than the social status of the characters. In fact, Diderot merely includes the characters' domestic roles in order to complete the list of social 'ranks' which are foremost in his mind: 'the man of letters, the philosopher, the merchant, the judge, the lawyer, the politician, the citizen, the magistrate, the financier, the nobleman, the commissary'" (translation mine).


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