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In the three decades between 1596 and 1626, roughly sixty city comedies were composed by early modern playwrights: these plays—some of which are largely out of print while others are frequently printed, anthologized, and taught—create a composite image of how drama imagines the lives of ordinary London citizenry. Partly due to the growth of London's marketplace economy, citizen wives and working women gain financial stability and visibility within early modern society during this period. City plays depict the female characters' negotiation of issues of power and agency; theater imagines the possibilities that might give these characters the capacity to manipulate societal expectations to gain power and agency.

In this study, I use exemplary city plays—including works by Dekker, Jonson, Middleton, and Shakespeare—from the aforementioned catalogue of city comedies to delineate and discuss three models of agency: defiant, subversive, and acquiescent. These models of agency are contingent on the subject's continual negotiation and reassertion of her positionality. Defiant agency is made possible through the rejection or visible challenge of patriarchal forms of control. Subversive agency requires the female characters' thorough understanding of modes of conduct to which they are supposed to conform; however, their obedient behavior ultimately ends with a subversion of societal expectations. The final model of agency I discuss is acquiescent agency. In this model, the female characters' behavior is in keeping with the societal regulations, but this behavior enables the female characters to occupy the role of validating patriarchal forms

of control. Additionally, female agency in early modern city plays often results from a communal negotiation of societal expectations of female behavior rather than an individual's relationship with the ideological apparatus. This study highlights manifestations of female power that are largely under-examined, as well as reading and interpretive practices that make it possible for scholars of female agency to locate it in instances of obedience rather than only in defiance of societal expectations of conduct.

(DIS)OBEDIENT WIVES: MANIFESTATIONS OF COLLECTIVE FEMALE AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN CITY COMEDIES

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: RETHINKING FEMALE AGENCY AND POWER IN EARLY MODERN CITY COMEDIES

In his comprehensive study of early modern city drama *The City Staged*, Theodore Leinwand compiles a list of female characters who are able to affect or critique the behavior of their male counterparts:

> Thus Doll Common must manage Subtle and Face; Moll Firth (in *The Roaring Girl*) trips up the gallant and protects the gentleman; Maria (in *The Woman's Prize; or*, *The Tamer Tamed*) demands the respect of Petruchio; Mistress Allwit (in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) tacitly (though not with our approval) signals the depravity of Sir Walter and Master Allwit; Sindefy (in *Eastward Ho*) reminds Quicksilver of his precarious position; Thomasine (in *Michaelmas Term*) chastens Quomodo and aids Easy; the wives in *Westward Ho* trick their husbands and their gallants; the silent "woman" turns the tables on Morose; the whore Frank Gullman (though she too is deceived) tricks Follywit and disparages Sir Bounteaous (in *A Mad World*); the Courtesan (in *A Trick*) finds a husband as she hoodwinks Hoard; and Field's ladies receive their amends. Few of these feminine victories are unequivocal. Yet throughout the decade of city comedy we are examining, playwrights were presenting independent, capable stage women. (139)

That Leinwand's study of Jacobean city comedy is exemplary in its scope and thoroughness hardly needs repeating. However, the aforementioned catalogue of remarkable moments of female power against male rule is just that: a catalogue of moments and instances. When examining many of the plays that Leinwand discusses throughout *The City Staged*, I resist the conclusion that he arrives at: that early modern dramatists frequently created powerful female characters who were capable of resisting

male-dictated expectations and could go as far as showcasing the shortcomings of the male characters with whom they shared the stage. My approach in this study is different from Leinwand's (and that of many early modern scholars) in that my analysis of the power of female characters is not concerned with how this power affects the male characters in the play.[1] In analyzing the relative power female characters might be able to wield in the course of a play, I am interested in how the female characters are able to use this power in a way that may have nothing to do with a male character. Thus, my interest in *Westward Ho* is not limited to the female characters' ability to fool their husbands and the gallants; rather, I am interested in how the trick they play on the male characters of the play benefits the female characters. Within the genre of city comedy, female power is frequently the result of careful—and subtle—negotiations of the circumstances and limitations surrounding the female characters; as such, it has been frequently glossed over in early modern scholarship. The following study is an examination of what the drama of the period may tell us about issues of gender, agency, and female power within early modern culture.

[1] Here and throughout I am mindful of Phyllis Rackin's critique of scholarly focus on male anxieties rather than female experiences when engaging in literary analysis: "As we all know, however, scholarly texts, no less than the texts scholars study, are imbricated in the historical contexts in which they were produced and shaped by the social locations and personal interests and desires of their writers, even though the conventions of academic civility make those factors difficult to discuss. Nonetheless, I believe it is important to note, not only that the feminist/ historicist Shakespeare criticism of the 1980s often tended to privilege male experience, emphasizing masculine anxiety in the face of powerful women, but also that some of the most influential work of that period was, in fact, the work of male critics" ("Misogyny Is Everywhere" 46). My readings of the plays are concerned not with how the female characters' attainment of power allows them to showcase the shortcomings of the male characters with whom they share the stage but how this power enables the female characters to advance their own goals.

The frequently subtle nature of female power in early modern plays necessitates an examination of our conceptions of what constitutes power and/or agency. In a foundational study of treatises and conduct manuals that are meant to regulate female behavior, Constance Jordan argues that the female subject may respond to such regulations in one of two ways: "Either she is to *reaffirm* the value of her duties as her husband's subordinate or she must *reject* the grounds upon which she has been assigned her role and discover others that provide her with greater scope" (13). In "Strategies of Submission," Emily Bartels offers a third possibility that guarantees power within the framework of female fulfillment of societal expectations:

> There is, however, a middle ground that proffers the safety of the first option with the radicality of the second and allows women to be actors: to speak out through, rather than against, established postures and make room for self-expression within self-suppressing roles. Under the cover of male authority, women could modify its terms and sanction their moves without direct resistance. They could be good wives *and* desiring subjects, obedient *and* self-assertive, silent *and* outspoken. (419)

Bartels argues that by looking beyond the face value of female conduct, we may discover possibilities of female power that result from obedience. Paradoxically, by engaging in conduct that is in keeping with patriarchal expectations rather than defies such expectations, the female subject is able to gain the freedom to act as she wishes and can avoid further regulation by societal institutions.

One manifestation of female power that results from obedient behavior operates through willful obedience, which Kathryn Schwarz discusses in *What You Will*:

> Women who willfully do what they should further the projects of chastity, marriage, and patrilineal succession, but those projects appear as work, in which feminine subjects play intentional parts. Rather than liberate women from repressive dictates, this compromised mode of self–direction alters the meaning of compliance. The gap between decree and execution requires an acquiescence that is deliberate and transactional rather than innate; through the contradictory logic of prescribed choice, feminine will becomes the means of social contract. (3)

Schwarz locates female power at the crux of cultural expectations of female behavior and the actual fulfillment of such expectations: she argues that the possible disparity between expectations of female conduct and female actions becomes a locus of power for the subject. By interpreting obedient female behavior as purposeful action, we find that female characters are capable of granting legitimacy to the very patriarchal expectations that seek to regulate their behavior. These characters' capacity to approve such patriarchal expectations is noteworthy as it enables the critic to discover instances of purposeful action within the obedient conduct of female characters of the middling sort and use this evidence to participate in largely glossed over discourses of middling sort female power.

Throughout this project, I rely on the theoretical practices that Bartels and Schwarz advocate: by re-conceptualizing liberatory feminist practices that associate power with defiant action, we are able to look beyond the easy categorization of female obedient action as powerlessness and discover elements of resistance within obedient conduct. In extending the scope of my study to female characters of the middling sort, I examine a set of characters that are largely excluded from Bartels's and Schwarz's readings. Bartels uses the examples of the Duchess of Malfi and Desdemona to make her claims, while Schwarz's focus on Shakespearean drama effectively eliminates women of

the middling sort from her consideration. Marital status and social class are only some of the factors that differentiate the higher-ranking characters that Schwarz and Bartels examine from the middling sort characters who populate early modern city plays. Female power is frequently contingent on honor and chastity[2]: yet, the standards of chastity and honor are different for married and unmarried women. One example of the differences in standards that married and unmarried women must conform to comes from Schwarz's discussion of the bed trick in *Measure for Measure*:

> The structure of the bed trick, which transforms virginity into married chastity yet preserves the virginal body intact, demonstrates that chastity is both means and end of social law: it must mean its own end, and at the same time remain an end in itself. This is the double edge of Parolles's riddle in *All's Well*: "Loss of virginity is rational increase, and there was never virgin got till virginity was first lost" (1.1.130). The surface describes the mechanics of reproduction, but beneath this we might feel a second, sharper point. A chaste woman perpetually reconstitutes herself as chaste, choosing, again and again, to make sexuality the sign of virtue. Chastity must be mutable and unconditional, a split requirement materialized in the bed trick's sleight of flesh. (176)

Schwarz's outline of the bed trick that enables Isabella to preserve her chastity works as a result of consummating Mariana's betrothal to Angelo, a process that transforms Mariana's illicit affair with Angelo into a marriage. While both characters benefit from the exchange—Isabella remains a virgin and Mariana can now claim Angelo as her husband—Isabella's status gives her considerably more power than Mariana's does.

[2] In a society highly concerned with orderliness, chastity becomes a crucial component of female obedience and fulfillment of her duties within society. Leinwand succinctly summarizes the role of male and female power and virtue: "Masculine virtues take shape in the public realm, whereas feminine virtues are private" (*City Staged* 140). As a result, "A man's honor depended on his word, but a woman's honor was her chastity" (*City Staged* 141).

Isabella needs to continue choosing virtue; an option that is not available to Mariana as the latter must first recover her tarnished reputation. Isabella's chastity is only possible as a result of Mariana's previous illicit sexual engagement with Angelo. If Mariana did not have anything to gain from taking Isabella's part in Angelo's bed, Isabella would likely have to succumb to Angelo. Demonstrated chastity is the pathway to power in both cases, but if Isabella needs to maintain her reputation of chastity, Mariana must first recover her own reputation as an honorable woman. This difference is hardly unique to *Measure for Measure* as many non-elite female characters are placed in a position of having to establish or re-establish their reputations by engaging in processes of demonstrated chastity.[3] The fundamental difference between the kinds of power available to non-elite women, including women of the middling sort, in contrast to their aristocratic or noble counterparts is, at least partly, due to the work they have to do in order to be deemed chaste (chastity being the ultimate tool of gaining respect and power within society). While Isabella is assumed to be chaste and only needs to continue proving her chastity, many of the citizen wives who take the stage in this period have to contend with the opposite: they are assumed to be dishonest to their husbands until they can prove the opposite. These different approaches result in disparate relationships to power, as the former keeps her power while the latter must re-discover and re-negotiate for power.

[3] While *Measure for Measure* does not provide enough details about Mariana's social status, we can, nevertheless, deduce that within the context of the play, Mariana is of a lower social standing than Isabella. Megan Matchinske summarizes Mariana's status in the play as a secondary character: "With reputation and dowry gone, the majority of her conversations spoken off-stage and out of the audience earshot, Mariana is without cultural or dramatic definition. In Shakespeare's imagining, she is neither maid, wife, nor widow; she 'nothing then'" (90).

Cultural construction of chastity and its applications to women from different social strata is only one of the reasons why it is necessary to investigate female power—even power gained as a result of obedience—across various economic classes and social roles.

To accomplish this task of locating middling sort women's agency, I approach the subject matter with the same methodological practices that Bartels and Schwarz use in their respective studies. Where this study differs from the aforementioned examinations of female agency is in its focus on women of the middling sort. Scholarly engagement with questions of agency as it pertains to the female subject of the middling sort necessitates a re-conceptualization of how we approach notions of subjecthood and agency. Thus, unlike the female characters that Schwarz examines in *What You Will* (including Helena from *All's Well that Ends Well*, Cordelia from *King Lear*, and Isabella from *Measure for Measure*) the female characters I examine cannot gain power as a result of symbiotic relationships with regulatory structures: "if…regulatory regimes produce an invested acquiescence only to be produced by it in turn, that acquiescence authorizes the methods to which it accedes" (Schwarz 6). For female characters of the middling sort compliance does not automatically lead to power; rather, these characters must negotiate for agency through demonstrative, collective compliance. While tacit acknowledgement and acceptance of social expectations of their conduct can become a source of power for elite or aristocratic characters, such is not the case for female characters of the middling sort. As many of the plays I examine below will demonstrate, female characters of the middling sort frequently negotiate for power as a group rather than on an individual basis. This collective negotiation for power is noteworthy for two

reasons: firstly, with the exception of *Epicene*—where the collective actions of the female characters prove detrimental to their attainment of power—the plays I examine demonstrate that collective negotiation is a more effective pathway to power. Secondly, because the middling sort female characters' power is possible through a process of demonstrative compliance, in negotiating for power as a group, the female characters bear witness to one another's honesty and chastity. This collective agency demonstrates that female compliance to patriarchal regulations is the expected behavior of all characters of the group rather than an individual, exemplary figure.

Why City Comedy?

In "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History," Louis Montrose argues that a text is evocative of the social conditions within which it is produced:

> To speak, then, of the social production of "literature" or of any particular text is to signify not only that it is socially produced but also that it is socially productive—that it is the product of work and that it performs work in the process of being written, enacted, or read. (8-9)

In exploring the text's function as socially produced and socially productive, I am interested in how agency operates in the lives of female characters of the middling sort as captured on the early modern stage by Jacobean city comedies. My interest in city comedies stems from the genre's portrayal of female power: city comedies engage in the creation of a fantasy of what female power, derived from obedience, may look like.

One way that this study sets itself apart from other examinations of the early modern subject's relationship with ideology and power is that I am examining these

issues in the context of city comedies (as opposed to tragedy or history). Here, I want to turn briefly to a few early modern studies of subjectivity to illustrate how such studies have neglected the middling sort. The Shakespearean plays that Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy*—a foundational study of early modern subjectivity—examines include *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *King Lear*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.[4] In a later study that interrogates the relationship between the individual subject and the structure of ideology, *Political Shakespeare*, a collection of essays edited by Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, many of the essays make their arguments using history plays or tragedies. *Henry IV, Henry V, The Tempest*, *King Lear,* and *Henry VIII* are some of the plays examined in many of the chapters. Meanwhile, the only comedies used in the volume are *Measure for Measure* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *What You Will*, Schwarz dedicates chapters to the sonnets, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure, King Lear,* and (briefly) *Coriolanus.* While I do not wish to engage in an extensive argument about the generic classification of *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, I would like to note that the plays represent the author's final dabblings in comedy: the second half of his writing career was spent composing tragedies and a few romances. Given this future trajectory of his writings, I contend that in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well* we begin to see a nascent desire to step away from the kinds of plays that critics have more easily and readily classified as comedies to a genre of plays that largely resist easy generic classification. In either case, even if we do accept *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well* as

[4] The non-Shakespearean plays examined in the study include: *Antonio's Revenge*; *Antonio and Mellida*; *Dr. Faustus*; *Mustapha*; *Sejanus*; *The Revenger's Tragedy*; and *The White Devil*.

comedies, we must still be mindful of the kinds of characters that take the stage in these plays: both Isabella and Helena belong to the upper echelons of society. As such, the manifestations of power that we see in these plays—manifestations of power that have clearly been of interest to scholars of early modern power and agency—are hardly representative of the societal stratifications that English society was experiencing during this period. To interrogate how this category of individuals participates in Montrose's formula of socially produced and socially productive literary works, I find it necessary to turn to comedies other than *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well*; indeed, I find it necessary to turn away from Shakespeare (almost) entirely. It is in the works produced by Shakespeare's colleagues—in a genre that Shakespeare seemed largely uninterested in—that we find examples of powerful, non-aristocratic women. My exploration of city comedies enables a consideration of a fuller cast of characters and an interrogation of the kinds of power that are not available to us if considering the ways in which aristocratic characters find power.

In an influential study dealing exclusively with city comedy, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, Alexander Leggatt defines the genre as "comedy set in a predominantly middle-class social milieu" (3) and extends his definition of "middle-class social milieu" to anything that does "not deal predominantly with the court or the aristocracy, but with the fluid, often ill-defined area that lies between this and the lowest class of workmen, servants, rogues, and vagabonds" (3). Leggatt's characterization of the middling sort as "fluid" and "often ill-defined" is in keeping with many such definitions of the middling sort at least partly because the category is arrived at as a result of self-

identification and elimination of other possibilities. For example, Richard Mulcaster, the first headmaster of London's Merchant Taylor's School, identified families who belonged to the middling sort as the ideal candidates for the school and defined them as a happy medium:

> The midle [*sic*] sort of parentes which neither welter in to much wealth, nor wrastle with to much want, seemeth fitteth [*sic*] of all, if the childrens capacitie be aunswerable to their parentes state and qualitite: which must be the levell for the fattest to fall downe to, and the leanest to leape up to, to bring forth that student, which must serve his countrey best. (qtd. in Leinwand, "Shakespeare and the Middling Sort" 290)

Keith Wrightson finds the origins of the term in discourses that divide England's population into two categories: the haves versus the have nots, the "better sort" versus the "meaner sort." The category I am concerned with emerges to accommodate people that the previously dichotomous system simply could not accurately define and capture:

> This dichotomous use of the language of sorts was to persist wherever it best expressed the social distancing of dominant local ruling groups from their "meaner" neighbors. In the course of the early seventeenth century, however, a further term was added to the vocabulary of "sorts", which was in widespread use by the 1640s. This was the "middle sort" or "middling sort" of people, an innovation which recast the language of sorts into a tripartite form. In all probability the "middle sort" was a term of urban, even of metropolitan, origin. It may have been coined to describe the independent tradesmen and craftsmen who stood between the civic élite and the mass of the urban poor. (22)

Wrightson's reminder that the dichotomous definition of the sorts was a means of separating the "better sort" from the "meaner sort" is apt for the emergence of the third category: the "middling sort," while not able to fit into the former category, also do not want to be associated with the latter category.

The expansion of a system that captures two categories of people to accommodate a third category is significant here because the linguistic expansion captures another, equally important expansion underway during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in London. Between 1550 and 1650, London's population nearly tripled, from 120,000 to 375,000 (Hubbard 17). Much of the growth during this period was due to migration into the city from elsewhere in England; Eleanor Hubbard estimates that 77.2 percent of London women were born outside of the city (17).[5] Many of the migrants who arrived in the city did so in search of training, employment, and eventually marriage; while the first step for male migrants was that of apprenticeship, female migrants worked as maids. Given evidence of steady employment, it is not hard to imagine that these individuals would eventually find their way into the category of the middle sort upon marriage. London's expanding mercantile economy made it possible for many such individuals to make money by trading wares in the marketplace.

The expansion of the city's population corresponds with the genesis of a new kind of play on the early modern stage: in the three decades between 1585 and 1625, roughly sixty comedies made use of the city as their setting and subject matter.[6] In addition to reminding us of changing generic conventions during the early modern period, these plays signal another, more important change in attitudes of playwrights and audience members alike, as the protagonists of many of these plays have more in common with the

[5] Hubbard bases this information on 2,406 cases of women testifying for the consistory court (47n6).
[6] This figure and time period is based on the plays Leggatt discusses in *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*.

average Londoner than the gentry or the aristocracy that had been (and continued to be) the main subject of dramatic literature. Jean Howard notes that this shift records a change in attitudes:

> These city plays represent a remarkable break from the conventions of the "higher" genres such as tragedy and the national history play. Seldom dealing with monarchs and rarely with aristocrats, they pitch their social register lower. In part, the historicity of these city comedies consists precisely in the fact that they mark a moment in early modern culture when urban commoners, those below the rank of gentleman, could become the protagonists in theatrical fictions. (*Theater of a City* 19)

While tragedies dealing with the gentry and comedies that use commoners to ridicule them or showcase the lack of their social graces continued to be composed during this period, the expansion of the genre that not only includes the middling sort as protagonists but also celebrates the victory of the lower class against its social superiors was definitely underway.[7]

I note the remarkable nature of citizens taking roles on the early modern stage partly because of the kinds of knowledge that this inclusion gives scholars. The plays' preoccupation with "social issues"—using Leggatt's definition—of "how to get money, and how to spend it; how to get a wife, and how to keep her" (Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy* 4)

[7] Leggatt argues that while many of the city plays pit the gallants against citizens, some offer a sense of celebration of the citizens' victory. Examples of such plays include *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*: "Part of this new spirit of social satire, with its topical bent, is a keener awareness of class distinctions, and a tendency to depict class warfare. It has been frequently asserted that the coterie playwrights took sides with the gentry against the citizens, and regularly mocked the latter, but this is not entirely true. Some plays, like David Lord Barry's *Ram Alley*...are anti-citizen, but in *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho* it is the gallants who are mocked, and thoroughly duped by the citizens" (*Citizen Comedy* 9). In discussing Greenshield's prostituting his own wife at Mayberry's request, Leggatt notes: "There is a hint here of class revenge, of the citizen turning the tables on the gallant" (*Citizen Comedy* 133).

naturally includes a number of female voices. Hubbard prefaces her study of London's female residents by noting the difficulty in finding records of women's lives:

> The narrow streets and lanes of early modern London were filled with women's voices. Chatting, quarreling, and advertising their wares, London women notoriously took every opportunity to defy conventions of feminine silence, adding their irrepressible noise to the raucous clatter of urban life. In the historical record, however, this cacophony of female voices is largely silenced. Instead, the weighty deliberations of aldermen, the wit and pathos of poets, the rhetorical flourishes of Members of Parliament, and the interminable sermons of popular preachers dominate what remains of early modern London speech. When women's writing and speech survive, those in question were often exceptional, members of the gentry or radical religious sects. Ordinary women and their ordinary lives have largely faded away. (1)

In her study, Hubbard constructs the missing narrative of women's voices by examining court records that include testimonies from female witnesses. In this study, I aim to fill the gap that exists in current discussions of female experiences by using city comedies: these plays capture many female voices not represented elsewhere. While the plays cannot be interpreted as historical documents, they allow us to imagine what forms female power could take during the period and counter narratives that stress female powerlessness. Leinwand argues that city comedy engages in an important consideration of a woman's role within the marital union: "The balance between entertainment and a serious consideration of a woman's role in marriage is maintained in the unique city comedy between 1603 and 1613 that focuses on an enterprising married woman" ("This Gulph of Marriage" 255-56). Leinwand's assessment of the genre as becoming a platform for a representation of middle class marriages and the role that the wife might play in such a marriage can be extended further to argue that city comedies also give us a

glimpse—albeit fictionalized and therefore mitigated by the playwright—into the lives of ordinary London citizenry.

In addition to capturing voices that are not normally represented in traditional historical narratives, the city comedies I include in this study also cover topics that deal with the concerns of the middle sort. Leggatt's delineation of the common issues that these plays explore—"how to get money, and how to spend it; how to get a wife, and how to keep her" (*Citizen Comedy* 4)—conveys the preoccupations, concerns, and problems of the middling sort family. As some of my chapters below will demonstrate, the separation that Leggatt establishes between money and a wife is not necessarily reflective of the reality of the situation: women and money are not completely separated. Here, I am not indulging in the easy assumption that money brings a wife: what I am more interested in this study is how the wife can help secure money. In several of the plays I examine, female chastity becomes synonymous with the well-being of the household: the wife's ability to safeguard the family home and its finances becomes an important component of her role.[8] The wife's infidelity—or perceived infidelity—can affect the family's well-being: as a result, the wife's safeguarding of the family becomes a locus of power for female characters.

The erroneous but popular assessment of city comedy and its representation of female characters as greedy, shrewish, and morally loose women who are particularly invested in hoodwinking their husbands is quickly put aside when seriously considering

[8] For a full discussion of women's domestic responsibilities in the context of England's emerging marketplace economy, see Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies.*

the actual impact that female characters make in their respective plays. In a discussion of female subjects in early modern comedy, Schwarz credits them with the perpetuation and continuance of society: "Through rebellion and acquiescence, disguise and revelation, departure and return, the feminine subjects of this genre [comedy] vitalize the interdependencies that sustain social forms" (166). Although Schwarz's comments are not specifically about city comedy, they still ring true: city comedy captures both the process of how society continues its existence and how the female subject participates in this process. Representations of female subjects and their over-regulation within the genre of city comedy reminds us of the kind of power that the female subject wields; societal preoccupation with regulating the female subject should indicate to us the stakes of female obedience and the repercussions of her disobedience.

Ideology and Female Power

My discussion of female power as it occurs within the context of early modern city comedy necessitates an inquiry into the ways in which female power interacts with broader institutions of control and what kind of impact it is capable of generating. Additionally, I am interested in how examples of female assertions of power may help elucidate our understanding of how power can be attained and how it functions within a broader ideological apparatus.

I begin my discussion of power with Louis Althusser's classic definition of how ideology grants subjectivity to an individual.[9] Althusser describes the process of gaining subjectivity through hailing: a person is walking down the street and he hears someone say "hey you"; the individual's acknowledgment of the hail as directed at him becomes an acknowledgment of his own positionality as a subject within the ideological apparatus. What Althusser's famous example of hailing excludes is the possibility of the subject's failure to respond to the hailing. Although such failure can be interpreted as failure to become a subject, it can also be interpreted as the refusal to be a subject, a refusal to acknowledge one's status as an already interpellated subject:

> ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. (119, italics in original)

If, as Althusser claims, the individual is always already a subject, then the hailing does not exactly reflect the process of an individual's gaining of agency. Rather, it reflects the subject's continued acknowledgement of his subjectivity. If an individual is always already a subject, then the process of the subject's acknowledgment of hailing can help us understand how the subject's obedience or defiance of societal expectations of his

[9] Here and throughout, one of the definitions of ideology that I am working with comes from Montrose: "In recent years, the vexed but indispensable term 'ideology' has, in its most general sense, come to be associated with the processes by which social subjects are formed, re-formed, and enabled to perform as conscious agents in an apparently meaningful world" (9).

behavior can lead to a better understanding of alternative methods of gaining subjectivity that are not limited to the subject's response to the hail.

The models of agency I suggest in this study (which I will discuss in more detail below) are in stark opposition to Althusser's tidy portrayal of the process that enables an individual to become a subject. These models showcase the messy process that Althusser glosses over, the process that does not assume that there is only one way to become a subject. These models of agency also remind us that agency and the acquisition of agency is not a finite process; it is a process that the female characters I examine must engage in continually and, frequently, must begin from scratch.

In a discussion of agency, Anthony Appiah—rather than follow Althusser's definition of the subject as always already constituted—outlines the notion of structural determinism in which he argues agency is fixed:

> …once an agent's socio-cultural location is fixed, his or her capacities for and in agency are fixed also; and, more particularly, that we will understand the outcome of social process only as the consequence of social structure and not "merely" as the result of individual acts. (66-67)

Appiah argues that rather than understanding the relationship between the subject and the structure that grants the individual subjectivity as a competition for superiority, we should consider the relationship as one that competes for narrative space. He notes that despite this acceptance of the relationship between structure and subject, one cannot exist without the other:

> In a society in which the discourse of structure is operative, the discourse of agency will have to take account of that discourse as the object of the attitudes of

> social agents; and the discourse of structure will be bound to acknowledge the discourse of agency because the only plausible view is that it is through this discourse that emancipation will be acted out by agents. (84)

Following Appiah's argument that the discourse of structure is influenced by the attitudes of social agents, we may similarly conceive of ideology as consisting of (and constituted by) a collection of individual voices, attitudes, and experiences. In other words, if the subject is always already constituted by the ideology that she is a part of and the perpetuation of ideology is contingent on the subject's tacit acknowledgment and acceptance of attempts to regulate her behavior, the ideological system cannot exist without the subject's willing participation. Appiah's argument that the subject cannot critique the system that she is a part of because she cannot step outside of the ideology that grants her subjectivity needs a bit more fine-tuning here. While I agree that the subject's critique of the ideology that she is a part of is difficult, if not impossible, it is nevertheless possible for the scholar—in this case of city comedy—to form a critique of ideology through the examination of the subject's behavior within the ideological apparatus. In order to perceive any kind of critique of the ideology, we must be mindful of the forms these critiques might take. We may find dissent in instances of experiences and attitudes that do not fit the status quo: one example of this is the female characters' obedience that ultimately leads them to key moments of power. The collection of such experiences and attitudes is the first step towards forming a critique of the ideological processes. Because power here is possible as a result of subtle actions, collective action becomes crucial for the possibility of notice: we are more likely to notice the dissent of a group of women rather than an individual agent. Unlike the examples from Bartels and

Schwarz that I use earlier, the female characters that I examine in this study are of a lower economic and social status; as a result, they must act as a group in order to gain validation from the ideological corpus that gives or eliminates possibilities of their power. Thus, collective action is necessary for the female subject of the middling sort to launch an observable critique against the ideological system that seeks to regulate her behavior. Indeed, collective action is imperative in this case because of ideological over-regulation of the female subject of the middling sort.

Looking back to the work of Althusser and Foucault, among others, Montrose characterizes the process of subjectification as one that "shapes individuals as loci of consciousness and initiators of action, endows them with subjectivity" (9) and also "positions, motivates, and constrains them within—subjects them to—social networks and cultural codes that exceed their comprehension or control" (9). Montrose's definition of the process of subjectification as one that is both all-encompassing and beyond the subject's comprehension or control aptly explains a process of subjectification that occurs as a result of obedience or following the expectations enforced on the subject. In other words, more so than in circumstances of the subject's active, explicit dissent, where we could assume the subject's purposeful action, the process of attaining agency is a process outside of the subject's specific desires/will since the process of subjectification is not one that the subject can actively, willingly engage with.

If the female subject cannot control the process of her subjectification or at least critique the ideological system which she is a part of, the same cannot be said about the critic. In a study that links individual experiences to subjectivity, Joan W. Scott advocates

that scholars attend to the processes that make it possible for the individual to gain subjectivity (791-92). Speaking of black identity, Stuart Hall insists that identity is not a result of creation, but a matter of discovery: "The fact is 'black' has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found" (45). Throughout this project, my discussion of agency (albeit white and female) operates in a similar vein: the discussion of agency does not become a source of agency for the female characters I include in this project. Rather, I establish ways of discovering the narrative that Hall mentions.

This discovery of female agency helps examine the function and, more importantly, the shortcomings of ideological oversight over female behavior. In *Fashioning Femininity*, Karen Newman notes that the continued existence of the community is contingent upon the successful ideological management of the female subject: "Managing femininity so as to insure the reproduction of the commonwealth, great and small, was a significant ideological feature of early modern England" (16). This management ranges from regulating the subject's behavior to regulating her body and takes a number of forms, including doctrines, conduct manuals, and even the dramatic works that depict female characters of the middling sort. One question that this study takes up is the necessity or effectiveness of such regulations, given that the female characters in many of the plays I explore throughout this project do not benefit from such regulations. In *Epicene*, the failure of the regulatory mechanism to properly anticipate and address the behavior of the female character leads to another failure: ultimately, the

female subjects cannot attain lasting power within the play because the regulatory mechanisms are not able to anticipate the women's creation of the college and issue a statement against such activity. The system's failure to prevent the creation of the college actively contributes to the collegiates' failure because, as I will demonstrate below, even in forbidding a certain action by the subject, the regulatory mechanism makes subjectivity possible. The failure of the system to regulate the subject properly (and do so in a timely manner) leads to a question about the role of ideology within a system that tries to regulate the already-regulated female subjects. If the project of ideological construction of society is a futile one, how do we account for the function and enduring value of ideological regulation? How do we explain the subject's continual engagement with ideology?

The answer—or at least part of the answer—is that the female characters' interaction with the ideological apparatus is not simply an act of obedient hailing, but one that enables them to demonstrate the shortcomings of a system that is seemingly responsible for all manifestations of individual power. If in *Epicene* we witness that ideology has failed to anticipate the specific possibility of disobedience from the collegiates, subsequent chapters in this project demonstrate similar moments of failure. Chapter 3 discusses the gossips' gradual taking over of the ceremony of christening and combining it with other ceremonies—namely the mother's lying-in and her churching—to eventually turn the ceremony into a space that allows them to spend time with each other, away from the vigilant view of the male characters of the play. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate the results of ideological attempts to regulate the subject when no such

regulation is necessary. In Chapter 4, female characters pit contradictory sets of patriarchal expectations against each other—represented within the plays as expectations for the women's obligations to their husbands and the gallants that patronize their businesses—and demonstrate the impossibility of following both sets of expectations simultaneously. In *Westward Ho*, the female characters deal with the impossibility of adhering to these contradictory expectations by adhering to both sets of expectations simultaneously, which ultimately allows them the geographical freedom to travel outside the city. Yet, even when they reach Brentford without husbands and in the company of the gallants, the wives are able to engage in self-regulatory behavior and avoid disrupting their spousal chastity. Ideological regulation is similarly unnecessary in Chapter 5, where the female characters' actions are largely limited to the family home: within this context external regulation of female behavior, as I will demonstrate below, is entirely unnecessary. Moreover, both plays I examine in this chapter—*Northward Ho* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—demonstrate that the husband, who is frequently put in charge of regulating the behavior of the female subject, is completely unqualified to do so.

My foregrounding of ideology despite these obvious failures of the system to regulate the female subject is not coincidental by any means. What I would like to suggest is that the dramatic works I examine in this study, in addition to registering the failures of the ideological system, also register a better way of engaging with that system. Given the challenges of the female subject to establish a clear path to power, it becomes necessary for the her to engage with societal expectations of female conduct not on an

individual basis, but as a group. This collective negotiation for power creates possibilities for female power that are not available to the individual subject of the middling sort.

What is Female Power?

Having considered how the female subject may interact with the ideological apparatus, I would like now to consider what constitutes female power. For the purposes of this study, I define female power as a favorable outcome for the female characters as a result of an engagement with societal expectations and dicta that are meant to regulate female behavior. The favorable outcomes can range from the female subject's ability to spend time in the company of fellow women to gaining geographical mobility to being able to manage the family household without spousal approval or having to prove continually her fidelity.

Female power is frequently born out of discourses of female chastity: here, I return briefly to the notion of female chastity as it pertains to married women of the middle sort. If discussions of chastity as they pertain to characters like Isabella commonly take the form of ensuring that the chastity of the female subject is not corrupted, female characters of the middle sort do not have the privilege of assumed chastity. As a result, the female characters I examine in this project operate from the opposite direction when compared to their social superiors. The marriage of the female character is treated as a slippery slope: once the female character is married, it is assumed that she is engaging in

sexual relations with men who are not her husband.[10] Thus, these female characters are assumed to be unfaithful unless they can prove otherwise. As I will argue in this study, married chastity becomes a stand-in for the well-being of the home; additionally, the process the female subject must undergo to prove her chastity is a complex one. In the process of proving their chastity, the female characters find themselves engaging in a fundamental transition of societal expectations about gendered behavior. Leinwand summarizes these societal expectations in terms of virtue: "Masculine virtues take shape in the public realm, whereas feminine virtues are private" (140). In the plays I examine female chastity becomes associated with the well-being of the household and, in turn, the well-being of the community; as such, the conduct of the female character moves out of the private realm of the household into the public realm of the community. Ultimately, the process through which the female character proves her chastity and dedication to the family home becomes a site of agency for her. In a broader sense, the female subject's chastity is one way that a female subject may demonstrate her obedience. Even in cases where chastity is not a determining factor, female obedience frequently plays an important role in giving the female subject power and agency. The female subject's ability to demonstrate her obedience is further complicated by the need for the female subject to obey clearly communicated patriarchal expectations. When such expectations are not communicated, female power—as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2—is compromised.

[10] This assumption of infidelity is at least partly due to—as I will demonstrate below—the female characters' participation in the marketplace and the underlying cultural expectation for the appearance of middling sort women's sexual availability to their customers.

Given the importance of societal expectations in the process of the female subject's attainment of power, we may—as I have already implied—find such power at the nexus of such expectations and female action. In *What You Will*, Schwarz examines the role of will (both in its current sense as well as early modern understandings of it) in the process of gaining agency:

> Will is not the mechanism for a single choice between submission and rebellion, or for a sustained refusal to engage at all. The friction between "wiling" and "willful" animates feminine social subjectivity, and if isolated masculine privilege risks stasis, this vitality offers a hazardous cure. (9)

One aspect of the agency-formulation process that my project examines is this notion of "friction": I argue that it is the female characters' continual engagement in this friction between heterosocial expectations of female conduct and their own desires that enables female subjectivity. This can be demonstrated by the characters' continual repetition of the practices of proving their chastity; additionally, this also explains the reason behind many plays' resolutions of marital problems (including spousal chastity) in the public sphere. Thus, the female characters I examine in this project are actively engaged in the kinds of frictions that produce female subjectivity. Frequently, this engagement extends to the ability not only to attain subjectivity but also to critique the system they inhabit. The female characters gain their power as a result of their engagement in a process that requires that they prove their chastity in front of an audience—an audience frequently made up of other characters that occupy similar social positions—that bears witness to their actions and provides strength in numbers. The female characters' power in these plays is frequently temporary; it often requires the presence of communal forces—either

in the form of other women or the community that surrounds the household—to be enacted.

Female power, even if temporary, is the subject of this study because it enables a more comprehensive understanding of how the subject may be able to achieve power in a context that limits her access to it. The practice of locating female power in moments of obedience enables a more thorough understanding of the process of subjectification, including how the subject—or groups of subjects—interact, use, and push back against the ideological apparatus that puts itself in charge of regulating female behavior. Finally, the use of early modern city comedies that feature female characters of the middling sort in prominent roles enables us to fill the kinds of gaps in early modern scholarship that arise while studying a culture where literacy is not available to everyone. As a result, chronicles and narratives that reveal to us the lives of early modern city women are rare. City comedies perform important work in the discourse of female power by helping us fill this gap by imagining possibilities of female power. More importantly, because these works demonstrate that female power may stem from obedience and not just from outward defiance of patriarchal expectations of female conduct, the genre provides a plethora of examples of female power for scholarly study.

Female Agency through Defiance, Subversion, and Acquiescence

My discussion of agency begins with a registration of a failure. The consideration of a model of agency that perhaps appears to be the most easily recognizable manifestation of female assertion of power—and ultimately a failing manifestation of

female power—enables a discussion of what causes this failure and why it is important to look for alternative ways in which female power operates. Saba Mahmood notes that scholarly conversations about female power and agency are frequently surrounded by "normative liberal assumptions about freedom and agency" (203) and proposes a change in perspective to combat our own assumptions of female freedom:

> I will begin by exploring how a particular notion of human agency in feminist scholarship—one that seeks to locate the political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power—is brought to bear on the study of women involved in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam. I will argue that, despite the important insights it has enabled, this model of agency sharply limits our ability to understand and interrogate the lives of women whose desire, affect, and will have been shaped by nonliberal traditions…I want to suggest we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create. (203)

The liberal assumptions that plague conversations about women's religious liberation that Mahmood discusses also play a significant role in scholarly study of early modern women, especially those of the middling sort. The model of agency I explore in this chapter is one that ultimately fails, but a consideration of this failure enables me to situate my discussion of agency in an appropriate context. The discussion of this failure helps my project in two ways: by registering the failure of outward, defiant action, I am able to demonstrate why it is necessary to engage in a shift of perspective, in a shift of conception as to what constitutes power and how it can be manifested. Secondly, a discussion of the failure of defiance to produce agency enables a better understanding of the specific mechanisms by which female agency operates. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, the collegiates' failure is partly due to the creation of a female order that is not

approved or disapproved by any societal expectations; as a result, their behavior eludes basic categorization of "acceptable" versus "unacceptable" female conduct. Leinwand discusses the necessity of categorization and definitions when it comes to female access to power:

> Even a whore is tolerable if she can be classified. But if women are merely actresses, filling roles without commitment, or if they blur distinctions between roles (like the adulteress, who is both a wife and a whore), then orderliness, and control that it allows, is threatened. ("This Gulph of Marriage" 248)

This threat that female subjects who are difficult to define pose to the social order also results in a difficulty for the subject to assert her position within social order and use this position to obtain power. In all, female power is contingent on recognizable, easily categorizable manifestations of female conduct; it is only with this kind of conduct that the female subject can gain power and make an impact within the play that she is a part of. Schwartz, drawing on the work of Judith Butler, argues that the very regulation of the body produces agency by giving credence to the body and its existence: "In this sense, the restrictions placed *on* the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction" (Butler, qtd. in Schwartz 5). Schwartz notes that subjectivity can be gained from the very restrictions placed upon the subject:

> Rather than take feminine subjectivity as fully conscripted to patriarchal ends, such scholarship reveals that women can transform, commandeer, or manipulate the terms of convention, and expands our understanding of what the enactment of social roles might mean. (10)

Teresa de Lauretis defines the process of female subjectification as one that limits the female subject's attainment of sexual activity:

> …objectification, or the act of control, defines woman's difference (woman as object/other), and the eroticization of the act of control defines woman's difference as sexual (erotic), thus, at one and the same time, defining "women as sexual and as women." And, MacKinnon suggests, this constitutive, material presence of sexuality as objectification and self-objectification ("she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision") is where the specificity of female subjectivity and consciousness may be located. (119)

If the female subject is constituted as a result of how she is sexually defined by the surrounding culture (and particularly in relation to the male subject), her failure or refusal to participate in normative sexual relations with male subjects may prevent the female individual's subjectification. In the case of *Epicene*, the collegiates' failure to attain long-lasting power within the play is partly due to the difficulty to categorize the female characters in terms of sexual action: their relocation into the city prevents them from engaging in regular sexual activities with their husbands. In residing away from their husbands, they also neglect their duties as housewives. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the female characters' fulfillment of tasks of overseeing the family home and obeying their husbands, in fact, become key loci of power for the female subject. This disobedience, combined with the collegiates' very obvious disregard for societal expectations, ultimately results in their failure and demonstrates why it is imperative for the critic to find alternative models of female agency.

The third chapter of this study uses Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* to explore the notion of subversive female agency. Subversive agency operates through the

subject's compliant fulfillment of societal expectations, while introducing incremental changes into each of these performances. The subject's engagement with this series of acts becomes a locus of power for her: she gradually gains the power to eventually participate in ceremonies that allow her to create a separate space of her own.

In interrogating the possibilities for subversion in the relationship between the subject and ideology, Montrose argues that such a possibility exists because of an inherent flexibility within ideology:

> I construe ideology not as a monolith but rather as a shifting complex of components, including what Raymond Williams calls "interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance"; these include the residual and emergent, oppositional and alternative values, meanings, and practices which are always creating potential spaces from which the dominant can be contested, and against which it must be continuously redefined and redefended. (10-11)

Montrose's definition of ideology as a "shifting complex of components" enables the possibility for a resistance against ideological restrictions. In the model of subversive agency, the subject can gradually take over the ceremonies that dictate her behavior; and in doing so with minor repetitions, she can gradually carve out a space of her own. The subject's deep familiarity with the societal expectations that dictate her behavior is a crucial component of the subject's ability to take over specific aspects of ceremonial celebration. Her attainment of agency through a process of subversion necessitates her thorough knowledge of the systems that regulate her behavior: this knowledge ensures either the subject's dutiful fulfillment of her responsibilities or enables her to intentionally subvert such expectations. In *Chaste Maid*, the gossips are able to create an

amalgam of ceremonies accompanying childbirth by obeying the cultural expectations for their conduct; yet, this obedience allows them to gradually take over the individual ceremonies and turn childbirth into a social event that supports the mother and her child. The subversive process through which the gossips gain agency is repeated at the end of the play by Moll Yellowhammer: by acting as an obedient daughter at the beginning of the play, she is able to turn a scene that is supposed to be her funeral into a wedding. While more purposeful than the gossips' earlier subversion, Moll's actions demonstrate the lasting effects of subversive practices that the gossips establish.

My project concludes with two chapters that explore the possibility of female agency that results from willful obedience. Unlike the previous models of agency wherein the female characters gain power from outward rejection or subversion of societal regulations of their behavior, this model of agency challenges patriarchal forms of control through the acceptance of these regulatory mechanisms. Through acquiescence, women become complicit in attempts to control their behavior; this complicity enables them to approve the existence of the very systems of control that direct their actions. The theoretical framework that shapes my argument in these chapters is largely influenced by Schwarz's *What You Will*, where she explores the possibility of female agency that results from obedient action:

> Women who willfully do what they should further the projects of chastity, marriage, and patrilineal succession, but those projects appear as work, in which feminine subjects play intentional parts. … this compromised mode of self-direction alters the meaning of compliance. The gap between decree and execution requires an acquiescence that is deliberate and transactional rather than innate. (3)

Where my project differs from Schwarz's argument is in the kinds of subjects I explore. Schwarz's conclusion that female characters gain power as a result of their ability to validate forms of patriarchal control does not apply to the female characters of the middling sort that populate early modern city comedies. Instead, as I will demonstrate below, the female characters of the middling sort must work as a group in order to achieve the kinds of power that their wealthier counterparts can achieve on their own. Chapter 4 analyzes examples from *Westward Ho* and *The Roaring Girl* to explore the possibility of female power that results from collective female chastity and obedience. Because the female characters in these plays act as a group, the behavior that is expected from the individual female characters becomes a guideline that all the women within a specific group must follow. One example of this collective obedience is evident in *Westward Ho* where the women embrace the opportunity to travel outside of the city under the guise of having an affair with the gallants that have orchestrated the trip. Upon arriving in Brentford, the women lock themselves in a room, thus eliminating the possibility of engaging in a sexual relationship with the gallants with whom they travelled. Here, I want to focus on two aspects of the female characters' use of collectivity to obtain power rather than doing so individually: since a woman's power is frequently contingent on her chastity—or societal perception a woman's chastity—the female characters in this play use the company of other women to create a self-monitoring entity that ensures female chastity. In other words, to prove their continued obedience to their marital vows, the characters can use each other's companionship to prove that they did not spend the night with the gallants. In pushing themselves close to

the possibility of cheating, the female characters in *Westward Ho* disrupt the archetypal representation of honorable Renaissance women and create a different narrative of female obedience. Within the play, female virtue is not a characteristic of a singular, exemplary female character; rather, virtue becomes the unifying factor of Mistresses Tenterhook, Honeysuckle, and Wafer.

Whereas Chapter 4 examines how female characters can use willful obedience within a group setting to gain power, Chapter 5 explores this possibility for women who may not be able to work alongside other women. The plays I examine in this chapter—*The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Northward Ho*—deal with female characters that are fully embedded into the households they are a part of. These characters are faithful and obedient through and through; nevertheless, they are subjected to doubt and scrutiny by their husbands. Despite the wife's ability to protect the household from the outsider, she is still scrutinized by her husband, who refuses to take his wife's word of her faithfulness. Eventually, the married couple joins forces to punish the intruder figure. The female characters in these plays, particularly Mistress Ford and Mistress Mayberry, derive their power from skillful management of the household and performance of wifely duties. Despite this dedication to the household, the women are still controlled by their spouses: a supervision that is unnecessary and, in the case of *Merry Wives*, proves that the husband's control and understanding of the household is inferior to the wife's.

This study aims to bridge the gap between feminist studies of agency and early modern materialist examinations of women of the middling sort by interrogating the processes of subjectification that female characters of the middling sort, as depicted in

dramatic literature, must undergo in order to gain power. The female characters that I examine allow us to discover possibilities of power that operate through the female subject's obedient conduct. More importantly, they highlight the need for scholarly flexibility when it comes to conceptions of gender and power in the early modern period. Thus, rather than look for possibilities of female agency that focus on the actions of the individual subject, I examine manifestations of collective agency (along with its failures or successes) of women of the middling sort. This aspect of female power yields rich material for study, as the following project will demonstrate.

CHAPTER II

INSTRUCTIONS IN THE MYSTERIES OF WRITING LETTERS, CORRUPTING SERVANTS, AND TAMING SPIES: AGENCY AND DEFIANCE IN *EPICENE*

DAUPHINE Ladies, for my sake forbear.
HAUGHTY Yes, for Sir Dauphine's sake.
CENTAUR He shall command us.
--Ben Jonson, *Epicene*, 5.4.18-20

TRUEWIT Madams, you are mute upon this new metamorphosis! But here stands she that has vindicated your fames.
--Ben Jonson, *Epicene* 5.4.197-98

In the final scene of Ben Jonson's *Epicene* (1609), the audience witnesses the resolution of the main conflict of the play: Dauphine, having orchestrated his uncle's marriage to a boy dressed as Epicene, a mute woman, invalidates the marriage by revealing the true gender of Epicene. In the process of dissolving his uncle's marriage, Dauphine ensures that Morose will give him his rightfully-deserved inheritance that Morose has refused to give to Dauphine; Dauphine accomplishes this partly by thoroughly humiliating his uncle in front of the rest of the characters of the play, which includes exposing Morose's fictitious confession to impotence. While Dauphine and Morose are the main focus of the scene, the backdrop of the action is comprised of most of the play's cast, including the collegiates—a group of women who have established a self-governing order—who have exhibited considerable power and freedom throughout

the play. As the play comes to a close, however, the female characters' ready submission to Dauphine's wishes signals their taking on a more passive role. Centaur's "He shall command us" (5.4.20) anticipates how the final scene will use them: after serving as the audience for Dauphine's victory over his uncle, the collegiates are placed into a position of enforced silence. Truewit's comments following the play's revelation of Epicene's true gender enforces this silence on the collegiates: "Madams, you are mute upon this new metamorphosis!" (5.4.197). Despite their enjoyment of relative freedoms throughout the play, the final moments of *Epicene* limit the collegiates to the role of an audience that Dauphine can use to advance his own desires. The stark contrast between the kinds of power the women enjoy at the beginning of the play coupled with the sense of powerlessness that surrounds them at the end of it makes *Epicene* a valuable tool for studying matters of female power and agency in early modern dramatic works.

What interests me about *Epicene* is its depiction of the collegiates' failure to secure agency as the play closes: the collegiates' behavior throughout the play is in keeping with easily recognizable manifestations of female assertions of power and agency, yet they are left mute and powerless by the end of the play. The collegiates' closing failure to secure agency prompts a discussion of what causes this failure and highlights the importance of looking for alternative conceptions of female agency and power. Saba Mahmood advocates for more inclusive definitions of agency: "I want to suggest we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (203). The collegiates' relative power at the beginning of the play, combined with

their enforced silence by the end of the play, demonstrates why Mahmood's definition of agency as something that is not precisely synonymous with resistance is necessary for the consideration of female agency during the early modern period. The collegiates' failure enables a better understanding of how female power operates: their inability to retain power throughout the play is partly due to the fact that their actions are not explicitly approved or disapproved by societal regulations.[11] In addition to posing a threat to the social order, it is this lack of easily recognizable and categorizeable manifestations of female conduct that results in the women's inability to attain power and agency.

I begin my examination of agency with the collegiates in *Epicene* because the play demonstrates the futility of female attempts to gain agency through visible, obvious actions. Chief among these actions is the creation of a social order of their own, which is modeled after male academies that were meant to help provincial noblemen acquire the necessary training to fit into higher echelons of society.[12] The collegiates' failure stems from two sources: in establishing the college, they openly defy the patriarchal regulations that direct their behavior. Secondly, their ability to establish the college and live in London comes at the cost of neglecting their marital responsibilities.

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[11] Theodore Leinwand's reminder of the importance of social order seems particularly apt here: "Even a whore is tolerable if she can be classified. But if women are merely actresses, filling roles without commitment, or if they blur distinctions between roles (like the adulteress, who is both a wife and a whore), then orderliness, and the control that it allows, is threatened" ("This Gulph of Marriage" 248).

[12] Jean Howard notes that the dramatic depictions of the academies have grounding in historical examples: "Beginning to be established at the end of the sixteenth century, these academies provided poorer or provincial noblemen, in particular, with the training in horsemanship, dancing, fencing, and military mathematics that would allow them to be integrated into the upper reaches of the military professions and to assume a place at court" (*Theater of a City* 185).

In *Epicene,* Jonson's dedication to the preservation of the unities results in a geographically claustrophobic play.[13] The play's action is limited to a small neighborhood in the West End of London (as evidenced from the characters' ability to turn Epicene's wedding celebration into a moveable feast). The sense of limited scope of the geographical locales in the play also extends to the characters that take the stage during the play. Practically all of the play's characters are involved largely in a single plot: Morose decides to get married to disinherit Dauphine, his nephew, because he believes that Dauphine and his friends are spreading rumors about him in London society. In order to prevent Morose's plans of marriage and to keep his inheritance, Dauphine creates the perfect mute woman, Epicene (who is actually a boy dressed as a woman) and arranges a meeting between his uncle and Epicene. Truewit, unbeknownst to Dauphine, visits Morose and lectures him on the ills of women to dissuade Morose from marrying, but Morose believes that Truewit was sent to him by Dauphine. The speech has the opposite effect and motivates Morose to marry Epicene. Soon after the marriage is declared valid, Epicene's silence disappears and she is readily accepted by the collegiates. Ultimately, Dauphine promises Morose that he will help orchestrate Morose's divorce from Epicene in exchange for his inheritance, and the marriage is declared void once Dauphine reveals Epicene's true gender.

[13] In the Cambridge edition of the text, David Bevington highlights the play's faithfulness to the three unities: "The play's location is indeed limited to London, and the action occupies a single day: Clerimont is getting up and dressing in the first scene, the dinner takes place in the middle of the day, the afternoon is 'well worn' by 4.4.16, and at 4.5.18 Truewit talks of bringing his plot to fruition 'afore night, as near as 'tis'" (377).

Conspicuous Consumption and the Marketplace

While Epicene is subjected to the majority of the critique that Jonson's characters direct at women in general—criticism that is mostly inspired by the female characters' desire to be accepted into the circle of wits and a steadfast refusal to lead lives of quiet obedience—the collegiates have the unique honor of frequently inspiring such criticism as well. Jonson's indictment of the collegiates begins with their names: Haughty, Centaure, and Mavis are given names that should indicate to the audience the uncontrollable nature of the women. The New Mermaids edition glosses Mistress Centaure's name as: "The classical monster, half human, half horse, characteristically savage and lustful…. female Centaurs do not exist in classical mythology. Centaurs mated with mares, or, usually by raping them, women" (5). With a focus on haughtiness and the kind of lust and violence associated with centaurs, the collegiates' names are meant to indicate to the audience their inappropriateness within the play: seemingly, the collegiates' desire to be included in the company of wits or to create their own social order is as plausible as the non-existent female centaur.[14] In a play that is preoccupied with the futile search for a "dumb woman" (1.2.21), the collegiates' desire to create a community of their own and to use this community to gain positions of authority is just as reprehensible as Epicene's marriage to Morose.

The collegiates' creation of their own order is symptomatic of the play's overall preoccupation with creating communities and spaces from which some inevitably will be

[14] Mistress Otter name, like her amphibian namesake, does not truly belong to the collegiates and is continually in the periphery of two worlds, but neither of them exclusively.

excluded. The college is created in response to the coterie of wits; like the wits, the collegiates practice exclusion by leaving Mistress Otter in the periphery of the college, a type of purgatory space from which she seems incapable of gaining full admission into the college (a move that Epicene makes much more easily). It is important to note that Morose's attempt to marry and disinherit Dauphine functions as a kind of gatekeeping as well. His attempts to disinherit Dauphine seek to keep the new versions of the city and the aristocracy at bay. Just as he cannot tolerate the city's noises of economic activity, he disdains those who have newly risen in the social order, including Dauphine. P. K. Ayers argues that Morose believes that Dauphine has purchased his title: "Morose's comments suggest that he too, along with Daw and La Foole, has bought his title: 'He would be knighted, forsooth, and thought by that meanes to raigne ouer me, his title must doe it' (2.5.101-2)" (Ayers 81). Leo Salingar labels Morose "a petty tyrant" and notes that his attempts to disinherit his nephew are symptomatic of a desire to stop change and progress:

> He is an ex-courtier, who considers himself a man of the old school and keenly resents his nephew's title; a martinet, who expects and fears contradiction; a self-tormentor who, hating noise and recoiling from personal contacts, elects to live in a double-walled room in a narrow lane near, of all places, the heart of fashionable London. (182)

We can also interpret Morose as an out of place figure still clinging to the older way of things when all around him the city is changing. The city's overpopulation due to migration patterns and the landed gentry's new custom of spending time in London

results in a claustrophobic setting that Morose rejects by distancing himself from the city and its noises.[15]

The creation of the college results in the play's representation of female characters as monstrous to some extent. Mimi Yiu argues that urban life in London turns all women into epicenes: "Morose's dream of attaining a silent wife is thwarted by the theatricality of Jacobean culture, in which the spectacular nature of urban life has perverted women into promiscuous, epicene creatures" (81). Though somewhat secondary in the play's cast of characters, the collegiates become important to the play as manifestations of the female subject who fails to follow cultural expectations of her conduct. Although not depicted on the stage until the third act of the play, the collegiates are discussed obsessively from the opening scenes of the play. Speaking to Clerimont, Truewit introduces the collegiates to the audience with a focus on their social status and their desire for upward mobility:

> TRUEWIT Why, is it not arrived there yet, the news? A new foundation, sir, here i' the town, of ladies, that call themselves the collegiates: an order between courtiers and country madams that live from their husbands and give entertainment to all the wits and braveries o' the time, as they call 'em, cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine, or rather hermaphroditical, authority, and every day gain to their college some new probationer. (1.1.58-64)

What Truewit finds reprehensible about the collegiates and their behavior is their ability to disobey the cultural expectations placed on them and to openly defy the cultural stratification of society. Truewit's characterization of the women as between "courtiers"

[15] See Salingar 184-185 for a discussion of overpopulation and changing patterns of the city.

and "country-madams," allows us to place them in the category of the middling sort, as they do not belong to either the aristocracy or the poor.[16] The categorization of the women as the "nouveau riche" captures some of the reasons behind the collegiates' ultimate failure to infiltrate the society of the wits. Despite the importance of money in the play—as evidenced by Dauphine's setting off the action of the play for an inheritance from his uncle—the collegiates' easy access to money does not make it any easier for them to move from their own group to the company of the wits. Indeed, it is the collegiates' conspicuous display of money that, at least partly, is to blame for their rejection from the coterie of wits.

Despite its inclusion of women of the middling sort, *Epicene* does not make the marketplace—the locale that a reader of city comedies would easily associate with such women—an explicit component of its plot.[17] In *Epicene*, Jonson chooses to create a world that is distant from the pedestrian concerns of the marketplace and indicts those characters that either actively participate in the marketplace or bear its signs. One such example is Mistress Otter, who is characterized by her own husband as a collection of bodily parts that she has acquired from various areas of the city:

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[16] In "Shakespeare and the Middling Sort," Leinwand notes the difficulties of drawing conclusions about social stratification, and argues that self-identification as middling sort is frequently a matter of eliminating other possibilities: "…the middling sort came more and more to identify themselves if not with the elite then at least in opposition to 'the meaner sort'" (292). This definition of the collegiates as members of the middling sort is apt in the context of the play: the collegiates would likely self-identify as the elite, but the true elite of the play (like Dauphine and Truewit) place them in the middle category.

[17] While the play does not provide enough information for us to deduce the source of income for the collegiates, we do know that Mistress Otter's financial well-being is directly linked to the London marketplace and her business selling fine china.

> All her teeth were made i'the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i'the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street. Every part o'the town owns a piece of her…She takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, into some twenty boxes, and about next day noon is put together again, like a great German clock; and so comes forth and rings a tedious larum to the whole house, and then is quiet again for an hour, but for her quarters. (4.2.75-82)

Jonson's indictment of Mistress Otter is particularly harsh because her economic well-being enables her to improve her appearance and allows her some degree of social mobility.[18] However, it is not merely the fact that Mistress Otter is purchasing her beauty but also that she is doing so in a very conspicuous way. Although the summary of the various body parts and pieces that make up the whole of Mistress Otter is delivered by her husband, who presumably has a more intimate knowledge of his wife's grooming rituals than other characters, the underlying assumption is that Mistress Otter (or any of the collegiates) is not hiding her purchased beauty particularly well.[19] Like Mistress Otter, Haughty is criticized for her elaborate preparations: in the opening scene of the play, the Boy reminds Clerimont that his position as a favorite of Mistress Haughty has allowed him to witness her preparations:

> The gentlewomen play with me and throw me o'the bed, and carry me in to my lady, and she kisses me with her oiled face and puts a peruke o'my head and asks me an I will wear her gown, and I say, 'No.' And then she hits me a blow o'the ear and calls me innocent, and lets me go. (1.1.10-14)

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[18] Salingar characterizes Mistress Otter as "a monstrous compound from the City's shop" (186).
[19] Yiu argues that the elements that make up Mistress Otter's artificial beauty also signify her familiarity with the city: "Since the spaces of her body are so thoroughly enmeshed with those of London, since every physical part corresponds with a choric locality in an increasingly differentiated city, Mistress Otter can exhibit her insider knowledge of London by making a spectacle of herself, by laying open the city's commercial secrets as an open secret inscribed upon her very body, by opening her closet to coyly reveal a cyborg woman, a matrix" (83).

Later, Clerimont relays the story to Truewit and notes the Boy's unique position: "There's no man can be admitted till she be ready nowadays—till she has painted and perfumed and washed and scoured—but the boy here, and him she wipes her oiled lips upon like a sponge" (1.1.67-70). Haughty's admission of the Boy during her morning ablutions is particularly offensive to the men because they perceive this as an act of emasculation of the Boy; if no man can be admitted while she is getting ready, the Boy's admission implies that, perhaps due to his age, she does not perceive the Boy as a man who should be excluded from her chamber.

Truewit—seemingly the play's most vocal character on the topic of women and their ills, delivering no less than three speeches about the subject matter—echoes these contradictory expectations of a woman's appearance: "A lady should indeed study her face when we think she sleeps; nor, when the doors are shut, should men be inquiring; all is sacred within then" (1.1.91-93). Thus, while the society that *Epicene* depicts expects women to enhance their beauty through artificial means, this work must happen behind closed doors—literally and figuratively. The work that goes into the public appearance of the women must stay private, and Truewit presents the audience with at least one example of the horror that results from having to witness the process of a woman's preparations: "I once followed a rude fellow into a chamber, where the poor madam, for haste, and troubled, snatched at her peruke to cover her baldness and put it on the wrong way" (1.1.102-4). Truewit's expectation that the women keep their grooming rituals private is reflective of at least two sets of the play's preoccupations. Firstly, the female characters' purchased beauty demonstrates their involvement in the marketplace, a facet

of London life that the play attempts to conceal at all costs. Secondly, the work that a female character might put into her appearance goes against the cultivated effortlessness that accompanies the lives of the wits. While the enforcement of the standards of the wits onto the lives of the female characters makes for an awkward transition, it is also an inevitability given the play's privileging of the experiences of the wits. The discontinuity between the expectations of the collegiates' behavior (as articulated by the wits) and their actual conduct highlights the impossibility of the female subject's attainment of agency and power through behavior that is not explicitly permitted or prohibited by the culture that she is a part of. Thus, the collegiates are ultimately incapable of attaining agency in the play because much of their behavior, including their establishment of the college, is neither explicitly approved nor disapproved by cultural expectations of female conduct.

Despite the wits' disapproval of the marketplace, it lingers in the background of the play in the form of goods and services that the play's less witty characters use in an attempt to improve their social stations. The collegiates' physical appearances are discussed throughout the play as a series of items that are purchased to enhance their natural looks. Like the collegiates, Jack Daw's involvement with the marketplace ultimately results in his rejection from the company of the wits, as Adam Zucker points out:

> Daw's bad taste stems in part from his inability to distance textual production from its material manifestations; he threatens the play's fantasy of effortless wit and laborless status by constantly letting the acts and objects of financial exchange and commodity consumption shape his relationship to the cultural sphere. ("Social Logic" 44)

Daw's failure to be accepted into the society of the wits stems from his inability to participate in the simultaneous display and elision of wealth and economic power that other characters are adept in. Similarly, the collegiates' outward display of their ability to purchase sex appeal ultimately results in their rejection by characters of higher status. Indeed, both the collegiates and Daw are indicted by the gallants for rendering visible the interference of the marketplace into the lives of the characters which the gallants want to conceal. However, it is important to consider the intentions behind the collegiates' attempts to improve their appearances. Delivered from the perspective of the male characters, the collegiates' attempts to improve their appearances is interpreted as happening for the sole benefit of the male characters in the play. The context of the play eliminates the possibility that the female characters could be improving their physical appearances for their own sake.

Yet, the collegiates and Daw are not the only characters that bring the London marketplace onto the stage: the city and its various goods for sale are perpetually in the periphery of the play and its characters. Although both Karen Newman and Zucker note the play's lack of economic activity, I argue that London's thriving marketplace is continually in the periphery of the play and influences how characters are perceived and treated throughout.[20] The play's confinement of its setting to various households in the

[20] Zucker notes the play's lack of staging of labor: "…*Epicoene* stages a city devoid of material labor. The workers, shops, and commodity exchanges that help to organize the status narratives of almost every city comedy written before 1609 (and many written after) do not appear on stage in the play, and the intricacies of London's literal marketplaces, while they are referred to at various points in the dialogue, are never explicitly acted out. In fact, it sometimes seems that social power in *Epicoene* is contingent upon the ability to ignore economic activity entirely" ("Social Logic" 44).

West End of London does not negate the background of the city, which is populated by fishwives, orange-women, chimney sweeps, costardmongers, waits, etc., creating a version of the city that is full of the bustle of economic activity. In "City Talk," Newman discusses the material conditions within which the play takes place and characterizes London as a "center of 'conspicuous consumption' where shoppers buy 'knicknacks,' though to no purpose necessary" (504). Londoners' purchasing without a purpose is reminiscent of Truewit's description of the collegiates and their actions that lack a sense of purpose: "Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause. They know not why they do anything but as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and – in emulation one of another – do all these things alike" (4.6.54-57). The collegiates' easy influence by a series of things is reminiscent of Newman's characterization of London's mercantile transactions. The collegiates' easy inclusion into the category of conspicuous consumers (who within the context of the play only seem to consume wit, manners, and makeup) becomes a part of the reasoning why the collegiates are depicted in a negative light.

If the collegiates can be easily categorized as consumers, then Morose represents the opposite position. What the play attempts to represent as Morose's aversion to noise is really an aversion to the economic activities of the city: "They say he has been upon divers treaties with the fishwives and orange-women, and articles propounded between them. Marry, the chimney-sweepers will not be drawn in" (1.1.119-21) says Truewit. Clerimont adds "broom-men" (1.1.122) and a "costardmonger" (1.1.123) to the list of Morose's abhorred personages. The list also includes smiths (1.1.124), hammer-men,

braziers, armorers, and pewters (1.1.125-26). In fact, even the location of the house is specifically chosen for its lack of access: "…he hath chosen a street to lie in so narrow at both ends that it will receive no coaches nor carts nor any of these common noises" (1.1.133-34). The characters that receive the most abuse at the hands of Morose are those that are engaged in economic transactions with him.[21] Unlike the street hawkers who must endure his abusive behavior or his barber and servants who communicate with him through an elaborate system of non-verbal cues, Truewit—who aside from trying to earn back Dauphine's inheritance from Morose does not need anything from Morose—enters his home with a trumpet in tow and launches into a long-winded lecture on the evils of women. Morose's resistance to London's burgeoning economic market is well-documented throughout the play; the play interprets Morose's behavior as an aversion to noise when, in fact, Morose is resisting the new economic order that surrounds him. His steadfast refusal to participate in the marketplace effectively eliminates his ability to engage in processes of production. Newman establishes a connection between consumption and production: "Consumption in Marx is revealed to be a function of production rather than access to cosmic expanse and pleasure" ("City Talk" 504). Although Newman's argument in this context is about economic production, I would like to consider her equation between production and consumption from the perspective of

[21] Yiu characterizes Morose's relationship with the street merchants as a series of political maneuvers: "Sheltering in the chaste island nation of his home and body, an island marked in opposition to Britain and its expanding empire under James, Morose embarks on a series of political sorties to secure his domain from aural assault" (79). Michelle Dowd supports this view of Morose's aversion not only to noise but to noise generated as a result of socio-economic activity: "…Morose is not simply a comic buffoon, but a figure of socioeconomic isolationism who is ill suited to the commercial and cultural climate of London and to its evolving patrilineal economy" (*Dynamics of Inheritance* 242).

procreation. If the relationship between consumption and production is to be believed, Morose's refusal to engage in consumerism inevitably leads to a refusal to participate in processes of production. The play's revelation of Epicene's gender ultimately eliminates the possibility of Morose's plan to have children in order to disinherit Dauphine. Yet, Morose's attempts to marry so that he can strip Dauphine of an inheritance are doomed from the outset because Morose's refusal to engage in an economy of consumerism inevitably eliminates the possibility of successful production. Indeed, the marriage ultimately ends with Morose's facetious confession of his sterility and a revelation of his bride's male gender. Within this context, the play's indictment of the college for its ability to educate women—among other things—in matters of how to prevent a pregnancy seems contradictory to the critique of their enthusiastic consumption. In other words, if the Marxist correlation between consuming and producing is to be believed, the critique the collegiates receive for both their ability to conceal and abort a pregnancy and their over-consumption of goods (which is linked with production) that can be obtained through the exchange of money seems contradictory. In the broader context of the play, the collegiates' ability to purchase barrenness along with all other products they purchase from the marketplace becomes grounds for faulty logic that is used to indict the collegiates for their refusal to fulfill their socially-dictated responsibilities of childbearing. If, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the female character's access to power is made possible as a result of her obedience to cultural expectations, the collegiates' seeming refusal to procreate achieves the opposite effect and eliminates pathways to female obedient power.

The play's criticism of the marketplace and mercantile relations is perhaps the most acute when it comes to the collegiates' ability to attempt to purchase a seat at the metaphorical table of the wits. The collegiates' attempts at self-enhancement are not limited to purchasing material goods and services to improve their physical appearances: their consumerism is regarded as particularly offensive to the male characters when the collegiates attempt to apply the same mercantile strategies to their social status within the play. Within a context of extensive criticism against the female characters for their embracing of artificial components of beauty, the largest faux pas they are guilty of is adapting the techniques of self-enhancement to increasing their aptitude in wit and manners. The college is discussed throughout the play as an institution that is not concerned with education in manners; rather, the wits view the college as an unsuccessful vehicle for social climbing as it is modeled after male academies that frequently fail to fulfill their promise to advance their provincial members into aristocratic society.

The Collegiates: An Order Between Courtiers and Country Madams

In a speech that is meant to dissuade Morose from marrying, Truewit creates an epic catalogue of the faults of women. Along with stories of wives who run away, rich wives who dominate their husbands, young wives who attract attention from others, wives who enjoy tormenting their husbands, and puritan wives who force their husbands to spend time with friends (2.2.88-89), Truewit speaks of the wife who will join a college:

> [she will] feign to be jealous of you first, and for that cause go live with her she-friend or cousin at the college that can instruct her in all the mysteries of writing letters, corrupting servants, taming spies; where she must have that rich gown for such a great day, a new one for the next, a richer for the third; be served in silver; have the chamber filled with a succession of grooms, footmen, ushers, and other messengers, besides embroiderers, jewelers, tire-women, sempsters, feathermen, perfumers;…know all the news, what was done at Salisbury, what at the Bath, what at court, what in progress; or, so she may censure poets and authors and styles, and compare 'em, Daniel with Spenser, Jonson with the tother youth, and so forth; or be thought cunning in controversies or the very knots of divinity; and have, often in her mouth, the state of the question; and then skip to the mathematics and demonstration; and answer in religion to one, in state to another, and, in bawdry to a third. (2.2.74-91)

Truewit's critique of the impact that the college may have on the citizen wife is really an indictment against her wishes for self-improvement: the mysteries of writing letters carries with it the potential of corrupting servants and taming spies; gaining information about events unfolding in Salisbury, Bath, and the court leads to a comparison and critique of Jonson to "tother youth"; the female character's engagement with questions of religion and state inevitably leads to her engagement in bawdry.

Despite the extensive critique the wits have for the women's college, the origins of it are hardly discussed. Newman notes the collegiates' adapting of men's societies of the kind:

> Their college apes contemporary educational institutions and associations for men, and they perform the activities of their "foundation" before an audience—the Wits and Braveries; significantly, it is the voicing of their critical opinions abroad ("down and up") that makes them monstrous. (*City Talk* 507)

Newman's argument that the women's monstrosity is linked to their ability to express criticism is rooted in the play's overall representation of class relations. Similarly, Jean

Howard notes the historical precedent for colleges that operated with the goal of providing false hopes of social mobility and characterizes academies as "spaces where instructors operated under false pretenses and where students' desires for upward mobility were matched only by their ineptitude in performing the codes of gentility" (*Theater of a City* 186). Within the play, the most obvious model for the women's college is the alliance of the wits. In taking their cues from the likes of Dauphine, Truewit, and Clerimont, the collegiates attempt to create a group that all its members can benefit from. In a discussion of the play's depiction of issues of inheritance, Michelle Dowd argues that the wits' self-organization into a group is ultimately financially beneficial to its members:

> …what Jonson really highlights in *Epicene* is the beneficial alternative of Dauphine's homosocial community, an affinitive network that Jonson associates positively with economic speculation and the risk-taking required by England's developing global economy. (*Dynamics of Inheritance* 239)

If for the male characters this community becomes a microcosm of economic advancement, such is not the case for their female counterparts. While the women's college ultimately does not benefit them financially, it does serve as a source of information and education. For Jonson, the female characters' education and, subsequently, ability to express opinions and views, is manifested in several instances throughout the play, including Truewit's example of the collegiates' comparisons of "Daniel with Spenser, Jonson with the tother youth" (2.2.87).[22] The female characters'

[22] Here, Jonson's refusal to name a second dramatist is a rhetorically powerful move. The omission of a second dramatist seemingly eliminates the audience's ability to make such

ability to purchase cultural capital to appear of a higher status than they are is partly to blame for their exclusion from the society of the wits. We can speculate that the association of academies with attempts by the newly rich to climb up the ranks of society is likely a part of the cultural imagination of Jonson's audience; he capitalizes on such conceived notions to further indict the collegiates.

Truewit's prediction of how joining a college may affect the relationship between husband and wife is captured on the stage after Epicene joins the cast. Although the collegiates are completely without the company of their husbands, the audience can observe the relationships between the married couple with a wife in the college through Mistress Otter and Epicene. Not yet a fully-fledged member of the college, Mistress Otter occupies the liminal space of belonging both to the college and with her husband. It is for this reason that she becomes the character that Epicene is told to emulate in order to discover her own power within a household that she shares with her husband (Mistress Otter, unlike the collegiates, still lives in with her husband and, as such, has a position that is more closely aligned with Epicene's role in her home). When Mistress Otter claims to have missed Morose's outrage because she was too busy "chastising my subject" (4.3.5), referring to her husband, Daw tells Epicene that she should learn to do the same: "Faith, mistress, you must do so too. Learn to chastise. Mistress Otter corrects

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comparisons themselves because the second name is missing. In the Cambridge edition, David Bevington notes that the "tother youth" is likely Shakespeare and argues that the line is likely an insider joke: "Identification with Shakespeare, though still debated, is strongly defended by Donaldson (1997). Shakespeare, nine years Jonson's senior, was 45 in 1609 – hardly a 'youth', but then Jonson was 36 himself. Other suggestions have included Dekker, Chapman, Marston, and Daniel once again. Perhaps this is a playful in-group joke, intended to tease the audience into wondering whom Jonson might compare himself with" (413n87).

her husband so, he dares not speak but under correction" (4.3.7-8). Daw's comments to Epicene are only the beginning of the process that elucidates for the audience Epicene's transformation into a collegiate. Haughty encourages Epicene to take Daw's advice about chastising her husband: "Practise it, Morose. I'll call you 'Morose' still now, as I call 'Centaur' and 'Mavis'; we four will be all one" (4.3.10-12). The women's readiness to embrace Epicene goes against the wits' predictions that the combination of the collegiates with Epicene will lead the former to mock the latter. Additionally, Haughty's declaration of her intentions to call Epicene "Morose" stages for the audience the process through which the women themselves have come to acquire their own married names.[23]

The play's inclusion of the collegiates without their husbands is at least a bit jarring for the reader of early modern drama, as such characters are usually the deviation and not the norm.[24] Unlike in other plays, such as *The Roaring Girl* or *Westward Ho*, where women of the middling sort are presented to the audience along with their husbands and are referred to as "Mistress" to differentiate husband from wife, *Epicene*'s absent husbands create a vacuum that gives the wives exclusive access to their husbands' last names. The change of Epicene's name into "Morose" depicts the process through which the women have come to assume the names of their husbands. As the play develops, Epicene gradually erases her new husband's identity and rejects his wishes: Morose's choice to live on a street that cannot accommodate carriages, to soundproof his

[23] Bevington argues that the women's addressing of each other is in keeping with fashions: "Fashionable ladies addressed each other in this mannish style" (461n11).
[24] Early modern drama does frequently depict women who appear on the stage without their husbands, but these women usually take on positions of business owners masquerading as bawds.

residence, and to order his servants to respond to his questions through non-verbal cues are all ignored once he marries Epicene. Immediately after the marriage is declared valid, Epicene gains a voice that Morose has not heard: "I'll have none of this coacted, unnatural dumbness in my house, in a family where I govern" (3.4.45-46) she declares, contradicting Morose's desires and household management. When Morose orders his servants to "Bar my doors! Bar my doors!" (3.5.24), Epicene issues a contradictory order to the servants: "Let 'em stand open. I would see him that dares move his eyes toward it. Shall I have a *barricado* made against my friends, to be barred of any pleasure they can bring in to me with honourable visitation?" (3.5.27-30). Not only does she take away his ability to enjoy silence and to order his servants around as he wishes, but also her contradictory orders open up the household to the intrusion of members of the community that Morose has worked hard to exclude: namely, Dauphine, Dauphine's friends, and the collegiates. By the end of the play, the collegiates become the audience to Morose's facetious admission of his impotency: "I am no man, ladies" (5.4.35). Although the collegiates do not necessarily deserve credit for Morose's admission—the credit for that goes to Dauphine—it does mark a moment of almost complete transformation of Morose. Through the course of the play, he loses his access to a quiet life in London, his money, and his control over his own name. As the collegiates begin to refer to Epicene as "Morose," the eponymous character of the play gradually corrupts Morose's identity and inserts herself at the top of his household. Epicene's ability to take over the management of the household is notable here because—as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters—

the female subject's obedient fulfillment of her domestic duties can become a key source of power for her.

The female characters' establishment of the college comes at the price of rejecting the expectations enforced on them by the patriarchal system that regulates all other aspects of the play. One examples of this rejection of societal expectations is evident in the scene during which the collegiates recruit Epicene to join their ranks: to entice her, the collegiates boast about their ability to prevent pregnancies:

> EPICENE [*To Haughty*] And have you those excellent receipts, madam, to keep yourselves from bearing of children?
> HAUGHTY Oh, yes, Morose. How should we maintain our youth and beauty else? Many births of a woman make her old, as many crops make the earth barren. (4.3.45-49)

The collegiates' decision to avoid pregnancy so as not to suffer its aging effects is one example of their neglect of their responsibilities as wives, a neglect that ultimately leads to their failure to be accepted into the fashionable society that they desire to be a part of. Alexander Leggatt notes that the collegiates' refusal to bear children constitutes a series of anti-social acts committed by the characters in the play, which also includes Morose's failure to be a godfather: "Again, they [the collegiates] are attempting to cheat nature, and to deny one of the chief purposes of marriage, as defined by the Book of Common Prayer" ("Morose and His Tormentors" 226). The collegiates' refusal to procreate is symptomatic of their broader refusal to fulfill their socially prescribed duties as wives and mothers: the collegiates' failure to keep their temporary power as the play ends reminds us how necessary obedient action is to female agency. In the end, the collegiates'

temporary power to live independently eliminates the possibility of infiltrating the circle of wits who occupy the highest status in the hierarchical division of the play.

Despite the rejections they endure from the wits because of their lower status in the play's hierarchical structure, the collegiates replicate this very structure when creating their own society. Here, the collegiates are in power and occupy the highest positions. Even before Haughty takes the stage, Mistress Otter discusses her with Dauphine and Truewit: "I told it my Lady Haughty t'other day, when Her Honour came hither to see some china stuffs" (3.2.51-52). Mistress Otter's mention of Lady Haughty is meant to solicit in her audience a flash of recognition, and she expects to be respected because of her interactions with Haughty. While ultimately ineffective, Mistress Otter's reference to Haughty demonstrates that, although self-contained, the college has a concrete hierarchical order, with Haughty occupying the highest position.

This hierarchical structure emerges more clearly during subsequent interactions between the collegiates. If Haughty is undoubtedly at the helm, the rest of the hierarchy is more difficult to define. Prior to the wedding, Mistress Otter and Mavis get into a dispute over their respective social roles:

> MISTRESS OTTER 'Tis my place.
> MAVIS You shall pardon me, Mistress Otter.
> MISTRESS OTTER Why, I am a collegiate.
> MAVIS But not in ordinary.
> MISTRESS OTTER But I am.
> MAVIS We'll dispute that within. (3.7.27-31)

Even though Mavis is a part of the collegiates, she seemingly occupies the lowest status among the three women. Mistress Otter, on the other hand, is attempting to break into the

inner circle of the collegiates, but she might only be able to do so through displacement. Her claim to Mavis's position is an attempt to establish herself in the hierarchy among the collegiates. Later, Haughty brings up the issue of rank among the collegiates when trying to get Dauphine's attention:

> HAUGHTY And howsoever I may suffer, in such a judgment as yours, by admitting equality of rank or society with Centaur or Mavis—
> DAUPHINE You do not, madam. I perceive they are your mere foils. (5.2.8-10)

Dauphine, smartly, gives Haughty credit for her position among the collegiates; Haughty's need for validation from Dauphine evokes the earlier conversation between Mavis and Mistress Otter and reminds us of the difficulty in determining social strata when it comes to the collegiates. The assumption that Haughty is the highest ranking member of the collegiates comes under doubt during her conversation with Dauphine. Haughty's equating her status with those of Centaure and Mavis both brings her own position into doubt and also portrays the status of the other women in a negative light. Inevitably, as Dauphine convinces Haughty that she is not on the same level as the rest of the collegiates, Dauphine effectively highlights the lower status of the other women. Mavis's conversation with Mistress Otter about their own relative social class positions brings in yet another layer of doubt into the discourse surrounding the collegiates. In a broader sense, the collegiates' understanding of their social strata exists in the vacuum of their own world; the rest of the characters in the play do not really give them the kind of credit for social positions that they assume they should have. For the rest of the characters, the women are merely the stuff of mockery: they invite the women to mock

Epicene and to be mocked as well. The college gives the women power only within that society but simultaneously eliminates the possibility of their inclusion into the circle of the wits.

Yet, if the collegiates' power allows them to admit Epicene into the college and, in the process, annoy Morose, it is also where their power stops. In the play's hierarchical division of characters, the wits—Dauphine and Truewit—reign at the top and are able to accept and reject other characters as they wish. The collegiates obtain agency by forming their own community and occupying positions of power within that community. The collective power of the collegiates enables the creation of the college, and they enjoy respect from fellow collegiates while within the college. However, their power within the college does not translate to the interactions they have with characters that are not a part of the college. Yet, the collective power of the collegiates—and their ability to recruit new members with relative ease—results in a visibility that ultimately leads to the critique and mockery the collegiates receive.[25] The college gives them a considerable amount of power, and some of this power can be regarded as competing against the wits. Zucker argues that one of the reasons the collegiates are rejected by the likes of Truewit and Dauphine is because the college gives them the power to pose a threat to the gallants as arbiters of taste:

[25] Salingar notes the women's collective identity: "The Collegiate Ladies seem almost indistinguishable from each other; but it is their role in the play to have no separate identities, to represent a collective scurrying after novelty" (186). Although I disagree with Salingar that the women do not have distinguishing features, his comment about the collective chasing for novelty is very apt.

> …Truewit's famous pronouncement that the Collegiates "cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority" (1.1.75-77) seems to register an anxiety generated not only by new possibilities for women in an expanding public sphere, but by the more specific possibility that once in this public sphere, women might use taste, "what they like or dislike," to stake a claim to a traditionally masculine authority. (Zucker 52)

The collegiates' failure is at least partly due to their response to the play's continual attempts to regulate their behavior. In many of the plays I explore in later chapters, the female characters follow specific guidelines that direct their actions; frequently, the female characters are able to find moments of power or freedom—such as the geographical mobility to travel outside of London in *Westward Ho* or the ability to perform their domestic duties without the direct supervision of their husbands in *Merry Wives of Windsor*—through their obedience. This is not the case for the collegiates because the systems that direct how the collegiates should act seem to be non-existent in this case. The collegiates' establishment of the college—an institution that models itself after men's societies of the sort—makes it difficult, if not impossible to regulate the collegiates. Ayers notes this difficulty of identifying sets of behavior according to gender: "Abandoning the conventions of their own sex, they [the collegiates] become parodies of the other, emblems of sexual deficiency rather than of excess or exuberance" (81). Ayers's argument about the collegiates' seemingly male-influenced gender performance explains part of the reason behind their failure to secure power. Because they are not following the regulations that direct female behavior and are acting in ways that are in keeping with the male characters of the play, it is particularly hard to generate a set of behavioral expectations that is meant to affect the women. The all-female version of the

college is akin to Epicene: an interesting prospect made impossible due to gender. Rather than follow along the expectations that are explicitly articulated for the female characters to follow in regards to the household—expectations that apply to all female characters and are frequently articulated within the play to direct the behavior of Epicene—the collegiates emulate the actual behaviors of those at the top of the hierarchical system. It is this emulation of the wits that results in the establishment of the college and the recruitment of new members into it. In *Epicene*, the female characters' academy becomes a source of contention because it gives them power: power to establish a world of their own that only they can rule and a world that allows them to assume positions of leadership. This world has its own hierarchical system that is not controlled by the male characters in the play; rather, in this hierarchy, Haughty is able to assume the highest position available

The powerless of the collegiates that we witness at the end of the play is due to the fact that the power the collegiates obtain within the confines of the college does not translate to an outside world. The college comes under attack from the male characters of the play because of its inadequacy in truly educating the collegiates in matters of wit and taste. Truewit captures some of the play's critiques of the college in characterizing the collegiates:

> Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause. They know not why they do anything but as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn love, hate, and – in emulation one of another – do all these things alike. Only they have a natural inclination sways 'em generally to the worst when they are left to themselves. (4.6.54-59)

Truewit's description reduces the collegiates to a series of verbs that capture the actions that they presumably engage in without reason or understanding; they are interpreted as merely copying the actions of the male characters. In addition to being criticized for trying to break into the social strata that operate on wit and fashion rather than money alone, the college, as portrayed by the male characters in the play, does not effectively give the female characters the kind of education necessary to fit in with the likes of Dauphine and Truewit. The collegiates' failure to be accepted by the wits is symptomatic of this lack of improvement that the college presumably promises and fails to deliver.[26] The play's establishment of a hierarchy on the basis of cultural capital—with Dauphine and Truewit at the top of it—effectively eliminates the possibility of the collegiates' inclusion into the highest rank of society within the play. Thus, the collegiates' attempts to be accepted into the higher strata of society—and to do so by paying money for services—are ultimately futile. Their failure to ingratiate themselves into the coterie of the wits is at least partly due to the open defiance of the expectations enforced on them; it is this defiance—the very public nature of the college and the visibility of its members—that contributes to the failure of the collegiates to make an impact on the play or its plot.

[26] Salingar characterizes the play's privileging of "discriminating enjoyment, based on intellectual cultivation" (151). Ayers locates the gallants' superiority in "easy and agreeable manners" (80). Zucker notes that the play's social stratification system operates on the basis of taste and wit: "A different sort of status formation is at work in *Epicoene*, a logic of social power that uses differences in taste, differences in cultural competence, to supplement, compete with, and at times disguise the developing economic and political relations of early modern London" ("Social Logic" 38).

After Dauphine and Truewit use the collegiates to punish Morose, the women are summarily dismissed from the stage.

Yet, the collegiates' open rejection of patriarchal expectations is not the only factor leading to their failure. Both Zucker and Dowd note the play's unusual location for the genre:

> In contrast to other city comedies that tend to focus on the more mercantile central and eastern areas of London, Jonson in this play is particularly interested in the neighborhoods between Westminster and the City walls, a neighborhood associated with "financial and cultural capital" but also with Bridewell Prison and tenement housing – features of the neighborhood's social geography that Jonson elides from his comedy in order to sustain its focus on the moneyed classes and matters of taste. (Dowd, *Dynamics of Inheritance* 241-42)

Dowd's characterization of the spaces of the play brings to mind Truewit's earlier description of the collegiates as "an order between courtiers and country madams": in a play that seems to be obsessed with binary relationships that explain status, class, and gender, the difficulty in defining the women's precise socio-economic status extends to their rejection from the locations of the play. The geographical markers that most accurately represent the setting of the play are Bridewell and the area that will eventually become the West End. If Bridewell is associated with tenement housing and the proto-West End represents institutions of law and civic activity, part of the collegiates' failure stems from their inability to belong fully to either of these spaces: the collegiates' relative wealth eliminates them from belonging in Bridewell.[27] The play's setting in the nascent

[27] For a full discussion of development of West End comedies, see Emrys Jones, "The First West End Comedy."

West End—home to institutions of law and power, including Inns of Court and the Court of Westminster and providing easy access to Westminster Hall—makes it difficult for the collegiates to fully belong to the location. Emrys Jones notes the fashionable population of the area even in the 16th century:

> Certainly, the westward movement of the fashionable classes, already perceptible in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, was acquiring more momentum throughout the reign of her successor…The City had no choice but to grow in that direction, since it was from there that power and influence emanated. (218-19)

In the context of the play, it is not enough to have a fashionable address; Jones notes that the Strand was the most sought-after area for residents of the West End and London alike but Sir Amorous La Foole does not benefit much from his own lodgings at the Strand. In *Epicene* purchasing power is not enough to be counted among the city's fashionable citizens; one must also have wit. Jones labels La Foole as "a typical Strand character, just as *Epicoene* itself is the first play to deal directly with the Strand social world" (221). What gives the characters the edge to seem fashionable is the aura that accompanies the individual that does not necessarily come with the fashionable address:

> …what we find here in Clerimont and his friends is that their undoubtedly superior judgment and wit have been reinforced by an elusive social superiority, an exercise of social power, elegant in expression but aggressive in temper, which gives them, as a group, unquestioned authority to amuse themselves at the expense of others. (Jones 245)

The importance of asserting social power and power as a means to gain social superiority can be gleaned in the interactions of the collegiates as well: although seemingly identical in all aspects of their lives, the collegiates do not regard Mistress Otter a full member of

their world. By keeping Mistress Otter in the periphery of their group, the collegiates effectively create a similar kind of relationship with Mistress Otter as the wits have with them or La Foole and Daw. Yet, even this assertion of social power does not give them the ability to be accepted into the society of the wits; even after Dauphine declares his love for all three, the collegiates are kept at an arm's length from the wits because the former are attempting to infiltrate a layer of society that operates on the basis of intelligence, humor, and wit; buying one's way into this level seems impossible.

The collegiates' failure to become a part of the society that the play regards as the highest order is due to their lack of a certain quality of fashionable wit. Salingar characterizes the qualities necessary for admission as "discriminating enjoyment, based on intellectual cultivation" (151). Ayers locates the gallants' superiority in "easy and agreeable manners" (80). Michael Shapiro comments on the gallants' aloof attitude towards the world that surrounds them:

> In their common attitude of playful detachment, their shared mode of ironic discourse, and their willingness to help each other preserve aristocratic superiority to the world around them, this trio is a flattering representation of the Whitefriars audience. (416)

Zucker, in noting such analyses of the gallants, reminds us of a scholarly investment in characterizing wit as a natural entity that is detached from the world of the marketplace and argues that in doing so we reinforce the play's "ideological fantasies" (41) that wit can and must exist outside of material conditions:

> *Epicoene* is widely regarded to be the first "West End comedy," or the first play to deal exclusively with the concerns of "polite society." It is also, however, the

> first English play set in London to imagine that wit and taste might exist apart from or eclipse entirely other structures of city life that generate status. Contemporary critics, vested in well-developed forms of the cultural capital that was only beginning to emerge in Jonson's London, have tended to take this premise of the play at face value, treating tastefulness as a transparent sign of inherent status, or as a social form detached from the material world. (41)

Zucker's critique of scholarly analyses of the play that assume an inherent link between tastefulness and status is apt as it captures only one aspect of the play's depiction of power structures. While noting instances where the collegiates' failure to attain power seems to occur as a result of their lack of taste, my broader focus in this chapter has been on two elements that lead to the collegiates' powerlessness in the play: the lack of clearly communicated expectations and the collegiates' all-too-obvious conduct throughout the play. The collegiates' failure in *Epicene* is significant in establishing how female power may operate and why it is frequently necessary to look beyond obvious manifestations of female power. While the establishment of the college gives the female characters of the play temporary power, this power does not have long-term potential as the women are relegated into the background of the play as it draws to a close. In future chapters, I explore models of female agency that work through obedience rather than outward rejection of societal expectations of female conduct; as I will demonstrate below, agency that works through obedience rather than defiance is frequently more successful at granting the female character a sense of enduring power.

CHAPTER III

"HERE COMES OUR GOSSIPS NOW": AGENCY, RITUAL, AND SUBVERSION IN *A CHASTE MAID IN CHEAPSIDE*

> [I]n this play, men discharge virtually all the responsibilities of culture, including the primary one—the containment of women.
>
> --Gail Kern Paster, "Leaky Vessels" (62)

> The play offers a textbook example of Gayle Rubin's "Traffic in Women." In a nexus of money and sex, Allwit exchanges his wife for material comforts; Sir Walter values Moll for her dowry; Lady Kix's pregnancy has cash value. Like other misers of gold and women (Shakespeare's Shylock, Spenser's Malbecco), Yellowhammer locks up his daughter "as carefully as my gold," and equates elopement with theft, with daughter-stealing.
>
> --Linda Woodbridge, Introduction to *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (908)

In the third act of Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), the audience is presented with the christening of the Allwit newborn. As the scene unfolds, Mistress Allwit's bed is brought onto the stage, and the christening ceremony is attended by five gossips, two puritan women, Maudlin Yellowhammer, Mistress Allwit's midwife, and a number of other women; namely, the majority of the play's twenty female characters.[28] However, the female characters are allowed to dominate the stage only up

[28] R. B. Parker notes that because most of the women appear on the stage simultaneously, the possibility for doubling for the female roles is not likely. This posed an interesting challenge to the initial stagings of the play: "Even if some of these were acted as grotesques by men, the number would still be too large for an ordinary adult company. Only the addition of Queen's Revels boys could have enabled Lady Elizabeth's Company to fill all the parts" (xxix).

to a point, as the christening scene is witnessed by Allwit who functions as a mouthpiece for the societal and cultural expectations of the female characters' behavior. It is through Allwit that the audience learns that the characters are overindulging in the food and wine served to them; he also alerts us of their leaking—to use Gail Kern Paster's euphemism. The scene's function in the play extends beyond demonstrating discrepancies between societal expectations and the female characters' behavior. What appears as the christening of the Allwit newborn is, in fact, an amalgam of at least three ritual ceremonies that surround the birth and delivery of a child.[29] As I will demonstrate below, the christening of the child is accompanied by the mother's lying-in and her subsequent churching. The latter two are ritual ceremonies that celebrate the survival of the mother after childbirth: as such, they are largely the domain of the mother and other women. In *Chaste Maid* we witness the gossips' transformation of the uniquely female space accompanying childbirth into a site of agency for the female characters who participate in ritual celebrations of mother and child.

To demonstrate how the female characters of the play are able to gain power from the ritual of christening, a brief examination of the notion of ritual is necessary. Edward Muir provides a basic definition of ritual as a matter of repetition of specific moments and actions: "Repetitions can create order out of chaos, but rituals seem to involve more than just repetition" (2). Following Muir's logic that rituals are about more than just

[29] The event is characterized using variations of christening in at least five instances: Davy characterizes the event as "kers'ning" (2.3.2) and stage directions in Act 3 follow suit. In Act 3, Scene 2, the First Gossip refers to the child as a "kersen soul" (2) and the First Puritan proclaims: "And, verily, well kersened i'the right way" (3). In the Oxford edition of the text, Linda Woodbridge repeatedly glosses the word as "christening."

repetition, an argument can be made about the failure of such repetitions: even when performed diligently, these repetitions can create fissures that over time can change the ritual itself. Muir draws a distinction between "good" and "bad" rituals and characterizes the latter in terms of possible corruption:

> To perform a ritual was risky because it gave one's enemies an opportunity to disrupt or manipulate it to serve their ends. And thus ritual was always potentially dangerous to the social order, not just as an opportunity to create or represent community, providing a lubricant for the social system as much of the modern ritual theory would assert. (8)

Looking beyond the "enemies" that Muir cites in his example, we may find that disruptions or manipulations of the ritual—even when occurring without malicious intent—are available and beneficial to the subjects who participate in the ritual. The repetition of actions dictated by ritual ceremonies creates the possibility for disruptive or manipulative repetition: a repetition that we may call a *repetition with a difference*.[30] The aforementioned fissures in the ritual ceremony are created as a result of repetitions with a difference. In *Chaste Maid*, it is these repetitions with a difference that eventually enable the female characters to manipulate the ritual and gain a degree of agency from it. In this chapter, I examine the play's two ensemble scenes—the christening of the Allwit newborn and Moll and Touchwood Junior's burial at the end of the play—to demonstrate

[30] Here I am reminded of Judith Butler's discussion of how performativity can influence materialization: "…performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies that Matter* 2).

how the play's female characters' transformation and subversion of ecclesiastical (and secular) ceremonies becomes a source of agency for their respective participants.

The two epigraphs to this chapter provide representative examples of how recent scholarship has approached the text. In her classic study of *Chaste Maid*—"Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy"—Gail Kern Paster highlights the play's ideological construction of the female subject as fundamentally unable to control the natural functions of her body. The containment of the leaky, female vessel becomes the self-assigned responsibility of the male characters of the play. Linda Woodbridge's comments about the material value that accompanies such containments of the female body remind us of the stakes in the play and the benefits that male characters can derive from controlling the bodies of their wives or female relatives. These readings of the play—while astute in all other aspects—take as a given the notion of female disempowerment. This chapter demonstrates an alternative method of interpreting what appears to be female obedience in the two ensemble scenes of the play.

While the christening scene has often received critical attention due to its portrayal of feminine excess in its worst possible form, I propose a more nuanced reading of the gossips' behavior in the play.[31] Rather than merely demonstrating the utter depravity of characters due to their gender and social rank, the gossips' conduct during

[31] Like their counterparts in *Epicene*, the female characters in *Chaste Maid* are frequently critiqued for their enthusiastic utilization of the marketplace and its goods (Allwit—as I will demonstrate below—is one of their most vocal critics). The central point of difference occurs in the women's ability to gain power despite this critique. While the female characters in *Epicene* openly defy expectations of their behavior, the gossips perform the role of obedient wives, whose socialization and creation of a private space is a socially sanctioned experience.

the christening may be construed as a key moment of empowerment. The characters' behavior during the scene leads to the formation of a subjectivity that, while seemingly adherent to male notions of female social conduct, deviates from some patriarchal standards of female behavior and produces a safe space for the female characters to create a sense of community and freedom. The gossips turn the christening of the Allwit newborn into a composite ritual that includes the christening, Mistress Allwit's lying-in, and her subsequent churching. This combined ritual ceremony gives the gossips a unique opportunity not only to form a community, but also to derive a certain sense of agency and power from such communal experiences. The power available to the female characters of the play occurs through a process of subversion: in a two-step process of gaining agency through subversion, the female characters must behave in keeping with patriarchal standards of female conduct. This obedience is manifested through a series of repetitive acts to conform to the ritual at hand. The repetition of acts here becomes a repetition with a difference, which ultimately enables the female characters to subvert the ritual they are a part of.[32] The gossips' combination of a christening with the rituals of the lying-in and the churching becomes possible as a result of a series of acts that are

[32] In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler discusses Luce Irigaray's miming as an alternative performance: "Through miming, Irigaray transgresses the prohibition against resemblance at the same time that she refuses the notion of resemblance as copy. She cites Plato again and again, but the citations expose precisely what is excluded from them, and seek to show and to reintroduce the excluded into the system itself. In this sense, she performs a repetition and displacement of the phallic economy. *This is citation, not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original, and which calls into question the power of origination that Plato appears to claim for himself.* Her miming has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin *as* an origin" (45). The gossips' repetitive performances of the rituals they are a part of enables a similar sense of gradual displacement until the displacement becomes the new origin.

repetitions with a difference. Within the play, this formula of subversion (outward obedience and ultimate rejection of societal expectations) finds its way into the second ensemble scene: Moll and Touchwood Junior are able to defy her parents' wishes and marry each other in a burial-cum-wedding scene by initially accepting the parents' decision to break off the match. Moll's ability to manipulate the situation around her to reach her goal of marrying Touchwood Junior is partly due to her use of the same techniques that the gossips use during the longer process of transforming the ritual ceremony of the christening into a social activity. The gossips' ability to gain power becomes ingrained in the cultural narrative of female power: subsequent female characters—like Moll—can adapt the process of attaining power through subversion to advance their own goals. The community of gossips here functions in two key aspects: it allows the female characters to rely on each other to present a united front, which will gradually institute change in the cultural expectations that are meant to regulate their behavior. Secondly, the communal power that the gossips generate in the process of transforming the christening into a celebration of motherhood becomes a significant narrative that can help future generations of women such as Moll—as I will demonstrate below—to find their own pathways to power and agency.

Leaking and Metatheatricality

In "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy," Paster labels the female characters exhibiting physical and sexual incontinence "leaky vessels" and argues that the gossips' urination on the stage is directly related to discourses of power:

> In the early seventeenth century this representation, rather than implying contests for control of public territory—such as the restroom—implies instead contests for control of the central domestic territory of the patriarchal family—the female body itself. In *Chaste Maid* this contest occurs most frequently as a function of competing explanations of behavior, as characters propose interpretations of motive and act which seem to be irreconcilable. These discursive collisions are most evident where the behavior of women is concerned. (55-56)

As Paster notes, discourse becomes a key method of both regulating female behavior and highlighting instances when this behavior does not align with cultural expectations. Chief among others is Allwit's interpretation of the christening scene, which becomes representative of the broader cultural conceptions of the gossips. Allwit's commentary throughout the scene critiques the gossips' disregard for the costs associated with the various items that accompany their daily lives:

> Now out comes all the tasseled handkerchiefs,
> …Now in goes the long fingers that are washed
> Some thrice a day in urine;
> …These women have no consciences at sweetmeats,
> Where'er they come (3.2.52-63)[33]

The common thread of the behaviors Allwit finds faulty is the notion of the women's lack of discretion in all aspects of consumption, which he links to the women's social class: "No mar'l I heard a citizen complain once / That his wife's belly only broke his back" (3.2.66-67). In Allwit's formulation, the overconsumption that bankrupts the citizen

[33] Woodbridge glosses the "tasseled handkerchiefs" as "fashioning large, ornamental handkerchiefs with tassels at the corners" (933n51). Similarly, Allwit's mention of the women's urine is evocative of purchasable goods: "used as a cleansing or cosmetic lotion. The disgusting ingredients of cosmetics were a staple of antifeminist satire" (933n54).

wife's husband is symptomatic of the female subject's inability to control her bladder.[34] In my analysis of the text, I aim to look beyond the gluttony that Allwit notes as the source of the gossips' behavior. In the same vein, I want to resist Paster's interpretation that the female characters' leaking on the stage is due to a lowering of the shame threshold (45). Rather, I argue that the gossips' leaking is an inevitability given their exposure to the food and drinks served to them; more importantly—as I will demonstrate below—the leaking that we witness on the stage is the result of the gossips' fulfillment of an important role in the broader project of cultural procreation.

The gossips' gluttonous consumption of the food and drink served to them is in keeping with the rest of their behavior during their brief tenure on the stage. As characters, the gossips are purposefully underdeveloped: they have a collective identity, but no names and very few distinguishing features. What Middleton presents his audience with is essentially a comical rendition of the stereotype of a loose woman. Despite distinguishing between the groups of gossips and puritan women, almost all of the

[34] The correlation between class and leaking is articulated in the play through both female and male characters. Paster brings up both Sir Walter and Touchwood Senior as exuding water and notes that while women's leaking is indicative of loss of their control, male leaking is portrayed as a sign of virility: "Male water, unlike female leaking, has economic value" (*The Body Embarrassed* 57). The play remains ambiguous regarding the value of male water; while Touchwood Senior ultimately benefits from his virility, initially he must separate himself from his wife because his "male water" is bankrupting the couple. The play seems to place the blame in the couple's production of children with Touchwood Senior rather than his wife, because subsequent incidents involving him show bastard children produced outside of the marriage. The discussion of male leaking can benefit from including Sir Walter, whose financial well-being excludes him from discourses of leaking and bankruptcy. Thus, male leaking is conceptualized negatively when combined with lower social status. In "Middleton, Shakespeare, and the Grotesque," Celia R. Daileader supports this view of male leaking by characterizing the male bodies in the play as grotesque: "Moreover, the most emphasized—and most morally suspect—bodily incontinence in this play (as elsewhere in Middleton) is male" (456). Male leaking, according to Daileader, is used to signify moral corruption.

women—including Maudlin Yellowhammer, Mistress Allwit, the gossips, and the puritan women—are constructed along the same lines, with very little variation and only a degree of specificity in the cases of Yellowhammer and Allwit.[35]

The limited development and the gluttonous behavior of the female characters fits into a larger sense of metatheatrical awareness in the play, as the women are able to exist both inside and outside the play. The gossips' behavior on the stage is largely in keeping with stereotypical understandings of female behavior. Sara Luttfring cites the example of *The Batcheleres Banquet*, which depicts the expectant mother and her gossips as a drain on the family's resources:

> Exotic foodstuffs are the chief expenditure; while she is pregnant, the wife "longs for strange and rare things…She must have cherries, though for a pound he pay ten shillings, or green peasecods at four nobles a peck." In addition, he must hire a dry nurse to prepare the "warm broths and costly caudles," "partridge, plover, woodcocks, [and] quails" that his wife desires, and the nurse insists on sharing these fine foods with her mistress, pilfering "the sugar, the nutmegs and ginger, with all other spices that comes under her keeping." Similarly, the gossips at the christening feast expect to be entertained with wine and "sugar, biscuits, comfits and caraways, marmalade and marchpane, with all kinds of sweet suckets and superfluous banqueting stuff, with a hundred other odd and needless trifles which … must fill the pockets of dainty dames". (129-30)

The Batcheleres Banquet captures some of the cultural understandings and anxieties about female conduct in the context of childbirth and christening. If the expectant mother's cravings for exotic foods is a matter of "longing" (a craving that she seemingly

[35] The puritan women's willful participation in the churching introduces an inkling of a doubt about the purpose and the validity of the christening. As I will further elaborate, the scene that Middleton describes is, in fact, a churching, which, as David Cressy argues, often came under protestant attack as an "unreformed purification" (199).

cannot control), the gossips' consumption of such foods is portrayed as an instance of opportunism: in indulging the expectant mother's cravings, the father of the child is forced to feed the gluttonous mouths of all women that participate in the birth. In keeping with Allwit's critique of the gossips, *The Batcheleres Banquet* reminds us that the latter captures some of the cultural interpretations of women's conduct during churchings and christenings.

The use of a shorthand in creating the female characters is only one aspect of the play's keen awareness of its composition processes. The play's metatheatricality is further achieved in the christening scene partly by the placement of the gossips on low stools, as ordered by Mistress Allwit. The play originally appeared at the Swan, a public theater that, evidently, did not have an inner stage and its above-stage gallery was not used as an acting area, but rather for spectators. Because of the number of characters on the stage, R. B. Parker contends that this scene would not have been performed in the gallery or an upper stage:

> This scene is an ensemble scene, however, for which the gallery would scarcely have room; moreover, it begins with the direction "*A bed thrust out upon the stage, Allwit's wife in it*", which makes it almost certain to have been set on the main stage. (lxi)

While the use of the main stage to act out a seemingly private scene is a practical choice, the placement of the scene on the main stage rather than a gallery or an upper stage gives the scene a certain sense of validity: on the main stage, the christening scene becomes a

crucial component of the play rather than an insignificant subplot.[36] The argument about the play's metatheatricality can be further supported by examining the composition of the stage and the placement of individual characters on it. Mistress Allwit's direction to the Nurse to ensure that low stools are brought out (3.2.7) leads to the conclusion that the gossips are sitting on them throughout the scene. To the original audiences of the play, the low footstools that the gossips are placed on would be reminiscent of the Jacobean tradition of having spectators sit on the stage on such stools during the play.[37] In this context, the gossips occupy an interesting role in the play as they are both inside the action and outside of; seemingly adherent to the rules and guidelines of the patriarchal society, yet subversive of it.

[36] In criticisms of the play, the christening scene did not garner much attention until Paster's discussion of it. For example, in a 1965 article on the play, "The Four Plots of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," Richard Levin lists the four plots as those including Touchwood Junior and Moll; Allwit and Sir Walter; Sir Oliver and Lady Kix; and Tim and the Welsh heiress. Conceivably belonging to the Allwit and Sir Walter plot, the gossips are hardly mentioned in the article. In the introduction of his 1969 edition of the play, Parker discusses the gossips, but notes their gratuity in the play: "The emphasis on urine occurs in contexts which suggest sexual incontinence and embodies a criticism of eroticism pushed too far" (lv). Paster explains that Parker's reading of the scene is due to our cultural squeamishness to discuss bodily functions outside of medical contexts (Paster, *The Body Embarrassed* 53).

[37] Parker notes that even though the play was performed at the Swan, the directions of the stage are possibly based on Middleton's experience in private theaters, validating the claim about the Jacobean tradition of placing audience members on stools: "its stage-directions may not be based on the practices of the Swan so much as on Middleton's own previous experience in the private theatres; and this possibility is strengthened if it is agreed that he designed the play originally for the Queen's Revels and handed it over to Lady Elizabeth's Men only when the two companies amalgamated in March 1613. It is possible, therefore, that the stage-directions of *A Chaste Maid* reflect private, not public, theatre practice" (lxi).

Churching and Female Communities

The stage directions that open Act 2, Scene 4 of *Chaste Maid* are crucial to our understanding of the play's presentation of the christening scene: "Enter [at one door] Midwife with the child, [Maudline, the two Puritans,] and the [five] Gossips, to the kers'ning." However, the play's continual references to the ceremony as a christening do not fully capture the events that unfold during Acts 2 and 3: in keeping with early modern ceremonies that accompanied the safe delivery of a child, the christening scene in *Chaste Maid* can be best characterized as a combination of three historical rituals from the period: the child's christening, the mother's lying-in, and the mother's churching.

In discussing the first of the three ceremonies I would like to examine in this chapter—childbirth—Adrian Wilson notes that it goes beyond the delivery of the child and argues that it is a life-altering period in the life of the mother: "What was happening in these rapid preparations was that the mother was moving into a different social space: away from the world of men (centrally, her husband) and into the world of women" (*Ritual and Conflict* 154). The preparations leading up to the delivery of the child anticipate the expectant mother's new role within society: more importantly, they guarantee the mother's ability to rest and recuperate after going through the process of childbirth. The space that was used for the delivery of the child (frequently darkened and only illuminated by candlelight) becomes the space for the mother's month-long recovery: her lying-in. Wilson divides the mother's lying-in period into three distinct phases:

> At first the mother was confined to her bed, for a period which varied from three days to a fortnight or more…Throughout this time the bed-linen was kept unchanged, but the mother's "privities" were kept clean by poultices or by bathing with herbal decoctions. Then came her "upsitting" (sometimes called her "uprising"), when the bed-linen was first changed; this initiated a second phase, lasting for a week or ten days, during which the mother remained in her room, not confined to bed but still enjoying physical rest. In the third and final stage of lying-in, the mother could move freely about the house, but did not venture out of doors; this stage, too, seems to have lasted for perhaps ten days, yet it could take over a fortnight. (*Ritual and Conflict* 171)

The lying-in process, the phases of which were frequently dictated by the physical capacity and strength of the new mother, gave the women not only a period of recovery but also the space to adjust to their new roles within society. This new role is frequently ushered in with the help of the women who visit the new mother during her lying-in period:

> Corresponding to the mother's shifts in physical space was a series of movements in social space. At first, only women could visit her, possibly only in ones and twos, and perhaps only those women who had been present during the delivery itself. The "upsitting" appears to have been an important social occasion…These visits were by no means mere desultory calls, but lasted for several hours. (Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* 172)

In the examples Wilson cites, women are said to have spent several hours with the new mother, many returning to her the following day; in one example, seventeen women are included in the list of guests who visited the wife of Samuel Sewall in January 1702, two weeks after her delivery. The group visits dwindle during the final stage of the mother's

recovery: while individual or group visits persist, these visits do not have the same feast-like quality as those that occur during the upsitting period.[38]

The sense of female comradery that accompanied childbirth finds its way into the christening scene in *Chaste Maid*. The stage directions that precede the christening scene in *Chaste Maid* list at least nine women: the number of the women entering the chamber allows for an educated guess that the play captures—at least partly—Mistress Allwit's upsitting. Subsequent stage directions in Act 3, Scene 2, solidify this claim by locating Mistress Allwit in her bed: "A bed thrust out upon the stage, Allwit's Wife in it. Enter all the Gossips, [the Puritans, Maudline, Lady Kix, and Nurse with child]." These directions effectively eliminate the possibility that the gossips' visit occurs during the final stage of Mistress Allwit's lying-in; that Mistress Allwit is brought onto the stage in her bed is a strong indicator that she is likely still in the upsitting stage of her recovery process and is not yet moving about the house.

The conclusion of the lying-in period is generally signaled by the new mother's churching, which *Chaste Maid* also captures. Performed several weeks after childbirth, churching marks the reintegration of the mother back into society after giving birth. Churching is a period that is meant to relieve the woman of her duties as a housewife and give her time to recuperate after childbirth. Caroline Bicks highlights the changing definitions and cultural perceptions of the churching ceremony during the early modern period:

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[38] Samuel Sewall notes that the women were treated to a "good dinner" and includes "boiled pork, beef, fowls; very good roast beef, turkey-pie, tarts" (qtd. in Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* 172) in the list of foods served to the women.

> Originally a Jewish purification of the new mother, the ceremony continued as a Catholic ceremony in which the new mother returned to church with her birth attendants, after a prescribed time at home, to be cleansed by the priest and so readmitted to the congregation. In its English Protestant form, the ritual lost its purifying function when it was renamed the Thanksgiving, or churching of women after childbirth in 1552. With this change, reformers meant to erase the superstitious transformation of the new mother into an asexual, almost virginal figure reminiscent of the Holy Mother. The procreative female body, now distanced from any original polluted associations by this doctrinal shift, retained its physical maternal function while demanding the attention of a holy congregation. The result was a troubling entrance of a celebrated female sexuality into church doctrine and practice. (207-8)

Bicks's definition of a churching captures the complicated role that churching played within the early modern society. While the period of rest and the woman's reintegration into society continued in practice, the notion of "purification" was quickly abandoned because of its Jewish and catholic origins.

Like Bicks, David Cressy finds several answers when exploring the changing role and cultural perceptions of churching within early modern society. On the one hand, churching becomes a liminal space or a rite of passage that deals with the cleansing and restoration of the mother that must follow the complicated process of childbirth.[39] This view of churching also regards it as an instrument of control within a patriarchal society. Alternatively, churching is criticized as "unreformed purification" (199). Rather than

[39] Cressy draws on Paster's work to argue that even when a scene does not explicitly declare itself as setting out to purify the women, the conversation about the uncleanliness of these women is inescapable: "Gail Paster, a literary scholar, has offered a sensitive rereading of the churching ceremony in light of the conservative medical discourse on women's bodies. Although, as she points out, the English religious ceremony makes no explicit reference to the subject of purification, a powerful rhetoric about unclean fluids hovered behind the text. Overt and latent meanings intermingled. The popularity of churching among women, Paster suggests, 'may argue just as forcefully for their internalization of shame and embarrassment as for their pride, relief, and self-congratulation'" (Cressy 200).

ascribe to either of these readings, Cressy proposes a third reading and argues that the women are seen as enjoying themselves in a communal environment: "Churching was, rather, a social gathering, a collective female occasion, and the conclusion to the privileged month that women normally enjoyed after childbirth" (Cressy 200). Cressy characterizes churching as a celebration of the woman's survival of childbirth and notes that it "occup[ies] a special space in the womanly world of fecundity and matronhood" (197).[40] However, churchings also represent a juncture between public and private realms: "Churching was a ritual process that connected the semi-secret domestic world of women and childbirth with the public ecclesiastical and communal business of religion" (197). As an ecclesiastical ceremony, churching was accompanied by strict rules and guidelines; yet, in its purpose of celebrating female survival and fecundity, it allowed for certain freedoms.

The definitions of churching I have provided above are representative of how the ceremony is frequently discussed in early modern scholarship. Most scholars accept the ceremony's origins as Jewish or catholic and note the early modern desire to eliminate such ceremonies. As a result, the notion of purification of the mother is frequently ignored or noted as no longer relevant. Cressy, for example, argues that the ceremony is a space of female social activity:

[40] Cressy uses the label "churching" to characterize various aspects of the religious practice: "Known by several names, the religious aspect of this ritual was variously referred to as 'Purification,' 'Thanksgiving,' and the 'Churching of Women'. The various names remind us that three separate issues were involved, three distinct activities with different meanings and different histories. […] it is important to keep in mind the idea that the ecclesiastical ceremony, itself ambiguously named, had different resonances and implications according to the religious viewpoint, authority, role, and gender of the parties involved" (Cressy 197).

> The most common view seems to endorse those early modern puritans who criticized churching as an unreformed purification, while at the same time arguing, with certain feminists, that churching was a patriarchal or misogynist instrument for the subjugation of women. My reading of the evidence leads me to neither of those conclusions. Indeed, an alternative case can be made that women normally looked forward to churching as an occasion of female social activity, in which the notion of "purification" was uncontentious, minimal, or missing. (199)

Cressy's definition of churching as seemingly rejecting the notion of necessary purification and, instead, celebrating female conviviality, while encouraging, glosses over key points of contention within the ritual. In other words, by portraying churching as a celebration of female survival, we risk losing the process through which the ceremony of purifying the female body becomes a celebration of it and ignore instances of disagreement. One such note of disagreement can be found in a prayer of Thanksgiving after childbirth included in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582) where the speaker expresses open disgust with the "vncleannes" of women and thanks God for having placed rules necessitating the cleansing of the woman after birth:[41]

> [God]…didst make diuers lawes concerning vncleannes, and the keeping of women with child; and an other for the first borne, and that not onelie to put vs in mind of order in this life, and thankfulnes towards thy Maiestie: but also to teach, that this our giltie and polluted nature, like the fowle menstruous cloth of a woman, is washed by the blood of thy sonne… (qtd. in Atkinson and Stoneman 198)

Colin B. Atkinson and William P. Stoneman note that the speaker of the prayer "refers to herself as 'thy most defiled and polluted hand maid' and bewails her 'vnworthines,

[41] In a broad overview of the text, Atkinson and Stoneman characterize it as "1,500 quarto pages, containing prayers and meditations for a variety of circumstances, extracts from the Bible, and brief lives of biblical and other model women" (193).

vilenes, and vncleannes" (198). Though the author of the poem is difficult to determine, the inclusion of this prayer in a volume produced in 1582 reminds us that while ecclesiastical documents might have eliminated the language of purification from the ceremony of churching in 1552, the notion of purification and uncleanliness continued to persist.[42]

My focus on the persistence of the language of purification despite its elimination from *The Book of Common Prayer* and ecclesiastical ceremony aims to illustrate the importance of continued examination of the uncomfortable transition from one set of rules accompanying the ceremony to another. In transitioning from catholic to protestant, from purification to thanksgiving, from ecclesiastical ceremony to a celebration of female survival, we should be mindful of the crevices that signal an incomplete transition to the new order. It is in these moments of resistance—in resisting the assumption that all ceremonies of churching were void of the notion of cleansing, for example—and the gradual transformation of one ceremony into another that we find female power. As I will demonstrate below, the christening ceremony in *Chaste Maid* enables us to reconstruct the processes through which churching may have become a female dominated space.

Unlike the ecclesiastical requirements of the churching ceremony, the "gossipings" that followed it were markedly social in nature. Cressy characterizes gossipings as "provid[ing] opportunities for hospitality, conviviality, and display" (201);

[42] Cressy notes the elimination of the word after 1552: "What appeared in 1549 as an anglicanization of the Latin 'ordo ad purificandum mulierem' (the order for the purification of women) became in 1552 and all subsequent editions of the prayer book, 'the thanksgiving of women after childbirth, commonly called the churching of women'. … Officially, after 1552, the service was no longer a purification; all notion of a penitential cleansing was disclaimed" (205).

Wilson focuses on the communal nature of the occasion: "Childbirth in the seventeenth-century England was a social occasion, specifically an occasion for women. In the later months of her pregnancy, the mother-to-be would issue invitations to her female friends, relatives, and neighbors" ("The Ceremony of Childbirth" 70). Gossipings were attended by both men and women, with the two genders eventually retiring to separate spaces. Gossipings were an occasion for women to dress in their finest clothes, consume food and wine, and spend time with other women.

While lying-in and gossipings were occasions for female companionship, churching and christening necessitated the participation of religious personnel. *The Book of Common Prayer* dictated that children be baptized by the first Sunday after the child's birth, a period that coincided with the mother's lying-in. To enable the mother's presence at the baptism of the child, parents turned to private baptisms at home. Wilson notes that such baptisms still followed protocol outlined in religious texts:

> In the first place, the Prayer Book also had a service for private baptism, that is, baptism at home; and some families practiced this instead of public baptism, thereby making baptism into a cheerful family ritual in which the mother herself took part. In such a case, the baptism could not take place until at least the second stage of lying-in, that is, after the mother's "upsitting," and this might well mean holding the baptism some days later than the Prayer Book required. (*Ritual and Conflict* 184)

The scheduling of the private baptism during the upsitting period of the mother's lying-in further solidifies my claim that the gossips' visit takes place during Mistress Allwit's lying-in period. The second, and less desirable, alternative for a mother to be present at her child's christening was to delay the christening and combine it with the mother's

churching. Wilson presents examples of this practice and notes that as of 1621, "this practice was unusual" (*Ritual and Conflict* 185). While private christenings were somewhat common, both Cressy and Wilson emphasize that the churching takes place exclusively at church.

The aforementioned regulations that accompany each of the ceremonies related to women and childbirth are casually tossed to the side in their dramatic representations in *Chaste Maid*. Unlike an ecclesiastical churching, where the ceremony is attended by a priest, the onstage christening in *Chaste Maid* is void of any religious figures except for the Parson whom Touchwood Junior consults in Act 3, Scene 1. The placement of Touchwood Junior's conversation with the Parson right in the middle of the scenes depicting the churching and the gossips reminds the audience of the crucial component missing from the christening. However, the transfer of the churching and christening to the Allwit home and the exclusion of religious personnel from the ceremony does not compromise the intention of the churching. One example of the celebration of both Mistress Allwit and the newborn occurs in Act 3, Scene 2, when the First Puritan responds to Mistress Allwit's pledging of her guests:

> FIRST PURITAN I'll answer for them.
> They wish all health and strength,
> And that you may courageously go forward
> To perform the like, and many such,
> Like a true sister, with motherly bearing. (3.2.74-78)

Despite the celebration that accompanies the christening ceremony in *Chaste Maid,* the gossips do not lose sight of the importance of the task at hand: by the end of the scene the

Allwit newborn has been christened and the mother has been re-integrated into society. The puritans' willing participation in the ceremony despite puritan reservations about churchings demonstrates that female companionship takes precedence over the religious ceremony, and Mistress Allwit's churching takes place in the company of fellow women rather than a church setting. The First Puritan's willingness to abandon her religious perceptions of churchings demonstrates the importance of the convivial aspects of the ceremony for those present.

This female-dominated ceremony is only possible due to the seeming obedience and subsequent subversion of patriarchal expectations of female behavior. Wilson notes that churching can function as a patriarchal tool of control:

> …the churching service has every appearance of having emanated from the world of men. It was an ecclesiastical ceremony; it had been described in the Middle Ages as a ritual of "purification"; after the English Reformation, it still involved various features which in the eyes of the Puritans bore the same stigma of defilement-by-birth; it required the mother to pay money to the priest and to the parish clerk. ("The Ceremony of Churching" 88)

Rather than reject this ceremony that seems to be a tool of male control and is meant to regulate the female body—and, in fact, cleanse the body after the supposedly messy process of childbirth—the female characters are able gradually to take over the ceremony and celebrate each other on their own terms. The intersection of male rule and female submission becomes a locus of power and agency for the female characters involved, as regulations or restrictions of certain types of behavior—including necessitating the cleansing of the female body—inherently grant power to the very thing they attempt to

regulate.[43] While seemingly compliant with the regulations that churching reinforces, the female characters manipulate the conventions of the ritual and gradually dismantle the ecclesiastical ceremony and convert it into an event in which the new mother is celebrated by her friends in a markedly female space.

Agency and Community

The churching and lying-in ceremonies that accompanied childbirth allowed the mother to adjust to her new role in society in the company of others that had already gone through this process; the shared experiences of childbirth created a sense of community and solidary among all the women present in these ceremonies:

> What made such solidarity possible was the fact that women of many different stations in life shared certain central experiences, such as the pains of childbearing, the inequality of marriage, or at least the expectation or memory of these. But what gave force to these shared experiences was something else: a collective culture of women. A network of so-called "gossip" bound together the women of each locality in a web of relationships which partly mirrored the male hierarchy. (Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth" 96)

The various processes that accompany childbirth present a prime opportunity for manifestations of female power. One example of such power is the midwife's responsibility to extract a confession of the father's identity out of the mother (which was

[43] Examining the relationship between the regulatory system and the subject it seeks to regulate, Butler notes: "…the suppression of the body not only requires and produces the very body it seeks to suppress…In this sense, the restrictions placed *on* the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction" (*Psychic Life* 59).

particularly important in cases of unwed mothers). Laura Gowing notes that this responsibility was included in the oaths midwives had to take in order to practice midwifery:

> Certainly, midwives' interpretation of their duty went beyond the letter of the oath. They questioned single women repeatedly, until a "true confession" was given; they withheld their help until the mother confessed; and they timed their interrogations to the moment of greatest pain, when a mother would be sure to tell the truth. (*Common Bodies* 159-60)

In examining the women's responsibility to extract a confession out of the mother in labor, Luttfring argues that the performance of this task places the gossips and the midwife in a position of validating patriarchal and social identities:

> Although the texts often critique both the speech of gossips and their voracious appetites, they also demonstrate how women's discursive production and economic consumption are necessary in constructing men's patriarchal identities. These women facilitate the circulation of socially crucial information as well as commodities and cash, regulating the flow of sexual and financial resources for the common good and reflecting the shifting gender paradigms and economic mindsets of seventeenth-century England. (127)

The midwife's responsibility to ascertain the identity of the father was particularly important in the case of single mothers because knowing the identity of the father shifted the responsibility of taking care of the mother and the newborn from the community to the individual. The legal responsibilities of the midwife and the gossips extended to safeguarding the survival of the child born to single mothers: the stillborn child of a single mother was presumed to be murdered by the mother until proven otherwise. Providing such proof to absolve the mother was frequently the responsibility of the

gossips and the midwife.[44] These tasks and duties placed gossips and midwives in socially sanctioned positions of power, making them prime examples for discussions of female power.

In addition to deriving power from their responsibilities to ascertain the identity of the father and safeguard the infant, the community that the women established in the process that began with the delivery of the child and ended with the churching of the mother allowed the women to exist within a markedly female space. Wilson characterizes the birth chamber as a social and a physical space:

> The social space of the birth, then, was a collective female space, constituted on the one hand by the presence of gossips and midwife, and on the other hand by the absence of men. But it was equally important to demarcate the physical space of the birth: to confer upon the room a different character, signifying its special function. This was achieved by physically and symbolically enclosing the chamber. Air was excluded by blocking up the keyholes; daylight was shut out by means of heavy curtains; the darkness within was illuminated by means of candles, which were therefore part of the standard requirements for a delivery. Thus reconstituted, the room became the *lying-in chamber*, the physical counterpart of the female social space to which the mother now belonged. (*Ritual and Conflict* 157)

The shared experience of childbirth gives the women a sense of commonality and community. The sealing off of the physical space that Wilson describes satisfies the requirements for the lying-in chamber; additionally, this hermetic sealing of the birth chamber creates a space populated exclusively by women. The women present during the delivery or visiting the mother conceivably had gone through the experience of childbirth

[44] Luttfring delineates the responsibilities of the midwives as "safely delivering babies, but also for ensuring that laboring women named the true fathers of their children and for preventing infanticides, abortions, baby-swapping, and counterfeit births" (24n39).

themselves, and, as such, had the necessary experience to help guide the pregnant mother through delivery. What we find when examining the process of childbirth is both a physical space dominated by women as well as a practice where the women have the most expertise; as such, the birthing chamber, moreso than many other spaces that the female subject could find herself in, was a space dominated by women.

My earlier discussion of the various ceremonies that accompany childbirth—including churchings and gossipings—reminds us that there is at least some level of fluidity in how the ceremonies were carried out.[45] The elimination of the "purification" aspect from ecclesiastical practice and its transformation into a ceremony of thanksgiving indicates that such fluidity and change was not limited to how the practice was carried out by early modern subjects but also included its cultural perceptions. In practice, churching takes on many of the social aspects that are frequently associated with gossipings. While the reasons behind such changes cannot easily be characterized as occurring as a result of female will—the elimination of the language of cleansing and purification, for instance, likely occurred in order to distance the ceremony from its Jewish and catholic origins—it is nevertheless important to examine how changes to established customs may occur and how such changes contribute to female agency.

[45] Wilson cites examples of women that openly defied the custom associated with the timing of baptisms and churchings: "Thus in 1597 Jane Minors of Barking, Essex, kept her child unbaptised for a month after birth and then 'came to be churched at the end of the said month, together with her child to be baptised'. A generation later, in 1621, John Cutfold's wife did the same at Funtington, Sussex; at the archdeacon's next visitation, the curate presented Cutfold for this, adding the remark 'no such thing accustomed to be done in the parish before'" (*Ritual and Conflict* 185).

The relative malleability of the ceremonies associated with childbirth allows the gossips to use these ceremonies as loci of power and agency. Within *Chaste Maid*, the freedom the female characters enjoy during the christening ceremony allows us to imagine their gradual taking over of ceremonies that accompany the delivery of the child. The gossips' ability to create a female social space and enjoy themselves within the company of other women is the result of a gradual blurring of the lines of demarcation between the various ceremonies that surround the safe delivery of the child. Mistress Allwit's churching, free of religious personnel and ecclesiastical ceremony, is the most compelling evidence of the female characters' creation of an alternative system of self-representation and self-celebration. The absence of ecclesiastical personnel does not stop the gossips from ensuring the proper outcome of the ceremonies. As far as the christening of the child goes, the following exchange between the gossips and Mistress Allwit allows us to deduce that the child was christened outside of the family home:

> FIRST GOSSIP How is't, woman? We have brought you home
> A kersen soul.
> WIFE Ay, I thank your pains.
> FIRST PURITAN And, verily, well kersened i' the right way,
> Without idolatry or superstition,
> After the pure manner of Amsterdam. (3.2.1-5)

If the christening of the Allwit newborn seems to have been performed within an ecclesiastical setting, such is not the case for Mistress Allwit's churching. Though not explicitly acted out on the stage, the christening scene includes the churching of the mother; Mistress Allwit's first appearance after the christening scene occurs in Act 5,

Scene 1, which, while taking place in the Allwit home, implies that Mistress Allwit's lying-in period has concluded. After parting ways with Sir Walter, the Allwits contemplate a change:

> WIFE I know he durst not stay when you named officers.
> …
> ALLWIT We are richly furnished wife, with household stuff.
> WIFE Let's set out lodgings then,
> And take a house in the Strand. (5.1.156-61)

Mistress Allwit's suggestion to rent out their current home and move to the more fashionable neighborhood of the Strand implies that she is no longer confined to her bed or to the home; she is able to move into a new neighborhood. Woodbridge argues that the Allwits' decision to move to the Strand has strong implications that they plan to run a brothel: "The conversation about a well-furnished house, following the Allwit's [sic] agreement that they will now support themselves as they used to (presumably before Sir Walter's advent), suggests that they are planning to establish a fashionable brothel" (951n161). Woodbridge's comment about the Allwits' decision to run a brothel brings full circle Mistress Allwit's selling of herself and her family to Sir Walter; additionally, it indicates that she is about to enter the marketplace as a laborer.[46] Sir Walter's departure

[46] Throughout the play, Mistress Allwit's participation in a market economy is remarkable because rather than trading with goods or wares, Mistress Allwit sells her family to Sir Walter. She may be seen as an articulation of male anxieties of women entering the marketplace because her union with Sir Walter has, in fact, invalidated her marriage and yielded several bastard children. As the household becomes more economically dependent on Mistress Allwit's union with Sir Walter, Allwit is gradually eliminated. In a union between Sir Walter and Mistress Allwit, she becomes the head of the household because Sir Walter is an absent figure. Within the family, Mistress Allwit's mastery in the marketplace has resulted in the economic stability of the household, which Allwit himself observes. Yet, as Sir Walter, Allwit, and the bastard children enter and exit the stage, the audience is repeatedly reminded that the household lacks a traditional

from the Allwit household results in a professional change for Mistress Allwit. By moving to the Strand with the intention of opening a brothel, Mistress Allwit turns from a combination of seller and product to only a seller; a move that conceivably is akin to expanding her business and profits.

Agency and Continuity

The lasting impact of the gossips' conduct can be gleaned from the play's representation of three daughters: Moll Yellowhammer, the Allwit newborn, and the daughter of the Fourth Gossip. In coming together to celebrate the return of an old friend and welcome a new member, the gossips both follow the traditional ceremony of the churching and christening and manage to turn the institutionalized ceremony into a social event. This change is possible through the gossips' continual engagement in a ritual that requires their acquiescence to a belief system that presumes the defilement and the subsequent cleansing of the female body.[47] Through a process of repetition with a slight difference the gossips have been able to gradually take over the ceremony and turn it into a safe space for all female characters to act as they wish. The Fourth gossip's nineteen-year-old daughter and the Allwit newborn, whether consciously or not, seem to be already following in the footsteps of their mothers and seem perfectly capable of carrying

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sense of order. Allwit's initial explanation of the household structure shows that he is both aware and approving of his wife's union with Sir Walter. Thus, Mistress Allwit's subversive control of the household comes as a result of seeming obedience and adherence to her husband's wishes.

[47] As evidenced above, despite the church's elimination of the language of purification in 1552, the idea continued to persist in other texts, such as Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones*.

on the project that their mothers started. The newborn whose christening has brought the gossips together is said to have a lot in common with her mother:

> THIRD GOSSIP As if it had been spit out of his mouth!
> Eyed, nosed, and browed as like a girl can be,
> Only indeed it has the mother's mouth.
> SECOND GOSSIP The mother's mouth up and down, up and down!
> THIRD GOSSIP 'Tis a large child; she's but a little woman (3.2.10-14).

The gossips imagine that the newborn girl will continue the traditions they have established across various churchings and gatherings. Within the context of the play, the reference to the newborn's mouth can be seen as sexualized—Richard Dutton glosses the line as: "Alludes to the constant motion of the chattering mouth, but also suggests sexual motions" (333n13). As a newborn, Mistress Allwit's daughter is susceptible to leaking from all of her orifices, including crying, and the gossips' discussion of the child labels this leaking as a very natural act. By discussing the newborn's leaking in conjunction with her mother's, the gossips suggest that the daughter is taking after her mother, and, by extension, that the mother's leaking is as natural an act as the daughter's.

The Fourth Gossip's daughter is another example of a future generation of leaking women. Although the gossips do not seem to make note of their own leaking on the stage, they do comment on the girl's bodily functions. In a drunken stupor, the Fourth Gossip confesses to the Third Gossip that her daughter is not married because she leaks:

> THIRD GOSSIP And now I'll tell you, gossip: she's too free.
> FOURTH GOSSIP Too free?
> THIRD GOSSIP O ay, she cannot lie dry in her bed.
> FOURTH GOSSIP What, and nineteen?
> THIRD GOSSIP 'Tis as I tell you, gossip. (3.2.98-100)

When discussing the girl's inability to control her bladder at the age of nineteen, the gossips are chiefly concerned with how it affects her chances of securing a husband. As the conversation continues, the gossips criticize the girl for her inability to control her bladder until she is wedded and of older age. Within the play's construction of their leaking as symptomatic of sexual looseness, the gossips demonstrate an awareness of the stereotypes that surround their behavior: the sexual looseness that the play associates with the women seems to have occurred after marriage. The very act of marriage and childbirth gives the women the freedom to go against patriarchal norms of conduct; conceivably, a married woman can leak without worrying about how it will affect her chances of finding a mate.

To fully understand the gossips' leaking on the stage, we must look beyond interpretations of it that equate it with sexual looseness. Paster characterizes the women's leaking as demonstrative of lack of control: "…the leaky women of Middleton's Cheapside cannot by themselves keep their barrels full or their holes plugged. Attempting such impossible tasks becomes the self-imposed responsibility of the patriarchal order" (*The Body Embarrassed* 63). In examining the gossips' leaking on the stage, I propose that their inability to control their bladders can be interpreted not only in terms of gluttony, but also as contributing to their successful subversion of the patriarchal expectations enforced on them. Since subversive agency occurs as a result of acceptance and subsequent subversion of societal expectations of female behavior, I contend that the gossips' inability to control their bodies demonstrates this notion of obedience. In addition to conforming to the play's expectations of their behavior, the gossips' leaking

can be seen as happening as a result of their fulfillment of their duties as mothers. Paster reminds us of possible complications accompanying childbirth: "Obstetrical instruments did in fact leave women mangled after difficult or protracted labors, threatening them with urinary incontinence" (Paster, "Leaky Vessels" 50). Michael MacDonald cites the example of Agnes Olny who after enduring a botched delivery "ever after continued lame and could not hold her water" (273n169).[48] It is safe to assume that the female characters' incontinence is at least partly due to giving birth; in fulfilling their socially dictated duties as wives and mothers, the gossips risk facing complications and losing bladder control. That their incontinence occurs during the celebration of Mistress Allwit's churching further highlights the importance and commonplace nature of giving birth. This connection between the gossips' leaking and childbirth allows me to make a claim that

[48] Although women's incontinence is not discussed at length in early modern midwifery manuals, the issue of incontinence during pregnancy is brought up by both Jane Sharp in *The Midwives Book or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* (1671) and François Mauriceau in *The diseases of women with child and in childbed* (1697). Sharp notes: "And as for women in child-bed, sometimes the *Secundine* or after-birth will not follow, their purgations are too few or too many, they are in great pains in their belly, their privities are rended by hard delivery as far as their Fundament, also they are inflamed many times and ulcerated and cannot go to stool but their fundament will fall forth. They have swoonding and epileptick fits, watching and dotings; their whole body swels, especially their belly, legs and feet: they are subject to hot sharp Feavers and acute diseases, to vomiting and costiveness, to fluxes, to incontinence of Urine, that they cannot hold their water" (193). Mauriceau explains that female incontinence during childbirth occurs as a result of pressure on the bladder: "The Situation of the Bladder, placed just upon the Womb, is sufficient to instruct us wherefore pregnant Women are sometimes troubled with difficulty of Urine, and the reason why they cannot often hinder, nor scarce retain their Water: which is caused two ways; 1. Because the Womb with Child, by its bigness and weight, compresseth the Bladder, so that it is hindred from having its ordinary Extension; and so incapable of containing a reasonable Quantity of Urine; which is the Cause that the bigger the Woman grows, and the nearer her time she approaches, the oftner she is compelled to make Water" (62). The midwife's possible ineptitude is recorded in Percival Willughby's *Observations in Midwifery*: Willughby quotes Katherine Key, a patient who complains about her midwife: "for that shee [the midwife] did nothing else, but pull, and stretch her body with all violence, to enlarge the pasages, not caring if that shee had torn her body to do it" (qtd. in Pollock 299).

their leaking occurs as a result of their participation in social proliferation. The survival of the community is contingent on the female characters' willing participation in childbearing; the churching scene captures some of the costs associated with the fulfillment of female duties.

The leaking that has occurred as a result of the female characters' participation in societal proliferation might put them in an embarrassing situation, but it is also instrumental in giving them a certain level of power. The gossips' attainment of agency in this play operates through the seeming obedience and ultimate subversion of societal standards that seek to regulate their behavior. From a theoretical point of view, the gossips' leaking reminds us that the characters have met the first requirement for attaining agency by fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers. In more practical terms, their leaking is what forces Allwit out of the gossips' celebration and enables the characters to occupy the space on their own. That the stage has turned into a thoroughly female space after Allwit's exit is evident in the gossips' treatment of Tim and his tutor: the overzealousness with which the female characters greet the two men forces the newcomers out due to their visible discomfort with the kind of attention they are getting from the gossips. The outward hostility with which the space greets any of the male characters in the play enables the gossips to continue spending time with each other. Within the play's broader concerns of female fecundity—as evidenced by Mistress Allwit's delivery of a child—the gossips' leaking becomes yet another natural excretion of the leaky vessel that is the female body. Like Mistress Allwit's process of childbirth,

the gossips' leaking is a natural and intimate act, which, nevertheless, turns the bed chamber into a specifically feminine space.

The final piece of evidence I would like to include in support of my claims about both the success of subversive practices and the continuation of the gossips' subversion of societal expectations is Moll's wedding. The issue of Moll's marriage is a focal part of the plot of the play—it begins and ends the play—and, predictably, there is a conflict between the wishes of Moll and those of her parents. Ultimately, Moll is able to marry Touchwood Junior, the man she has wanted to marry all along, but this opportunity is available to Moll as a result of a process of obedience and ultimate subversion of her parents' wishes. Unlike the gossips, however, Moll's path to agency is more intentional: Moll follows along the expectations of her parents to marry Sir Walter before ultimately going against their wishes. First, the play registers her attempt to escape from her parents through "a little hole looked into the gutter" (4.4.8). When her parents drag her back home (wet and by the hair), she fakes an illness that ultimately claims her life.

The audience's next encounter with Moll is at the church during her funeral, which becomes yet another ecclesiastical ceremony that in the hands of the play's characters loses its religious significance. Act 5, Scene 4, which features the burial-cum-wedding of Touchwood Junior and Moll Yellowhammer, depicts, in miniature, the actions that are behind the process of subverting societal expectations to benefit the needs of an individual. The scene opens with Touchwood Senior's delivery of a eulogy for his brother and Moll. Touchwood Senior evokes Moll's chastity, "chaste monument of her

living name" (5.4.12); he also claims that he cannot go into much detail in praise of his own brother for fear that it be considered flattery. Yet, the most powerful moment of Touchwood Senior's elegy comes when he linguistically merges the couple together:

> Beauty set in goodness
> Speaks what she was that jewel so infixed,
> There was no want of anything of life
> To make these virtuous precedents man and wife. (5.4.17-20)

What Moll and Touchwood Junior have yet to achieve in person, Touchwood Senior achieves linguistically and evokes a mournful response from his audience. Touchwood Senior pushes the subject matter further and argues for the possibility of joy if the marriage had occurred:

> I cannot think there's anyone amongst you
> In this full fair assembly, maid, man, or wife,
> Whose heart would not have sprung with joy and gladness
> To have seen their marriage day. (5.4.23-26)

The response to this second inquiry is, predictably, a joyful one: "It would have made a thousand joyful hearts" (5.4.27) is the enthusiastic response of the ensemble cast. Touchwood Senior responds to this second reaction with a powerful speech act:

> TOUCHWOOD SENIOR [*to Touchwood Junior and Moll*]
> Up, then, apace and take your fortunes,
> Make these joyful hearts; here's none but friends. (5.4.28-29)

Touchwood Senior's comment about the company of "none but friends" reminds the audience that the ceremony, up to this point, is taking place without the presence of

Moll's parents, which enables Touchwood Junior and Moll to orchestrate this plan with the assistance of Touchwood Senior. Yet, the ceremony unraveling in this scene is not completely void of societal approval. Touchwood Senior's initial address to the audience should be regarded as an instance of going through the motions: even though he is well-aware that the scene is ultimately not going to end with the burial of his brother and his bride-to-be, it is still necessary for him to go through all the steps that he would have to go through if he were burying his brother. The responses he solicits from the cast of characters enables the audience to witness the process wherein he gains social approval to resurrect the couple. The ceremony officially uniting the couple is performed in haste because the risk of an interruption by Moll's parents looms large in the background. By the time the Yellowhammers join the rest of the cast, the couple's union is finalized.

Shortly after the wedding, Touchwood Senior reveals that Moll orchestrated the plan to enable her wedding to Touchwood Junior: "'twas she / That wrought it to this purpose cunningly" (5.4.56-57). When the Yellowhammers finally reach the church, the audience experiences an anti-climactic moment:

> I will prevent you all and mock you thus,
> You and your expectations: I stand happy
> Both in your lives and your hearts' combination! (5.4.60-62)

Yellowhammer's readiness to abandon his role as the interfering father can perhaps be explained by another complication that has occurred behind the scenes: after Tim's marriage to the Welsh Gentlewoman, the Yellowhammers have discovered that she is not the wealthy relative Sir Walter pretended she was. That the rest of the scene does not

return to the conflict resulting from the marriage of Moll and Touchwood Junior might reveal a sense of shifting priorities: in light of the revelation about Sir Walter's lies, the Yellowhammers concede to Moll's wedding because her marriage to Sir Walter is no longer a possibility. Despite prohibitions against the explicit staging of weddings on the early modern stage, the ceremony accompanying the wedding goes through the necessary steps to portray the union as legitimate. What enables Moll to enact her wedding is the continual obedience to her parents' wishes, which culminates into a slight of hand wherein the ceremony of burial becomes a wedding. Here we see Moll adapting the formula of subversion that the gossips have created in the process of their own establishment of female space within the christening ceremony to advance her own goals and obtain power over her destiny.

Chaste Maid's inclusion of events surrounding childbirth—an inherently powerful space for early modern women—along with its inclusion of twenty named female characters may indicate to its audiences the potential for a representation of female power. The female characters' power—both individually and collectively—comes from a purposeful engagement with the patriarchal institutions of control that are meant to regulate their behavior. The female characters obey patriarchal expectations with the ultimate goal of subverting them; in the case of Moll Yellowhammer this subversive model of agency is more intentional than the gossips' participation in Mistress Allwit's churching. In both cases, the female characters are able to enjoy the power to act as they wish: Moll Yellowhammer is able to marry Touchwood Junior and the gossips create a safe space where the expectant mother can deliver her child in the supportive company of

other women. In the process, the safe delivery of the child becomes a truly enjoyable celebration for all parties involved.

CHAPTER IV

"A NEEDLE 'TWIXT TWO ADAMANTS"[49]: IDEOLOGICAL STRIFE AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY IN *THE ROARING GIRL* AND *WESTWARD HO*

> Purge: …'tis time for tradesmen to be in their shops, for he that tends well his shop, and hath an alluring wife with a graceful "what d'ye lack" shall be sure to have good doings, and good doings is that that crowns so many citizens with the horns of abundance. (2.1.1-4)
>
> --Dekker and Middleton, *The Family of Love*

> In many examples of early seventeenth-century literary culture, the market town of Brentford in Middlesex is depicted as a point of rendezvous for actors in adulterous affairs—as an iniquitous getaway, a location for a "dirty weekend" (70)…It is important to note, however, that the fantasy of this escape from urban scrutiny is largely male-authored. Invariably, visits to Brentford are engineered by male characters and treated by women with a range of reactions varying from complicity to contentment to outright refusal. (75)
>
> --Simon Morgan-Russell, "'No Good Thing Ever Comes Out of It': Male Expectations and Female Alliance in Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho*"

Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's play, *A Family of Love* (1608), includes the musings of Purge, a merchant, which capture some of the early modern cultural expectations about women's work in the marketplace: the family business, when tended

[49] *The Roaring Girl*, 6.79. The Oxford edition of the text glosses "adamants" as: "hard stones confused with loadstones or magnets; she is pulled two ways, by her attraction to Laxton and her desire to stay married" (749). The line appears at the end of a speech by Mistress Gallipot during which she contemplates how to handle Laxton's request for thirty pounds so as not to reveal their "affair" to Gallipot. Within the context of the speech, the "adamants are Mistress Gallipot's "own fears" (6.78) and Laxton's "wants" (6.78).

to by the couple, is inevitably accompanied by expectations that the wife appear to be sexually available to customers. While the wife may not be expected to engage in a sexual relationship with her customers, her appearance and availability for "courting" is thought to bring in business, thereby contributing to the family's economic well-being.[50] Purge's comments about the politics of the marketplace depict a paradox that the married woman entering the marketplace must contend with: she is expected to be chaste and faithful to her marital vows while seeming sexually available to the customers—namely, the gallants—that frequent the marketplace. Morgan-Russell's analysis of Brentford as a locus of sexual intrigue addresses the issue of public female lives from the opposite perspective: the women are supposed to be sexually available to men outside their marriages and are simultaneously expected to be loyal to their families.

Societal Expectations and Ideological Strife

I begin this chapter by noting the contradictory sets of expectations the female subject must adhere to in the process of entering the marketplace because the female

[50] Examining the use of shame and gossip as a regulatory mechanism, Mario DiGangi notes the women's problematic position within society: "Urban plays like *The Roaring Girl* instead depict citizen-class wives who participate in a public market economy: an arena, much like the public theater itself, in which female visibility could easily translate as sexual availability" (DiGangi, "Sexual Slander" 147). Similarly, in *Theater of a City*, Jean Howard demonstrates a similarity of cultural attitudes to women at the marketplace and prostitutes summoning customers: "In London plays, women who keep shops, whether positioned at the door or inside the establishment, are often represented as not so very different from their suburban, taffeta-gowned doubles…in *The Roaring Girl* the gallants who cruise the shops of London are in constant dalliance with the shopkeepers' wives. Most of the time in comic London plays wives do not actually sleep with the gallants who pursue them in their shops, but part of the titillation provided by the genre is the ever-present possibility that they might" (129).

subject's engagement with such expectations plays a pivotal role in her ability to gain subjecthood and power. Louis Montrose defines the process of attaining subjectivity as something that hinges on consciousness:

> I mean to suggest a process of *subjectification*, that on the one hand, shapes individuals as loci of consciousness and initiators of action, endows them with subjectivity; and that, on the other hand, positions, motivates, and constrains them within—subjects them to—social networks and cultural codes that exceed their comprehension or control. (9)[51]

Montrose's formulation of subjectivity is a process that places and confines subjects in specific social networks and enforces cultural codes on them. However, what happens when the subject is placed in multiple and contradictory social networks and the cultural codes enforced on the subject are similarly self-contradictory? In this chapter I examine two dramatic manifestations of contradictory cultural expectations—Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho* (1604) and Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611)—and the impact such expectations have on the female subjects they attempt to regulate. The female characters I examine in this chapter are in a precarious position of ideological strife as the cultural expectations that are meant to direct their behavior do so in conflicting, contradictory ways. In both plays the citizen wives are regulated by two sets of expectations enforced on them by their public and private lives,

[51] Similarly, Teresa de Lauretis focuses on the importance of consciousness in the process of attainment of subjecthood: "This fundamental redefinition of social and economic oppression in relation to subjectivity and identity, on the one hand, and to the subject's capacity of resistance and agency, on the other, hinges on the notion of consciousness that I have been trying to delineate as historically specific to contemporary feminism and the basis of feminist theory as such" (141).

and ultimately, collectively, use these conflicting expectations to demonstrate the ideological strife they must contend with in leading lives both inside and outside the family home. The ideological system requires that the female characters occupy at least two roles: that of the faithful wife who helps tend to the family business and that of the attractive citizen wife whose appearance of sexual availability helps bring customers into the family business. The dramatic representations of the expectations that the female subject of the middling sort might have to contend with push the contradictory expectations to the extreme and create a possibility where neither set of expectations is successful at regulating female conduct. Rather, the societal expectations that are meant to regulate and correct female behavior give the subject the kind of freedoms that they would like to discourage.

Partly due to the growing cultural anxiety about the female subject's ability to leave the family home and enter the marketplace, both as a consumer and a seller, the early modern period produced an extensive amount of materials (such as conduct manuals and sermons) that were meant to regulate the behavior of female members of society. I would like to expand the body of works discussed to include literary works as well.[52] Although there are many overlapping features between the two categories, the advice given by conduct manuals directs women to take care of the household and its

[52] Theodore Leinwand notes that early modern plays perfectly capture the context within which they are produced and argues that "contemporary ideology and drama are mutually constituting" (Leinwand, "This Gulph of Marriage" 257). In *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* Alexander Leggatt traces a similar thread of treatment of loose morality in dramatic works and moralizing literature: "What is interesting is that the jokes and the sermons share the same analysis of the whore's way of life…[T]he duplicity of the whore (who spends her working hours acting a lie) can easily be dramatized as amusing chicanery. The whore's posture of respectability leads just as easily to laughter as to moral outrage" (103-4).

members while the dramatic texts from this period frequently operate under the assumption of female infidelity. If one of these sets of texts advises women on the rules of good housewifery and the other set of texts anticipates the failure of the first category, together the texts register the failure of the ideological system to regulate female behavior and the anxiety about such regulation. Jean Howard addresses this ideological contradiction when she notes its material component:

> It is necessary, I think, to see that the scripts [of the plays] themselves embody social struggle, that they enact a contest between and a negotiation among competing ideological positions; and that a further level of analysis is also necessary as one tries to take account of the potential consonance or conflict between the ideological import of a dramatic fable and of the material conditions of its production. (*The Stage and the Social Struggle* 84)

I extend Howard's argument a step further and argue that the dramatic text both becomes a second set of ideological constraints and registers the impact of having different sets of ideological expectations enforced on the individual. However, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, the failure of the ideological system stems from its attempts to over-regulate the female subject: in anxious prediction of its own failure, the ideological system—in the form of dramatic texts—represents this potential failure through a worst possible case scenario. The dramatic representation of the results of female disobedience both registers the failure of the ideological system to make an impact on female conduct and becomes a second set of expectations and standards enforced on the female subject. Instead of successfully regulating the female subject, the two sets of expectations operate in contradictory ways (one directs the female subject's behavior and the other depicts the subject's failure to adhere to the standards of the former), creating possibilities for the

female subject to find power while behaving in accordance to societal expectations. As I will demonstrate below, the female subjects' acquiescent conduct in keeping with the multiple sets of expectations results in instances—albeit temporary—of power.[53]

Acquiescence and Collective Female Agency in *The Roaring Girl*

> And thus,
> If we to every brain that's humorous
> Should fashion scenes, we, with the painter, shall,
> In striving to please all, please none at all.
> --Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (Epilogue 27-30)

In the Epilogue of Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, the actor delivering the lines uses a series of metaphors to justify the play's ending and ask for the audience's merciful applause. The metaphor used is a story of a painter who hangs a portrait of a woman in public and makes changes to the portrait each time a passerby makes a suggestion. The end result is characterized as "vile" (13); the audience is to understand that, unlike the painting, the authors of this play have not attempted to please everyone to avoid creating a "vile" play, which explains why some audience members might not enjoy it. However, the example of the painter also evokes the play's subplot of the citizen

[53] One example of the kind of power afforded to these characters in my analysis is the power to prove their honesty and chastity. In *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, Leggatt argues that Moll Cutpurse goes against stereotypical representations of female characters either as lascivious citizen wives or chaste maids: "The stereotype, in other words, seems difficult to break. But it *does* break, with a satisfying crash, in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, where female chastity is embodied, not in a virtuous shopgirl, but in Moll Cutpurse, whose racy speech and intimate knowledge of the underworld might seem more appropriate to a conventional whore" (109). The kind of analysis I am engaged with here—with full consideration of obedient conduct—enables models of chastity that may not necessarily include challenging male suitors to duels like Moll does in *Roaring Girl*.

wives. Throughout the play, the female characters of the play are caught between two sets of expectations: those of the gallants and their own husbands. Like the painter evoked in the Epilogue, the wives keep changing their behavior in accordance to the expectations of their husbands and the gallants. The wives become the locus between the desires of two sets of men: the gallants who want their money and the husbands whose work necessitates the female characters' active participation in the public world of the marketplace. The two sets of expectations that the wives in the play are subjected to throughout the play have a basis in actual literary and historical works and documents from the early modern period. These works, while advocating women's obedience to their husbands and their faithfulness to their families, frequently depict female disobedience in the form of dramatic representation or advice on how to handle the disobedient wife. The female subject's choice is limited to being the obedient wife and taking good care of the household or entertaining the company of the gallants and, in due course, squandering the home's wealth. Yet, the female characters I examine in this chapter demonstrate a third choice by refusing to choose and embracing both sets of expectations simultaneously; as a result, they gain the power to expose the ideological strife that these self-contradictory expectations bring about.

Roaring Girl's development of the citizen wives' subplot occurs in a matter of three scenes: Scene 3, Scene 6, and Scene 9. Seemingly detached from the rest of the play, the group is tied to the main plot of the play through their occasional interactions with Moll. Yet, given the play's central preoccupation with the marriage between Sebastian and Mary, it is important to note that the citizens' plot is the only aspect of the

play that deals with married couples, as Jean Howard reminds us: "Women, in the form of wives, are very visible in this plot in contrast to their near absence in the aristocratic plot" ("Sex and Social Conflict" 176). If the main storyline of the play focuses on the potential marriage of Sebastian and Mary, the subplot of the citizen wives depicts what happens after a marriage has taken place. The subplot joins together the gallants Laxton, Goshawk, and Greenwit with the citizens and their wives, Rosamond Openwork, Prudence Gallipot, and Mistress Tiltyard. As the play establishes the relationships between its various characters, including those of the gallants and the citizen wives, the audience witnesses the various machinations that the husbands, the wives, and the gallants all put each other through. Chief among many are Laxton's and Goshawk's attempts to woo Mistress Gallipot and Mistress Openwork, respectively.

While Laxton frequents the Gallipots' apothecary under the guise of purchasing tobacco, Goshawk repeatedly tells Mistress Openwork that her husband is having an affair with a prostitute in London's suburbs in the hopes that her outrage with her husband will prompt her to pursue an affair with him. Goshawk gains access to Mistress Openwork by fulfilling her husband's request to mediate peace between the married couple. Unbeknownst to Goshawk, Openwork has told Goshawk that he is having an affair only as a ruse to test Goshawk's honesty after spotting "wanton fire" (9.232) in him. Similarly, Mistress Gallipot's involvement with Laxton is soon revealed to be a ruse as well: Laxton recounts Mistress Gallipot's decision to prove to a group of gallants that her husband would not believe rumors about her and engages in an affair with Laxton to

demonstrate her point. Throughout the play, the wives prove to be superior to a number of other characters as they manage to see through plots inflicted on them and carry on their own plots without exposure. More important to note, however, are the motivations and reasoning behind the plots the wives orchestrate. For instance, Mistress Gallipot is unable to prove the truthfulness of citizen wives—her own and that of her cohort—in any way other than taking on the very characteristics that would make them unfaithful. The women are able to gain the attention of other characters only as a result of misbehaving and following along *all* possibilities that regulate their behavior. What we witness in *Roaring Girl* is that the only way for the citizen wives to prove their marital faithfulness is by pushing themselves to the edge of being unfaithful and ultimately staying true to their husbands.

My discussion of *The Roaring Girl* is focused on the citizen wives, but no discussion of the play would be complete without discussing Moll. She has come to occupy a prominent role in the early modern canon as a memorable female character, no doubt partly due to the geographical and social mobility that is afforded to her as a result of cross-dressing. Moll is seemingly the unifying factor of the various subplots of the play, including the narratives of the marriage negotiations of Mary and Sebastian, the gallants, the citizen wives, and the city's seedy underworld. Arguably, Moll has the most freedom and power within the play; this freedom may be explained, at least partly, through her defiance of the societal expectations that direct the behaviors of all female characters in the play. Moll frequently dresses in male clothing; she flouts conventional expectations of her geographical presence; she challenges Laxton, who propositions her,

to a sword fight. She goes from interacting with the highest-ranking members of the play (Sebastian and Sir Alexander) to those in the middle (the citizen wives and their husbands) to the lowest (the Cutpurses and Trapdoor). Throughout the play, Moll demonstrates remarkable freedom to travel both geographically and across social strata, but this freedom also comes at a cost of heightened visibility, which ultimately leads to her continual critique and disparagement. Thus, Sir Alexander describes Moll as:

> A scurvy woman,
> On whom the passionate old man swore he doted.
> "A creature", saith he, "nature hath brought forth
> To mock the sex of woman." It is a thing
> One knows not how to name: her birth began
> Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,
> Man more than woman, and which to none can hap,
> The sun gives her two shadows to one shape;
> Nay, more, let this strange thing walk, stand, or sit,
> No blazing star draws more eyes after it. (2.127-36)

Sir Alexander's description of Moll targets both her gender as well as her gender performance; he finds her appearance, in its combination of both male and female genders, particularly offensive. Later in the scene Sir Davy describes her as a "monster" (2.137). Similarly, Mistress Gallipot engages in this tradition of depicting Moll as an ambiguous creature whose sexuality seems to be doubly dangerous in a play that is preoccupied with female chastity and marital fidelity:

> MISTRESS GALLIPOT Some will not stick to say she's a man, and some both man and woman.
> LAXTON That were excellent: she might first cuckold the husband and then make him do as much for the wife! (3.216-19)

Perhaps unintentionally, Laxton's comments about Moll—which note her ability to corrupt husbands and wives equally—turn Moll into the great equalizer who places male and female fidelity (or lack thereof) on even footing. Throughout the play, Moll demonstrates remarkable freedom to travel both geographically and through social strata, but this freedom also comes at a cost of heightened visibility, which ultimately leads other characters to critique and disparage her continually.[54]

In addition to being subjected to criticism from many of the play's characters, Moll's function in the play is limited to bringing about the happy ending of heterosocial relationships and a heterosexual marriage. Her punishment of Laxton and her enabling of Sebastian to take advantage of her in order to gain Mary's hand in marriage ultimately makes her a reinforcer of a belief system that values the union of heterosexual marriage above all else.[55] Arguably, the limitations that Moll faces in attaining long-term power to further her own goals (which the play does not provide enough information to venture a guess about) are due to the open defiance with which she regards the regulations placed on all female characters, herself included.

Considering that it is frequently her male attire and her defiance of conventions of behavior that give Moll her geographical freedom, conceivably it is her power, as a female subject, to have such mobility that Sir Alexander and Sir Davy, as well as Laxton and Mistress Gallipot, find monstrous. It is in this context—where female power is

[54] Moll's behavior and freedom throughout the play is more in keeping with Jonson's collegiates, whose failure to attain agency I discuss in Chapter 2.
[55] Leinwand characterizes Moll as "defender of virtue and a debunker of prejudice against women" ("This Gulph of Marriage" 254).

regarded as monstrous—that it becomes necessary for the citizen wives to engage with less obvious manifestations of female power. Moll's defiant agency, which is gained through her meditated flouting of expectations of female behavior and dressing in male attire, gives her both social and geographical freedom; however, this freedom comes at the steep cost of social rejection and gossip. After all, while Moll seemingly fits into most of the spaces that the play includes, she does not fully fit into any of them exclusively and does not have a space that is exclusively available to her.[56] Moll's inability to fit fully into any of the social strata we find in *Roaring Girl* and her failure to claim ownership over any of the spaces available in the play is at least partly due to her obvious rejection of societal expectations of female conduct. Her actions—strongly in keeping with the defiant mode of agency—demonstrate the shortcomings of defiant female action and encourage the scholarly discovery of alternative means of attaining power.

If Moll gains her relative social and geographical freedom as a result of open defiance of gender roles, the citizen wives come to occupy a powerful position (at least in some sections of the play) because of their refusal to be regulated by a single set of expectations. While the citizen wives endure their share of criticism and mockery, none of the commentary that is made at their expense is as harsh as what is said about Moll. Additionally, the women do indeed create and engage in a sense of community

[56] Moll's itinerant nature in the play—both literally and figuratively—is captured in Scene 5 where Moll, dressed as a man, confuses both Laxton and Trapdoor. Still in disguise, she offers two options to Trapdoor's question of "what house you're of" (5.161): "one of the Temple" (5.162) and "About Chick Lane" (5.163). Later, Trapdoor and Moll discuss "This Holborn is such a wrangling street" (7.187). Moll's quick transition from some of the most prestigious areas of the city (the Inns) to some of the least prestigious (Chick Lane), reminds us that Moll can occupy both spaces, as she can both genders. Yet, the middle ground of gender that she occupies translates into a geographical lack of specific space.

throughout the play. The play's juxtaposition of Moll and the citizen wives reminds the audience that the subtler set of behaviors might be more effective in procuring and retaining a sense of power for the subject. The directions for the second act set the stage for the activities of the citizen wives by locating them in the middle of economic activity. The scene opens with Prudence Openwork's "Gentlemen, what is't you lack? What is't you buy? See fine bands and ruffs, fine lawns, fine cambrics. What is't you lack, gentlemen, what is't you buy?" (3.1-4). Mario DiGangi notes the inherent connection between Mistress Gallipot's question of "what is't you lack" and Laxton's name: "By implicitly offering the consumer her body as well as her merchandise, the shopwife's industrious hawking produces economic profit or 'abundance' for her husband, but at the price of crowning him with cuckold's horns" ("Sexual Slander and Working Women" 153-54). The women's hawking is necessary to encourage a mercantile transaction, but this transaction places the women in a precarious position by calling to mind the numerous cultural associations between speaking (having a loose tongue) and loose morality.[57] Already, we see the nascent stages of conflicting expectations about the wives: they are supposed to hawk the wares of the family business but this hawking comes with the expectation that they should seem to be sexually available to the male customers that frequent their shops.

Throughout the play, the wives are seen cavorting with gallants—whose attention comes with a steep price tag—presumably to engage in a sexual relationship. Despite the

[57] Gail Kern Paster's metonymic chain of "a woman who leaves her house is a woman who talks is a woman who drinks is a woman who leaks" (*The Body Embarrassed* 46) comes to mind.

play's seeming preoccupation with sex, not much sex appears to occur throughout the play. Howard locates at least some of the blame for the lack of sex in the play with the husbands:

> But while these merchants *have* money, there are strong suggestions they are not satisfying sexual partners for their wives. Gallipot embodies one type of Renaissance effeminacy in that he dotes on his wife to excess, excusing every fault, making no demands, but, it is implied, leaving her sexually unsatisfied. […] By contrast, Mistress Openwork complains that her husband spends himself sexually with other women, leaving her no source of pleasure. This seems to be the basis for her anger in Act 2 at Moll who has come to her shop to buy the shag ruff… These marriages of sexual lack seem to indict the merchant-class man for impotency and the merchant-class woman for insatiability. Neither heterosexuality nor marriage seems very attractive in this depiction. ("Sex and Social Conflict" 176-77)

The seeming implication throughout the plays—and in Howard's analysis—is that if sex were to happen it would happen outside of the marital union. However, as the play develops, this seems to not be the case. By the end of the play it is clear that no sex has transpired between Laxton and Mistress Gallipot or Openwork and his alleged mistress. For example, Moll argues that the virtues of the wives are never tested because the gallants never fully engage with the citizen wives:

> O, the gallants of these times are shallow lechers: they put not their courtship home enough to a wench; 'tis impossible to know what woman is thoroughly honest, because she's ne'er thoroughly tried. I am of that certain belief there are more queans in this town of their own making than of any man's provoking: where lies the slackness then? Many a poor soul would down, and there's nobody will push 'em. (3.329-37)

Moll argues that the wives never have the opportunity to prove their chastity because the gallants never ask for this chastity to be proven. While Moll's comments are meant to

critique the gallants, who are not truly capable of capturing the citizen wives' attentions, her commentary still implies that the wives' honor needs to be tested on a regular basis and that if the gallants actually tried to have a sexual affair with the wives, they would willingly betray their husbands. If Moll's argument that the citizen wives and the gallants never fully engage in a sexual relationship is to be believed, then what is the benefit of this relationship? Similarly, her critique of Mistress Tiltyard's moral character—"I'll try one spear against your chastity, Mistress Tiltyard, though it prove too short by the burr" (3.356-57)—registers for the audience what becomes one of the main preoccupations of the play: the testing of female honor. Living in a world where their honor will become the subject of speculation and doubt no matter what they do, the wives deal with this questioning through compulsive obedience: they remain loyal to their husbands while entertaining the gallants. Throughout the play Mistress Openwork and Mistress Gallipot are managed by at least two male characters, who correspond to the roles that the wives are expected to play in their public lives. Faced with contradictory expectations, the wives rebel by obeying, which ultimately enables them to gain power—albeit temporarily—over the very system and the representatives of the system that enforce the contradictory expectations that they should seem to be sexually available to the gallants while remaining faithful to their husbands.

The contradictory expectations of the wives' conduct throughout the play deserve more attention as they frequently result in behaviors that are confusing to the reader and difficult for the citizen wives. Howard captures the play's dual sets of expectations when characterizing the citizen wives:

> The most sexually shunned woman is, predictably, the outspoken, publicly visible, economically productive wife. She is legitimate, but not entirely subordinate, caught as she is in the nowhere land between the actualities of marriage as a functioning economic institution that demands her visibility and independence and the ideologies of acquiescent femininity associated with the concept of wife. ("Sex and Social Conflict" 186)

The nowhere space that Howard characterizes as being bookended by "actualities of marriage" and "ideologies of acquiescent femininity" is focal to my interpretation of the female characters in this chapter; however, I wish to complicate Howard's formulation by examining the kind of behavior that such expectations generate. The acquiescent wife obeys cultural formulae that direct her to go into the marketplace and participate in her husband's business, but this participation also requires a display of her sexual availability to potential customers. The citizen wife's role in this play is inherently contradictory and rather than follow either set of guidelines, the wives adhere to both sets of guidelines simultaneously, resulting in conduct that is frequently confusing to the reader and ultimately unbeneficial for the women involved. The contradictory expectations of female conduct seek to regulate various—and equally important—aspects of the female subject's world. Instead of choosing one set of expectations over another—such as spurning the advances of the gallants or cheating on their husbands with the gallants—the wives continue to obey both sets of expectations and in the process demonstrate the absurdity of the societal expectations that direct their behavior. In simultaneous obedience to contradictory expectations, the female character is able to gain considerable power while at the same time critiquing societal attempts to contain their behavior.

As the play establishes the relationships between its various characters, including those of the gallants and the citizen wives, the audience witnesses the various machinations that the husbands, the wives, and the gallants all inflict on one another. Chief among many are Laxton's and Goshawk's attempts to woo Mistress Gallipot and Mistress Openwork, respectively. Soon after the gallants enter the stage for the first time, Goshawk delineates the differences in his and Laxton's wooing styles:

> 'Tis the closest striker! Life, I think he commits venery forty foot deep: no man's aware on't. I, like a palpable smockster, go to work so openly with the tricks of art that I'm as apparently seen as a naked boy in a vial; and were it not for a gift of treachery that I have in me to betray my friend when he puts most trust in me—mass, yonder he is too—and by his injury to make good my access to her, I should appear as defective in courting as a farmer's son the first day of his feather, that doth nothing at Court but woo the hangings and glass windows for a month together, and some broken waiting-woman for ever after. I find those imperfections in my venery, that were it not for flattery and falsehood, I should want discourse and impudence; and he that wants impudence among women is worthy to be kicked out at bed's feet.—He shall not see me yet. (3.26-41)

While Laxton can be characterized as the "closest striker" (3.26) who "commits venery forty foot deep" (3.26-27) in a way that "no man's aware on't" (3.27), Goshawk's own wooing style is "like a palpable smockster" (3.27-28). His method of courting, because of its obviousness, appears to be not as skilled as Laxton's, but this enables him to cuckold Openwork in order to "make good my access to her [Mistress Openwork]" (3.33). The main difference Goshawk cites between his own courtship style and Laxton's is that he courts openly and Laxton does so secretly. The reasons behind the different methods that the men employ can be traced to the kind of relationship the gallants are trying to maintain. Laxton's courting of Mistress Gallipot is private and secretive because he is

trying to corrupt her and the household by taking money away from her. By contrast, Goshawk's interest in Mistress Openwork is seemingly sexual: by trying to convince her that her husband is cheating on her, he hopes that she will take vengeance on him by having an affair with Goshawk. However, it is important to note that the option of courting someone's wife openly is an option that is available to Goshawk. Goshawk's open courting of Mistress Openwork is, at least partly, symptomatic of cultural conceptions of women in the marketplace during the early modern period. Natasha Korda highlights the inherent sexualization of all aspects of women and the marketplace, including their wares:

> Because female virtue was strongly associated with chastity and sexual purity… women accused of manufacturing impure, adulterated, or defective wares were stigmatized as sexually unchaste or impure (or as aggressive usurpers of male authority) and were disciplined with the same forms of punishment used for prostitutes, adulteresses, and scolds. (*Labors Lost* 177)

Similarly, Laura Gowing notes that "like prostitutes, the [street] sellers were seen as enticers" ("Freedom of the Streets" 142). Goshawk's courting of Mistress Openwork is in keeping with this ideological conception of female participants in the marketplace—along with their wares—as inherently sexualized.

If Goshawk's relationship with Mistress Openwork—which I will discuss in more detail below—captures some of the cultural perceptions of women and the marketplace, Laxton's interactions with Mistress Gallipot depict the difficulties that arise from such cultural associations of female sellers and sexual looseness. For Mistress Gallipot, the sexualization of female sellers results in ideological strife that affects the integrity of her

marriage and results in behavior that is frequently self-contradictory and confusing to the audience. In examining the relationship, Howard notes that Laxton uses Mistress Gallipot for a financial gain:

> The woman *from* whom he takes the money he does his best to avoid sexually (2.1.116-28); the woman *to* whom he gives it he does pursue sexually. The difference, obviously, has to do with Laxton's relative power in the two circumstances. In the first, he 'lacks stones' in relation to the economically prosperous middle-class merchants. Mistress Gallipot, while seen by him as sexually available, is not erotically stimulating, perhaps because she is powerful, if only economically, in ways he cannot control. ("Sex and Social Conflict" 182)

Laxton's interest in a relationship with Mistress Gallipot is twofold: it allows him to keep up with the fashion of gallants pursuing citizen wives and it gives him the financial means to keep up with other gallants who might have more money than him.[58] Greenwit's succinct summary of Laxton's financial troubles—"he's run three streets from a sergeant" (3.77-78)—further corroborates the audience's assumption that Laxton's interest in Mistress Gallipot is purely for financial reasons. In the process Howard describes, money changes hands at least twice: the wife takes money from the husband and gives it to the gallants and the gallants spend the money on other women. Lawrence Stone notes that aristocrats frequently borrowed money from various London merchants, including mercers, silkmen, jewelers and goldsmiths. Some borrowing was necessary "to adjust fluctuating income to fluctuating expenditure" and "temporary overdraft" but overspending is also cited as a cause: "there can be little doubt that most noble

[58] The play's demonstration of Laxton's lack of resources, along with Sir Alexander's preoccupation with Sebastian's marital match, strongly insinuates that Laxton's monetary problems are somewhat common among all the gallants.

indebtness, and indeed all the more spectacular examples, were caused…by personal extravagance" (508).[59] In the dramatic depictions of the marketplace, the wives take on the roles of creditors, generating a set of relationships that ultimately results in the transference of money from the citizen to the aristocratic members of society.[60]

While Laxton's motivations for being with Mistress Gallipot can be explained through his financial dependence on her, the citizen wife's own motives defy such easy explanation. Laxton's discussion of his interactions with Mistress Gallipot corrects the audience's assumption that the relationship between the citizen wife and the gallant is inevitably a sexual one:

> Good wench, i'faith, and one that loves darkness well. She puts out a candle with the best tricks of any drugstore's wife in England; but that which mads her, I rail upon opportunity still, and take no notice on't. The other night she would needs lead me into a room with a candle in her hand to show me a naked picture, where no sooner entered, but the candle was sent of an errand; now I, not intending to understand her, but like a puny at the inns of venery, called for another light innocently. Thus reward I all her cunning with simple mistaking. I know she cozens her husband to keep me, and I'll keep her honest, as long as I can, to make the poor man some part of amends. An honest mind of a whoremaster! (3.137-50)

Laxton's story of the candle corrects the audience's assumption about the nature of his relationship with the citizen wife: her encounters with Laxton are ultimately devoid of sex. Indeed, despite Laxton's proclamations of keeping Mistress Gallipot "honest"

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[59] Stone goes on to note: "Some measure of borrowing was dictated by general factors applicable to all, but it was personal deficiencies in character and intelligence which time and again turn out to have been the decisive causes of serious indebtedness" (508). For a full discussion of aristocratic borrowing practices, see Stone, 505-46.

[60] Sebastian's use of Moll to secure Mary in marriage is yet another example of the aristocracy's use of (in the case of Moll) the lower sort to further the goals of those at the top of social hierarchy.

(3.148), it seems like his participation is hardly necessary. Throughout the scene that leads to Laxton's speech about the candle, it is not Laxton but Mistress Gallipot who seems to be in charge in the relationship. Laxton's visit to the apothecary under the guise of purchasing tobacco ultimately ends with his plea for money. Additionally, as the gallants start to interact with the wives, Mistress Gallipot pulls Laxton aside to discuss their affair: "Be not forgetful; respect my credit; seem strange, art and wit makes a fool of suspicion; pray be wary" (3.58-60). This quick interaction establishes that despite their respective social standings, Mistress Gallipot has the upper hand in the relationship. She also does not fully trust that Laxton will be able to keep their secret and has more to lose if the relationship is revealed.[61] The play's reminder of these stakes makes it more difficult to understand why Mistress Gallipot would engage in such a risky relationship, especially if it ultimately does not have much potential for a payoff for her. One explanation I would like to offer for the affair is that in many ways being in the relationship is beyond her control: Mistress Gallipot does not necessarily choose to have an affair with Laxton. Rather, she has an affair with him because it is what is expected of her and attempts to minimize the damage that the relationship might cause to her

[61] DiGangi argues that a woman's affair can threaten her husband's reputation as householder and shopkeeper: "The economic and sexual misconduct of Mistress Gallipot does call into question her husband's management of household and shop. To regain his credit as a 'good husband', he therefore needs to establish his ability to 'fashion' or control, his wife" (167). I contend that while the play engages with the possibility of the wife's corruption of the husband's reputation and business, Mistress Gallipot's dalliances with Laxton do not endanger Gallipot's businesses. When Mistress Gallipot prepares her husband for the news about her and Laxton, he suspects that the news is about his endeavors: "Are my barns and houses / Yonder at Hockley Hole consumed with fire?…[I]s the Jonas sunk?" (6.99-102). The play ultimately demonstrates that Mistress Gallipot's dalliance with Laxton has not endangered her husband's businesses whatsoever.

marriage. Her involvement with Laxton might have the potential of jeopardizing her marriage, but her performance of sexual availability is a culturally expected component of her public life.

The contradictory cultural expectations that are placed on the female characters and their negative impact on their behaviors can be found in almost all the scenes that include the citizen wives. Such is the case in Scene 6, which depicts the domestic life of the Gallipots. Mistress Gallipot chastises her husband for doting on her too much—"Pray be not so fond of me, leave your city humours. I'm vexed at you to see how like a calf you come bleating after me" (6.3-5)—while Gallipot wonders why she has left the dinner table where her guests are still eating: "how does your rising up before all the table show? And flinging from my friends so uncivilly?" (6.6-8). The discord that the couple is exhibiting here is directly linked to Mistress Gallipot's failure to fulfill her responsibilities as a hostess and a wife: she gets up from the table while her guests are still dining and rebukes her husband for the latter's—perhaps gratuitous—attention.

If the scene set at the Gallipot home reveals Mistress Gallipot's neglect of her duties as a wife and a hostess, a letter from Laxton asking for money forces her to come close to jeopardizing the family's well-being, as well as its reputation within the community. We learn that the letter is delivered to Mistress Gallipot by a woman selling "scurvy grass" (6.49); as such, she is a possible competitor to the Gallipots' apothecary. However, rather than recognize that she is actively undermining the family's financial well-being (by allowing a competitor into the family business and accepting Laxton's request for money), Mistress Gallipot praises Laxton for his creativity in sending her the

missive (3.2.50). Her praise of Laxton's wits is indicative of a competition between her husband and Laxton, wherein the wittier of the two gets her attention. After reading the letter, she contemplates ways of generating the money Laxton has requested:

> Alas, poor gentleman! Troth, I pity him.
> How shall I raise this money? Thirty pound?
> 'Tis thirty sure: a three before an O—
> I know his threes too well. My childbed linen?
> Shall I pawn that for him? Then if my mark
> Be known, I am undone! It may be thought
> My husband's bankrupt. Which way shall I turn? (6.71-77)

Mistress Gallipot's thought process exemplifies what she—and many of the citizen wives—must contend with in leading public and private lives. In this case, the expectations placed on the citizen wives to appear sexually available to the gallants interfere with their responsibilities at home. In order to generate the money that she needs to give to Laxton, Mistress Gallipot considers pawning her household wares—her linen—which she ultimately resists doing because if her signature is identified, it will jeopardize the reputation of the household. We are reminded here of the precarious position of the citizen wife: her economic and social positions situate her as always already sexually available to the gallants that may be interested in her but she is expected to stay faithful to her husband. While Mistress Gallipot's relationship with Laxton ultimately does not affect her marriage, her attempts to meet his financial demands demonstrate how such expectations can affect the integrity of the marital union, as well as the household's reputation within the community.

The detrimental effect of enforcing conflicting expectations on the wife is further exemplified in the scene where Mistress Gallipot informs her husband of her relationship with Laxton. Gallipot's willingness to forgive his wife does not seem to solve the problems the couple is facing. Mistress Gallipot, still intending to pay Laxton the thirty pounds he asked for, tells her husband that she has been betrothed to Laxton:

> MISTRESS GALLIPOT
> Yes, yes, before
> I was to thee contracted, to him I swore.
> Since last I saw him, twelve months three times told
> The moon hath drawn through her light silver bow;
> For o'er the seas he went, and it was said—
> But rumor lies—that he in France was dead.
> But he's alive! Oh he's alive! He sent
> That letter to me, which in rage I rent,
> Swearing with oaths most damnably to have me
> Or tear me from this bosom. O heavens save me! (6.126-35)

Mistress Gallipot's invented backstory about her betrothal to Laxton prior to meeting Gallipot is a direct result of cultural expectations about married women's sexual availability. Upon hearing that his wife has been betrothed to Laxton, Gallipot contemplates ways of getting his wife out of the contract that she is involved in with the gallant. He considers telling Laxton that his wife is with child (6.140) and paying him off: "I'll buy thee of him, stop his mouth with gold: / Think'st thou 'twill do?" (6.145-46); he is even willing to pay ten pounds more than the thirty pounds that Laxton has requested. Later, when Laxton visits the couple and insists on continuing his relationship with Mistress Gallipot, Gallipot makes a case that his wife belongs to him. Here we see Gallipot's logic of ownership over his wife:

GALLIPOT
I married her, have lain with her, and got
Two children on her body: think but on that.
Have you so beggarly an appetite,
When I upon a dainty dish have fed,
To dine upon my scraps, my leavings? (6.249-53)

Gallipot argues that Laxton does not have a claim to Mistress Gallipot because Gallipot has married her and had sex with her, but also has the children that her body has produced. Gallipot returns to this metaphor of ownership when he compares his wife to a dress that fits his body perfectly:

GALLIPOT
Then pray, sir, wear not her, for she's a garment
So fitting for my body, I'm loath
Another should put it on: you will undo both. (6.256-58)

The conversation between Gallipot and Laxton effectively eliminates Mistress Gallipot from being a part of the bargaining. Rather than express her preference in the situation, Mistress Gallipot is stripped of her will and is analogized as material goods that the two men can bicker over. Gallipot's claim to his wife is twofold: Laxton cannot have Mistress Gallipot because her marriage to Gallipot is akin to being fully customized for Gallipot and this customization makes her incompatible with Laxton. Secondly, Mistress Gallipot seems like a finite good that has been consumed away and there is nothing left for Laxton. Gallipot's transformation of his wife into a consumable product notwithstanding, his rhetoric of possession is noteworthy here: he resorts to the language of goods (such as a garment fitted to his body) to convey an ultimate sense of belonging to each other that

unites the couple. The imagery of clothing that Gallipot resorts to in order to claim ownership over his wife demonstrates the impact that the gallant's intrusion has on the lives of the citizens.

As the play attempts to tie its loose ends, Laxton explains that his involvement with Mistress Gallipot has been a ruse:

> LAXTON
> I scorned one woman, thus, should brave all men,
> And—which is more vexed me—a she-citizen.
> Therefore I laid siege to her: out she held,
> Gave many a brave repulse, and me compelled
> With shame to sound retreat to my hot lust.
> Then seeing all base desires raked up in dust,
> And that to tempt her modest ears I swore
> Ne'er to presume again, she said her eye
> Would ever give me welcome honestly;
> And—since I was a gentleman—if it run low,
> She would my state relieve, not to o'erthrow
> Your own and hers; did so. Then seeing I wrought
> Upon her meekness, me she set at naught;
> And yet to try if I could turn that tide,
> You see what stream I strove with. But sir, I swear
> By heaven and by those hopes men lay up there,
> I neither have nor had a base intent
> To wrong your bed. What's done is merriment;
> Your gold I pay back with this interest:
> When I had most power to do't, I wronged you least. (9.327-46)

Laxton's revelation that Mistress Gallipot participated in the ruse to prove to the gallants—including Laxton—that her husband would not doubt her honesty begins to answer questions about Mistress Gallipot's motives. While Gallipot's final words in the scene—"Wife, brag no more / Of holding out: who most brags is most whore" (9.353-54)—reveal that Gallipot might not necessarily trust his wife the way that she believes he

does, Laxton's story does support the interpretation that the sexual aspect of the relationship has not really occurred.[62] After the revelation of the bet, Laxton is lauded for not taking advantage of Mistress Gallipot, while she is merely critiqued for pointing out her own honesty. Her attempts to remind her husband of her own honesty are rewarded by more suspicion and being called a whore. Gallipot's rejection of his wife's proclamation of innocence—even when this proclamation is the direct result of her faithful behavior—is related to the play's engagement with conceptions of female power. The play discourages obvious manifestations of female power; indeed, even the discursive highlighting of obedient conduct is considered suspect and invites critique rather than praise (or even acknowledgment). Gallipot's critique of his wife's declaration of her innocence demonstrates why the female subject might need to resort to non-obvious manifestations of power.

Gallipot's critique of Mistress Gallipot notwithstanding, her ability to highlight her fulfillment of her spousal duties is an instance of power that results from obedient conduct. Mistress Gallipot's relationship with Laxton is merely a performance of infidelity that, nevertheless, allows Mistress Gallipot to place herself at the cusp of infidelity, only to resist temptation. Like Mistress Gallipot, Mistress Openwork approaches her own marriage and Goshawk's attempts to convince her that Openwork is

[62] My reading of the scene deviates from DiGangi's interpretation of it, as DiGangi argues that the story Laxton tells is merely a tale for the benefit of Gallipot: "Through this colorful, pious tale, Laxton successfully passes off his seduction of Mistress Gallipot as a 'merriment' (9.344), not a serious attempt at adultery; consequently, Master Gallipot commends his sexual restrain...Yet as Master Gallipot's cutting response indicates, Laxton's exculpatory tale also casts Mistress Gallipot as the type of undisciplined, indiscreet, wife whose loose speech and behavior threaten the householder's attainment of 'good husbandry'" (167-68). My analysis of the play assumes that the tale Laxton tells at the end of the play is the truth.

unfaithful to her with the same obedience that accompanies Mistress Gallipot's conduct. Towards the end of the play, when it is revealed that Goshawk has been lying to her, Mistress Openwork quickly turns on him, showing that ultimately her allegiance is to her husband and not to Goshawk. In this instance, while there is no proof that Openwork has been unfaithful to his wife, Mistress Openwork entertains Goshawk's lies for quite some time because her task is to be located in the crux of the two sets of expectations: those that direct her actions as a wife and those that direct her availability for the sexual advances of the gallants. Mistress Openwork uses the metaphor of a spider that is poisoning the household from within, thus deflecting the blame from herself. In this Mistress Openwork openly defies the stereotype of the woman that corrupts the household with her involvement with the gallants, but she is able to do so as a result of her initial performance of susceptibility to Goshawk's advances.

If the Gallipots' subplot is concerned with Mistress Gallipot's possible dalliances with Laxton, which could ultimately lead to the loss of household goods and income, the reverse is true in the case of the Openworks. Throughout the play, Mistress Openwork is led to believe that her husband is visiting prostitutes, thereby undermining both the integrity of their union and the financial well-being of the household. She initially resorts to Goshawk's help to safeguard the family home from her husband, but in the process, leaves herself open to his advances. Openwork informs Goshawk about the marital strife the couple is experiencing because of his wife's accusations of his infidelity:

> I am of such a nature, sir, I cannot endure the house when she scolds; sh'as a tongue will be heard further in a still morning than Saint Antholin's bell. She rails upon me for foreign wenching, that I, being a freeman, must needs keep a whore

> i'th' suburbs, and seek to impoverish the liberties. When we fall out, I trouble you still to make all whole with my wife. (3.313-19)

Mistress Openwork is characterized in rather stereotypical terms: she is shrewish, she scolds her husband and drives him from the family home. What Openwork interprets as shrewish conduct is actually Mistress Openwork's attempt to safeguard the family home in light of her husband's visits to prostitutes. Mistress Openwork is, at least partly, motivated by her desire to keep the money generated from the family business in the city and out of the suburbs.[63] Here, yet again, we see the wife controlled by two sets of expectations: from her own experience—as the play later reveals—she knows that her husband is not straying from the household but she cannot ignore Goshawk when the latter insists that her husband is cheating on her.

Mistress Openwork's performance of jealousy extends to her husband's interactions with Moll as well. Moll's entrance to the Openworks' shop brings about the second deception plot involving the citizen wives: after her husband greets Moll by saying "Mistress Mary, that shalt thou, i'faith, and the best in the shop" (3.230-31), Mistress Openwork responds with:

> How now? – Greetings! Love terms, with a pox between you! Have I found out one of your haunts? I send you for hollands, and you're i'the low countries with a mischief. I'm served with good ware by th'shift, that makes it lie dead so long upon my hands, I were as good shut up shop, for when I open it, I take nothing. (3.232-38)

[63] Mistress Openwork's concern, at least partly, is that her husband visits prostitutes in the suburbs and not the liberties.

In this speech, Mistress Openwork critiques her husband for his friendliness with Moll; at the same time, she complains that the result of his friendliness with Moll is his lack of attention to her. She insinuates that his absence from the shop and his possible dalliances with other women are akin to losing business: "I'm served with good ware by th'shift that makes it lie dead so long upon my hands I were as good shut up shop, for when I open it I take nothing" (3.235-38). Mistress Openwork implies that her husband's absence from the store and his dalliances negatively affect the store's profits to a point that is akin to not making any sales.[64] Moll's presence in the store, combined with Goshawk's goading effectively sets the stage for her suspicion of her husband and the subplot it brings.

When the wives reappear on the stage during the ninth scene, Mistress Openwork seems to be fully aware that Goshawk has been lying to her all along: "For all the world, so does Master Goshawk double with me" (9.16-17). Mistress Openwork's realization that Goshawk has been tricking her is further solidified in a subsequent line: "Because Goshawk goes in a shag-ruff band, with a face sticking up in't which shows like an agate set in cramp-ring, he thinks I'm in love with him" (9.20-23). While Goshawk wants to believe that Mistress Openwork is in love with him, the citizen wife is fully aware of Goshawk's plans: "He has, by often beating into me, made me believe that my husband kept a whore" (9.26-27). Mistress Openwork's statement here is both thoroughly tolerant

[64] DiGangi notes Mistress Openwork's ability to maintain the family business without her husband's help: "Diverting Master Openwork from his financial and conjugal responsibilities, Moll deprives Mistress Openwork of both the profit and the pleasure she believes are her due as a legitimate wife. Significantly, in describing her capacity (however thwarted) to run the family business in her husband's absence, Mistress Openwork touts her housewifely thrift and relative economic independence" ("Sexual Slander" 155).

and defeatist: while explaining the process through which Goshawk has influenced her suspicions of her husband, she nevertheless continues to perform the part of the jealous wife. This self-cancelling duality can be explained by looking at the process that motivates the actions of the female characters throughout the play. In this case, Mistress Openwork knows that her husband is not truly cheating on her, but she is nevertheless forced to perform the role of the jealous wife because Goshawk's expectations direct her to do so. The ideological system at work directs her to be suspicious of her husband while being available to the wooing of Goshawk.

When the Openworks, with the help of Mistress Gallipot, confront Goshawk about his behavior, it is soon made clear that the reasoning behind the trust that the married couple put in Goshawk is merely to correct his behavior. However, before that is can be achieved, Master Openwork points out Goshawk's insincerity:

> I'll tell you, Master Goshawk, ay, in your eye
> I have seen wanton fire; and then to try
> The soundness of my judgment, I told you
> I kept a whore, made you believe 'twas true,
> Only to feel how your pulse beat, but find
> The world can hardly yield a perfect friend.
> Come, come, a trick of youth, and 'tis forgiven. (9.231-37)

Openwork's confession to Goshawk that he was merely testing his honesty defies the stereotypical depictions of relationships between the citizen wife and the gallant. Openwork's determination to test Goshawk is solidified by his earlier comment about wanting "to try thy honesty" (3.322-23). It is noteworthy here that Openwork is testing Goshawk and not his wife. In the moments leading up to Goshawk's confession that he

has betrayed Openwork by telling his wife of his alleged dalliances with prostitutes, the Openworks join forces and are aided by Mistress Gallipot in pointing out Goshawk's unsuccessful attempts to corrupt the wives. Mistress Openwork's attempt to correct Goshawk's behavior is made clear with her question to Goshawk: "You'll deal upon men's wives no more?" (9.239) to which he responds with a defeated: "No. You teach me a trick for that!" (9.239-40). The Openworks, along with Mistress Gallipot, can correct the behavior of the lascivious gallant, but this correction is only possible if they put Mistress Openwork's reputation on the line and potentially endanger that of Mistress Gallipot.

The wives' collaboration to correct the behavior of the gallant becomes a part of a broader project that Mistress Gallipot has engaged in throughout the play by pretending to be interested in Laxton. After Laxton regales the group with the story of how he, along with Mistress Gallipot, generated the plot that the audience has witnessed throughout the play, Mistress Gallipot explains that she participated in the plot in order to defend female honor:

> LAXTON
> The first hour that your wife was in my eye,
> Myself with other gentlemen sitting by
> In your shop tasting smoke, and speech being used
> That men who have fairest wives are most abused
> And hardly 'scaped the horn, your wife maintained
> That only such spots in city dames were stained
> Justly, but by men's slanders; for her own part,
> She vowed that you had so much of her heart,
> No man by all his wit, by any wile
> Never so fine spun, should yourself beguile
> Of what in her was yours. (9.314-24)

Mistress Gallipot's motivation here seems to be both self-interest as well as clearing the reputation of many other citizen wives whose fidelity is questioned regularly. Mistress Gallipot believes that if she can demonstrate her own chastity to the gallants, it will be enough to clear the names of other citizen wives. However, the only way that Mistress Gallipot can prove her chastity is by engaging in behavior that does not look like chastity to outsiders.

The restrictions that control the female characters ultimately enable their relative freedom in the play. By engaging in obedient behavior throughout the play, Mistresses Gallipot, Openwork, and Tiltyard gain the power to critique the behaviors of the gallants that seek to corrupt them. Along the way, the wives earn the power to exist both inside and outside the family home. More importantly, we can glean the possibility of even broader physical mobility. Tiltyard's announcement of a group visit to "Hogsden", a village near London, (3.419) is one such manifestation of geographical freedom.[65] While the women do not ultimately go anywhere during the play, the play's discussion of trips reminds us that the possibility of travel is not inconceivable. The possibility of geographic mobility that the citizen wives earn in *The Roaring Girl* as a result of their obedient conduct becomes a reality for another set of citizen wives, who—as I will discuss below—engage in a similar set of obedient behaviors.

[65] Woodbridge reminds us that Hoxton is "an area north of London with open fields, popular for excursions" (741).

Acquiescent Agency and Geographical Mobility in *Westward Ho*

In an analysis of gendered space in early modern London, Gowing reminds us of the geographical limitations faced by early modern women:

> A prosecution from 1613 records another kind of female use of city space: Elizabeth Taylor, Joan Jones, Elizabeth Williams, Elizabeth Crayford and Martha Greene were all committed to prison without bail "for going a pilgrimage to Tyburn." Formal and informal, orderly and disorderly, rituals marked out space by gender. ("Freedom of the Streets" 141)

Gowing's account of London's spaces reminds us of the frequently hostile environment that early modern women faced in their daily lives and the geographical limitations placed upon them by the city and its legislative bodies.

If the historical documents in this period record the physical limitations placed on the female citizens, the literary depictions of female characters portray a different picture. Unlike their real-life counterparts, the citizen wives in *Westward Ho*—Mistresses Honeysuckle, Tenterhook, and Wafer—enjoy quite a bit of geographical freedom. The play imagines a narrative of the women's freedom to travel outside of the city limits by pitting two sets of expectations of their behavior against each other. The wives are expected to be faithful to their husbands yet available to the advances of the gallants in the play. Like their counterparts in *The Roaring Girl*, the wives do not reject either set of expectations and, as a result, are able to enjoy a certain degree of power and geographical freedom.

Unlike the citizen wives in *The Roaring Girl*, the female characters in *Westward Ho* are not sexualized because of their participation in the marketplace as sellers.

Michelle Dowd characterizes the women in *Westward Ho* as "…wives who seem to do nothing but spend; they do not participate in productive labor in their husbands' shops or elsewhere" ("Leaning too Hard upon the Pen" 227). Mistresses Tenterhook, Honeysuckle, and Wafer are also markedly different from the wives in *The Roaring Girl*—and many other citizen wives of the early modern period for that matter—in their ability to travel outside of London instead of merely discussing the possibility of such travel. Their trip to Brentford comes with the sexual advances of the gallants, and, as such, provides an opportunity for the wives to prove their honor to their husbands and the gallants; it also serves as an opportunity to venture outside of the city in the company of friends. Here, the female characters' slightly higher economic status seems to be the source of relative geographical freedom.

The issue of female chastity occupies both of the play's major plots. Justiniano, in an attempt to test his wife's honor, announces that he is leaving town because he is impoverished. His wife, Mistress Justiniano, with the encouragement of Birdlime, the go-between of the play, considers submitting herself to a wealthy Earl who can pay off her husband's debts and free her from her husband's obligations. Meanwhile, Justiniano takes on the disguise of a writing tutor, Parenthesis, presumably to teach the citizen wives how to write. His proximity to the wives enables him to orchestrate a trip to Brentford with the gallants—Monopoly, Linstocke, and Sir Gosling Glowworm. Unbeknownst to the female characters, he also encourages their husbands to regard the wives with suspicion and eventually to follow them to Brentford. Ultimately, both plots are resolved without any damage to female reputation: Justiniano takes his wife's place for a meeting with the

Earl, tells the Earl that he has poisoned his wife, and chastises the Earl for his lasciviousness before revealing that Mistress Justiniano is alive and well. The citizen wives, once in Brentford, separate themselves from the gallants; when their husbands arrive in Brentford the following day, they find that sexual relations have not transpired between the wives and the gallants. With female honor intact, the characters return to their regular lives in London.

The play's primary locale of London notwithstanding, the plot of the citizen wives' potential infidelity is resolved away from the city. The play's use of Brentford is necessary for the ultimate testing of female honor because of the cultural significance of the location. Morgan-Russell notes that the city's status contributes to the gallants' proposal to visit it and the wives' acceptance of the invitation:

> I would like to suggest that Brentford functions as a similarly liminal space in the seventeenth century: the same characteristics that determine its availability for construction as a male fantasy for retreat—its "openness" as a site of flesh exchange, its status as an unauthorized space removed physically form systems of City governance—also allows the women in the play the possibility of revolt. (Morgan-Russell 76)

The city's status as a liminal space enables what Morgan-Russell characterizes as a "revolt"; however, the power that the wives manage to gain is not necessarily limited to the locale that they eventually find themselves in. In addition to the remote space, the wives' power in the play comes from the circumstances that take them to Brentford: namely, the cultural expectations that the female characters are going to make themselves available to the advances of the gallants, while at the same time staying loyal to their husbands. If the expectations of the wives' sexual availability enable them to travel to

Brentford, their marital vows stop them from engaging in sexual relations with the gallants.

When the possibility of taking a trip comes up, before ultimately settling on Brentford the group proposes Ham, Blackwell, and Limehouse (2.3.68-71), reminding the audience of the ubiquity of such travel. Yet, to take part in the journey, the wives must come up with a credible excuse that will enable them to leave their family homes. As the wives contemplate what excuses they could possibly use to gain freedom to leave the city, Justiniano generates a list of excuses that also trace the daily activities of a citizen wife: "You must go to the pawne to buy Lawne: to Saint Martins for Lace; to the Garden: to the Glasse-house; to your Gossips: to the Powlters: else take out an old ruffe, and go to your Sempters: excuses?" (2.1.214-17). In addition to providing a list that the wives can use to get out of the family house and venture outside of the city, Justiniano's list demonstrates the necessity for such lists because practically every aspect of the wives' days is implicated in the possibility of cheating on their husbands. In other words, even if the female characters perform tasks that are seemingly fully innocuous, they are under suspicion of misbehavior; this further prompts the need for excuses for any excursions that they might undertake, even if it were to purchase poultry. The aura of suspicion that surrounds the female subject and the resulting over-regulation ultimately becomes a source of female power: cultural attempts to control as many aspects of the female character's daily routine result in work-around solutions. *Westward Ho* reminds us of one such scenario: knowing that their husbands would not allow them to travel on their own, the citizen wives use the excuse of the sick child to travel outside of the city limits.

Once the wives arrive in Brentford, they insist on having separate quarters from the gallants who have accompanied them on their journey. They enroll the help of the Chamberlain to keep the men away from their room: "Good Chamberlin keepe them and their Helthes out of our company" (5.1.27-28), says Mistress Tenterhook when it is revealed that Sir Gosling is drunk. Monopoly at first encourages the wives' distancing of themselves from Sir Gosling because he assumes that he will not be excluded from the company of the female characters: "let em keep their owne quarter: Nay I told you the man would soake him if hee were ten Knights: if he were a Knight of Gold theyd fetch him ouer" (5.1.30-32). However, the wives order the rest of the gallants to get their own rooms as well: "pray spawle in another room: fie, fie, fie!" (5.1.135-36), says Mistress Tenterhook, supported quickly by Mistress Honeysuckle: "Get two roomes off at least, if you loue vs" (5.1.138). After the gallants leave, Mistress Tenterhook poses a seemingly innocuous question: "So: are they departed? What string may wee three thinke that these three gallants harp vppon, by bringing vs to this sinfull towne of *Brainford*? ha?" (5.1.146-48). Given the play's preoccupation with female infidelity and cuckoldry, this question seems unnecessary. Rather than consider what the men's motivations are in bringing the wives to Brentford, I would like to consider what these characters' motivations are in travelling to Brentford. The fact that they are not planning to have sex with the gallants is obvious from their insistence on separate living quarters; the question that Mistress Tenterhook poses further solidifies this intent as it reminds the audience that the wives, as a group, have decided against having sex with the gallants.

In an answering her own question, Mistress Tenterhook claims that the wives' engagement with the men is a matter of wit and games:

> They shall know that Cittizens wiues haue wit enough to out strip twenty such guls; tho we are merry, lets not be mad: be as wanton as new married wiues, 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. (5.1.159-63)

Mistress Tenterhook goes on to confirm the wives' collective goal to turn cultural expectations against the men who enforce them:

> It were better we should laugh at theis popin-Iayes, then liue in feare of their prating tongues: tho we lye all night out of the Citty, they shall not find country wenches of vs: but since we ha brought em thus far into a fooles Paradice, leaue em int: the Iest shal be a stock to maintain vs and our pewfellowes in laughing at christenings, cryings out, and vpsittings this twelue month: how say you wenches, haue I set the Sadle on the right horse. (5.1.168-74)

The wives' decision to go to Brentford with the gentlemen stems from their desire to prove to the gallants (and anyone else who might be inclined to spread rumors about them) their chastity, but seemingly—as is the case in *The Roaring Girl*—the only way of proving their chastity is by pushing themselves to the edge of being unchaste or at least seeming unchaste and resisting the temptation. However, the wives are only able to demonstrate their honor due to two circumstances that play in their favor: they are caught in between two sets of expectations and in fulfilling the roles and responsibilities that come with these expectations, they are able to gain geographic freedom; secondly, the wives support one another in their project to prove their innocence and, as a group,

demonstrate to their audience the negative impact of living with contradictory expectations.

The dual set of expectations that direct female conduct results in the citizen wives' self-contradictory behavior. One example of this is Mistress Tenterhook's treatment of Monopoly's debt to her husband. Upon finding out that Monopoly owes money to her husband, Mistress Tenterhook encourages her husband to have him arrested: "Maister *Tenterhooke* as I am vertuous you shall arrest him" (3.1.20-21) and even tells him where he might be able to find Monopoly when Tenterhook claims that he does not know when Monopoly will come back to town:

> Hees in town: this night he sups at the Lyon of Shoaredich, good husband enter your action, and make hast to the Lyon presently, theres an honest fellow (Sergeant *Ambush*) will doe it in a trice, he neuer salutes a man in Curtesie, but he catches him as if he would arrest him. Good hart let Seriant *Ambush* ly in waite for him. (3.1.23-28)

Mistress Tenterhook's plotting to have Monopoly arrested extends to her own plans with Monopoly, as she reveals to the audience:

> Wel my husband is gon to arrest *Monopoly*. I haue dealt with a Sargeant priuately, to intreate him, pretending that he is my Aunts Son, by this meanes shal I see my young gallant that in this has plaid his part. When they owe mony in the Citty once, they deale with their Lawyers by atturny, follow the Court though the Court do them not the grace to allow them their dyet. O the wit of a woman when she is put to the pinch. (3.1.38-45)

Mistress Tenterhook's plan to have her husband arrest Monopoly while making her own arrangement to have him released from prison is precisely the kind of contradictory behavior that permeates the play and the wives' actions throughout *Westward Ho*. In the

span of two dozen lines Mistress Tenterhook advises her husband to punish Monopoly, only to later come up with a plan to release him from prison. Her explanation that her manipulation of her husband and Monopoly is meant to unite her with her "young gallant" does not seem satisfactory enough. I argue that Mistress Tenterhook's self-contradictory behavior occurs as a result of the ideological expectations that are enforced on her: in her capacity as a housewife, she has to safeguard the family home and ensure that the household money owed to the household is paid. Yet, in her capacity as a woman who has a public presence, she is expected to display her sexual availability to the gallants who are interested in the citizen wives' material wealth. That the exchange of the diamonds uncovers the "flesh exchange" (Russell-Morgan 72) that occurs during the play and implicates the citizens in affairs with Luce seems like a matter of lucky coincidence.[66] The contradictory expectations placed on the wives result in seemingly contradictory behaviors that become an opportunity to gain power and physical mobility,

[66] Morgan-Russell's summary of the exchange of the diamonds is as follows: "In particular, the passage of Mistress Tenterhook's diamonds demonstrates this exchange. In III.iv, Mistress Tenterhook uses the stones as security for Monopoly's release from his arrest by Sergeant Ambush, to purchase his presence for the trip to Brentford. She instructs Ambush, who his holding Monopoly at Tenterhook's charge, to 'not come in my husbandes sight in the meane time" (III.iv.37). Ambush is, however, exposed by Justiniano and made to reveal the security in Birdlime's brothel: the two diamonds that Tenterhook recognizes instantly as those belonging to his wife. The prostitute Luce takes the diamonds from Tenterhook, maintaining that she will keep them as security for the 'silk gowne, and six els of Cambricke' (IV.i.215-16) promised in payment for her services. Tenterhook is not content with this exchange, but is advised by his fellow merchants to 'respect your credit.' Luce retains the stones, but Mistress Birdlime believes that 'the getting of these two Diamondes maie chaunce to save the Gentlewomens credit' (228-29): she arrives at Brentford to present the diamonds as an indication of Tenterhook's presence at the brothel even as he confronts his wife about her liaison with Monopoly. The eventual return of the diamonds to their point of origin, which through their circulation have incriminated several characters in extramarital activity, emphasizes the distinct limitations of the 'closed' market and its containment within a circumscribed 'City' system of exchange" (72).

but this power is only available to the wives if they decide to obey both sets of expectations simultaneously.

The negative repercussions of the contradictory expectations that the wives must obey extend to their husbands as well. The husbands' arrival in Brentford ushers in a cataloguing of the "abuse" they have endured from their wives: "Wee are abuzd, wee are bought and sold in *Brainford* Market; neuer did the sicknesse of one belyed nurse-child, stick so cold to the heartes of three Fathers: neuer were three innocent Cittizens so horribly, so abhominably wrung vnder the withers" (5.4.14-17). The husbands' alleged suffering in this instance stems from a system that subjects the female characters to conflicting expectations; it is this very system that the men propagate when visiting Luce despite being married, yet they do not enjoy it when their wives' obedience to expectations of sexual availability leaves the men feeling neglected.[67]

As the husbands contemplate how to deal with their wives' infidelity, it is Justiniano—despite his instigation of the Brentford plot—that prevents the husbands' public demonstration of their wives' dishonesty: "when women are proclaymed to bee light, they striue to be more light, for who dare disproue a Proclamation?" (5.4.48-49). Justiniano implores the men to keep their wives' possible dishonesty private and cites his own wife as an influence: "My wife intreats you, and I intreat you to haue mercy on your selues, though you haue none ouer the women" (5.4.53-54). Although it is Justiniano's

[67] Birdlime's repeated assertions to each of the men about Luce's loyalty to each individual is another example of multiple and self-contradictory expectations. If each of the husbands expects to be the only customer that Luce sees, Birdlime and Luce have no choice but to engage in deception.

suspicion of his wife's dishonesty that prompts the rest of the men to suspect their own wives and to follow them to Brentford, seemingly Justiniano's encounter with the Earl proves to him his wife's chastity. The citizen wives, on the other hand, must prove their chastity on their own. What follows is a series of events, any of which could serve as proof that the women have been loyal to their husbands, but ultimately it is the accumulation of the points of proof that exonerates the wives. When the husbands first knock on the wives' door, Mistress Tenterhook responds with: "What a murren aile these colts, to keepe such a kicking. Monopoly?" (5.4.108-9). Mistress Tenterhook's inquiry if Monopoly is at the door should prove that Monopoly (or any of the gallants) is not with the women and likely has not spent the night with the women. Mistress Tenterhook's subsequent note about resisting the men's attempts is another example of the wives' innocence that their husbands initially ignore:

> Haue we defied you vpon the wals all night to open our gates to you ith morning. 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! (5.4.117-24).

Mistress Tenterhook's response to the knocking—which she believes is the gallants—demonstrates both the wives' approach to their husbands' suspicions about their infidelity as well as the reasoning why the men should not feel suspicious. Mistress Tenterhook downplays the significance of the wives' visit to Brentford: in her formulation, the husbands should be more concerned with the safety of the wives' journey rather than their

fidelity (and considering that the men are meant to believe that the wives are merely visiting the sick child, suspicions of infidelity feel out of place). However, Mistress Tenterhook's use of plural pronouns to sum up the actions of the female characters also presents to us the collective female will of the citizen wives. Seemingly, it is the collective will of the wives to shun the men away from them and order them to stay in separate quarters. Similarly, it is the collective experience of women, with their capacity to monitor themselves and each other, that they can use to demonstrate their fidelity to their husbands.[68] Not only do the women use each other's company to prove their innocence to their husbands, but they clearly enjoy spending time together, as stated by Mistress Wafer: "I, I knock your bellies full, we hugg one another a bed, and lie laughing till we tickle againe to remember how wee sent you a Bat-fowling" (5.4.126-28). The women clearly enjoy their time together; yet, the opportunity to spend time together is the direct result of having to endure conflicting sets of expectations imposed on them: expectations that while restricting certain aspects of their lives, also create opportunities for conviviality and companionship.

The wives' ability to turn the cultural expectations into an opportunity for freedom is, at least partly, due to their skillful manipulation of these expectations. Thus, when the husbands confront their wives in Brentford, the wives turn the men's questioning and accusations against them by pointing out the inherent hypocrisy of

[68] After placing Mistress Justiniano in a similar situation with the Earl, the play seemingly cannot allow her the kind of self-regulatory capacity that the rest of the female characters have. Indeed, the only way of preventing Mistress Justiniano's corruption at the hands of the Earl is by replacing Mistress Justiniano with her husband dressed in her clothes.

critiquing the wives for their alleged dalliances with the gallants when they regularly visit Luce: "Doe you come after vs with hue and cry when you are the theeues your Selues" (5.4.237-38), asks Mistress Tenterhook. This moment exemplifies the process that enables the wives to gain power: it is through a questioning and pushing back against an ideological system that lays out different expectations for men and women and even contradictory expectations for the women that the wives are able to gain the power to venture outside the confines of the city.

Ultimately, the wives are able to prove their innocence with the help of Monopoly and Justiniano: the male characters who play a pivotal role in attempting to corrupt the wives. When the husbands declare their intentions to save their wives, Monopoly points out that the female characters' own behavior has rendered the husbands' intervention unnecessary: "Your wiues haue saude themseules for one" (5.4.195). Here, Monopoly articulates what the play attempts to demonstrate throughout: through their combined efforts, the wives are able to engage in self-regulation and do not require the supervision of their husbands to remain true to their marital vows. As Monopoly tries to convince the husbands of their wives' innocence, the seemingly endless questioning of the wives' honesty comes to a stop when the person originating the questioning, Justiniano, declares the female characters innocent:

> …for you see your Wiues are chast, these Gentlemen ciuill, all is but a merriment, all but a May-game; she has her Diamonds, you shall have your money, the child is recouered, the false Collier discouered, they came to *Brainford* to be merry, you were caught in Bird-lime; and therefore set the Hares-head against the Goose-giblets, put all the instruments in tune, and euery husband play musicke vpon the lips of his Wife whilst I begin first. (5.4.277-84)

Justiniano's speech about the wives' chastity is indicative of the play's broader representation of female chastity: it is simultaneously the most important aspect of the characters' lives and a trifle. After spending the entire run of the play to incriminate the wives for their potential dalliances, the play merely dismisses them as "but a May-game" (5.4.278). The forced lightheartedness with which the play discusses potential adultery at the end of the play reveals the lingering social anxiety over female power. Morgan-Russell's observation that the wives' alliance "expresses a powerful and successful alternative to the male homosociality in the text, a strength that is disruptive of male expectation within the play" (83), reminds us that, despite appearances, the play is not able to neatly tie all of its loose ends. We may interpret the wives' return to their regular lives in London as a loss of the agency that made female companionship and travel possible, but that is not necessarily the case.

The plays I have discussed in this chapter imagine a possibility of female power that works through the collective acquiescence of female subjects. The cultural expectations that direct these characters' behavior frequently do so in contradictory ways: the citizen wife is expected to stay faithful to her husband, while appearing to be sexually available to the gallants she might encounter outside the confines of the family home. The female conduct that results from these expectations is one that is frequently confusing and self-contradictory; yet, the citizen wives' obedience in these plays becomes a locus of power and agency. As a result of obedient behavior, the characters are able to gain the power to critique cultural conceptions of citizen wives (*The Roaring Girl*) or to take a trip outside the city in the company of fellow women (*Westward Ho*). In both plays, female

power is inherently linked to discourses of chastity and obedience; because the citizen wives negotiate for agency as a group, chaste conduct becomes the norm for all members of the group. The citizen wives' achievement of agency in these plays reminds us that marital chastity is not the exemplary behavior of the idealized female subject. Rather, in collective negotiations for power, chastity becomes the commonplace and ordinary behavior of all citizen wives who take the stage in *The Roaring Girl* and *Westward Ho*.

CHAPTER V

DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT, COMMUNAL INTERVENTION, AND FEMALE ACQUIESCENT AGENCY IN *NORTHWARD HO* AND *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*

> What happens when feminine subjects recognize and participate in the doctrines that govern them? Whose act of will is this? (2)
>
> --Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space*

> FEATHERSTONE …This onely remaines: what wrong the poore Gentlewoman hath since receaued by our intollerable lye; I am most hartely sorry for, and to thy bosome will maintaine all I haue said to bee honest.
> MAYBERRY Victorie wife thou art quit by proclamation. (5.1.290-294)
>
> --Thomas Dekker and John Webster, *Northward Ho*

> FORD Pardon me, wife, henceforth do what thou wilt.
> I rather will suspect the sun with [cold]
> Than thee with wantonness. Now doth thy honor stand,
> In him that was of late an heretic,
> As firm as faith. (4.4.6-10)
>
> --William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

The excerpts from Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Northward Ho* (1607) and William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) that open this chapter capture moments of a wife's absolution from accusations of infidelity. The two scenes also have in common the setting where this absolution takes place: what one would imagine could be resolved within the confines of the household actually occurs within a public forum. Examining matters of privacy in a period that ushers in the ability to purchase and

maintain a household full of objects—a period during which the phrase "A man's house is his castle" becomes proverbial (Orlin 2)—Lena Orlin notes the contradictory nature of the duality of privacy and ownership:

> Social regulation of this sort [mandates for public vigilance] militated against privacy; in fact, it engendered a suspicion of the private. In other words, the cultural ambition to champion each householder as lord of his own castle conflicted with the compulsion to manage him through communal surveillance of his personal affairs. (*Private Matters* 7)

The communal surveillance that Orlin discusses often takes the form of mandating the fastidious adherence to gender-based hierarchical dicta that oversee the proper management of the household. Communal commitment to the maintenance of societal order is evident in an anecdote Karen Newman relays about the skimmgton of Nicholas Rosyer and his wife. Here, the communal punishment of the couple is meant to reverse the upheaval of the hierarchical system of control that has resulted from the couple's transgressions: "The community's ritual action against the couple who transgress prevailing codes of gender behavior seeks to reestablish those conventional modes of behavior—it seeks to sanction a patriarchal order" (*Fashioning Femininity* 35-36).[69] The

[69] Newman's account of the events leading up to the skimmington taking place in 1604 in Suffolk is as follows: "A drunken tanner, Nicholas Rosyer, staggers home from the alehouse. On arriving at his door, he is greeted by his wife with 'drunken dogg, pisspott and other unseemly names.' When Rosyer tried to come to bed to her, she 'still raged against him and badd him out dronken dog dronken pisspott.' She struck him several times, clawed his face and arms, spit at him, and beat him out of bed. Rosyer retreated, returned to the alehouse, and drank until he could hardly stand up. Shortly thereafter, Thomas Quarry and others met and 'agreed amongest themselfs that the said Thomas Quarry who dwelt at the next howse… should…ryde abowt the towne upon a cowlstaff whereby not onley the woman which had offended might be shunned for her misdemeanors towards her husband but other women also by her shame might be admonished to offence in like sort'" (35).

examples I present at the beginning of this chapter are reminiscent of the phenomenon that Orlin and Newman discuss, but their precise function is different: instead of depicting the community's forced interference to adjudicate the conflicts of the family unit, the married couple chooses to employ the community as a witness to the resolution of the conflict that has served as the major plotline throughout the play. The inclusion of the community—here represented by both the characters on stage as well as the audience of the play—reminds us of the close relationship between the family unit and the community within which the couple lives, as the well-being of the individual couple guarantees the well-being of the community. The examples that Orlin and Newman present in their discussions of the role of the community are symptomatic of the close link between the family unit and the community that surrounds it. Because the poor conduct of the individual family reflects poorly on the community that surrounds it, the communal interference in the affairs of the family unit to ensure its proper behavior is imperative for the survival of the community.

In keeping with the aforementioned communal interference, the key difference between the examples Orlin and Newman provide and the communal interference that occurs in *Merry Wives* and *Northward Ho* is the function the community serves in each case. If in the former instances the community forcefully inserts itself into the affairs of the family, in the plays I examine in this chapter, it is the family that invites the community to witness its struggles. Whereas in the previous chapter the wives are able to gain power as a result of collective action, the female characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Northward Ho* are able to reach a similar goal with the help of the

community. The examples of power available to the female subject of the middling sort I highlight in this chapter remind us that this power is only possible within the context of the family home and under the watchful eye of the community that surrounds the home; nevertheless, these manifestations of power bring us closest to the possibility of individual female agency. The excerpt from *Northward Ho* I cite at the beginning of this chapter takes place during the final scene of the play and includes the Mayberrys, the Greenshields, Bellamont, Featherstone, and the host.[70] In *Merry Wives,* Ford's acceptance of his wife's innocence is witnessed by Page, Ford, Mistress Page, Mistress Ford, and Evans. The placement of a plotline that deals with possible female infidelity and threatens the integrity of a marriage in front of an audience is puzzling at best. The key to understanding the playwright's choice to resolve seemingly private issues in front of a large audience lies in the careful consideration of both the action that has occurred in the play, as well as the role of the community. This chapter will argue that the seduction subplots in the two plays are not about sexual conquest; rather, they are about economic and financial conquest. As a result, the proof of the wife's marital fidelity cannot come from her abstaining from sex with anyone other than her husband. The female character's

[70] Because 5.1 is a conclusive and a particularly long scene, at specific points the stage directions call for the entrance of practically every character in the play: "*Enter old* Mayberry *and* Bellamont" (5.1.1); "*Enter* Greeneshield" (5.1.22.1); "*Enter Fidlers*" (5.1.57.1); "*Enter* Greensheild *disguised, with mistresse* Greensheild" (5.1.124.1); "*Enter mistrisse* Mayberry *her haire loose, with the Hostice*" (5.1.194.1); "*Enter* Fethersone" (5.1.262.1); "*Enter* Philip, Leuer-poole *and* Chartly" (5.1.359.1); "*Enter* Phillip *and* Fetherstone" (5.1.418.1); "*Enter* Captaine, Allom, Hans, *and others booted*" (5.1.454.1); "*Enter* Bellamont, *and* Hornet, *with* Doll *betweene them*, Greeneshield, Kate, Mayberies *wife*, Phillip, Leuerpoole, *and* Chartley" (5.1.477.1). It should also be noted that the directions are not scrupulous about announcing the exits of secondary characters. Thus, the exit of the group that enters with Captain Jenkins is never explicitly noted; as a result, a staging of the play could place this group in the background, increasing the number of the people on the stage during this scene.

proof of fidelity is contingent upon a demonstrated excellence of home management, but not just within the confines of the home. The wife must demonstrate her ability to oversee the family dynamics in front of the community as a whole because the survival of the individual household ensures the survival of the community. This demonstrative housekeeping serves at least two goals: it allows the female subject to demonstrate that she has kept the family home safe from outsider attacks. More importantly, the female subject's successful homekeeping is a result of willful acquiescence: it is through the purposeful acceptance and fulfillment of her duties as a wife and a mother that the female subject has ensured the survival of the family home.

The significant power the female character wields in ensuring the survival of the community is not necessarily the site of female power. Rather, the female characters in these plays gain power from their willful subjugation to their spousal roles. In the process of a demonstrative fulfillment of her duties—to ensure the survival of the household and the community—in a public setting, the female character is able to prove her ability to safeguard the family home, and, in the process, she exposes her husband's inability to manage the family home. Female subjectivity here occurs as a matter of displacement. The wife's ability to maintain the family home comes at the price of taking on a dual role: that of the husband (whose duty it is to supervise the management of the home) and the wife (who, in following the directives of the husband, performs the duties necessary for the maintenance of the household). Frances Dolan, in discussing female subjectivity resulting from adultery, points out this notion of displacement:

> …the wife diminishes or usurps her husband's claims to authority as she asserts herself by committing adultery, beating or bossing her husband, or plotting to kill him…If the husband and wife become a joint subject at marriage, then, these popular representations seem to suggest, the wife's enlargement into volition, speech, and action necessarily implicates, diminishes, and even eliminates the husband. These popular representations push the logic of coverture to suggest an economy of marital subjectivity that leaves room for only one subject. They constitute the wife as a subject only to the extent that they qualify her husband's claims to subject status by silencing and immobilizing him and casting doubt on his authority and potency. (Dolan 36)

While Dolan's discussion of female subjectivity is limited to models that occur as a result of criminality or abnormality—including witchcraft, adultery, and petty treason—and are granted to the female subject largely for the sole purpose of doling out punishment, the female characters I examine in this chapter are able to gain agency through the same process of "silencing and immobilizing him and casting doubt on his authority and potency," but they do so by eliminating the need for spousal supervision by both performing their household duties and doing so in a demonstrative way that eliminates the need for the husband's intervention.

Agency through Acquiescence

"What happens when feminine subjects recognize and participate in the doctrines that govern them? Whose act of will is this?" (2), Kathryn Schwarz asks in *What You Will*. Schwarz characterizes the function of female acquiescence as "deliberate and transactional rather than innate; through contradictory logic of prescribed choice, feminine will becomes the means of social contract" (3). Schwarz's interest in female will stems from the seeming threat posed to social order by female obedience: in

Schwarz's formulation, the visceral reaction that female acquiescence often receives demonstrates the inherent power of willful female subjugation.

The subject's attainment of agency depends on her inclusion in an ideological system, and the ideological system that grants agency to the subject is inherently dependent on the subject's choice to participate in that system. Turning to Louis Althusser's famous example of hailing, we find a process that focuses mostly on how the ideological system enables the individual to become a subject but fails to address a reciprocal relationship:

> By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he [the hailed individual] becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed" (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, and one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. (118)

The process that Althusser describes does not record a crucial step in the process that turns individuals into subjects**.** The individual gains agency by responding to the hailing, but his response to the hailing is necessary to validate the ideology that he is a part of. Thus, the two participants in the process of gaining subjectivity are inter-related; one is not possible without the other because ideology cannot exist without the subjects' willing participation in it. Judith Butler takes the conversation about the subject and power further by noting that even in limiting the subject, the ideology creates the conditions necessary for the existence of the subject:

> In Foucault, the suppression of the body not only requires and produces the very body it seeks to suppress, it goes further by extending the bodily domain to be

> regulated, proliferating sites of control, discipline, and suppression. … the body ... is incessantly produced and proliferated in order to extend the domain of juridical power. In this sense, the restrictions placed *on* the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction. In what many have come to see as a finally utopian gesture in Foucault, this proliferation of the body by juridical regimes beyond the terms of dialectical reversal is also the site of possible resistance. (Butler, *Psychic Life* 59)

For Butler, the limitations placed upon the subject both bring about the existence of the subject and create the conditions for the subject's resistance. In the case of the female characters this chapter discusses, the subject's mere existence does not easily lead to resistance. Although acquiescent agency is available to the female characters I discuss in this chapter, it is available to them through a careful negotiation of the private and public spaces that they occupy. Because the responsibilities of the female characters that this chapter explores are mostly confined to their work within the family home, their attainment of agency and power is at least partly contingent on their ability to take care of the home. However, as I will demonstrate below, the family home is a vital part of the larger community that surrounds it and, as such, is vulnerable to criticism and attacks from outsiders.

To consider the kinds of agency that we may find in the works I examine in this chapter, it is necessary to engage with traditional definitions of female agency. Emily Bartels argues that scholarly neglect of alternative forms of female agency is due to expectations of female agency as occurring naturally rather than being purposefully contrived:

> Recent work has begun to uncover multiplicity and conflict within established positions of those in and out of power, but we still tend to take women's voices, whether represented or real, at face value. … Since, in this period, self-making is an activity of the public sphere, we do not expect women (other than the queen) to do it—at least not with the same self-consciousness, manipulativeness, and control. (418)

Physical location figures prominently in the process of the female characters' acquisition of agency through submission because this form of agency is available to female characters of the middling sort at the juncture between the public and the private spaces that they occupy. Because the responsibilities of the female characters that this chapter explores are mostly confined to their work within the family home, their attainment of agency and power is at least partly contingent on their ability to take care of the home. As a vital part of the larger community, the survival of the family unit guarantees the well-being of the community. Given this dual set of expectations for the family home to function as its own unit while fitting into the larger community, the housewife's role is similarly shaped by work both within and outside of the home. In the case of *Northward Ho* and *Merry Wives*, the female characters deal with the inherent vulnerabilities of the home by fulfilling their responsibilities within the home in a public, demonstrative way. This demonstrative management of the household, in turn, becomes a source of agency for the female subject. The female characters I examine in this chapter gain agency by demonstrating—much with the same "consciousness, manipulativeness, and control" that Bartels argues goes into male self-fashionings—their skillful management of the private spaces of the home to a public audience composed of the community surrounding the family unit.

The process of attaining acquiescent agency, while void of disobedient action, is not passive. The female subject's agency results from the questioning or challenging of her ability to govern the family home and stay loyal to her husband. In the plays I examine, the female character's fastidious adherence to patriarchal expectations of her conduct—including expectations of chastity, obedience, and skillful home management—does not automatically eliminate doubt and suspicion about her disobedience. Rather than eliminate the possibility of such doubt (which in many cases is impossible) or ignore unfounded assumptions of their infidelity and disobedience, the female characters in these plays fully embrace such instances of doubt or suspicion as opportunities to prove their obedience within a public forum. In a discussion of how experience figures into the formation of subjectivity, Joan Scott argues for situational agency: "They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them" (793). If, as Scott argues, agency is gained through situations and statuses that are conferred on the individual, the female subject's engagement with the community surrounding the household—and in the case of *Merry Wives* the active encouragement with Falstaff—creates the very situations that both give the female characters agency and manifest the testing of their honesty. In continuing to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers, the female characters are eventually able to gain back the power they lost as a result of the initial challenge. The situations that create the conditions to make the female characters' transgressions possible effectively allow them to regain agency, rendering any

extraneous intervention superfluous.[71] Additionally, the wives' active engagement with Falstaff enables them to prove their innocence by engaging in communally demonstrated acts of willful obedience.[72]

Stolen Rings and Sleepwalking: Domestic Labor, Spectacle, and Agency in *Northward Ho*

John Webster and Thomas Dekker's *Northward Ho* (1607) is unique in its plot development as it seems to begin where most Renaissance plays end. Having been rejected by Mistress Mayberry, Greenshield and Featherstone set out to take vengeance on her by "accidentally" telling her husband that she has had an affair with both of them. Predictably, Mayberry's initial reaction is outrage at his wife's potential infidelity. Where the play departs from most works that deal with spousal infidelity lies in Mistress Mayberry's ability—with the help of Bellamont—to convince her husband of her innocence. The couple then joins forces to punish the instigators for spreading libel about Mistress Mayberry. Part of the punishment includes Greenshield's hiring of his own wife as a prostitute for Mayberry, in the process revealing the marital discord of the

[71] I characterize the female characters' actions in these plays as regaining agency rather than gaining it because they have clearly held the position of power over the household at some point in the past. The process through which the female characters are able to prove their innocence and exercise some notion of agency is one of recovery; hence its relative ease. This process of gaining and regaining agency undermines theoretical assumptions that attainment of agency is a finite process. At least for female characters of the middling sort, agency is slippery and must be continually renegotiated.

[72] In *What You Will* Schwarz notes that disciplinary mechanisms, while containing the subject, also give her cultural competence: "Disciplinary mechanisms are always double-edged: early modern discourses formulate rules only to produce culturally resistant subjects who are culturally literate as well" (10).

Greenshields. In the end, the Mayberrys force a confession out of Greenshield and Featherstone about their initial lie, and Mistress Mayberry is able to prove her innocence within a public setting. In due course, the play pits practically all of the characters against one another: Bellamont is made to believe that he has been committed to Bedlam, Greenshield unwittingly prostitutes his wife, and Featherstone and Greenshield are forced to turn against each other. The issues the play tackles range from deteriorations of friendships to imprisonment to alleged mental illness, but there is one issue that the play cannot take lightly: that of female chastity.[73] Indeed, spousal infidelity seems to be the one problem that the play cannot easily manage. In the process of resolving the cheating subplot, the play punishes Greenshield and Featherstone for their attempts to besmirch Mistress Mayberry's reputation. Featherstone is forced to marry Doll, a prostitute, and Luke Greenshield is implicated as the cause for the discord in the Greenshields' union. Greenshield's attempts to accuse Mistress Mayberry of cheating on her husband are symptomatic of his overall disrespect for the marital union (as evidenced by his own infidelity to Kate). The play's punishment of Greenshield in the process of resolving the cheating scandal exemplifies its inherent value system: female chastity is valued above anything else because throughout the play it becomes synonymous with the well-being of the household. The play's resolution of issues of female chastity in a public setting

[73] To consider how seriously the play takes female infidelity, we may look at the fact that no female infidelity occurs in the play, at least not in the marital setting. Even Doll, a prostitute, is placed within a storyline wherein she seeks to marry Philip Bellamont and leave prostitution behind.

testifies to its interpretation of female spousal chastity as crucial to the survival of the community as a whole.

Northward Ho reveals a symbiotic relationship between the female character and the community: spousal chastity is instrumental to the survival of the community and the community absolves the female character of fabricated accusations of infidelity.[74] When first presented with the news that his wife has been unfaithful, Mayberry reacts like most characters from this period would to the news that they have been cuckolded:

> Nay, nay Gods pretious you doe mistake mee Maister *Bellamont*; I am distempered, for to know a mans wife is a whore, is to be resolu'd of it, and to be resolued of it, is to make no question of it, and when a case is out of question; what was I saying? (1.1.164-68)

Mayberry's fatalistic approach to the news of his wife's alleged dalliances places him neatly in the stereotypical category of the cuckolded husband who takes his wife's cheating as a given and admits defeat. It is the reasonable voice of Bellamont that enables Mayberry to disassociate himself from the performance of the cuckolded husband: "O madnesse! that the frailty of a woman should make a wise man thus idle!" (1.1.173-74). Bellamont responds to Mayberry's proclamations of his wife's cheating with disbelief: "…yet I protest, to my vnderstanding, this report seemes as farre from truth, as you from

[74] Wendy Wall argues that as a crucial building block of the society at large, the household inculcates valuable lessons of citizenship into its subjects: "As the 'first Societie' and 'Seminarie,' the early modern family bore the tremendous burden of inculcating citizenship and virtue in a patriarchal and hierarchical world by structuring the proper dependencies that founded church, state, and body politic. Through this key structure, early modern people learned to rein in chaotic impulses and fantasies and to become full citizens. Representations of domestic disorder on the stage might thus simply be said to anatomize the wayward passions to be mastered or pathologies to be cured so as to ensure the proper ordering of home and polity" (*Staging Domesticity* 2).

patience" (1.1.174-75). Bellamont's response to the gossip about Mistress Mayberry is what shifts the narrative of the play into one where the couple joins forces to punish those that spread libel about the wife instead of believing them and shunning her. While *Northward Ho* is hardly unique in presenting domestic chastity as a matter of social interest, it is remarkable in demonstrating that just as communal exposure to cuckolding can exacerbate the impact of female infidelity, the community can also intervene in righting a wrong associated with female reputation. It is not enough for Mistress Mayberry to be faithful to her husband; she must prove this faithfulness to the community that surrounds the family unit with the help of Bellamont. Because female chastity becomes a socially determined phenomenon, it cannot be proven solely on the basis of sexual relations; as a result, the play invents alternative methods of determining what constitutes female spousal chastity.

In addition to being a socially determined and approved entity, female chastity functions as a stand in for a number of concepts in the play, including the well-being of the household. For Theodore Leinwand, sexuality is inherently linked with wealth within the urban milieu: "When a gallant captures (or attempts to capture) a city wife, he adopts the surest method of undermining the citizen's social stability, and he strips the citizen of all but his gold" (*The City Staged* 51). In *Northward Ho*, the gallants' attaining of sexual favors from the city wife is closely linked with the loss of material goods from the household, as evidenced in Mistress Mayberry's forfeiture of her ring and in Kate Greenshield's propensity to expose the contents of her home as a part of her dalliances with Featherstone. The play's linking of female sexuality with the household's material

well-being is evidenced in Mayberry's response to the news that his wife has been unfaithful. His response is not really a response to female infidelity; it is a reaction to the fact that his household has been compromised.[75] While pretending that he is not aware that Greenshield and Featherstone are talking about his wife, Mayberry inserts himself into the situation: "I warrant her husband was forth a Towne all this while, and he poore man trauailed with hard Egges in's pocket, to saue the change of a baite, whilst she was at home with her Plouers, Turkey, Chickens" (1.1.115-18). In this instance, he does not address the fact that the wife is being dishonest to her husband or that the husband is being made a cuckold; instead, he focuses on her careless management of the household and his own frugality while she is surrounded by a household of excess. Yet, Mayberry's response to his wife's infidelity directs the audience's gaze to the inner workings of the household and reveals a reciprocal relationship. While Mayberry works outside the family home, Mistress Mayberry's labor takes place inside the family home. If Mayberry's work, supposedly, brings money from the public realm into the private, his wife's labor enables him to take the goods of the household—in this case the hard-boiled eggs—out of the household and into the public realm.[76] It is striking that even in his moment of utmost frustration Mayberry, in an attempt to demonstrate the stark contrast

[75] Natasha Korda traces this premise between good housekeeping and chastity to Juan Luis Vives's *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*: "the danger posed by the unfearful or 'over free' wife is one that the husband has good reason to fear himself: the goods and income 'wyll waste in short tyme,' his 'house muste nedes sone decaye,' and his wife's 'honesty' or chastity will be 'lyghtly' undone" (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 30-31).

[76] Korda argues that this division of labor is dictated by many of the domestic manuals produced during the early modern period: "Domestic treatises played an important role in defining the precise parameters of this gendered division of labor, in which the husband's duty or 'calling' (in Protestant terminology) became that of *getting*, and the wife's that of *keeping*, household stuff" (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 26).

between his life and his wife's, reveals the work she engages in to ensure the prosperity of the household. Mayberry's self-pitying "whilst she was at home with her Plouers, Turkey, Chickens," reminds the audience of the markedly female labor that goes into producing boiled eggs from the chickens. Mayberry's response demonstrates that he values the well-being of the household above all else (including being made a cuckold) and that despite his best efforts Mayberry still gives credit to the work his wife does to ensure the home's long-term survival.

This issue of the home's well-being is also apparent in the ease with which Mistress Mayberry convinces her husband of her fidelity. Because Mistress Mayberry's fidelity becomes synonymous with the well-being of the family home, all it takes for Mayberry to be convinced of the former is to witness the wholesomeness of the latter. In his analysis, Cyrus Hoy praises the play for its original treatment of the possible cuckoldry plot:

> Thus while the gallants, Greenshield and Featherstone, have told Master Mayberry that they have both slept with his wife, he has the wit to believe her when she denies the charge, thereby shattering the stereotype of the husband who believes he has been cuckolded that has seemingly threatened to descend on the character in the early scenes; once it is shattered, the way is clear for fresh comic energies to shape the play. (249)

Hoy perhaps gives too much credit to Mayberry for his handling of the situation. Mayberry's initial response to the news that he has been cuckolded is far from witty interpretation and, in fact, is perfectly in keeping with the archetype of the cuckolded husband. For Mayberry, the step from suspecting a wife's infidelity to being resolved of it is an immediate one: "for to know a mans wife is a whore, is to be resolu'd of it, and to

be resolued of it, is to make no question of it" (1.1.165-67). In Mayberry's formulation, the wife's infidelity will inevitably be known to the community that surrounds the couple. This formula is at least partly because of the inevitability of containing the information of the wife's infidelity from the community. Mayberry's response to his wife's potential infidelity and Bellamont's subsequent interventions illustrate two important components of the cuckoldry plot: that the wife's potential unfaithfulness affects the well-being of the home and that the only way of undoing this damage is for the wife to prove her innocence to the community that surrounds the couple. Because of his position as an outsider, Bellamont deserves as much, if not more, credit as Mayberry for keeping the marriage of the Mayberrys intact.[77] Bellamont's investment in preserving the marriage—along with his capacity to intervene to save the marriage—demonstrates the play's preoccupation with the integrity of the household rather than the marriage. Ultimately, it is not anything that Bellamont or Mistress Mayberry say to Mayberry to disabuse him of his conviction of Mistress Mayberry's unfaithfulness; rather, it is his observance that the family and his home—along with all the objects it contains—have stayed intact during his absence.[78]

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[77] Charles Forker credits Bellamont for his ability to "distinguish between appearance and reality, as he proves when he warns Mayberry that Greenshield's story about the ring may be a hoax" (97). Bellamont is believed to be based on the playwrights' colleague, George Chapman, and the character's ability to skillfully navigate the conflicts of the play seems like an homage to Chapman. For arguments about the connection between Chapman and Bellamont, see Bradbrook, *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist* (111-12); and Ornstein, "The Dates of Chapman's Tragedies, Once More" (61).

[78] Leggatt argues that Mistress Mayberry's relatively easy task of convincing her husband of her fidelity is symptomatic of the solidity of their marriage: "The ease with which the usually all-consuming passion of jealousy is killed in Mayberry indicates this; he will simply take his wife's word for it that she is chaste" (*Citizen Comedy* 134). While I agree with Leggatt's assessment of the Mayberry union—and argue that this ease is one manifestation of Mistress Mayberry's power in the home—the well-being of the marriage is only one piece of evidence that leads to Mayberry's conviction of his wife's chastity. That the family home (which the wife is responsible

Mistress Mayberry's skillful management of the home and thorough comprehension of its importance is evident in the scene during which Mayberry confronts her about the gallants' accusations. Mistress Mayberry smartly places herself at the threshold of the household when revisiting her encounter with the gallants:

> …that slaue, that damned fury
> (Whose whips are in your tongue to torture me)
> Casting an eye vnlawfull on my cheeke,
> Haunted your thre-shold daily, and threw forth,
> All tempting baytes which lust and credulous youth,
> Apply to our fraile sex: but those being weake
> The second seige he layd was in sweete wordes…
> At last he takes me siting at your dore,
> Seizes my palme, and by the charme of othes
> (Back to restore it straight) he won my hand,
> To crowne his finger with that hoope of gold. (1.3.103-14)

Mistress Mayberry's account of the encounter demonstrates that Mayberry's earlier predictions about spousal absence leading to infidelity are at least partially accurate. Throughout the play, the Mayberry household may only continue to thrive if both parties are faithful to it: the union of Mayberry and Mistress Mayberry guarantees this strength.[79] Mistress Mayberry's placement at the threshold of the household makes her appear as an extension of the household: a position that enables her to protect the household and be protected by it.

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for guarding) has remained safe during the gallants' attacks enables Mayberry to quickly assess the situation and verify his wife's performance of her duties.

[79] By contrast, as I will demonstrate later, the union of the Greenshields is compromised because of Luke Greenshield's prolonged absences and infidelity to his wife and Kate Greenshield's (seeming) abandonment of her duties as a wife.

In addition to providing some protection to Mistress Mayberry, the household threshold is also a liminal space that marks the intersection of private and public spaces. The household threshold does provide some protection to Mistress Mayberry, but Mistress Mayberry's positioning of herself at the threshold of the household becomes complicated when considered in the context of the early modern interpretations of public space. Laura Gowing associates the threshold with matters of honor and propriety:

> In London, as outside, a prime place for insults and verbal abuse was the doorstep. As the threshold between public and private, household and community, doorsteps carried considerable symbolic weight. They were a good place for attacking and defending honour; and in a culture that understood the walls of the house as the guarantee of female chastity, they marked a special boundary for women. For many women, doorsteps were also a primary workplace, where they sewed, made lace, knitted or nursed babies… Standing or sitting at their doors, women also embodied the authority of neighborhood morality. ("Freedom of the Streets" 137)

Gowing's characterization of the threshold as a liminal space between the inside and the outside of the household reminds us that Mistress Mayberry's encounter with the gallants is quite typical, as in a single transaction she goes through an attack on her honor and effectively defends it. Yet, the threshold's function as a space of female labor necessitates Mistress Mayberry's presence at the threshold where she is susceptible to public attacks. Jean Howard supports this interpretation of the threshold as a space where female reputation can come under attack and argues that the presence of a woman at the threshold becomes synonymous with prostitution:

> …many popular texts from the late sixteenth century pressure this idea of the automatic or easy legibility of either whores and whorehouses. While women standing in taffeta dresses in the doors of buildings often advertised the

> whereabouts of suburban brothels, not all whores throve on legibility… [I]n *Northward Ho*, every house might be a covert whorehouse, a place where loose women perform versions of respectable femininity in order to conduct their trade. In such a world, the place of prostitution is potentially everywhere (*Theater of a City* 125-26).

The threshold of the home is particularly hostile to female presence, but female presence—in the form of labor—is frequently inevitable. Eleanor Hubbard reminds us that the threshold is both a locus of sociability for the female subject and a necessity for completing her work: it allows the female subject to keep an eye on her servants, to be apprised of the conversations and quarrels her neighbors might be engaged in, and to forego the cost of candlelight to complete, for example, her needlework.[80] The female subject's presence at the threshold gives her a unique opportunity to occupy both the private space of the household and the public space of the community simultaneously, while also fulfilling responsibilities that come with her occupation of both of these spaces. Mistress Mayberry's presence at the threshold is in keeping with the aforementioned reasons, but it also reveals that the threshold may threaten female reputation. In the context of the play, Mistress Mayberry's presence at the doorstep becomes a physical hindrance that prevents theft and corruption of the household and the

[80] Per Hubbard: "women also spent many of their waking hours sitting at their doors or in their shops, where they could see and hear what happened in the street and sometimes in neighboring houses. Given the expense and bad quality of candlelight, sitting by the door may have been necessary for eye-straining needlework. In addition to this advantage, however, the threshold simultaneously favored domestic order and sociability. A woman sitting there could keep an eye on her maidservant and see that the apprentice was at work, stand up to serve a customer, watch her children playing in the street, observe any interesting passerby, hail a hawker, and pass the hours of tedious labor gossiping, joking, and quarreling with her neighbors" (149).

goods it contains, but her protection of the household comes at the cost of a threat to her honor.

Yet, Mistress Mayberry's occupation of the threshold is far more complex than the cultural associations of the threshold with prostitution capture. The Mayberrys operate within a material system wherein the well-being of the household is contingent upon its containment of the goods that are a part of it. Tracing the development of middle-class sentimentalities and attachments to objects, Natasha Korda argues that the household takes on this very quality, serving as a kind of repository:

> As householders of the middling sort began to furnish their houses with new luxuries…they found new significance in the trope of the household as a *hold*, not simply in a sense of a "property held; a possession, holding," but of "a thing that [itself] holds something… a receptacle" or repository of goods, analogous to a "ship's hold" (*OED*). (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 25)

The household's nascent capacity to hold material objects translates to new responsibilities of the housewife as a manager:

> The housewife's role in managing the household economy, her oversight of its stuff and provisions, is clearly not a passive one, as the term *keeper* might suggest; for her responsibilities include not only saving, storing, and maintaining, but marking, ordering, accounting, dividing, distributing, spending, and disposing of household property, including both durable and perishable goods…The housewife's…duty as a keeper, thus positioned her in an active, managerial role that required her not only to keep or hold goods, but to deal out, distribute and dispense them, and thereby to "govern" the household economy (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 27).

The household's capacity to hold objects brings about the subjectivity of the wife who oversees the household; the wholesomeness of the household serves as proof that the housewife has fulfilled her duties.

To better understand the system that governs the family home we may look at one of the play's subplots that deals with the home and its well-being. In an attempt to gain Bellamont's approval of Doll, Philip sets up a household using Bellamont's wares and puts Doll in charge of it. When Bellamont visits Doll, his own wares catch his attention:

> BELLAMONT: You should be a kin to the *Bellamonts*, you giue the same Armes madam.
> DOLL: Faith I paid sweetely for this cup, as it may be you and some other Gentlemen haue don for their Armes.
> BELLAMONT: Ha! the same waight: the same fashion: I had three nest of them giuen mee, by a Nobleman at the christening of my sonne *Philip*.
> PHILIP: Your sonne is come to full age sir: and hath tane possession of the gift of his God-father. [*Comes forward with* Chartly.]
> BELLAMONT: Ha, thou wilt not kill mee.
> PHILIP: No, sir, ile kill no Poet least his ghost write satires against me. (3.1.70-80)

This scene reinforces two notions that the play continually revisits: that the household is vulnerable to the attacks of outsiders or even its own members (as is the case here with Philip) and that the household is capable of indicating its own well-being. In this case, the material goods that make up Bellamont's home indicate that the household has been compromised: it is no longer safe against attacks from others, even if the attack is coming from Bellamont's son. Following this logic, the presence of all the items that make up the household indicates its status of well-being. In analyzing Mistress Mayberry's encounter with Greenshield and Featherstone, I would like to focus on two components: the social

reputation of the house and its material well-being. While Mistress Mayberry's presence at the doorstep allows for the easy interpretation of the home as a whorehouse, her physical presence at the threshold protects the material objects that the home contains (the exception being her ring that Greenshield and Featherstone snatch from her finger). In return, the material objects that constitute the household—which Mistress Mayberry essentially protects by sacrificing her reputation—enable her to quickly prove her innocence to her husband. Once Mayberry arrives home and sees that everything at home is intact, he lets go of his performance of the jealous husband because he can glean that his wife has fulfilled her role as the guardian of the household quite well.

For the rest of my discussion of *Northward Ho*, I would like to focus on Luke Greenshield and Kate, because the Greenshields represent the predictable outcome when it comes to potential female infidelity; the outcome that does not affect the Mayberrys because Mistress Mayberry is able to convince her husband of her loyalty.[81] Like the Mayberrys, the Greenshields endure accusations of cuckoldry, the husband's absence from the household, and the wife's possible dalliance with another man. The main difference between the two couples seems to be Luke Greenshield's lack of respect for the marital union: his own as well as those of others.[82]

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[81] Leinwand comments on the play's inclusion of Kate: "It is unusual to find a married gallant in a city comedy, and in *Northward Ho* it is Kate's affair with Luke's companion Featherstone that leads to Luke's embarrassment" (*City Staged* 50).

[82] Alexander Leggatt supports this characterization of Greenshield by describing him as a "lecher…who has been paying court to Mistress Mayberry, a citizen's wife. It is characteristic of his type that his main motive is not love for the woman but a desire to translate into action his cynical belief that all city wives are lecherous" (*Citizen Comedy* 132).

Unlike the Mayberrys, the Greenshields do not escape accusations of infidelity unscathed. While Mayberry's earlier formulation of female infidelity might not apply to his own marriage, it is perfectly apt for the Greenshields: "This wit taking of long iourneys: kindred that comes in ore the hatch, and sailing to Westminster makes a number of Cuckolds" (1.1.131-32). As the play reveals, Mayberry is not absent from the family home for extended periods of time, and Mistress Mayberry does not regard his absences as an opportunity to cheat on him. However, this does not seem to be the case for the Greenshields. The cracks in the marriage appear when Greenshield and Featherstone first discuss Kate:

> I left my boy to waight vpon her, by this light, I thinke God prouides; for if this cittisen had not out of his ouerplus of kindnes proferd her, her diet and lodging vnder the name of my sister, I could not haue told what shift to haue made; for the greatest part of my mony is reuolted: weele make more vse of him: the whoreson rich Innkeeper of *Doncaster* her father shewed himselfe a ranke ostler: to send her vp at this time a yeare; and by the carier to, twas but a iades trike of him. (2.2.90-98)

Greenshield here makes use of Mayberry's finances to cover his wife's travel expenses because he cannot afford to do so. While the couple's lack of financial stability is not to be blame for their imperfect relationship, the scarcity of family finances may be interpreted as indicative of improper household management. By contrast, the Mayberrys' financial well-being is symptomatic of a carefully managed household (one example of this may be seen in Mayberry's complaint of traveling with hard-boiled eggs to save on food while on the road; presumably, Mistress Mayberry takes care of the home and the family business while her husband is away). Mistress Mayberry's own ability to

accompany her husband on the trip—and the family's overall financial solvency—is at least partly due to her willing fulfillment of her duties as a housewife, including taking care of the livestock and preparing meals for Mayberry to take with himself while travelling.

The Greenshields' inability to manage the family's finances is only one part of their marital failure. After Kate is introduced, it is clear that Greenshield has failed to disclose that he is married to Mayberry and Bellamont, as the two express their dismay at the news of Greenshield's marital status: "His wife! Is *Greensheild* [sic] married? I haue heard him sweare he was a batchiler" (4.1.231-32). The Greenshields' union demonstrates that the well-being of the home is contingent upon the dedication of both parties; in the case of the Greenshields, the husband has forsaken his duties, which has resulted in the wife's seeming failure to follow hers.

Luke Greenshield's lack of investment in the marital union brings about Kate's lackadaisical attitude towards her duties as a wife. In Act 3, Squirrel and Leapfrog, servants to Featherstone and Greenshield, respectively, discuss the deception scheme that Kate Greenshield has orchestrated. Squirrel recounts:

> I will tell thee, the most pollitick trick of a woman, that ere made a mans face looke witherd and pale like the tree in Cuckolds Hauen in a great snow: and this it is, my mistris makes her husband belieue that shee walkes in her sleepe a nights, and to confirme this beleefe in him, sondry times shee hath rizen out of her bed, vnlockt all the dores, gon from Chamber to Chamber, opend her chests, touz'd among her linnen, and when he hath wakte and mist her, comming to question why she coniur'd thus at midnight, he hath found her fast a sleepe, mary it was Cats sleepe, for you shall heare what prey she watcht for. (3.2.12-21)

Squirrel's anecdote vividly depicts Kate's frenzied activities of going through the house, opening doors and chests, taking items out of their proper places and strewing them around. Squirrel's label of Kate's actions as "pollitick" and his subsequent "my mistris makes her husband belieue that she walkes in her sleepe a nights" indicates to us the aura of suspicion with which Kate's sleepwalking should be regarded. Kate's own anticipation of her husband's suspicion results in a "Cats sleepe," which allows her to pretend to be fast asleep when Greenshield inquires about her absence from the marital bed. Kate's performance of sleepwalking enables her to manipulate skillfully the situation around her and turn her husband to her "prey."

In discussing the sleepwalking scene, Jeremy Lopez reminds us of another famous sleepwalking scene which deals with marital struggle for power—that of Lady Macbeth—and argues that both scenes reveal as much as they conceal:

> She [Kate] has been pretending to sleepwalk in order to give her cover on those nights, such as tonight, when she and her husband sleep in the same house as Featherstone and she gets up to share Featherstone's bed. But, of course, to perceive the difference between the two scenes, which is the marker of genre – comedy conceals and reveals adultery, tragedy murder – is also to perceive their most fundamental similarity: in neither scene is any one *really* sleepwalking; Dekker and Webster present *as* acting a repertory of gesture which Shakespeare uses to render acting invisible. (Lopez 128-29)

Lopez's argument about Kate's performance as simultaneously concealing and revealing—the revelation in this case being that of sexual frustration—is only one part of the function of Kate's performance. Read literally, the sleepwalking performance allows Kate to sneak into Featherstone's bed when she chooses. However, Kate's performance is not limited to merely sleepwalking. Squirrel notes that "shee hath rizen out of her bed,

vnlockt all the dores, gon from Chamber to Chamber, opend her chests, touz'd among her linnen." As she makes her way through the home, she can be seen opening up the household and its various crevices, and even tossing her linen around. As with Mistress Mayberry, Kate's chastity has a twofold purpose: on the literal level, it depicts her loyalty to her husband, but it can also figure for her care for the household. Kate's nightly performance of sleepwalking should be interpreted along these two sets of expectations. As the conversation between Squirrel and Leapfrog reveals, Kate's sleepwalking is a guise for her eventual cuckolding of her husband: by engaging in the performance of sleepwalking frequently, Kate creates the circumstances that would enable her to cheat on her husband. On the material end of the spectrum, Kate's opening of doors and chests while sleepwalking exposes the household and its goods to outsiders.

Kate's performance of unfaithfulness and household vulnerability is just that: a performance. However, this performance of infidelity is necessary for Kate to prove her own skills at managing the family home. Kate must create the conditions through which she can prove her fidelity. Despite Kate's orchestration of the sleepwalking scheme, there is no indication that the household has been compromised. During the final scene of the play Featherstone admits that Kate Greenshield's reputation has been unjustly compromised: "I protest the gentlewoman is honest, and since I haue wrong'd her reputation in meeting her thus priuately, Ile maintaine her" (5.1.337-38). Kate claims that since Greenshield believes that she has been unfaithful to him, she will behave in accordance to his expectations: "Ile be diuorc'd by this Christian element, and because thou thinkst thou art a Cockold, least I should make thee an infidell, in causing thee to

beleeue an vntrueth, Ile make thee a Cuckold" (5.1.340-42).[83] Kate's sleepwalking plot and subsequent interactions with Featherstone demonstrate the ease with which the wife may deceive her husband and her continual choice to remain faithful to the home, her husband, and her responsibilities as a wife. While Mistress Mayberry gains power from the fulfillment of her wifely duties, Kate seemingly gains power from the exact opposite. Kate's performance of sleepwalking, as well as her opening up of the home's spaces enables her to stage the possibility of the threat that the household can be subjected to. Her demonstration of the vulnerability of the household—as represented both in the possibility of her cheating on her husband and not safeguarding the contents of the home—is merely a ruse that enables her to render visible the work that goes into maintaining the household. Kate's staging of the vulnerability of the household while simultaneously ensuring its well-being reminds the audience how easy it is for the wife to betray the household. Kate Greenshield derives her power—which in the context of the play manifests itself in the form of an upper hand over her husband—by showing all the ways in which she could fail to fulfill her role as a wife only to do everything she is supposed to do, even when her husband fails to fulfill his own responsibilities within the

[83] My interpretation of Kate here and throughout varies from previous critical examinations of the character. For instance, Larry Champion labels Kate "the worst of the lot" in the play and provides the following evidence for his indictment: "Married to one man, she pretends to be his sister in order to cozen a second, meanwhile engaging in an affair with a third and also finding time to offer herself as a prostitute to a fourth" (259). While the play does not offer incontrovertible proof that Kate does not cheat on her husband, it also does not provide incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. Featherstone's comments about her honesty, along with Kate's declaration to her husband that she'll cheat on him to satisfy his belief that he's a cuckold, introduce an aspect of ambiguity about Kate's extramarital activities. In discussing Kate, I resist her easy classification as an adulteress, particularly given her ability to ensure the well-being of the family home.

household. As is the case with Mistress Mayberry, the female character's power does not come merely from her fulfillment of her duties; rather, it is in her demonstrative (to an audience comprised of the community that surrounds the family unit) fulfillment of her duties, coupled with her exposure of the possibilities of her failure to fulfill these duties that brings about female agency.

When asked to explain her sleepwalking scheme, Kate justifies her actions by citing her husband's frequent absences from the family home:

> he ran away from me like a base slaue as he was, out of *Yorke-shire*, and pretended he would goe the Iland voiage, since I neere heard of him till within this fortnight: can the world condemne me for entertayning a friend, that am vsed so like an Infidel? (2.2.123-28).

Kate's representation of her marriage justifies her attempts to stray from her husband even if her extramarital affairs might ultimately bring about the demise of the household. Greenshield's shirking of his duties as a husband, his long absences from home, and his attempts to seduce other women all contribute to the play's depiction of the Greenshield union as doomed. Greenshield's refusal to fulfill his duties as a husband quickly spreads to others: Kate cites her husband's absences from the family home as the reason behind her own performances of disobedience. Greenshield's mere presence at the threshold of the Mayberrys' home disrupts the peace between the couple and invites criticism of Mistress Mayberry's ability to perform her duties as a housewife.

Northward Ho deals with the far-reaching negative impact that Greenshield has on the marriages around him by subjecting him to the heavy punishment of self-cuckoldry by inadvertently prostituting his own wife to the man he tried cuckold

(Mayberry). The play's swift punishment of Greenshield for wrongdoings that have affected the marital unions within the play, including his own, alerts us that the play prioritizes the integrity of a marriage above all else. One reason behind the play's steadfast maintenance of marital unions is because the well-being of the marriage guarantees the well-being and survival of the community that surrounds the married couple. The relationship between the family unit and the community at large can be explained on at least two levels: conceptually, the family is regarded as a microcosm of the community (and the community, in turn, becomes a microcosm for the monarchy). On a practical level, the financial burden that accompanies the improper management of the household due to marital discord falls on the community and threatens the well-being of the community.[84]

Despite the many commonalities that the two couples share, there is a crucial difference when it comes to spousal chastity and dedication to the family home. In the case of Mistress Mayberry, her decision to stay faithful to her husband is not to be confused with powerlessness; rather, it should be interpreted as a moment of willful obedience. Mistress Mayberry chooses to stay faithful to the marital union and this choice, in fact, empowers the union and ensures its survival. As evidenced in Kate's sleepwalking scenes, the wife's capacity to betray the household is limitless: it is the

[84] Hubbard cites examples of neighbors that were tasked with dealing with a discordant couple's insolvency: "Neighbors testified that *they* had been burdened with the care of providing for troubled households: when husbands failed to provide, and, worse, undermined the efforts of the wives to do so, charity paid for household necessities. Domestic harmony was undone when husbands attacked their wives, children fled their fathers, and servants—to save their mistresses' lives—raised hands against their masters. Neighborhood harmony was shattered by the curses of drunken husbands and the shrieks of battered wives" (137-38). For a discussion of societal order, see Hubbard and Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society*.

husband's participation in household matters that makes the difference between the wife's self-placement at the threshold to protect the household and her opening its various spaces in a performance of sleepwalking. The wife's empowerment occurs as a result of her obedient fulfillment of her responsibilities as a mother and a wife: however, this empowerment is only possible if female obedience is performed in a visible, public setting. Female obedience becomes a source of power only if it is sanctioned by the community. For both Mistress Mayberry and Kate Greenshield, power stems from their fulfillment of their duties as domestic managers in a public setting. It is through the communal performance of home management that the wives are able to put the blame of possible domestic problems back on their husbands: in due course, Kate is able to demonstrate Luke Greenshield's neglecting his own role as the head of the household and Mistress Mayberry—with the help of Bellamont—is able to prove her own honesty and her husband's unwarranted suspicions. The female characters' ultimate investment in ensuring the well-being of the household can be gleaned from the play's continual engagement with the notion of female infidelity, only to reveal at the end of the play that no marital infidelity has, in fact, occurred. While the rumors of Moll Mayberry's infidelity are clarified within the initial acts of the play, we do later learn that despite her brilliant plan of sleepwalking to deceive her husband, Kate Greenshield has, in fact, been faithful to him: "My deare vnkind husband; I protest to thee I have playd this knauish part only to be witty" (5.1.231-32) to which Greenshield later responds with "A pox of your wit and your singing" (5.1.245). Despite her proclamations to the contrary, Kate Greenshield has remained honest to the household and has kept the home intact. In this

case, while it is clear that she has the opportunity to be unfaithful to him (and perhaps his long absence from the home justifies this), she merely chooses to teach him a lesson by demonstrating just how easy it would be to stray from him. If the rumor started by Greenshield and Featherstone creates the circumstances that allow Mistress Mayberry to perform her duties as an obedient housewife, Kate is able to achieve a similar effect by creating the circumstances that demonstrate her ability to take care of the family home. The family home and the dangers that it can endure from both spouses give the female character the opportunity to demonstrate her obedience to patriarchal systems of control and gain power through this obedience.

"Buck, Buck, Buck": Domestic Management and Acquiescent Agency in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

The notion of unwarranted spousal suspicion of female infidelity becomes a focal point in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* With its primary locale in Windsor, the play is not commonly categorized as a city comedy. My inclusion of the play in a study concerned primarily with city comedies is motivated by the fact that the play is clearly influenced by many of the conventions that generate city comedies. With its witty female characters and its preoccupation with female chastity, the twenty miles that separate London from Windsor are quickly rendered negligible. Falstaff's geographical references breathe the life of the city into the play: "Come, I cannot cog and say thou art this and that, like a many of these lisping hawthorn buds, that come like women in men's apparel, and smell like Bucklersbury in simple time" (3.3.70-73), says Falstaff when

Mistress Ford first inquires about his affection for her. A few lines later, Falstaff makes another vivid reference to the city: "Thou mightest as well say I love to walk by the Counter-gate, which is as hateful to me as the reek of a lime-kill" (3.3.77-79), proclaims Falstaff this time referring to the city's debtors' prisons. Falstaff's references to specific locations in the city remind the play's audience of the physical proximity of Windsor to London and the immense influence that the latter seemingly wields on the citizens of former. However, these references also participate in a process that Howard calls "rendering the *un*familiar intelligible" (*Theater of a City* 39). Discussing dramatic depictions of the Royal Exchange, Howard notes: "The function of the Exchange scene, then, can be viewed as an induction into the ways of a monumental, but not intimately known, urban site as much as a confirmation of knowledge already in the viewer's possession" (*Theater of a City* 39). The case for the play's representation of city life is further augmented by the largely neglected quarto version, which Leah Marcus characterizes as "'lower', more urban, closer to the pattern of city or 'citizen' comedy" (88).[85] Marcus cites the quarto's urban setting as "strongly suggesting London or some provincial city" (84). While the 1623 folio "map[s] Windsor and its surrounding villages

[85] In *Unediting the Renaissance*, Marcus argues that the neglect of the quarto version stems from scholarly dedication to an image of Shakespearean composition as void of revisions. As a result, any variances of the texts are considered to have originated from pirated versions of the text: "Shakespeare has to be kept free of any taint of commercialism, because that taint is reserved for contaminators—to some extent the printers, who sold his precious creations in cheap popular editions, but more especially those pirates the memorial reconstructers, who perverted his language out of greed and ignorance" (78). Although my discussion of the play is based largely on the folio version, I will occasionally turn to the quarto to discuss the aspects of the play that are particularly relevant to the wives' role in the household.

through many topographical references to the area, its palace, park, river, and environs," the quarto's relative lack of specificity enables the play's location to be more broadly imagined:

> The names surrounding towns are similar in both versions, but in nearly every place where the folio specifies a Windsor locale, the quarto substitutes a more generalized location which could easily be London or a largish provincial town rather than Windsor. (Marcus 84)[86]

The textual differences between the quarto and the folio enable a reading of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as a city comedy: presumably ignored because—as Marcus puts it—"Shakespeare has to be kept free of any taint of commercialism" (78). Arguably, Shakespearean scholarship, in addition to keeping Shakespeare out of processes that involve revisions of text, strives to keep Shakespeare out of the commercial world of London by embracing the version of the play that takes place in Windsor and does not become a part of the genre of city comedy.[87]

The Merry Wives of Windsor revolves around two couples: the Fords and the Pages. The marital unity of both couples is shaken when Falstaff tries to seduce the wives. The wives immediately set up a plan to punish Falstaff, and the family home and

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[86] Additional evidence that Marcus presents to support the quarto's validity (and its presentation of a city comedy) include the quarto's exclusion of the court, Doctor Caius's establishment resembling "the shop of a town apothecary" (85), and the Pages' and Fords' economic status as members of the middling sort (95) as opposed to the folio's representations of the two couples as bordering on aristocracy.

[87] I read *Merry Wives* as a city comedy in order to deconstruct two long-held myths in early modern scholarship. Firstly, such a reading validates the Quarto version of the text, which—as is the case with other "bad" quartos—has been frequently dismissed as a pirated copy of Shakespeare's work. Secondly, this reading of *Merry Wives* as a city comedy demonstrates that despite commonly held beliefs that Shakespeare was not interested in city comedy, the genre clearly influenced him to at least dabble in writing a city comedy.

its various spaces and crevices become instrumental in administering this punishment. In an attempt to hide Falstaff from her husband (and do so in the most humiliating way possible), Falstaff is carried out of the Ford home in a laundry basket and dumped into a river along with dirty clothes. In a subsequent instance, the wives attire Falstaff in a woman's dress and he has to endure abuse from Ford as he leaves the Fords' home. Concurrently, the women, especially Mistress Ford, must deal with their husbands' suspicions that the wives are indeed succumbing to Falstaff's charms. The women must contend with two key problems: they must ward off Falstaff's advances while demonstrating their spousal chastity to their husbands. Korda characterizes the play's resolution as resulting from "mov[ing] away from the spectacle of the public shaming ritual toward a more discreet mode of domestic discipline" (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 76) and credits the wives for their self-discipline:

> They [the wives] do so, I maintain, not by publicly shaming Falstaff… but rather by rendering any outside intervention superfluous; they thus protect the property and propriety of their household by demonstrating their competence as disciplined, yet discreet, domestic supervisors. (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 83)

Korda is correct in arguing that the wives' self-management eliminates the need for extraneous intervention, but their attainment of power is anything but discreet: both the punishment of Falstaff and the wives' attainment of power are performed in the public realm. The wives gain their power within the household by publicly demonstrating their ability to oversee the household. They must demonstrate their ability to manage the family home and all of its contents in front of the community they are a part of in order to

gain and retain their positions of power within the household. While the wife's successful management of her home does not have to include her public shaming in the form of a skimmington, it is also not entirely devoid of an aspect of a public spectacle. The wives are not subjected to public shaming, but they do, consciously, stage their own management skills in a public setting. Although Falstaff's initial encounters with the wives all occur within the confines of the household (and according to Falstaff would be limited to the household), the wives' eventual punishment of Falstaff cannot be thus limited to the private realm. Rather, the wives' task in rejecting Falstaff's advances are twofold: to prove their innocence and to do so within the public arena in order to demonstrate their ability to maintain the proper functions of the household. Wall characterizes the wives' treatment of Falstaff as a purging:

> Undertaking Falstaff's spiritual reformation, the wives move between figurative and literal acts of purgation, with the result that the household swells to define the ethics and boundaries of the community. Is it any wonder that the chastising fairies later appear specifically as housecleaners? ("Why Does Puck Sweep?" 95)

Wall notes that female housework is partly the balancing act of the humoral body that is the home; extending this claim further, I argue that Falstaff's repeated rejections from the family home are necessary to keep the balance of the home intact.[88] Like the previous day's refuse Falstaff is forcefully and involuntarily carried out of the household because only in publicly rejecting Falstaff can the women prove their innocence which throughout

[88] Wall reminds us of "the period's belief that the humoral body churned unpredictably in a state of disequilibrium and required an almost daily regimen of diets, purges, vomits, sweatings, and enemas" ("Why Does Puck Sweep?" 99) The wife's task in this context is to "orchestrate the flow of intake and output for these bodies" ("Why Does Puck Sweep?" 99).

the play becomes synonymous with their ability to maintain the proper functions of the household. What is at stake in this play is female labor: the wives perform the tasks necessary to safeguard the family home both prior to Falstaff's attacks and during his attempts to corrupt their homes. Because this labor does not receive acknowledgment unless performed within a public setting, the wives embrace the opportunity—which occurs as a result of Falstaff's attempts to corrupt the household and Ford's subsequent doubt of his wife's fidelity—to dispel this notion of female infidelity and incompetence.

Falstaff's interest in the wives' wealth (rather than their sexual appeal) is evident in his first discussion of his plans: "Now, the report goes she has all the rule of her husband's purse. He hath a legend of angels" (1.3.52-53). That Falstaff includes an imperialist analogy to characterize his intentions with the wives is only fitting for an endeavor where money is the ultimate reward.

> Here's another letter to her. She bears the purse too; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me. They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both. Go, bear thou this letter to Mistress Page; and thou this to Mistress Ford. We will thrive, lads, we will thrive. (1.3.68-74)

In Falstaff's formulation, the wives are the land to his conqueror figure; they "bear the purse" of their respective homes.[89] His thinly veiled amorous speech implies that the

[89] Like the wives, Anne Page, is frequently discussed within the context of her father's financial well-being. In the first scene of the play, Anne's beauty and her dowry are discussed concurrently by her suitors. Per Sir Hugh Evans: "It is that fery person for all the orld, as just as you will desire, and seven hundred pounds of moneys, and, gold and silver, is her grandsire upon his death's-bed (Got deliver to a joyful resurrections!) give, when she is able to overtake seventeen years old. It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page" (1.1.49-57). This discussion of Anne Page makes it evident that the family's financial power makes her more appealing to potential suitors

wives will be unable to resist Falstaff's charms and will submit themselves—and their household goods—to him. It is this insinuation that ultimately leads to Falstaff's downfall and humiliation. Indeed, Falstaff's attempts to woo the wives for his own financial gain becomes an opportunity for the latter to display their competence in household management. In other words, the wives not only set out to protect their homes, but they do so in a visible, communal setting because the wives' management of the family homes, along with the items that populate the home, becomes a source of power within the play.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the wives are quick to realize that Falstaff is motivated by access to money rather than sex, which enables them to plan a revenge plot accordingly:

> What an unweigh'd behavior hath this Flemish drunkard pick'd (with the devil's name!) out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me? Why, he hath not been thrice in my company! What should I say to him? I was then frugal of my mirth. Heaven forgive me! Why, I'll exhibit a bill in the parliament for the putting down of men. How shall I be reveng'd on him? for reveng'd I will be! as sure as his guts are made puddings. (2.1.22-32)

Mistress Page responds to Falstaff's letters with outrage that is carefully couched in observations. Prior to reading the letter, she expresses her surprise that she should receive

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but also leaves the family more vulnerable. Later, when Anne discusses her relationship with Fenton, he, too, confesses to an initial interest in her money:

> FENTON
> Albeit I will confess thy father's wealth
> Was the first motive that I woo'd thee, Anne;
> Yet wooing thee, I found thee of more value
> Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags;
> And 'tis the very riches of thyself
> That now I aim at. (3.4.13-18)

love letters at all: “What, have [I] scap’d love-letters in the holiday-time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them?” (2.1.1-3). Mistress Page’s response evokes Ford’s response later in the scene to the news that Falstaff is attempting to woo his wife. “Why, sir, my wife is not young” (2.1.112) claims Ford, reasserting Mistress Page’s hint at a value system that would only attempt to seduce a woman for her youth and beauty. Yet, as it is soon made evident in the play, Falstaff’s intentions are not about sexual conquest, but a financial one. Falstaff’s initial disclosure of his plans to seduce the wives is bookended by a conversation about his lack of money (and the need for him to give up Bardolph to the Host to settle his debts) and about the wives’ access to their husbands’ “legend of angels” (1.3.53); his use of metaphors of land and conquest—“she is a region in Guiana” (1.3.69) and “They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both” (1.3.71-72)—demonstrates that his interest in the wives is limited to the economic benefits he could derive from them. Interestingly, what is missing from Falstaff’s proclamations of his plans is any expression of sexual desire. Falstaff’s matter-of-fact declaration of “I do mean to make love to Ford’s wife. I spy entertainment in her. She discourses, she carves, she gives the leer of invitation” (1.3.43-46)—is limited to Falstaff’s interpretation of the wives’ interest in him that would guarantee his success at seducing them and gaining access to their husbands’ finances. The wives’ physical attributes that might make them appealing to Falstaff do not come up during his declaration of plans to seduce them. Korda characterizes Falstaff’s advances as “not merely sexual but pecuniary as well” (98). Following Mistress Page’s logic as she reads Falstaff’s letter, we may come to a conclusion that strongly supports his superior interest

in the wives' financial well-being as opposed to a sexual attraction. Despite a momentary acceptance of the blame—which Korda claims is a necessary part of the wives' self-disciplinary gaze (88)—Mistress Page ultimately concludes that her own conduct during her brief encounters with Falstaff has not given him any indication of her own interest.[90]

Unlike Mistress Page's dismissive contempt, Mistress Ford is worried that Falstaff's letter will make her husband jealous: "O that my husband saw this letter! it would give eternal food to his jealousy" (2.1.100-1). Mistress Ford's language here indicates that Ford has demonstrated jealousy before, and the letter might remind Ford that he could be susceptible to being cuckolded. In fact, when Pistole informs Ford of

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[90] While the Folio version of the play does not record any encounters between Falstaff and the women prior to their first encounter at the Fords' home, the 1602 Quarto stages a meeting between the Falstaff and the women:

> FALSTAFF Mistress *Foord*, I thinke your name is,
> If I mistake not.
> (*Syr John Kisses her*.)
> MISTRESS FORD
> Your mistake sir is nothing but in the Mistresse. But my husbands name is *Foord* sir.
> FALSTAFF
> I shall desire your more aequaintance.
> The like of you good misteris *Page*.
> MISTRESS PAGE
> With all my hart sir *Iohn*.
> Come husband will you goe?
> Dinner staies for vs. (A4)

It should be noted that this conversation takes place in the context of an impending dinner by the Pages which includes—among other guests—the Fords, Anne Page, and Anne's suitors. Mistress Page's line of "With all my hart sir Iohn" can be interpreted as merely the generosity of a hostess. The quarto's portrayal of the first encounter between Falstaff and the wives enables the audience to deduce that Falstaff's advances are the result of taking advantage of the hospitality that a good housewife would display to any guest. The quarto scene also supports Korda's interpretation of the encounter: "Although their [the wives'] judicious observation of the lewd knight is aimed at protecting the propriety of their households and ultimately, as we shall see, at warding off other forms of judicial intervention, much to the merry wives' chagrin Falstaff interprets their furtiveness as a sign not of civility, but of a lascivious intent that must be concealed or dissimulated" (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 85).

Falstaff's intentions towards the women, Ford—in keeping with the audience's expectations—reacts with jealousy: "Why, sir, my wife is not young" (2.1.112). Ford's mention of his wife's age—in an attempt to disprove the reality of Falstaff's advances—indicates his inability to comprehend that Falstaff's interest in the wives is motivated by greed rather than lasciviousness.

As in *Northward Ho*, Falstaff's attempted seduction of the wives should not be interpreted primarily in terms of sexual desire: rather, the wife becomes the locus of intersection of a myriad of issues, including household duties, finances, security, and marital fidelity. The material well-being of the home is contingent upon both spouses' commitment to earn and keep money within the family home. Falstaff's attempts to seduce the wives is based on this connection between spousal fidelity and housekeeping. More erroneously, Falstaff's actions are also motivated by the belief that the wife is the household's weakest link. When discussing his plans to woo his own wife under the guise of Brooks, Ford engages in a conversation that includes the language of conquest used in *Northward Ho*. Ford says:

> Believe it, for you know it. There is money, spend it, spend it; spend more; spend all I have; only give me so much of your time in exchange of it, as to lay an amiable siege to the honesty of this Ford's wife. Use your art of wooing; win her to consent to you; if any man may, you may as soon as any. (2.2.231-37)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "to lay siege to" as "the action, on the part of an army, of investing a town, castle, etc., in order to cut off all outside communication and in the end to reduce or take it; an investment, beleaguering" (6a). The use of a word with heavy military connotations is quite apt in these situations wherein the conquest of the

wife is synonymous with the conquest of the riches of the household. Thus, the wife is the key to gaining hold of the household and its financial resources. This places the wife in a precarious position: spousal chastity guarantees the household's well-being, but the wife's ability to safeguard the household is not assumed unless she has proven this ability in a communal setting.

The opportunity for the wives to demonstrate their skillful home management derives from a societal perception that the wife will stray from her husband and her household responsibilities if she has a chance to do so. In Act 2, Falstaff promises as much to Brooke (Ford in disguise);

> Want no Mistress Ford, Master [Brook], you shall want none. I shall be with her (I may tell you) by her own appointment; even as you came in to me, her assistant or go-between parted from me. I say I shall be with her between ten and eleven; for at that time the jealious [sic] rascally knave her husband will be forth. Come you to me at night, you shall know how I speed. (2.2.260-67)

Here, Falstaff operates on the assumption of a wives' infidelity when she is without supervision; yet, as we see in the play, the wives use these unsupervised instances to demonstrate their abilities to regulate their own behavior. Throughout the play, the female characters gain agency by, as Korda argues, engaging in self-discipline: "[the women] prove that they are not in need of spousal supervision. In this play, the husband's disciplinary intervention in his wife's domestic affairs is portrayed as meddling, and he is ridiculed for it" (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 76). Korda's point about the play's portrayal of the meddling nature of the husband's intervention is supported by the staging of Ford's insistence to go through a basketful of laundry in an attempt to discover

Falstaff. Yet, I contend that the notion of female self-discipline captures only one aspect of the process that allows the wives to assert their power and prove their ability to oversee the family home. While the husbands are patently unqualified to oversee matters of household upkeep and, therefore, cannot competently regulate their wives' labor, the wives' ability to take care of the family without spousal supervision is questioned until they perform housekeeping within a visible, communal setting. Ford, Page, Ford's search party, the fairies in the final act of the play, and even Falstaff all become a part of the community that must witness the wives' ability to spurn the advances of outsiders against the family home; it is this performance of housekeeping in a communal setting that finally puts an end to the doubt and suspicion that accompanies female labor.

The husbands' ineptitude to oversee the household and the wives' expertise at the task stems, at least partly, from the home's capacity to hide things. The audience first witnesses this phenomenon in the first act, when Mistress Quickly directs Simple to go into the closet: "We shall all be shent. Run in here, good young man; go into this closet. He will not stay long" (1.4.37-38). Right away, the audience is exposed to the capacity of the household to hide things, even from its rightful owner, Doctor Caius. This capacity of the household to conceal its contents from its owner becomes a vital part of the plotline later in the play when Falstaff visits Mistress Ford. Unbeknownst to Falstaff, the wives orchestrate Mistress Page's discovery of Falstaff at the Ford home: "O Mistress Ford, what have you done? You're sham'd, y' are overthrown, y' are undone for ever!" (3.3.94-96) exclaims Mistress Page. "Your husband's coming hither, woman, with all the officers in Windsor, to search for a gentleman that he says is here now in the house, by your

consent, to take an ill advantage of his absence. You are undone" (3.3.106-10). By orchestrating a scenario that would allow Ford to discover Falstaff, the wives force the knight to place himself voluntarily with the soiled linen to be carted out of the house by servants. The wives' ingenious use of household objects and chores to punish Falstaff for his attempts to corrupt the family home reminds us of the expertise with which the wives carry on their tasks as homemakers.

If, as evidenced above, Doctor Caius is not fully capable of keeping up with his own home, such is not the case for the wives. Falstaff's second visit highlights various aspects of the Ford home that are associated with female labor; more importantly, these spaces gain a commonplace nature, recognizable not only by Mistress Ford, but also by Mistress Page. Expecting Ford home shortly, Falstaff joins the wives in trying to conjure a hiding place for himself. Both Falstaff and Mistress Page suggest a few places for Falstaff to hide, and it is soon made clear that the places they are considering are all associated with female labor:

> *Fal*. What shall I do? I'll creep up into the chimney.
> *Mistress Ford.* There they will always use to discharge their birding-pieces. Creep into the kill-hole. (4.2.55-58)[91]

[91] Following Edmund Malone's 1790 edition of the text, Russ McDonald assigns "Creep into the kill-hole" to Mistress Page in the Pelican edition of *Merry Wives*. The line belongs to Mistress Ford in the 1790 text, with a footnote from Malone: "I suspect, these words belong to Mistress Page. See Mistress Ford's next speech. That, however, may be a second thought; a correction of her former proposal: but the other supposition is more probable" (275). Given Mistress Ford's subsequent line of "He will seek there, on my word" (4.2.60), I am inclined to agree with Malone's claim that the suggestion to use the kilnhole as a hiding place is Mistress Page's.

Along with Mistress Ford's listing of the places that her husband has included in his inventory, we encounter a list of spaces in the household that are associated with female labor: the place where she mixes and bakes bread, stores the family's goods and clothes. The discussion of the various aspects of the household reminds the audience that there are specific locations within the household that are associated with female labor. Labor enables a gendered demarcation of the household and enables the wife to have more command over some areas that her husband does not have expertise over.

Ford's discovery that his wife has helped Falstaff sneak out of the Ford home (while disguised as Brooke) further undermines Ford's ability to supervise the household because he is clearly not sufficiently familiar with the household to supervise its management. Later, as Ford is trying to find Falstaff again, he turns to his servants and other characters to help him out:

> Buck! I would I could wash myself of the buck! Buck, buck, buck! ay, buck! I warrant you, buck, and of the season too, it shall appear. [*Exeunt Servants with the basket.*] Gentlemen, I have dream'd to-night; I'll tell you my dream. Here, here, here be my keys. Ascend my chambers, search, seek, find out. I'll warrant we'll unkennel the fox. Let me stop this way first. [*Locking the door.*] So, now uncape. (3.3.157-65)

Not only is Ford under-qualified to take care of his household, in this instance he actively undermines his wife's attempts to keep the home safe from intruders by giving away his keys to members of the search party he has formed and inviting them into the home to look for Falstaff. Here we observe Ford engaging in a kind of thought process that assumes the home vulnerability at the hands of its members. Dolan discusses the home's

vulnerability to those that "rise against it from within" (29) and argues that marital intimacy makes it difficult to prevent such crimes:

> Such representations of the violated home both reinforce the household as the sphere in which women act and suggest that women were not only confined to the household but were empowered within it. There they may suffer frustrations and annoyances so great that they turn to violence, but at home they also dare to transform their household tasks into the occasions of retributions and their household tools into the weapons they need. (31)

Although Dolan's discussion here is focused on more violent acts that a wife might commit against her husband, the discussion of the wife's dangerous empowerment helps explain Ford's actions in Act 3, Scene 3. In a (misguided) attempt to save the household from an internal threat, Ford, in essence, leaves it vulnerable to a number of external threats. Thus, while Mistress Ford is perfectly capable of protecting the household, Ford renders it vulnerable to outsiders because of his jealousy. The on-stage interactions of the couple effectively demonstrate Mistress Ford's superiority over her husband when it comes to household matters. Meanwhile, the wives' fastidious performance of the ideal home maker—and the household labor that such a performance entails—becomes a source of power and agency for Mistresses Ford and Page.

Ford's discovery that his wife has tricked him yet again results in a search of the household to prove that his mistrust of his wife has been justified. Mistress Page sums up his reaction as:

> Of none but him, and swears he was carried out, the last time he search'd for him, in a basket; protests to my husband he is now here, and hath drawn him and the

> rest of their company from their sport, to make another experiment of his suspicion. But I am glad the knight is not here. Now he shall see his own foolery. (4.2.31-38)

As the wives and Falstaff try to conjure a plan to hide Falstaff from Ford, Mistress Ford rejects Mistress Page's suggestion to hide Falstaff in the kilnhole:[92] "He will seek there, on my word. Neither press, coffer, chest, trunk, well, vault, but he hath an abstract for the remembrance of such places, and goes to them by his note. There is no hiding you in the house" (4.2.60-64). While the list that Ford has composed might enable him to keep track of the household and its various aspects, it also reminds the audience of a crucial difference between the spouses: Ford needs a list to keep track of the various aspects of the household, information that is readily available to Mistress Ford. Korda summarizes the wife's ability to manage her home as consisting of her ability to always keep a mental checklist of duties and objects:

> The housewife's role as keeper of the household stuff crucially depends on her anxious looking "upon all thyng often tymes"; yet this supervisory role entails not only the watching of external objects, but keeping these "thyng[s]" ever in her mind ("redye in memorie"), where they are stored, ordered, and re-collected according to the rules of oeconomy. (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* 77)

If household management is acquired knowledge for Ford (as evidenced from his inventory of places within the home), it is innate knowledge for both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. Mistress Page's participation carries a twofold significance: first, her thorough knowledge of the Ford home and ability to use this space to conceal Falstaff

[92] Here I am following McDonald's assigning the line to Mistress Page.

from the home's supposed head suggests the communal nature of female housekeeping. Second, her investment in a plot that should only affect Mistress Ford (as Page is not plagued by the same kinds of suspicions that Ford is) reminds us, yet again, of the link between the individual household and the community surrounding it. By ascertaining the well-being of the Ford household, Mistress Page ensures the survival of both her own home and the Windsor community. Ford's inability to oversee the household, on the other hand, effectively eliminates him from this project of home and, by extension, community making. The wives' ability to gain power as a result of conduct according to traditionally assigned spousal roles reminds us of the importance of the household's well-being. The female subject's agency in this case works through acquiescence: she accepts the role that has been traditionally ascribed to the wife but, in doing so, she gains power over the household, which in turn gives her power over Falstaff and her own husband. The household's capacity to hide things comes full circle by the end of the play as the correct management of the household enables the person in charge of it to exert power over the household itself and the people that set foot in it.

The various methods that the wives use to protect and safeguard the household become known to Ford only as a result of his conversations with Falstaff. However, rather than reassuring Ford of his wife's ability to protect the household, it becomes fodder for more suspicion and speculation. In the process of discovering Falstaff's attempts to corrupt the two households, Ford practically talks to every character (including both Page and Mistress Page and Falstaff) but never discusses the matter with his wife. One way of explaining Ford's refusal to discuss the household business with his

own wife is by examining the process of absolving Mistress Ford of her guilt: rather than convince her husband of her spousal chastity, Mistress Ford's chastity must be approved by a committee of individuals outside of the marriage, including the person who lays assault on the household. Female agency through obedience is a communal process here: instead of realizing his wife's innocence, Ford must witness the communal approval of Mistress Ford's conduct in order to let go of the imaginary faults he has ascribed to his wife.

The play's final public shaming of Falstaff becomes a crucial component in the process that ultimately enables the wives to (re)gain agency. Korda focuses on the public aspect of the punishment:

> In the end, Mistress Ford thus appears to renounce her feminine discretion in favor of her husband's penchant for publicity: "methinks there would be no period to this jest," she asserts, "should [Falstaff] not be publicly shamed" (4.2.208-9). Her statement suggests that Falstaff's punishment would somehow be incomplete if it were to remain private…Ford and Page entrust their wives with the public punishment of Falstaff because their wives have proven themselves "honest" and competent housekeepers. The play's final shaming ritual thus functions not as a refutation, but rather as a confirmation, of the efficacy of the wives' domestic management. (95-96)

The public nature of Falstaff's punishment is meant to serve as punishment for all the crimes he has committed against Windsor society; yet, the wives' motivation does not seem to be solely limited to punishment. I would like to push Korda's argument about the incompleteness of the punishment further and examine the role of this public punishment in the wives' project of self-assertion. Falstaff's skimmington-like punishment becomes a final, public performance of housekeeping. Having completed a series of private

punishments of Falstaff to rid him from the family home, the wives are ready to undertake a final punishment of Falstaff for the misdeeds against the entire Windsor community. In keeping with Wall's formulation, if carting Falstaff away from the family home in a laundry basket is akin to getting rid of the family's refuse, in the final act of the play, Falstaff becomes the refuse of the Windsor community that the wives are tasked with ejecting.

Northward Ho and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* both emphasize the notion of spousal chastity as necessary for the well-being of the marriage, the household, and the community. As such, it must be proven to the community at large rather than only to one's spouse. It is not enough that the female characters in these plays are loyal to their husbands (like Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are) or even that their husbands are complicit in staging the circumstances to prove female honesty (like Mistress Mayberry). The wives must prove their honesty to the community as a whole, which results in the proclamations that open this chapter. Ford must recant his suspicions of jealousy in front of a group of people most of whom have, at some point in the play, tried to convince Ford of his wife's honesty. The Mayberrys must get a confession out of Greenshield in a public setting to put the rumors about Mistress Mayberry to rest. Female characters of the middling sort in these plays cannot gain power from mere approval of patriarchal standards; they must demonstrate their skills at managing the family home in a communal setting because they become a vital component of the community's survival. Citing an instance of Margery Newbury's successful suit for separation against her husband

Thomas, Hubbard reminds us of the important work the female subject must perform in maintaining social order:

> The rhetoric of order was a double-edged sword. If men were able to draw on patriarchal discourse, so were women. Margery Newbury's witnesses consistently deployed patriarchal ideals to demonstrate how utterly Thomas Newbury had failed to live up to his obligation as husband and father, provider and guide, and how admirably Margery herself had fulfilled the role of the provident wife, mistress, and mother. Margery fed and clothed her family, keeping them off the poor rates; Thomas threatened to cast his wife and children into the hospital, to make them beggars, dependent on parish charity…On one side, as the witnesses put it, the wife strove for order, economic stability, health, and domestic harmony, and on the other, the husband threatened to destroy his own household and to weaken the broader social fabric. (142)

When husbands are unqualified or refuse to maintain social order, community survival depends on female labor. The female characters I have examined in this chapter assume the task of ensuring domestic and communal well-being and survival and do so through compliance. This obedient conduct becomes a source of acquiescent agency for the female subjects and gives the female subjects (perhaps temporarily) reprieve from societal over-regulation.

CHAPTER VI

CODA: FEMALE POWER FOR ITS OWN SAKE

> The historical evidence I have sampled undermines the current scholarly consensus that respectable women were expected to stay at home, that they were economically dependent on fathers and husbands, and that they were subjected to constant surveillance by jealous men, obsessively anxious about their sexual fidelity. I found it because I was looking for it. Historical evidence…is subject to selective citation and motivated interpretation.
>
> --Phyllis Rackin, "Misogyny is Everywhere" 51

In a list of playgoers spanning from 1567 to 1642, Andrew Gurr lists thirty-one women; they comprise twelve percent of the individuals Gurr includes in the list (*Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, Appendix 1). Because the information included is based on written records, most of the women who are a part of Gurr's list belong to aristocratic families. Elsewhere in his study, Gurr notes the theater's appeal to illiterate individuals: precisely those who would likely be excluded from written records. Illiterate early modern women make up a large portion of theatrical audiences: "The high proportion of women at the playhouses testifies to the popularity of playgoing for the illiterate, since few women of any class, even in London, could write their names" (65). Citizen wives, in particular, were "a noteworthy presence" in London's playhouses (66).

That women were a part of the audience of early modern theatrical performances is hardly news. Richard Levin argues that in examining women's influence on the theater, we should focus on the collective potential of the female audience rather than specific figures:

> But if we are concerned with their possible effect on the drama, that would depend not on their absolute numbers or proportions of the audience but on whether they were regarded by playwrights and acting companies as a constituency whose interests and feelings should be considered. ("Women in Renaissance Theater Audiences" 165)

Given early modern women's propensity towards theater—both in individual numbers and as a collective force—we can speculate that the corpus of dramatic texts produced in the early modern period considers the presence of women during a performance a given fact.[93] How, then, do we account for the dramatic representation of female characters as mischievous, unfaithful, and greedy in so many of the plays, especially since the female infidelity that many of the plays promise to their audiences rarely comes to fruition? Though questions of authorial intentionality are particularly tricky to answer (and I am not making a claim about authorial intentionality here or elsewhere), the female characters that frequently occupy the early modern stage resist depictions that focus on qualities such as dishonesty to their husbands and a failure to attend to all aspects of their households. I am reminded here of Louis Montrose's characterization of the critic's power in determining the scope of her study:

> Integral to this new project of historical criticism is a realization and acknowledgement that the critic's own text is as fully implicated in such an

[93] In "Scripts and/versus Playhouses: Ideological Production and the Renaissance Public Stage," Jean Howard suggests that the power of female audience members may extend to a capacity to gaze at other theatergoers and, as such, becomes subject to regulation: "At the theater door, money changed hands in a way which enabled women access to the pleasure and privilege of gazing, certainly at the stage, and probably at the audience as well….[I]n public, where they could become objects of desire, certainly, but also desiring subjects, stimulated to want what was on display at the theater, which must have been, not just sexual opportunity, but all the trappings of a commodifying culture worn upon the very backs of those attending the theater and making it increasingly difficult to discern 'who was one really was' in terms of the categories of a status system based on fixed and unchanging social hierarchies" (36).

> interplay as are the texts under study; a recognition of the agency of criticism in constructing and delimiting the subject of study, and of the historical positioning of the critic vis-à-vis that subject; and thus a renunciation of the illusory quest of an older historical criticism to recover objective, authentic, or stable "meanings." (7-8)

Following Montrose's argument that literary texts should be regarded as capable of revealing additional facets of the landscape of history, the examination of city comedies gives us valuable perspective into the lives of the female characters. This critic's decision to use her agency to examine manifestations of female power through a series of city comedies fills a part of the landscape of history that has been plagued by the aforementioned problems of illiteracy and lack of record keeping. By mining early modern city comedies for information about female power and agency, we are able to gain a unique understanding of how such power functions. Specifically, we can observe, analyze, and trace the deployment of female power that may be gained as a result of obedience. This, in turn, allows us to imagine possibilities for female power under the extreme scrutiny of societal disciplining gaze.

The quotation from Phyllis Rackin that begins this section has informed my own line of critical inquiry throughout this project. While texts that challenge the easy assumption that women were supposed to behave in accordance to directives to be chaste, silent, and obedient exist in the early modern period, they have received less critical attention than other literary and historical works from the period. The challenge in engaging in scholarship that examines women of the middling sort is in dealing with neglect: the figure of the early modern woman of the middling sort as an agent is largely neglected by authors and scholars alike. The plays in which such figures may appear are

frequently ignored by early modern scholars; even when they are discussed, the focus is on the plays' primary characters and not the citizen wives despite their potential contributions to scholarly understandings of female power and agency. Rackin reminds us of the impact that scholarship can have on generating misconstrued conceptions of the early modern world:

> The problem is that the conceptual categories that shape contemporary scholarly discourse, no less than the historical records of the past, are often man-made and shaped by men's anxieties, desires, and interests. As such, they constitute instruments of women's exclusion, and often of women's oppression. (47)

Examples of scholarship that engages in practices of reinforcing ideas of female oppression and powerlessness are numerous, but a few seem particularly apt in this instance. In a discussion of *Epicene*, Alexander Leggatt—unlike many critics who simply gloss over the characters—labels the collegiates "an organized body of shrews" (88) whose biggest crime seems to be the subversion of traditional expectations of female conduct:

> In adopting this unnatural authority they have denied their own womanhood: among other things, they take mixtures to prevent childbirth…They prefer a parody of eternal youth, with the help of cosmetics, to accepting their natural roles as women. Jonson also shows, in the case of Tom Otter, the dislocation of a husband's nature when his wife takes over. (Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy* 88)

Such dismissals of the collegiates are hardly unique, and—unlike many of the other citizen wives that I examine in this project—it is indeed difficult to find redeeming qualities in much of the collegiates' behavior. However, the immediate categorization of

the collegiates as "an organized body of shrews" hinders a more thorough analysis and critique of the characters.

Another example of dismissal of early modern city comedies that I would like to highlight comes from Larry S. Champion's comparative study of *Northward Ho* and *Westward Ho*:

> …Dekker's *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*, both in collaboration with Webster, offer striking examples of the development in this form as well. The structure of the first is fundamentally flawed and contributes directly to the quality of dramaturgy that makes Dekker such an easy target for both historical and literary critics. The second, structurally sound, tonally and morally consistent, and reasonably witty, deserves a better fate than merely to be considered a sequel. (252)

In discussing *Westward Ho*, Champion cites Justiniano's sudden change of perspective as contributing to the play's inconsistent plot structure. The wives' decision to stay faithful to their husbands is cited as another example of this inconsistency: "the wives, for their part, readily agree to both afternoon and evening assignations arranged by their confidant; the idea of abrogating the relationship just short of actual carnality seems at best an afterthought" (257). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, another reading of the play is possible: rather than interpret the wives' change of heart as symptomatic of an inconsistent plot structure, I argue that the wives possibly never fully intended to engage in a sexual relationship with the gallants. Mistresses Tenterhook, Honeysuckle, and Wafer take advantage of the opportunity to travel outside of the city and once they arrive in Brentford they choose the company of each other over the company of the gallants. Readings of these texts that dismiss the middling sort characters or the plots they take

part in as hastily composed do as much disservice to them as their authors did. Jonson's contemptuous attitude towards the collegiates is repeated in readings of the text that fail or refuse to engage with the characters more closely. Such readings may not always be fruitful in discovering redeeming qualities of the characters or manifestations of female power—my own reading of the text demonstrates this latter point—but they are nevertheless crucial for a broader understanding of female power. By examining the failure of the collegiates to secure agency within the play, we are reminded of the importance of alternative manifestations of female power as well as scholarly representations of it.

The examples of female power that become the subject of my inquiry throughout this study gain an extra-textual power: attempts to regulate female characters through representations that showcase their infidelity fail because the female characters ultimately remain true to their husbands, going against the narrative the texts try to construct about them. Here, as before, the possibility of unquestioned scholarly belief in what the texts purport to be true hinders our ability to critically examine the claims made by the plays. In "A Case for Anecdotalism in Women's History" Lena Cowen Orlin cautions against an easy acceptance of information merely because it is frequently repeated:

> I have myself been oppressed by the sheer weight of homiletic record, by the sermons and conduct books that are so readily available, so genetically familiar, so textually congenial. I and perhaps others have been seduced by the mere effort of research into thinking these prescriptions were culturally operative in a way that they cannot have been in many women's daily lives. Even though we have told ourselves that such admonitions would not have been necessary had their strictures been generally observed, we have nonetheless persisted in depicting women as victims of unrelenting misogyny, patriarchy, and oppression…If we have enjoyed this construction of women, perhaps it is because it offers us the

> comforting reassurance that history has made progress and that we have come a long way (baby) from our early modern predecessors. (74)

Orlin's highlighting the possibility that we observe a kind of early modern oppression partly because of our own desires to create a narrative of progress resonates for me throughout this project. The common thread of negative representations of female characters prevails in practically all the plays I study. The characters whom the citizen wives share the stage with rarely mince words when it comes to critiquing the female characters for their behavior, for their freedom, and for their sexual looseness. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this project—particularly in the later chapters—these portrayals of the female characters rarely align with their behaviors. While the power of gossip as a mechanism of social conduct is not to be ignored, the portrayals of the women and their corresponding behavior cannot be explained away on the basis of social regulation only. At the root of the problem is a moment of discord between societal portrayal of female characters and the characters' refusal to be reduced to a stereotype. Ultimately, these characters' continued obedience to their husbands undermines cultural understandings of the female characters as unfaithful to their households and their husbands. The female characters manage to go against the narratives of how they should be perceived; yet, their defiance of the stereotypical narrative of the dishonest wife goes unnoticed by many of the critics examining early modern city comedy. As a result, my readings of these characters largely go against the critical consensus. Of note are Mistress Gallipot and Kate Greenshield from *Roaring Girl* and *Northward Ho*, respectively. During their final appearance in *Roaring Girl*, Mistress Gallipot and Laxton explain that

their relationship has been a ruse to prove the chastity of the citizen wife. Laxton proclaims that he never intended to defile the Gallipots' union:

> But sir I swear
> By heaven and by those hopes men lay up there,
> I neither have nor had a base intent
> To wrong your bed. (9.341-44)

Gallipot's response to this news is to take Laxton's side over his wife's: "Wife, brag no more / Of holding out: who most brags is most whore (9.354-55). Gallipot's skepticism extends to scholarly examinations of the play; for example, Mario DiGangi interprets Laxton's explanation as occurring for the benefit of Gallipot:

> Through this colorful, pious tale, Laxton successfully passes off his seduction of Mistress Gallipot as a "merriment" (4.2.333), not a serious attempt at adultery; consequently, Master Gallipot commends his sexual restraint: "I am beholden—not to you, wife,— / But Master Laxton, to your want of doing ill" (4.2.337-38). Yet as Master Gallipot's cutting response indicates, Laxton's exculpatory tale also casts Mistress Gallipot as the type of undisciplined, indiscreet, wife whose loose speech and behavior threaten the householder's attainment of "good husbandry." ("Sexual Slander" 167-68)

Like *Roaring Girl*, *Northward Ho* includes a storyline of a cheating wife who only appears to be (but, in fact, is not) unfaithful to her husband. Having concocted an elaborate sleepwalking scheme to be able to cheat on her husband, Kate Greenshield argues that she has been faithful to her husband: "My deare vnkind husband; I protest to thee I haue playd this knauish part only to be witty" (5.1.231-32). Featherstone, her husband's friend and the man with whom she was most likely to have an affair, corroborates her story: "I protest the gentlewoman is honest, and since I haue wrong'd

her reputation in meeting her thus priuately, Ile maintaine her" (5.1.337-38). Champion, in his analysis of the play, chooses to neglect the information that could exonerate Kate and characterizes her as: "Married to one man, she pretends to be his sister in order to cozen a second, meanwhile engaging in an affair with a third and also finding time to offer herself as a prostitute to a fourth" (259).

The examples from *Roaring Girl* and *Northward Ho* I have cited represent a kind of a scholarly commitment to the stereotype of the dishonest wife that I have resisted throughout this project. I do not argue that Kate Greenshield and Mistress Gallipot have been faithful to their husbands without a doubt; such a claim would be difficult to make with absolute certainty. However, the examples I cite from these plays should complicate the (frequently) baseless stereotype of the dishonest wife that appears in early modern plays and is accepted by critics as a given.

I engage with the work of Orlin and Rackin in this section because I hope that this study has accomplished some of the objectives that these scholars advocate for in their own works. In purposefully disengaging from a narrative of female power as an indicator of male anxiety, I have been able to discuss female power for its own sake: as a set of interactions between individuals and institutions that gives women the ability to act according to their own volition. Though my analysis frequently references the kinds of dogmatic works that Orlin argues contribute to our view about the over-regulation of female subjects, my engagement with these texts does not assume the automatic powerlessness of the female subject. Rather, as I demonstrate throughout this project, female obedience may be interpreted as a site of agency for the female subject. Female

power in the early modern period is a difficult topic to discuss: written records from this period largely capture the lives of literate, powerful women. The quest for powerful women of the middling sort necessarily begins with a re-thinking of what female power might look like. City comedies serve as the perfect backdrop for discourses of female power because these plays capture possibilities of female power that in turn help us re-evaluate our own conceptions of how this kind of power can be manifested.

My choice of plays in this study is the result of two factors: primarily, I have chosen plays that include portrayals of female conduct that may seem powerless at first glance. A careful examination of what the female characters are able to achieve during their time on the stage enables a deeper understanding of how the characters operate and how they use the circumstances around them to gain power. Secondly, throughout this study I have found it easier to construct arguments about manifestations of female power when using plays that have not received enough critical attention recently. The reason, I suspect, for this ease of interpretation is tied to the kinds of arguments that reaffirm female powerlessness: an argument about female power in a given play must necessarily counter all other conclusions about the play's characters and their powerlessness. For this reason, the inclusion of plays that have not received much critical attention—like *Northward Ho*—is crucial in discovering new interpretations of female power and agency as this allows the critic to look at texts unencumbered by an existing scholarly consensus about the text.

I would like to conclude by revisiting the concept of collective agency that has been a focal point throughout this study. In an examination of scholarly practices that

emphasize the accomplishments of individual subjects, Crystal Bartolovich advocates for a consideration of the collective power of early modern figures and characters:

> Early modern studies, as all social sites, has a role to play in determining whether or not such liberatory projects prevail, but for criticism to be politically progressive it must pay attention to blind spots produced by the dominant-hegemonic social relations of the world in which critics live as well as the incomplete projects we inherit from the past. (77)

Bartolovich turns to petitions filed to the Parliament by groups of non-elite women in the 1640s and 50s to demonstrate how collective actions were regarded by these women as having the possibility of granting the kind of power—in this case the audience of the Parliament—that individual actions might not. The examples that Bartolovich cites occur a few decades after the plays I examine and they are frequently ultimately unsuccessful, yet I turn to them because they remind us that the singular will of the individual agent is not necessarily a given in the cultural context within which such plays were produced (and if it was, it was not available to female subject of the middling sort).

Though my work here has only partially illuminated the blind spots that Bartolovich mentions, I hope that my critical approach can help fill some of the existing gaps in scholarly understandings of early modern women of the middling sort and discourses of power. One way of accomplishing this goal is to—as I have done—turn to plays that give space to female characters of the middling sort and to look beyond what the play or existing scholarship tell us about individual characters. Many of the city plays I examine in this study have not received enough scholarly attention, which, I suspect, is at least partly due to the fact that they do not have particular characters that the critic

looking for an individual's accomplishments can delve into. The exceptions to this are *Epicene*, *The Roaring Girl*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which have Morose (or even Epicene), Moll Cutpurse, and Falstaff, respectively. While these characters are compelling for literary study, they do not warrant the neglect of secondary characters or characters who operate as groups rather than as individuals. I hope that this project will inspire future examinations of city plays and their middle sort characters as such studies can elucidate our understandings of collective female agency in ways that a Shakespearean tragedy cannot.

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