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Trafficking Women: Interest, Desire, and Early Modern English Drama

Emily C. Gerstell
University of Pennsylvania, ecgerstell@gmail.com

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Abstract
Studies on the traffic in women have usefully illuminated the ways in which women function as objects under patriarchy; this dissertation expands that paradigm to address trafficking women — women who operate as agents, rather than objects, of exchange. The female protagonists of the plays I examine — William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603/1604) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623), Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), and the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (1592) — deliberately pursue relationships with men and other women to bring themselves financial and social benefit. In attending to the ways in which women are imagined to befriend, love, or lust after men and women, I focus on how women achieve and seek to achieve those affective aims, noting the key role that money and class play in enabling women to get what they want. What these women want, I argue, has not always fit comfortably with what certain strands of feminist criticism have wanted women to want. In particular, analysis guided by tenets of cultural feminism, which tends to read women as driven by desires to form close interpersonal relationships marked by egalitarianism and warmth, has stopped us from seeing these women as fully rational and has shifted attention away from the economic and political underpinnings of their affective ties. In my analysis of *Hamlet* and *Dido*, for example, I break from a tradition that has framed discussions of female rulers in terms of the queen's private feelings rather than public concerns, highlighting the ways in which both Gertrude and Dido exert not just sexual but also political agency. While gender is my primary category of analysis, this dissertation attests to the ways in which social class presents an equally if not more powerful force in structuring imaginative possibilities for the men and women of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. This is particularly clear in drama that depicts the middle-class domicile and its master, mistress and servant relationships. In *All's Well*, Helena's ability to achieve her desires, in contrast to Diana's almost certain failure to do the same, or, in *Arden*, Susan's inability to be innocent in Alice's crime exposes the limits of using female agency as a proxy for gender or social parity, for, as all the plays I examine demonstrate, personal agency invariably comes at the literal and figurative expense of others. Through analysis of these plays and other contemporary writings, this dissertation shows how early modern women are variously imagined not only to resist but also consciously to participate in, benefit from, and perpetuate gendered, economic, and social hierarchies.

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TRAFFICKING WOMEN
INTEREST, DESIRE, AND EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

Emily C. Gerstell

A DISSERTATION
in
English

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
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Supervisor of Dissertation
Melissa E. Sanchez
Associate Professor of English

Graduate Group Chairperson
Melissa E. Sanchez, Associate Professor of English

Dissertation Committee
Zachary Lesser, Associate Professor of English
Peter Stallybrass, Walter H. and Leonore C. Annenberg Professor in the Humanities; Professor of English and of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory of English
I vividly remember listening to Melissa Sanchez deliver a talk on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, feminism, queer theory, and early modern sexuality and thinking to myself, “That’s what I want to do. That’s what I want to be when I grow up.” That was a year before I began the dissertation project, and it has been my greatest fortune to have Melissa as my advisor. She has been a model for me not only intellectually but also personally. Her scholarship has inspired my own; if I am proud of my work, it is because she has pushed me to think more deeply and engage more fully with the questions I have sought to answer. I have left every conversation with Melissa not only feeling like I could do it, but that I wanted to.

Neither would this dissertation exist without the guidance of Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass. Zack brings the same level of care to his own work as he does to others’; to benefit from his attention and feedback has been a great boon to my work. He was always ready to answer my questions, engage my ideas, and encourage me to see the bigger picture. I have often, as I have been writing, found myself asking of an argument, “What would Zack’s comment be about this?” So doing has reminded me to be not only clearer but also more compelling in my thoughts, as it has also reminded me to always be curious. It is not always easy to find joy in research and writing, but Peter’s enthusiasm is infectious. I have learned so much from him and am so fortunate to have benefited from his tremendous intellect and warmth. Peter, too, has always prompted me to see more and to cherish this work.
My intellectual debt cannot, of course, stop there. Margreta de Grazia writes with a grace and rigor I can only begin to aspire to, and I am so appreciative of the attention I have received as her student and teaching assistant. I will be a better scholar and professor because of her. I count myself incredibly fortunate to have taken classes with David Wallace, Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, and Heather Love; it is my hope that my research bears traces of what I have learned from them. While I was never formally a student of Emily Steiner’s, I am grateful for the care she has shown both to me and to my work.

I would not have been able to benefit from the training I have received at the University of Pennsylvania had I not had superlative professors at Barnard College. Peter Platt, Anne Prescott, and Saskia Hamilton stand out as the reasons why I wanted to become a professor. They encouraged me to be more daring in my analysis, bold in my writing, and obsessive in my research.

My work has been made possible by both the institutional and educational support Penn and especially the English department have offered. Special thanks to all the staff of the English department, to the Medieval Renaissance Seminar, to the Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies department, to the Center for Teaching and Learning, to the Critical Writing Program, to the Furness Shakespeare Library, to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, and to all at Penn who helped in ways big and small.

My good fortune is so great that I shall never appreciate its full extent. In light of that, I endeavor to be grateful for the people and things I have in my life, knowing that I
will always come up short; these acknowledgments, however, afford an excellent opportunity to begin to get it right.

While I have written on close female relationships governed by self-interest rather than sincere affection, I am pleased to report that my research bears little resemblance to my own experience. My friends have made the past six years not merely possible but pleasurable. We have shared in joy, frustration, sorrow, hope, bewilderment and wonder; countless cups of coffee and, I should like to think, countable bottles of wine; and in each other’s lives. If I thanked each friend for all she or he has brought to me, I should never stop. Let me just say, however, to Louise, Julie, Elizabeth, Ashley, Eric, Nik, Miriam, Julia, Megan, Liz and Shaudi, that I hope you know how much your friendship means to me. Emma is my oldest and dearest friend: I am so grateful that as we have grown up, we have grown in parallel, so that, were I choosing friends anew, I would still choose her. Sheila’s grace, warmth and intelligence have always made my day a little brighter. Jeanne is less a friend than a presence in my life; I like to think it was more than just coincidence that led to our meeting.

Above all, I owe my deepest gratitude and love to my family. My great sorrow is that, of all my grandparents, only Martin Gerstell will see this; having him and the adoration he showers upon me more than make up, however, for their absence. So much of how I see myself is shaped by my two brothers, Daniel and Jonathan, and their love. They mean the world to me, and I am so very proud to be their big sister. My parents taught me not only to be attentive to language but also to enjoy it. They, as well as their parents, always made it clear that education was the priority and that books, unlike toys,
were something one always deserved. I owe my mother and father so much, and I endeavor to make them as proud to have me as a daughter, as I am to have them as my parents.

Pursuing a doctorate, in particular, the process of writing a dissertation, can be an incredibly lonely and isolating process. That solitude has been made bearable not only by my friends and family, but also by the acquaintances and even strangers who had a smile, or a wave, or pleasantries that occasionally deepened into something more substantive. Or sometimes it just resulted in me getting my coffee the way I like without having to ask for it. Those small gestures and moments of connection kept me afloat and on course; it is, as they say, the little things that count.

Yet however hard this has been, it has been glorious to immerse myself in such beautiful works of literature. I am grateful, too, for this.
ABSTRACT

TRAFFICKING WOMEN: INTEREST, DESIRE, AND EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

Emily C. Gerstell
Melissa E. Sanchez

Studies on the traffic in women have usefully illuminated the ways in which women function as objects under patriarchy; this dissertation expands that paradigm to address trafficking women – women who operate as agents, rather than objects, of exchange. The female protagonists of the plays I examine – William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603/1604) and *All’s Well That Ends Well* (1623), Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), and the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (1592) – deliberately pursue relationships with men and other women to bring themselves financial and social benefit. In attending to the ways in which women are imagined to befriend, love, or lust after men and women, I focus on how women achieve and seek to achieve those affective aims, noting the key role that money and class play in enabling women to get what they want. What these women want, I argue, has not always fit comfortably with what certain strands of feminist criticism have wanted women to want. In particular, analysis guided by tenets of cultural feminism, which tends to read women as driven by desires to form close interpersonal relationships marked by egalitarianism and warmth, has stopped us from seeing these women as fully rational and has shifted attention away from the economic and political underpinnings of their affective ties. In my analysis of *Hamlet* and *Dido*, for example, I break from a tradition
that has framed discussions of female rulers in terms of the queen’s private feelings rather than public concerns, highlighting the ways in which both Gertrude and Dido exert not just sexual but also political agency. While gender is my primary category of analysis, this dissertation attests to the ways in which social class presents an equally if not more powerful force in structuring imaginative possibilities for the men and women of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. This is particularly clear in drama that depicts the middle-class domicile and its master, mistress and servant relationships. In *All’s Well*, Helena’s ability to achieve her desires, in contrast to Diana’s almost certain failure to do the same, or, in *Arden*, Susan’s inability to be innocent in Alice’s crime exposes the limits of using female agency as a proxy for gender or social parity, for, as all the plays I examine demonstrate, personal agency invariably comes at the literal and figurative expense of others. Through analysis of these plays and other contemporary writings, this dissertation shows how early modern women are variously imagined not only to resist but also consciously to participate in, benefit from, and perpetuate gendered, economic, and social hierarchies.
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Figure 1. Woodcut depicting the murder of Thomas Arden in *The lamentable and true tragedy of Master Arden of Feversham in Kent* (1633), Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery via Early English Books Online......................................................145
INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about desire: first and foremost, it is a dissertation that examines the desires female protagonists of early modern English drama express for economic, political, and social power, as well as the ways in which women’s desires for other men and women defy certain critical expectations about gender ideology. The female protagonists of the plays I examine are largely guided by self-interest, subjects who are savvy about subjugating the men and women who surround them in pursuit of their personal goals. In attending to the ways in which women are imagined to befriend, love, or lust after men and women, I focus on how women achieve and seek to achieve those affective aims, noting the key role that money and class play in enabling women to get what they want. What these women want, however, has not always fit comfortably with what certain strands of feminist criticism have wanted women to want. In particular, analysis guided by tenets of cultural feminism, which tends to read women as nurturing, kind and driven by a desire to form close interpersonal relationships marked by egalitarianism and warmth, has stopped us from seeing female characters as fully rational and has shifted attention away from the economic and political underpinnings of these women’s affective ties. Highlighting the critical role that class plays in structuring women’s options and motivations, I demonstrate the limits of using female agency as a proxy for gender or social parity, for, as these plays demonstrate, personal agency invariably comes at the literal and figurative expense of others. To that extent, this dissertation is, therefore, also about the desires that scholars have projected onto their readings of these plays.
Studies drawing on the traffic in women paradigm have usefully illuminated the ways in which women function as objects under patriarchy\(^1\); this dissertation expands that paradigm to examine trafficking women—women who operate as agents, rather than objects, of exchange. The female protagonists of the plays I discuss deliberately pursue relationships with men and other women that will bring them economic and social benefit, often through strategic negotiation of the marriage market and service economy. Scholars have typically read women’s agency in pursuing both same- and opposite-sex relationships as grounded on sincere and selfless love, but I find that in many early modern plays women are depicted as being just as self-interested as men are: the relationships we have typically identified as governed by love or friendship are equally driven by desires for economic and political gain. In my chapters on Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for example, I argue, that both Dido and Gertrude are well aware that the man who shares the royal bed shares the throne, and that what we have read as spontaneous sexual choices are in fact strategic and political.

This dissertation is equally invested in examining how women’s knowing manipulation of the marriage market affects their relationships with other women. The same logic that reads the political ramifications of women’s actions as secondary consequences of women’s pursuit of private goals tends to idealize relations between women as governed by sincere affection that excludes calculation of the social, economic, or political benefits a particular relationship might bring. By contrast, I argue

\(^1\) Claude Lévi-Strauss advanced his alliance theory of kinship in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (*Les
that women are just as likely to instrumentalize the men and women around them as men are and that, moreover, friendship may coexist with self-interest. This tension is evident in Helena’s relationship with the Florentine women in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, Gertrude’s treatment of Ophelia across the First Quarto, Second Quarto, and Folio texts of *Hamlet*, or Alice’s manipulation of the men and women in her service in *Arden of Faversham*. Through analysis of these plays and other contemporary documents, this dissertation shows that in early modern drama female characters are variously imagined not only to resist but also consciously to participate in, benefit from, and perpetuate gendered, economic, and social hierarchies.

By focusing on these relationships, this dissertation follows what Dympna Callaghan has described as “post-revisionist feminism,” which examines women’s complex role as “excluded participants,” within early modern culture. In pursuing this line of scholarship, I draw on Karen Newman’s discussion of the role women play in the traffic in women and Melissa Sanchez’s recent writings on the fiction of female friendship as inherently compassionate and caring. Sanchez’s examination, moreover, of female sado-masochistic fantasies has been critical to my own understanding of women’s desires to use and be used and why feminist criticism has been reluctant to address these impulses. Likewise, Kathryn Schwarz’s work on female volition that appears radically

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4 Some of this reluctance has been traced to the break between feminism and queer theory. For this divergence see, in addition to Sanchez, “Use Me But as Your Spaniel,” Lynne Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Janet Halley,
destructive in its pursuit of socially conservative aims has guided my readings of the ways in which patriarchal structures of the home may actually (and at times paradoxically) empower certain women.\textsuperscript{5} Turning my gaze towards the inner workings of the domicile – be it the royal household of Elsinore or Carthage, the noble estate of Rousillon, or the middle-class homes of the Widow Capilet or Arden of Faversham – I build off the scholarship done on women and the household by Natasha Korda, Wendy Wall, and Frances Dolan to examine the implications for female rule at home.\textsuperscript{6}

While gender is my primary category of analysis, this dissertation attests to the ways in which social class presents an equally if not more powerful force in structuring imaginative possibilities for the men and women of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Indeed, as not only the plays of this dissertation but much of early modern English drama attests, male \textit{and female} protagonists are driven by a quest for power, honor, and personal gain: the extent to which men and women are able to traffic themselves is frequently bound less by gender than it is by class. This is not to suggest that ideas of femininity and masculinity do not and did not exist, but that perhaps some of what scholars code as traditionally “male” or “female” was, for an early modern audience, coded on a different binary or continuum than that of gender. In the same way that queer theory has argued for a different understanding of sexuality in early modern Europe than how sexual


identities are constructed in contemporary society, feminist scholarship can help illuminate the ways in which early modern understandings of gender ideology not only differ from our own but may, in some areas, have been more expansive in their understanding of what did and did not constitute gendered behavior. As the plays I examine and their protagonists show, the condition of womanhood does not stop these women from pursuing and achieving goals that do not fit with certain constructions of feminine behavior. Curiously, it has historically been the scholars, not the characters within the plays, who cite the protagonists for “unwomanly” behavior – while these women may be censured within the plays for their actions, the censure is not because they are “untrue to their sex” but, more often, because they are “untrue” to their class or make choices that diminish the financial or social status of their kin.7

The fiscal, social, and political ramifications of female sexual agency, are, I argue, key to understanding the vitriol directed at women who assert a sexuality that conflicts with the desires of their male counterparts. The revulsion, for example, Hamlet expresses that Gertrude would “post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets” (1.2.156-57) has pulled focus from the larger problem Gertrude’s bed presents to Hamlet, that of what we might label the problem of the “Queen’s two bodies”8: as Claudius’ appellation of Gertrude as “th’imperial jointress” (1.2.9) indicates, marriage to a queen is marriage to a kingdom. Looking at moments in which male characters decry female sexual autonomy

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7 See, for example, my survey of criticism on Helena in Chapter Four, or my discussion of the ways in which Dido’s language is not so much gendered as it is classed in Chapter Two.
8 I reference here the idea of the King’s Two Bodies, advanced by Ernst Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); for a discussion of this idea applied to queens, see Katherine Eggert, Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
and the way scholars have read those moments, I offer a different take on the larger trend in feminist criticism that assumes that, because female sexuality is, *ipso facto*,

threatening, any attack on female sexuality should be accepted at face value as being about the threat that female sexuality presents. As I show, this stops us from considering that, because attacks on women are so frequently framed in terms of their sexuality,\(^9\)

indicting a woman for licentiousness may be a way of deflecting attention from the real target of attack. As taboo as female sexual autonomy may seem, perhaps more taboo is female financial and political power.

My first chapter begins with that most canonical of Renaissance plays, *Hamlet*, addressing criticism on Gertrude in *Hamlet* in order to demonstrate that canonical readings have missed the political significance and desires of the Queen of Denmark. To do this, I address the differences across the three texts of *Hamlet*: the First Quarto (Q1) of *Hamlet*, printed in 1603 but not discovered until 1823; the Second Quarto (Q2) of *Hamlet*, printed in 1604; and the first Folio (F) edition of *Hamlet*, printed in 1623; through close readings of the Queen of Denmark as she appears both in Q1 and in the Q2/F texts, I highlight the ways in which Gertrude of Q2/F is intensely political, particularly when read alongside Gertred, her Q1 counterpart. Moreover, Gertrude is politically prominent not because she is an attractive pawn in the power play for Denmark’s crown, but because she is a literal and figurative kingmaker. Whereas critical tradition assumes that Gertrude is solely driven by lust, by a desire for Claudius’ material

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body, I contend that Gertrude can just as easily be read as driven by ambition, by a desire for Claudius’ metaphysical “kingly” body. Reading Hamlet alongside Eastward Ho suggests that, for Hamlet’s early audience, Gertrude was defined less by her appetite for sex than for power. This interpretation reflects, moreover, an understanding of the key importance that wealth and property were commonly understood to have in marital negotiations. Tracing the language of “gifts” and “jointure” in both Hamlet and contemporary writings demonstrates the vital significance Gertrude’s appellation as “th’imperial jointress” carries. I use readings of Gertrude as a salient example of larger trends within feminist criticism in general and early modern feminist criticism in particular: namely, the tendency to frame discussions of female characters in terms of sexuality. As I show, examining Gertrude through this lens has stopped us from seeing her as a exercising political and financial, rather than just sexual, agency. Attention to Gertrude’s political actions also causes us to reevaluate her relationship with Ophelia, challenging a tradition that has tended to see Gertrude as maternal and nurturing towards Ophelia and as Ophelia’s sole ally amid a cold, patriarchal Denmark.

In Chapter Two, I consider a different but no less canonical figure of female rule: Dido. Focusing on the depiction of Dido in Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe’s play, Dido, Queen of Carthage (1594), I ask what happens when we take seriously the play’s titular promise to stage Dido as the Queen of Carthage. Pairing Dido with the Aeneid highlights the precise political nature of Dido as she is imagined by Marlowe and Nashe, offering a counter to a critical tradition that has read Dido as a woman overruled and driven to misrule by private emotions. Dido may be pierced by Cupid’s arrow, but
she is not blinded by it: her articulations of her desire for Aeneas, I argue, show great consciousness of herself as a public figure, and she relies more on her status as Queen of Carthage than on her great beauty in her pursuit of Aeneas. The reading also highlights how central questions of “worth” are to Dido and the ways in which individual agency is always constrained by and contingent on others. As the machinations of the gods and mortals reveal, affective ties cannot be disentangled from self-interest, nor can private concerns be separated out from public ones. The tragedy is both Dido’s and Aeneas’: Aeneas survives but is no victor, while Dido dies a spectacular death that, however problematically, proclaims her as the queen. In its depiction of the courts of both Carthage and Mount Olympus, Dido offers us an opportunity to examine the nexus of desire, power, and the limits of agency and how powerful women and men are imagined to negotiate these at times conflicting, at times complimentary, forces.

Chapter Three, on Arden of Faversham, turns its gaze away from tragic queens and toward women of more modest means. Frequently cited as the first “domestic drama,” so named because its protagonists are of the merchant rather than noble class, Arden tells the true crime story of Alice Arden’s sensational act of petty treason, the murder of her husband in order to marry her lover, Mosby. To achieve their aims, Alice and Mosby enlist the services of her servants and a variety of hired assassins; they succeed in murdering Arden only to suffer their own tragic demise. Scholarship on the play has illuminated the ways in which ambition, class and business savvy animate the men of Arden, but has neglected to see the ways in which Alice, too, is driven by those forces. Like Dido, Alice’s sexuality is something that cannot be divorced from her social
standing, and, like Dido, that is something that she uses to her advantage. If the
governing image of Dido’s allure is Aeneas’ description of how “Each word she says will
then contain a crown, / And every speech be ended with a kiss” (4.3.53-54), then Arden
offers a parallel fantasy of “Sweet Alice Arden, with a lap of crowns” (III. 86). While
readings of Alice have focused on her “sweet … lap,” I insist on reading the centrality of
those “crowns,” arguing for the ways in which Alice uses her social class and financial
capital to traffic not only in herself, but also in the men and women whose service she
conscripts. Paying attention, too, to the play’s other female protagonist, Susan, suggests
precisely how a woman’s ability to make choices and the choices that are available to her
are constrained by class position. While Susan has, strictly in terms of the number of
speaking lines, a tiny part in Arden, she is a pivotal figure in the play. She is also, I argue,
far more complicated than previous scholarship has suggested. As Alice’s servant and as
the desired bride of Arden’s would-be murderer, Arden figures Susan as simultaneously
culpable in and innocent of Arden’s murder. Attention to the play’s paratextual material,
from its historical sources to the woodcut that accompanied the 1633 quarto to the ballad
also printed in 1633, suggests that, in adapting the murder of Thomas Ardern for the early
modern stage, Arden of Faversham places gender, justice, and social class at the heart of
its narrative.

In my final chapter, “All’s [Not] Well: Female Service and ‘Vendible’ Virginity in
Shakespeare’s Problem Play,” I move from tragedy to comedy with a play that ends with
marriage, not death. This shift suggests that if lust is the primary lens through which
tragedy’s female protagonists are read, then love is its comic counterpart. Yet Helena’s
 fantasies of sexual and domestic service to Bertram, Diana’s fantasies of serving Helena, Bertram’s rejection of Helena’s service, and Helena’s rejection of Diana suggest that self-interest, not love, is the primary tie that binds. Against readings that posit Helena’s relationships with the women who surround her as governed by sincere affect and solidarity, I emphasize that the “friendly help” (3.7.17) Helena finds is not purely “friendly,” it is bought. The actions of Helena and the Widow, both of whom seek to better their estates through marriage, attest to the ways in which women adeptly negotiate the service industry and marriage market. By highlighting the economic dimensions of All’s Well, in particular the role Helena plays as a mistress to the Widow Capilet and her daughter, Diana, I show that Helena is not a passive victim of patriarchy who finds nurturing and egalitarian sisterhood with the Florentine women. Instead, Helena is a woman keenly aware of both her own financial situation and that of those surrounding her, fluent in the “market price” (5.3.219) of virginity, and masterful at getting what she wants.

I end with All’s Well That Ends Well and its resistance, I argue, to “end well” because it so elegantly encapsulates the tensions between the desires expressed by characters within a text and the desires that we, as scholars, infuse into our interpretations. I keep in mind, of course, my own investment in a reading that insists on women as political and economic actors. While this dissertation focuses on representations of women in early modern English drama, my hope is that in showing the fissures between the gender ideology we project back onto earlier times and the gender ideology that these works, in fact, offer, we might find ways to reinvigorate feminism
within and beyond the academy. I write this as a scholar firmly committed to a feminist critique for, if feminism’s larger goal is to change structures that create and reinforce injustice and oppression, we must be attuned to the ways in which such structures are experienced differently by different women. An idealized, universal womanhood glosses over these divisions; in imaging that women all the want the same thing and that what women want is, primarily, to care and be cared for by others, we curtail the public role women are imagined to have – and the public role women can, do, and should have.
CHAPTER ONE
“TH’IMPERIAL JOINTRESS”: POWER, POLITICS, AND THE LOST
GERTRUDE OF HAMLET

I. Introduction

There is perhaps no more canonical work than Hamlet, and yet Patricia Parker reminds us that, when reading canonical works, we often find that “what was canonical was not so much, or not just, the text in question but the received readings of it, its normalization or its familiar construct.”10 This chapter addresses criticism on Gertrude in Hamlet in order to demonstrate what these canonical, “received readings” have missed: the political significance and motives of the Queen of Denmark. Part of dismantling the “familiar construct” of readings of Gertrude entails addressing the differences across the three texts of Hamlet: the First Quarto of Hamlet, printed in 1603 but not discovered until 1823; the Second Quarto of Hamlet, printed in 1604; and the first Folio edition of Hamlet, printed in 1623.11 While there is relatively minimal difference in the character of the Queen of Denmark as she appears in the Second Quarto (Q2) and Folio (F), she is often seen as the most striking difference between those versions of Hamlet and that of the First Quarto (Q1).12 Through close readings of the Queen of Denmark as she appears both in First Quarto (Q1) and in the Second Quarto/Folio (Q2/F) texts, I highlight the

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ways in which Gertrude of Q2/F is intensely political, particularly when read alongside Gertred, her Q1 counterpart.\(^{13}\)

Moreover, Gertrude is politically prominent not because she is an attractive pawn in the power play for Denmark’s crown, but because she is a literal and figurative kingmaker. Whereas critical tradition assumes that Gertrude is solely driven by lust, by a desire for Claudius’ material body, I contend that Gertrude can just as easily be read as driven by ambition, by a desire for Claudius’ metaphysical “kingly” body. In prayer, Claudius avers that he murdered Old Hamlet for “those effects for which I did the murder, / My crown, mine own ambition and my Queen (3.3.54-55).\(^{14}\) Previous scholars have declared that Gertrude remarries either because Claudius forces her into the marriage or because marriage licenses her sexual desire for Claudius. But what if her marriage is, like Claudius’ murder, motivated by a desire to possess the “effects of the throne”? In pursing this question and others, I offer a reading of Hamlet in which Gertrude is an active participant in Danish politics. By examining what the Queen of Denmark says and does across the three texts, I argue that Gertrude of Q2/F is more

\(^{13}\) Since there is relatively minimal difference between Gertrard of Q2 and Gertrude of F, I will follow in the established scholarly tradition and treat the character as one, thus, Gertrude of Q2/F. Where there is a difference between the two texts, I will highlight that (e.g. in Ophelia’s mad scene). When I discuss the Queen of Q1, I use the name “Gertred,” as she is referred to within that text. This analysis was prompted in no small part by Zachary Lesser’s “Enter the Ghost in His Nightgown: Hamlet after Q1” (paper presented at the University of Pennsylvania’s Material Text Seminar, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 23, 2012). See Lesser’s Hamlet after Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) for a fuller discussion of the First Quarto and its scholarship.

\(^{14}\) Hamlet, ed. Neil Taylor and Ann Thompson (New York and London: Methuen, 2006). Unless the citation clearly refers to the First Quarto, all citations from Hamlet are to this text, which is based off the Second Quarto. Because the Second Quarto of 1604 and the Folio of 1623 are so similar, I will consider them as one text, noting divergences when relevant to the argument. All citations of the First Quarto are from the Arden edition of Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (New York and London: Methuen, 2006).
nuanced and more politically engaged character than previous criticism has shown or Hamlet’s own words would suggest.\textsuperscript{15}

Reading Gertrude as a political agent offers a break from the critical tradition that has focused on her sexuality and maternity and that has read \textit{Hamlet} as a domestic rather than dynastic drama. Such a move builds on recent work in that direction by Margret de Grazia and Steven Mullaney, as well as efforts by Dorothea Kehler and G.B. Shand to draw our attention to Gertred of Q1. I use readings of Gertrude as a salient example of larger trends within feminist criticism in general and early modern feminist criticism in particular: namely, the tendency to frame discussions of female rulers in terms of private feelings rather than public concerns. As I will show, examining Gertrude through this lens has stopped us from seeing her as exercising political and financial, rather than just sexual, agency. Attention to Gertrude’s political actions also causes us to reevaluate her relationship with Ophelia, challenging a tradition that has tended to see Gertrude as maternal and nurturing towards Ophelia and as Ophelia’s sole ally amid a cold, patriarchal Denmark.\textsuperscript{16} Part of this project thus entails tracing a genealogy of feminist criticism of Gertrude in order both to situate these readings in response to larger critical

\textsuperscript{15} Other critics have also staked their argument on an examination of what Gertrude says and does (rather than what Hamlet has to say about her). This is the starting point for Rebecca Smith’s essay, “A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare’s Gertrude”: “the traditional depiction of Gertrude is a false one, because what \textit{her} words and actions actually create is a soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman who is caught miserably at the center of a desperate struggle.…. She loves both Claudius and Hamlet, and their conflict leaves her bewildered and unhappy,” \textit{The Woman’s Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare}, eds. Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 194.

\textsuperscript{16} For a recent example of this and overview of criticism on Ophelia, see R.S. White, “Ophelia’s Sisters,” in \textit{The Impact of Feminism on Renaissance Studies}, ed. Dympna Callaghan (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007), 93-113.
trends and to formulate new directions for not only for criticism on *Hamlet* but also for feminist criticism in general.

II. A Genealogy of Gertrude(s)

The discovery of Q1 in 1823 ignited a debate about the extent of Gertrude’s involvement in Old Hamlet’s murder in Q2/F. In Q1, Gertred strikingly swears her innocence when Hamlet presses her about Old Hamlet’s death: “as I have a soul, I swear by heaven / I never knew of this most horrid murder” (11. 85-86). In light of Gertred’s declaration, Gertrude’s failure in Q2/F to either confirm or deny that she knew of Old Hamlet’s murder prompted scholars to look afresh at the Queen of Denmark; indeed, it was this question that prompted what we might term the first scholarship on Gertrude. This school of criticism focused both on whether Gertrude knew of or was an accomplice in Claudius’ murder of her husband and on whether Gertrude’s sexual relationship with Claudius antedated her marriage to him. These two concerns – surrounding Gertrude’s involvement in committing adultery and murder – animated nineteenth century interest in Gertrude. It was, in part, in answer to these two questions that A. C. Bradley offered his

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17 Samuel Coleridge, in an 1818 lecture on *Hamlet*, for example, could not determine the answer to her culpability: “I confess that Shakspere has left the character of the Queen in an unpleasant perplexity. Was she, or was she not, conscious of the fratricide?” *Lectures and Notes on Shakspere and Other English Poets* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), 365. For a response to Coleridge’s “perplexity” and an attempt to answer the question, see, for example, the anonymously written tract *Hamlet. An Attempt to Ascertain whether the Queen were an Accessory, before the Fact, in the Murder of her First Husband* (London: John Russell Smith, 1856) – which found the “balance of evidence” to be in favor of Gertrude’s innocence, 46; Edward Strachey also found Gertrude likely to be innocent: *Shakespeare’s Hamlet: An Attempt to find the Key to a great Moral Problem* (London: J. W. Parker, 1848), 77. More recently, Elizabeth Oakes has argued that Gertrude’s failure to see the Ghost confirms her innocence in Old Hamlet’s murder, finding that, in contemporary plays, the guilty always saw the ghosts of those they murdered: “Two Notes on Gertrude,” *Hamlet Studies* 16.1-2 (1994): 85-88.
famed pronouncements on Gertrude: “She loved to be happy, like a sheep in the sun.”

Declaring Gertrude too guileless to be complicit in her husband’s murder, Bradley argued in his 1904 lecture on Hamlet that her predilection for simple, sensual delights would indicate that she did, indeed, succumb to Claudius’ advances while Old Hamlet was still alive. While John Dover Wilson, in his seminal work, What Happens in Hamlet (1935), offers a slightly less dismissive stance on Gertrude’s character, he, too, draws the same conclusion about Gertrude’s innocence. Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones’ Oedipus complex, despite placing Gertrude at the heart of Hamlet’s motivations, had little to say about her, focusing, instead, on Hamlet’s feelings and actions.

The perception of Gertrude as a frail, wanton woman went virtually unchallenged until Carolyn Heilbrun’s 1957 essay, “The Character of Hamlet’s Mother,” appeared in Shakespeare Quarterly. In her essay, traditionally cited as the first feminist reading of Hamlet, Heilbrun offers a direct response to a critical tradition that has “accepted Hamlet’s word ‘frailty’ as applying to [Gertrude’s] whole personality” and argues that scholars have dismissed Gertrude because they cannot imagine her as a sexual being.

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22 Heilbrun, “The Character of Hamlet’s Mother,” Shakespeare Quarterly 8.2 (1957): 201. Heilbrun notes that Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones’ oedipal reading of Hamlet marks a break from scholarship that saw Gertrude as insignificant, yet finds that even this reading which places Gertrude as central to Hamlet’s
Advancing what we might anachronistically term a “sex-positive” reading of Gertrude, Heilbrun contends that scholars have been unable to appreciate her character because they cannot imagine that a woman of advanced age could be sexual:

[Scholars have] misunderstood Gertrude largely because they are unable to see lust, the desire for sexual relations, as… the flaw, the weakness which drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appalls her son, and keeps him from the throne.23 Throughout the essay, Heilbrun champions Gertrude as thoughtful, humane and decent, examining Gertrude’s words and actions to find her “not a little courageous” (203), a woman who tries to placate her son, who is kind towards Ophelia, and who is quick to admit “that lust has driven her, that this is her sin” (205). Heilbrun, writing some five years before Betty Freidan’s The Feminist Mystique was published, in many ways anticipates the critique Second Wave Feminism would offer, particularly her discussion of scholars’ inability “to see lust, the desire for sexual relations” as what drives Gertrude, as well as through her implicit point that women, like men, are motivated by sexual desire.24

Heilbrun’s argument about Gertrude, however, was not immediately accepted. In a direct response to Heilbrun’s “The Character of Hamlet’s Mother,” Baldwin Maxwell published “Hamlet’s Mother” in Shakespeare Quarterly in 1964. Maxwell’s essay opens with a snide dismissal of Heilbrun’s thesis, pronouncing “Miss Carolyn Heilbrun … seemingly unaware of the essay by Professor Draper, the Queen’s most ardent

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23 Ibid., 202, emphasis added.
24 The Feminine Mystique (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963) is traditionally cited as the instigator of Second Wave Feminism in America.
defender.” Maxwell then proceeds to read each scene in which Gertrude appears, finding her, contra Heilbrun, incapable of “acting independently” and dependent instead on following whatever action Claudius or, post-closet scene, Hamlet proposes she take (242). As Maxwell’s essay and others suggest, Heilbrun’s view of Gertrude was initially slow to gain acceptance among literary scholars; however, in the decades following this debate, Heilbrun’s reading of Gertrude has received more favorable attention.

Indeed, Heilbrun’s argument about Gertrude, particularly her thesis that Gertrude is driven by sexual desire, has essentially laid the framework for the past four decades of readings of Gertrude. While many of the feminist readings of Hamlet that emerged from Second Wave Feminism are explicit responses to New Historicism and psychoanalytic criticism, they take as axiomatic Heilbrun’s central tenet: Gertrude lusts for Claudius. This is not to say that scholars like Lisa Jardine, Juliet Dusinberre, or Jacqueline Rose

25 Baldwin Maxwell, “Hamlet’s Mother,” Shakespeare Quarterly 15.2 (Spring 1964): 235. Maxwell’s insistence on calling Heilbrun “Miss Carolyn Heilbrun” seems all the more striking in that he does not introduce “Professor Draper” with his first name (i.e. John Draper). It should also be noted that, at the time of Maxwell’s essay (1964), Heilbrun had already received a doctorate from Columbia (in 1959), joined Columbia’s faculty (in 1960), and become an Assistant Professor (in 1962; she would become an Associate Professor in 1967 and receive tenure in 1972): “Carolyn Heilbrun,” Columbia 250, Columbia University, http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_celebrates/remarkable_columbians/carolyn_heilbrun.html, accessed February 2, 2013.

26 This view is echoed in other writings in Shakespeare Quarterly: the year before, in an essay on Ophelia, Linda Wagner declared “Shakespeare…has created an ironic parallel in the characterization of Ophelia as compared with that of the Queen, whose equally simple, rather carnal attitudes have led her into deepest sin… Ophelia is a younger edition of the unthinking Queen”: “Ophelia: Shakespeare’s Pathetic Plot Device,” Shakespeare Quarterly 14.1 (Winter 1963): 94.

27 In an essay on Eastward Ho and Hamlet, Richard Horwich compares the two plays’ Gertrudes, declaring “both Gertrudes are seen as dupes, hoodwinked by fleshy but corrupt men who appeal to their unreasoning appetites”; in the footnote to this point, Horwich writes, “Some critics disagree with this view of Queen Gertrude” and cites Heilbrun’s essay: “Hamlet and Eastward Ho,” SEL 11.2 (Spring 1971): 231n9.
center their analysis on Gertrude’s sexual desire; rather, for these and other critics, an underlying assumption is that Gertrude remarryes because she sexually desires Claudius.  

What is all the more striking about the critical consensus that Gertrude remarryes because of lust is how closely it conforms to early modern moralists writing on widow remarriage. Juan Luis Vives could imagine no reason aside from sexual desire why a woman would remarry: “For none of you [widows] taketh a husbande but to the intent that she will lye with him, nor except her lust pricke her.”

To the extent that critics fail to examine *Hamlet* for rational motives for Gertrude’s remarriage, they take for granted the premise of Vives’ argument: women remarry either because they want to “lie with” their new husbands or because their more generalized “lust” drives them to marry.

Yet for some of these critics, locating Gertrude’s motivations in sexual desire is integral to a larger feminist project that seeks to recuperate narratives of female sexual autonomy: as Juliet Dusinberre declares in her preface to the second edition of *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, “To recognize in Gertrude a woman pursuing her own desires in world which denies her the right to do so enriches the play by complicating the relationship with Hamlet.”

The reading of Gertrude as “a woman pursuing her own desires” –her “middle-aged sexuality” –remains an important touchstone in a feminist critique looking for examples of embodied and autonomous

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28 See below for a further discussion of Jardine, Dusinberre, and Rose. This tendency continues in more recent feminist scholarship: for example, Michael Grossman finds Gertrude marked by an “incestuous refusal to relinquish the body of the king from the stronghold of her flesh,” “*Hamlet* and the Genders of Grief,” in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, eds. Jennifer Vaught and Lynn Dickson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 192.


female sexuality. Lisa Jardine has further speculated as to why Gertrude figures so prominently in feminist criticism:

Whenever we give attention to the figure of Hamlet's mother it is, I think, as part of an attempt to understand the cultural dynamics of blame and its relation to questions of gender. Virtually silent on her own behalf (Gertrude speaks fewer lines than any other major character in the play), her depth as a protagonist is accumulated out of the responses to her of others. Thus she captures for feminist critics the constructedness of femaleness which has absorbed us for more than a decade. For Jardine and for others, Gertrude is an important figure in feminist criticism because of what she can tell us about the ways in which women are literally and figuratively “constructed[].” The scholarship that this turn has produced has been incredibly rich and useful for thinking about the culturally and historically contingent attitudes towards women, yet it has diverted our gaze from the other concerns that swirl around Gertrude. Indeed, it has limited our understanding of what Dusinberre gestures towards when she writes that Gertrude is “a woman pursuing her own desires in a world which denies her the right to do so” for, as I argue, it is not so much “the world [of Hamlet] which denies [Gertrude] the right” to “pursu[e] her own desires” but rather Hamlet himself.

32 For recent feminist criticism on Gertrude, see also, Akiko Kusunoki, who locates Gertrude at the vanguard of emergent ideas on female sexual autonomy, “‘Oh Most Pernicious Woman’: Gertrude in the Light of Ideas on Remarriage in Early Seventeenth Century England,” in Hamlet and Japan, ed. Yoshiko Uéno (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 169-84; Abigail Montgomery, “Enter Queen Gertrude Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet,” South Atlantic Review 74.3 (Summer 2009): 100-101; Katherine Eggert, Showing Like a Queen. In these works, we still find a tendency to assume that Gertrude marries Claudius because she lusts after him.


34 See, for example, Janet Adelman’s discussion of Gertrude as one of Shakespeare’s few non-absent mothers, Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest (New York: Routledge, 1992). More recently, Gail Kern Paster uses Gertrude to theorize depictions of mature female sexuality; in “Hormonal Conclusions,” Paster cites Gertrude as a rare example of a post-menopausal, sexually desirous female protagonist, The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies, ed. Dympna Callaghan (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007), 326-33
Because scholars have tended to focus on ways in which Gertrude transgresses gender, rather than state, politics, they have limited the scope of their analysis to Gertrude as she appears as a wife and mother. This has lead critics to miss the role that Gertrude’s status as Queen of Denmark plays in Hamlet’s attack on her. Mullaney contends:

[A] long history of oedipal readings…effac[es] the sovereign cast of Hamlet’s obsessive misogyny – Gertrude as queen – by an exclusive focus on the domestic scene, viewing the play as one more family romance – Gertrude as mother – only incidentally staged in terms of state hierarchies and monarchical sexuality.40

Like de Grazia, Mullaney argues that we have missed out on Gertrude’s political prominence41; “oedipal readings” have occluded the specificity of Hamlet’s misogyny, making us blind to the fact that Hamlet’s rage is directed at “Gertrude as queen,” not “Gertrude as mother.” Yet while Mullaney urges us to appreciate “the sovereign cast” of Hamlet’s fury, critiquing those who see the play “as one more family romance…only incidentally staged in terms of state hierarchies and monarchical sexuality,” Mullaney defaults to writing solely about Gertrude’s sexuality. The scope of Mullaney’s article on “mourning and misogyny” may circumscribe his ability to examine Gertrude as a political agent, but it seems odd that Mullaney would decry scholars for failing to appreciate “the sovereign cast of Hamlet’s misogyny” since Mullaney does not address the “sovereign” concerns that Hamlet’s “obsessive misogyny” itself “effaces.”

Mullaney’s omission is symptomatic of a larger trend in feminist criticism that assumes that, because female sexuality is, ipso facto, threatening, any attack on female sexuality

41 de Grazia writes, “That Hamlet’s feelings for his mother are intense has never been denied. When his mother’s political prominence slips from view, it becomes difficult to account for this intensity, particularly its sexual charge,” Hamlet without Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107-8, emphasis added.
should be accepted at face value as being about the threat that female sexuality presents. This stops us from considering that, because attacks on women are so frequently framed in terms of their sexuality, indicting a woman for her sexuality may be a way of deflecting attention from the real target of attack. As taboo as female sexual autonomy may seem, perhaps more taboo is female financial and political power.

Despite the efforts of some critics to read Gertrude as exerting sexual agency, feminist criticism has taken a surprisingly insistent stance that Gertrude is a passive victim of Claudius’ political desires, of Shakespeare’s misogynistic culture, or of the misogyny of literary critics. Indeed, for Jardine, Gertrude’s passivity is so obvious that, when she writes, “we have lost the ability to read the narrative [in *Hamlet*] which attributes blame to the initiator for an unlawful marriage,” she does not even need to specify who “the initiator” is. The specification only comes in the conclusion of *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, some hundred pages later; there, Jardine finally stipulates that “the initiator” is Claudius: “blame for the incestuous marriage entered into by Old Hamlet's brother, Claudius, is passed across to Gertrude as if she were its instigator” (149). Jardine does not propose that Gertrude could be the “instigator” of the “incestuous marriage” or even, on a more basic level, that both Gertrude and Claudius “enter” into their marriage – Claudius is not the sole party who “entered into” their

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42 Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*.

43 This latter point is the conclusion Jacqueline Rose draws in her essay, “Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*,” in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 97-120.

44 Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare*, 47.
Reading through feminist criticism on *Hamlet*, there is a persistent failure to acknowledge or even explore Gertrude as an agent of her own marriage, let alone as a political agent: indeed, one gets the sense that critics are afraid to posit such a reading of Gertrude. Eggert, Jardine, and Kusuoki are each invested in exploring female power, yet all three critics are only able to imagine sexual power as the sole form of agency that Gertrude wields. While feminist criticism has been vital in demonstrating that women, just like men, are sexual beings, feminist criticism on *Hamlet* suggests that scholars have been slow to see women like Gertrude as active in not just sexual politics but also state politics.

Indeed, Vives’ condemnatory phrasing, in which a widow “taketh a husbande but to the intent that she will lye with him, nor except her lust pricke her,” proposes a more active Gertrude than most critics imagine. When critics write about Gertrude and Claudius’ marriage, they invariably assign active verbs to Claudius’ actions and passive verbs to Gertrude’s. The most common construct is “Claudius marries/married Gertrude,” but some even go so far as to write that Claudius “takes” Gertrude (and Denmark).

There is also the tendency to follow Hamlet’s fantasy and imagine that

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45 We might think here about Callaghan’s analysis of the bride’s participation in her marriage ceremony in *The Impact of Feminism*, 1-9.

46 For example, Eggert, notwithstanding her discussion of the importance of “Gertrude’s place as ‘imperial jointress,’” avers, “I would not want to assert that Gertrude is in charge of Danish monarchical policy in any significant way (although she certainly bears a considerable degree of royal self-possession),” *Showing*, 103. Likewise, Jardine is careful to characterize Gertrude as “civically non-participating,” *Reading Shakespeare*, 46.


48 Jason Rosenblatt, for example, writes, “in taking the Queen as his wife, Claudius also takes Denmark”: “Aspects of the Incest Problem in *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.3 (Summer 1978): 353; Jenkins
Claudius “seduced” Gertrude. The language critics use to describe Gertrude and Claudius’ marriage leaves little room to imagine that Gertrude might be, as all signs within the text suggest, a willing and active participant in her own marriage. By formulating her marriage as out of her control, critics forestall their ability to examine why a woman would be imagined to desire remarriage. Hamlet and moralists like Vives protest so loudly that women are driven to remarry by lust that they drown out the voices that cry otherwise, rendering us deaf to the other story of female desire that Hamlet proffers, one in which Gertrude is, like the Player Queen, seduced by “gifts,” and one in which financial and political, not merely sexual, desires drive the Queen of Denmark.

Indeed, Hamlet presents as much evidence for Gertrude as the “instigator” of the marriage as for Claudius: to insist on Gertrude as a passive victim or as driven into Claudius’ bed because of her blinding lust (or love) for him misses the practical and political advantages marriage to Claudius bestows upon Gertrude. For all the condemnation early modern moralists directed at widow remarriage, a significant portion of early modern English widows remarried. Women who remarried were often in a significantly better financial position than those widows who remained unmarried (indeed, “poor widows” were, along with their children, understood to be the neediest members of society), and, as such, alongside the detractors of remarriage we also find an

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awareness of the financial benefits remarriage offered women.\textsuperscript{51} Indeed, the focus on the threat that female sexuality poses causes us to miss the early modern commonplace that women remarried for money and power.\textsuperscript{52} While Jardine finds Gertrude “virtually silent on her behalf,” I demonstrate that Gertrude is neither silent nor disinterested: Gertrude may speak less than the play’s other protagonists, but the lines that she speaks and the actions she performs show her to be a savvy player of \textit{realpolitik}. Gertrude offers us a depiction of a woman invested in her position as Queen of Denmark, who works to preserve her political power, who is no less monarchical than she is maternal (indeed, is, arguably, more invested in her status as monarch than as mother), and who is savvy about instrumentalizing those around her (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia) to achieve her aims.\textsuperscript{53}

III. Gertude’s Politics

There is perhaps no more sexually taboo act than incest, and, yet, as Lisa Jardine has shown, for early modern England, concerns about incest were largely concerns about inheritance, not morality.\textsuperscript{54} Following Jardine’s argument, we might consider that Hamlet’s rant about his mother’s incestuous union, while couched in terms of moral

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\textsuperscript{51} Most widows experienced a reduction in their financial circumstances relative to what they had prior to their husband’s death; for a discussion of this and the economic considerations of remarriage, see Amy Erickson, \textit{Women and Property in Early Modern England} (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially 200-203.
\textsuperscript{52} In addition to Erickson, see also Jennifer Panek, \textit{Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kathryn Jacobs, \textit{Marriage Contracts from Chaucer to the Renaissance Stage} (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001); Tim Stretton, \textit{Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101-128.
\textsuperscript{53} The impulse to overlook Gertrude’s use of others for her personal gain presumably derives from what Melissa Sanchez in “‘Use Me But as Your Spaniel’” has demonstrated is a tendency in feminist criticism to read female-female relationships as inherently nurturing and egalitarian.
\textsuperscript{54} Jardine, \textit{Reading Shakespeare}, 35-47.
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disgust, derives from the inheritance Gertrude and Claudius’ marriage has, in his mind, deprived him of. According to Hamlet, Claudius has “popped in between the election and my hopes” (5.2.64). Hamlet, “beggar that I am” (2.2.249), lacks “advancement” (3.2.331), and is “so poor a man” that the only reward he can offer his friends for their loyalty to him is “his love and friending” (1.5.82-83). Though some of Hamlet’s protests may be rhetorical posturing, he presents his position in marked contrast to his uncle’s, who enjoys the office and privilege of kingship. In light of this, Jardine states, “Claudius’ unlawful marriage to Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude, cuts Hamlet out of the line. The offense is against Hamlet; the offending party is Claudius” (45).

Yet as de Grazia astutely points out, the real offending party may be Old Hamlet, not Claudius: whereas Claudius promptly and publicly proclaims Hamlet his heir, Old Hamlet does not seem to have made a similar gesture. If anything, Old Hamlet not only did not declare his intent that Hamlet should be his heir, but also, through jointure, seems to have bestowed a substantial inheritance on Gertrude, whose jointure may well have been Denmark. Pointing to Claudius’ public appointment of Hamlet as his heir, de Grazia posits that this proclamation is something Old Hamlet failed to do: but what if Old Hamlet did not fail to appoint an heir? What if the heir Old Hamlet nominated was Claudius? Claudius, unlike Hamlet, is an adept politician; taking Claudius’ political

55 Actually, it would seem that the “offending party” consists of both Claudius and Gertrude, but, for Jardine, Gertrude is “civically non-participating” and thus cannot “offend”.
56 de Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, 90-91.
acumen into account suggests one reason why Gertrude may have chosen to marry him. An additional reason may be that if Gertrude wants to remain Queen, she must be married to the man elected to the throne: Claudius, it would seem, is her only option. Gertrude’s choice of Claudius, however, is consistently read as a choice clouded by lust (or love), not a calculated decision to stay in power. Even de Grazia, unusual among critics in that she highlights Gertrude’s “political prominence,” reads Gertrude’s desire to marry Claudius as one of lust, not ambition. De Grazia asks, “What if it were admitted, as fact, that Gertrude’s sexual desire, legitimized by her ‘o’erhasty marriage’ has alienated Hamlet from succession?” (108, emphasis added) But what if it is not “Gertrude’s sexual desire” that motivates Gertrude to marry Claudius and thus “alienate Hamlet from succession,” but rather Gertrude’s “desire” to preserve her “political prominence” that causes Hamlet’s alienation?

IV. Imagining A Lost Gertrude

What is, perhaps, most notable about the critical failure to examine why Gertrude would choose Claudius is that we have become blind to Gertrude’s ambition, an

when confronted with Laertes’ rebellion: “Power and Politics in Hamlet,” Research Studies (Washington State University) 32.3 (1964): 218, 219. See also Draper, “Queen Gertrude,” esp. 120. For the counter view, see Hadfield. To Hadfield, Claudius is a “murderous usurper,” whose crime leaves in its wake the “standard combination of sycophancy and espionage found at the court of tyrants,” “Power and the Rights,” 571.
58 Denmark, with the exception of Margaret I (1353-1412), did not have a history of allowing women to rule independently. When King Valdemar IV of Denmark died, his five-year-old grandson, Olaf II and son of Margaret I and King Haakon of Norway, became the King of Denmark and Margaret I served as regnant. When Olaf II died at sixteen, Margaret became sole ruler.
ambition, it would seem, that was apparent to past audiences. As scholars have noted, the earliest criticism we have on *Hamlet* is George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston’s play, *Eastward Ho* (1605). Eastward Ho revolves around a goldsmith, Touchstone, and his household, which includes two apprentices and two daughters. One of these daughters is named Gertrude, and she has a footman, Hamlet. When Hamlet first appears, he enters “in haste” (3.2.1 *stage directions*) and calling for Gertrude’s coach, prompting another character to protest, “Sfoot, Hamlet, are you mad? Whither run you now?” (3.2.6-7). As de Grazia has noted in regards to *Hamlet*, and as *Eastward Ho* would suggest, for early audiences, Hamlet’s defining feature was not his melancholic “that within which passes show” (1.2.85) but rather his “antik disposition” (1.5.180).

Likewise, we may be able to use Gertrude of *Eastward Ho* to understand how early audiences imagined Gertrude’s character in *Hamlet*.

In *Eastward Ho*, Gertrude is defined by her ambition. Gertrude first appears on stage anticipating the arrival of her fiancée, Sir Petrol Flash. As Gertrude’s exchange with her sister, Mildred, makes clear, Gertrude’s primary (indeed, seemingly sole) interest in Sir Flash is the title that marriage to him offers: “I must be a lady,” she says, a refrain she repeats again and again over the scene. Obsessed with the elevated social

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60 Michael Davies, *Hamlet: Character Studies* (London: Continuum, 2008), 1-5. While the play, as its title suggests, is more directly a response to *Westward Hoe*, it contains numerous references to and frequently satirizes *Hamlet* (e.g. a botched version of Ophelia’s mad song, Gertrude’s cold meats from her wedding are served at her sister’s subsequent wedding ceremony, etc.)


63 Over the course of fifty lines of dialogue (1.2.1-50), Gertrude makes a reference to being a lady ten times (e.g. “I must be a lady”; “my mother must call me Madam”; “I must be a lady”; “I must be a lady, and I will be a lady”; “I shall be a lady,” etc.)
position marriage to Sir Flash bestows upon her, Gertrude delights in reminding her father, mother, and sister that she, upon her marriage to Sir Flash, will be a member of a different social class. When her father chides her to be more modest, Gertrude replies, “Modesty! Why, I am no citizen now. Modesty? Am I not to be married? Y' are best to keep me modest, now I am to be a lady!” (1.2.72-74) When her mother, who appears only slightly less ambitious than her daughter, says that Gertrude, her “Lady-Daughter,” will “have a coach as well as I, too,” Gertrude reminds her mother of their new distinction in status: “Yes, Mother. But by your leave, Mother (I speak it not without my duty, but only in my husband's right), my coach horses must take the wall of your coach horses” (108-10). Marriage to Sir Flash elevates Gertrude above her kin and bestows on Gertrude a new *habitus* – no longer merely the daughter of a goldsmith, Gertrude will “eat cherries only at an angel a pound” (18-19) and dress herself in “rich scarlet black” (19) and comport herself not as a “citizen” (72) but “in the lady fashion” (59).

Predictably, Gertrude’s fantasy fails to come to fruition. Gertrude quickly finds herself the lady of a nonexistent castle, married to a man who has nothing more than a title, all “Petrol Flash” and no substance, a man who has in fact married her for her dowry. After Sir Flash deserts Gertrude and sells off her dowry, Gertrude returns to London with her maid, desperate for money; Gertrude’s mother counsels her to take refuge with her sister, Mildred, who, unlike Gertrude, married a man of their own class (their father’s apprentice) who offered substance of character rather than social status. Mildred’s husband, a diligent worker, has become a successful goldsmith in his own right, and, working with Touchstone, Gertrude’s father, the two men are able to bring
about the reunification of Gertrude with her repentant husband (whose debts had landed him in jail).

As Gertrude’s discussion of Sir Flash’s merits make clear, Gertrude desires him not because she loves him (or because she lusts after him) but because he offers her the chance to be Lady Flash. Indeed, immediately following their wedding night, rather than spend another evening with her husband, the newly anointed Lady Flash prefers to spend the night – alone – in her castle and races off to the countryside, sans Sir Flash. While, in Hamlet, Hamlet rails against Gertrude, “O, most wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets” (1.2.156-57), in Eastward Ho, Gertrude literally “posts” (in her coach befitting a lady) with “speed” and “dexterity” not to her husband’s “sheets” but to her new castle. As Gertrude rides off in her coach to what she believes is her future estate, Quicksilver assures Sir Petrol that he need not worry about what he has done to Gertrude: “So a woman marry to ride in a coach, she cares not if she ride to her ruin” (3.2.185-86). Quicksilver suggests that what Gertrude wants first and foremost is material and social capital, all that is symbolized by “rid[ing] in a coach.” The “ruin” that follows from her ambition is not just sexual but also financial ruin. Indeed, the financial ruin becomes Gertrude’s far more pressing concern as she and Sindefy, her maid, are reduced to pawning their possessions to pay for their next meal; yet, even as Quicksilver predicted, Gertrude clings to and takes comfort in her title.

There are many differences between Gertrude of Eastward Ho and Gertrude of Hamlet, yet Gertrude of Eastward Ho suggests that early modern audiences may have understood Gertrude’s remarriage as driven by ambition rather than lust. In a play imbued
with alchemical references, each of the protagonists has a name that suggests his or her essential quality: Quicksilver, Golding, Touchstone, Sindefy (Gertrude’s lascivious maid), Sir Petrol Flash, Security (the usurer), Mildred (Gertrude’s “mild” sister). Gertrude, according to the editor of the New Mermaid Edition, is the sole exception to this rule: Petter posits that Gertrude is so named strictly as a kind of joking allusion, along with her footman, Hamlet, to Hamlet. Her name, however, may just as clearly signify as those of Eastward Ho’s other characters. Gertrude, as her father proclaims, is defined by her ambition, suggesting that, for an early modern audience, what Hamlet’s Gertrude evoked was not necessarily deviant sexual appetite but ambition and financial and political aspiration.

Such a reading pushes us to consider the practical political and financial advantages that marriage to Claudius offers Gertrude. If Eastward Ho affirms that Hamlet’s “antik disposition” defined him, then it also reveals that Gertrude’s ambition defined her character. If that is the case, then what if Gertrude desires not the physical body of the king (Claudius) but the political body, or office, of the king? The ensuing sections bring yet another contemporary text to bear on our understanding of Gertrude in Hamlet – reading Q1 alongside Q2/F demonstrates that such conjectures about Gertrude’s political designs are, in fact, supported by Q2/F.

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64 In his note on the dramatis personae, Petter conjectures that the footman, Hamlet, “might explain ‘Gertrude’ who is not named for her humour as is her sister ‘Mildred’ – i.e., mild,” Eastward Ho!, 4.
V. Reading Gertred of Q1

Examining Gertred, the Q1 Queen of Denmark, can help us to see how politically engaged and significant Gertrude of Q2/F is. The character of Gertred is frequently cited as the biggest textual difference between Q1 and Q2/F.\(^{65}\) We might say that there are four major points of difference between Gertred and Gertrude. The first point is that, while in Q2/F, Claudius first describes Gertrude as “th’imperial jointress” (1.2.9), Gertred is never called a jointress. Whatever inheritance Gertred may or may not have received is left a mystery in Q1. The second difference concerns Gertred’s treatment of Ofelia.\(^{66}\) Whereas Gertrude has a much more ambiguous relationship with Ophelia, particularly her initial refusal to grant mad Ophelia an audience, Gertred seems to have a much more sympathetic attitude towards Ofelia. The third major, and perhaps most striking, difference, is that Gertred, when confronted by Hamlet in her closet, swears her innocence.\(^{67}\) Finally, an equally striking difference is the inclusion in Q1 of a scene in which Gertred and Horatio conspire in favor of Hamlet and against the King.

The sum of these differences constitutes a Q1 Queen of Denmark who is, according to Eggert, precisely the Queen that Hamlet wants but is denied in Q2/F.\(^{68}\) We might also say that, in a way, Q1 Gertred is the Queen that critics have “wanted” in the sense that the ways in which critics write about Gertrude of Q2/F more accurately

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\(^{66}\) This is also a point of difference between the Q2 and F texts, which I discuss later.

\(^{67}\) As G.B. Shand has shown, Gertred is generally much more preoccupied with God and salvation: “Although [Gertred’s] role is just over half the size of the Q2/F Gertrude, she has three times the number of references to God, heaven, her soul, and prayer”: “Gertred, Captive Queen of the First Quarto,” in Shakespearean Illuminations, ed. Jay Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 42.

\(^{68}\) Eggert, Showing Like a Queen, 128.
describes Gertred of Q1. Gertred of Q1 is “purifi[ed] of independent desires” (128): she follows the lead first of her husband, and then, when Hamlet confronts her with the King’s crime, commits herself to serving her son. Gertred is completely obedient, passing from the authority of one man to the next, as if she were determined to follow the laws of coverture, and pass from the legal jurisdiction and protection of one male relative to the next.⁶⁹

In Q1, Gertred has a minimal political role and appears to have little personal political desire. The majority of her lines express her obedience to or echo of the desires of her husband, the King. Gertred obeys “with all [her] heart” the men who direct her: when Corambis asks Gertred to leave so that he may spy on Hamlet, she responds, “With all my heart” (7.112), and exits. When Corambis proposes to the King that Gertred call Hamlet to her chamber after they view the play, the King agrees and turns to Gertred, asking if she will acquiesce. Again she responds, “With all my heart. Soon I will send for [Hamlet] (8.38).” Finally, when Hamlet confronts her about the King’s murder of Old Hamlet and presses her to “forbear the adulterous bed” and “assist me in revenge,” Gertred swears obedience:

> Hamlet, I vow by that majesty
> That knows our thoughts and looks into our hearts
> I will conceal, consent, and do my best
> What stratagem so’er thou shalt devise.
> (11. 97-100)

While Gertred departs from her preferred promise of obedience “with all my heart,” her “vow” is paradoxically both more emphatic and tenuous than her earlier oaths of

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⁶⁹ That this transition from one male authority figure to another is effected so seamlessly is, for Kehler, a site of problematic obedience: Gertred’s submission to the men around her is so complete as to be radically destabilizing, “Widow Gertred,” 81.
obedience. Here, Gertred’s emphasis on the “heart” elevates her typical promise of performing “with all my heart” to a prayer. She offers a “vow by that majesty / That knows our thoughts and looks into our hearts,” an oath that echoes her earlier promise that “as I have a soul, I swear by heaven, / I never knew of this most horrid murder” (85-86). Gertred’s pious pledges suggest that, notwithstanding Hamlet’s plan to “make your eyes look down into your heart, / And see how horrid there and black it shows” (21-22), what Hamlet finds is a comparatively pure and pious “heart.”

Gertred’s sin is her weakness, not her malevolence. Gertred herself emphasizes her feminine frailty, promising to “conceal, consent, and do my best” – in effect, Gertrude promises to try, not to do, proleptically imagining that the extent to which she can “do” will be qualified by her ability. That Gertred furthermore promises to “conceal” and “consent” suggests specifically gendered forms of aid: her help will be hidden and passive, rather than open and active.70 Gertred’s sense of her abilities effectively echoes the sentiment her first husband expresses when he warns Hamlet, “her sex is weak” (11.71).71 Indeed, Gertred consistently presents herself as an embodiment of the idea – or ideal – offered in all the texts of *Hamlet*: “Frailty, thy name is woman” (2.66).

It is furthermore notable that the clearest instance of Gertred exerting her strength – the scene in which she meets with Horatio – emphasizes her role not as Queen of

71 Interestingly, while in Q1 the Ghost of Hamlet urges, “Speak to her, Hamlet, for her sex is weak” (11.71), in the parallel scene in Q2/F, the Ghost advises Hamlet, “Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works / Speak to her, Hamlet” (3.4.110-11). Whereas the Ghost in Q1 equates Gertred’s “weakness” with her “sex,” the Ghost of Q2/F does not draw an explicit equation between Gertrude’s “weakness” and her gender. This opens the possibility that Gertrude is weak not because she is a woman but because she, as an individual, is weak; Q1, however, does not afford this reading.
Denmark but as mother. Like Gertred’s avowal that she “never knew of this most horrid murder,” the scene between Horatio and Gertred is also unique to Q1. Moreover, like her protestation of innocence, this scene also allows Gertred to demonstrate her allegiance to her son over her current husband. Horatio informs Gertred that Hamlet is safely arrived in England, having “escaped the danger / And subtle treason that the King had plotted” (14.3-4). Gertred responds to news of the plot to kill Hamlet, repeating Horatio’s charge of “treason”:

Then I perceive there’s treason in his looks  
That seemed to sugar o’er his villainy.  
But I will soothe and please him for a time  
(For murderous minds are always jealous).

(14.10-13)

Gertred, consistent with her earlier promise to Hamlet to “conceal, consent, and do my best / What stratagem so’er thou shalt devise,” again imagines her own gendered frailty and a specifically feminine form of resistance. Promising to “soothe and please” the King, Gertred envisions the comfort she offers her husband as maternal rather than sexual, as if her husband were a colicky baby rather than murdering man. Moreover, her invocation of his “looks” of “sugar” suggests a kind of feminine susceptibility to not only appearances but also sensual delights. Interestingly enough, if she envisions the King as a child in need of “sooth[ing] and pleas[ing],” then her sense of herself as lured by “sugar” also suggests a kind of childlike desire and simplicity, infantilizing both herself and her husband.72

72 This is not to suggest that Gertred is imagined as helpless, but that she performs her role of Queen of Denmark very differently than does Gertrude of Q2/F. Gertred may call to mind a pre-Elizabeth I model of queenship, in which part of the queen’s power lies in her ability to intercede on behalf of others, to beg a boon of the king, and her awareness of the ways to placate a tyrant.
In this scene with Horatio, Gertred is careful to emphasize her passivity, showing how she understands her role in her commitment to Hamlet to “do my best / What stratagem so’er thou shalt devise.” Upon learning that Hamlet will meet Horatio the following morning, Gertred bids Horatio to send her blessings: “Commend me a mother’s care to him – / Bid him awhile be wary of his presence/ Lest that he fail in that he goes about” (18-20). Gertred’s oblique reference to Hamlet’s plot – “that he goes about” – suggests a lack of involvement in and understanding of her son’s plans. Moreover, she specifies that the plans are Hamlet’s, and his alone: “lest he fail in that he goes about.” Gertred does not include herself (nor does she include Horatio) in her imagining of Hamlet’s actions; instead, she positions herself as observer, peripheral to Hamlet’s plans. The extent of Gertred’s aid is her blessing, and she emphasizes that her blessing is that of a mother, not of a Queen. Echoing her earlier request that Horatio “commend me a mother’s care” to Hamlet, Gertred takes her leave of Horatio “with a thousand mother’s blessings to my son” (33).

Gertred’s emphasis on her role as mother may also be a strategy to foreground Hamlet’s right to rule. Before sending the “thousand mother’s blessings,” Gertred, learning of Hamlet’s escape from death, exclaims, “Thanks be to heaven for blessing of the Prince!” (31) In addition to referring to him as “the Prince,” Gertred also repeats Horatio’s charge of treason against the King for plotting against Hamlet. If the King is the legitimate ruler, the King’s plot to kill Hamlet is not treason; Gertred’s repetition of

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73 The words “prince” and “princely” are used 18 times in Q1 but only four or three times in Q2/F: Hamlet: Texts of 1603 and 1623, 55n26-32. This perhaps suggests that Hamlet has a clearer relationship to the throne in Q1 than he does in Q2/F.
the charge of the King’s “treason” suggests that she believes Hamlet, instead, to be the rightful ruler. Gertred’s political desires seem to be to support the rightful ruler to the throne of Denmark, not to stay on the throne herself.

Notwithstanding the work that critics like Kehler and Shand have done on the ways in which Gertred is depicted, their readings of the Gertred of Q1 have not led them to read Gertrude of Q2/F as politically engaged. Even though Shand contrasts the two Queens, the comparison does not enable him to view Gertrude of Q2/F as, ultimately, any different from Gertred of Q1. For Shand, Q2/F can only “paradoxically empower the marginalized Gertrude” because he assumes that Gertrude is, by definition, “marginalized”: this is particularly surprising since his work on Q1 and the ways in which Gertred is “contain[ed]” (35), “subordinat[ed]” (34), “exploit[ed]” (34), “objectifie[d]” (36), “ignored” (38), and “excluded” (38) would suggest that, in contrast, Gertrude is not marginalized in the way Gertred is.

Kehler makes a similar move, noting that Gertred is “neutralized politically, being largely overlooked by Claudius and slighted by Corambis” and “less politically sophisticated” than Gertrude. Reading Q1 alongside Q2/F, Kehler aligns Gertrude with those contemporary representations of remarrying widows “liable to be figured as ‘lusty widows’” (400). Her own declaration of Gertred as “less politically sophisticated” and “politically neutralized” when compared to Gertrude argues, however, that Gertrude is so much more than a “lusty widow and prodigal mother” (409). While Kehler does not draw

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74 Shand, “Gertred, Captive Queen,” 38.
75 Kehler, “Widow Gertred,” 404, 407. We could say that Gertred is politically sophisticated in a different register – that her political sophistication is that of the queens of the Romance tradition, rather than the emerging world of Elizabethan statecraft.
this conclusion, Gertrude of Q2/F, because of her “political sophistication” and “political non-neutrality,” offers a potential counter to the stereotype of widows as driven primarily by lust.  

VI. “Th’ Imperial Jointress”

The first point of substantial divergence between the Q1 and Q2/F texts comes in the second scene of the plays: in the opening speech that each King delivers, a radical difference between Gertred and Gertrude emerges. Whereas Q1 begins with the King notifying the assembled members of the court that he has written to Fortenbrasse, dispatching his ambassadors to Norway, and then turning to Leartes’ suit, Q2/F begins with Claudius offering a lengthy and complicated disquisition on his marriage to Gertrude; after that, Claudius turns his attention to the letter for the ambassadors and Laertes:

First Quarto
KING. Lordes, we here have writ to Fortenbrasse, Nephew to olde Norway, who impudent And bed-rid, scarcely heares of this his Nephews purpose: and We here dispatch Yong good Cornelia, and you Voltemar For bearers of these greetings to olde Norway, giving to you no further personall power To businesse with the King, Then those related articles do shew:

Second Quarto
CLAUD. Though yet of Hamlet our deare brothers death The memorie be greene, and that it us befitted To beare our harts in griefe, and our whole Kingdome, To be contracted in one browe of woe Yet so farre hath discretion fought with nature, That we with wisest sorrowe thinke on him Together with remembrance of our selues:

76 Ultimately, Kehler’s focus is on Q1 and on arguing for the play’s performance in Northern, Catholic-leaning England. At the same time, in arguing that “Q1 depicts a queen well suited to audiences dedicated to the old religion and its values, one who could be considered a ‘Catholic’ Gertred,” Kehler misses how non-Catholics may also have been opposed to widow remarriage, not because they had moral objections but because they had economic reasons for wanting to emphasize widow celibacy, “Widow Gertred,” 409.
First Quarto (cont’d.)
Farewell, and let your haste commend your
dutie.

(2.1-10)

Second Quarto (cont’d.)
Therefore our sometime Sister, now our
Queene
Th’imperial jointress to this warlike state
Have we as ’twere with a defeated joy
With an auspicious, and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in
marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole
Taken to wife: nor have we herein bard
Your better wisdoms, which have freely
gone
With this affaire along (for all our thanks).

(1.2.1-16)

The particular language that Claudius uses to describe Gertrude and their marriage in this
opening speech suggests a practical difference between the relationship Gertred and
Gertrude have towards political power. Claudius’ appellation of Gertrude as
“th’imperial jointress” points to what I argue is in fact the key distinction between the
Queen of Denmark in the Q2/F and Q1 texts: while Q1 emphasizes the role of Gertred as
mother, Q2/F emphasizes Gertrude’s role as ruler. Moreover, “th’imperial jointress”
suggests not only Gertrude’s relationship to politics (she is “imperial”) but also her
relationship to property (“jointress”).

Both these terms – “imperial” and “jointress” – had a particular significance for
eyearly modern England. Calling Gertrude a “jointress” suggests that she occupies her
position of queen as a result of jointure: her current position on the throne of Denmark is
a consequence of her dead husband’s position on the throne of Denmark. The “sometime
Sister, now our Queen” is also a “sometime” (i.e. former) Queen and current Queen. The
psychosexual intrigue suggested by “sometime Sister, now our Queen” has pulled critical

77 Dover Wilson is credited with being the first critic to discuss the implication of Gertrude as a jointress,
What Happens in Hamlet, 38.
focus from the political implications of “imperial jointress,” and unpacking the density of Claudius’ appellation is key to understanding the stakes of Gertrude’s remarriage. It is worth noting, moreover, that Claudius’ description of Gertrude’s role is particularly confusing. Gertrude is “th’imperial jointress to this warlike state”: it is unclear from this description whose jointress she is. The primary sense, and the way the OED understands “jointress” to be operating in this phrase, is that it is almost synonymous with widow (the OED defines “jointress” as “a widow who holds a jointure”). This primary sense invokes Gertrude as the jointress of her dead husband and beneficiary of his estate. But because Claudius has just called her “our sometime Sister, now our Queen,” the possessive article hovers over his description of her as a jointress, as if Gertrude were his jointress, perhaps suggesting that they hold “this warlike state” in joint, i.e. that the realm is theirs in joint tenancy.

A “jointress,” Shakespeare’s neologism from the noun, “jointure,” suggests a woman who inherits through those means. That Gertrude inherits through jointure may have been particularly significant for Shakespeare’s original audience, since Hamlet was first performed at a time when jointure was gaining popularity and beginning to replace dower as the preferred form of inheritance. Eggert offers a clear discussion of the difference between jointure and dower:

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78 “jointress, n,” OED Online, May 2012 (Oxford University Press).
79 Ibid.
80 For a further discussion of jointure, in particular its difference from dower, see Eggert, Showing, 103-104; Erickson, Women and Property, 178-86; Stretton, 121-123. In this discussion of jointure, I follow in the critical tradition of assuming that Shakespeare’s audience would apply English property law to Hamlet, notwithstanding the play’s Danish setting. I do this because I am interested in showing what criticism has missed – namely, that thinking about women and English property law should highlight our ability to read Gertrude’s power, rather than diminish it.
[Jointure] could be substituted for the common-law grant of the wife's dower, [and] was an increasingly common practice in the sixteenth century, beginning with the Statute of Uses (1535) enacted during the reign of Henry VIII. Instead of the dower's provision of an estate for life in one-third of her deceased husband's lands (including land acquired or disposed of during their marriage), a widow who had been granted jointure was entitled to the use and income of lands designated in the jointure agreement, which as a rule had been drawn up before the marriage took place. In theory, jointure was more advantageous than dower since jointure was not limited to one-third of the husband’s property and could consist of all of the husband’s property. In practice, however, Eggert suggests that jointure may be thought of as analogous to the modern-day “prenup,” not only because it was a contract typically drawn up before marriage, but also because it was typically used to decrease a spouse’s income upon the dissolution of the marriage (be it through death or divorce). One concrete advantage, however, that jointure held over dower was that, because dower comprised lands acquired and disposed of during the marriage, dower could be difficult to calculate. Furthermore, because a jointure agreement was usually established prior to a marriage, the bride and the bride’s family were able to negotiate the terms of jointure, while dower, established in the husband’s will, would in theory be entirely up to the husband. As Eggert’s discussion of jointure suggests, what jointure looked like depended on the social circumstances of the jointress and presented a particularly attractive form of inheritance for upper-class families, as well as for wealthy widows who were remarrying and bringing significant assets to their marriage.

81 Eggert, Showing, 104.
82 While under common-law dower was limited to one-third of a husband’s property, dower could also be established under equity, and could be any portion of the husband’s property greater than or equal to one-third of his property: Erickson, Women and Property, 24-25.
83 Eggert, Showing Like a Queen, 104
Jointure carried a third advantage that bears particular relevance to *Hamlet*. Unlike dower, a widow was guaranteed her jointure not only if she remarried but also if she were even found guilty of adultery or fornication. As such, the Ghost’s charge that Gertrude has committed adultery is, from the point of view of her inheritance claim, irrelevant. Perhaps the focus on Gertrude’s sexuality is symptomatic of a frustration with an inability to restrict her inheritance and punish her remarriage: what Gertrude holds in jointure from her prior marriage, she is free to enjoy during any subsequent marriage.

That Gertrude is a jointress and a queen also carries a special significance, particularly if Gertrude were Queen Consort of Denmark. Under law established in 1540, the queen consort of England was the only married woman in the realm who did not become a *feme covert* and retained the legal status of *feme sole* upon her marriage to the king. The special privileges that derived from her exceptional status afforded the queen consort “the right to administer her own jointure lands, maintain her own household, preside over her own Council, and make use of her own royal seal.” Thus, for an early modern English audience, jointure was a way in which the exceptionality of the queen’s status was made manifest.

According to Eggert, the reason Gertrude’s status as a jointress has not received more attention is that “*Hamlet*’s editors are quick to discount the Shakespearean neologism ‘jointress’ used to denominate Gertrude, since it creates the impression that she is a queen regnant, not a queen consort.”

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 105.
86 Ibid., 103.
does it make if Gertrude is a queen regnant or a queen consort? Were Gertrude Queen
Regnant, that would set up obvious parallels with two married Queens of recent English
memory: Mary I of England and Ireland and Mary I of Scotland. Were Gertrude Danish
royalty by birth, as she is in Shakespeare’s French and Latin sources, we would perhaps
expect a greater focus on Gertrude’s involvement in politics: born royal, Gertrude would
be brought up to understand that one day she would assume the throne. The same
attention that scholars devote to Hamlet’s assumption of inheriting the Danish kingdom
should apply to Gertrude. Instead, however, we see scholars take for granted that
Gertrude is brought up to marry, not to rule, notwithstanding the formidable Queens of
early modern Europe: Elizabeth I, Mary I of England, Catherine de Medici, Mary I of
Scotland.

This is not say that scholars have failed to note parallels between Gertrude and
contemporary regnant queens; rather, the ties scholars establish between Gertrude and
early modern female monarchs tend to showcase the problems of female rule. The most
obvious historical parallel for Denmark seems to be Mary I of Scotland, who, like
Gertrude, marries her first husband’s murder. However, instead of using this
comparison to think about the complexities of Mary Queen of Scots’ situation, how Lord

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88 At the same time, it is important to note that women do not seem to have been allowed to assume the throne of Denmark. Furthermore, we could argue that whether Gertrude is Queen Regnant or Queen Consort is irrelevant since the Danish monarchy is elected rather than inherited, but because scholars have treated Denmark’s monarchy as if it followed English rule, it worth following that line of reasoning to its logical conclusion as it applies to Gertrude.
Darnley was an ineffective and alcoholic king, or why Boswell may have appealed to Mary not only sexually but also politically, scholars have emphasized that Gertrude, like Mary Queen of Scots, is blinded by love, “besotted,” and “the queen whom Cupid has hit.” Ultimately, these comparisons indicate how gendered ideologies shape not only literary criticism but also historical narrative; again and again, we find an insistence on reading public woman as governed, if not blinded, by private choices, rather than as public women who govern.

VII. The State of Denmark

But what, exactly, Gertrude holds in jointure is unclear. Claudius’ formulation, “th’imperial jointress,” does not stipulate what Gertrude’s jointure consists of: specifically, does the adjective, “imperial,” modify the woman or the inheritance? Gertrude, by virtue of her marriage (prior and current), is “imperial”; alternatively, Gertrude may be, as she is in Shakespeare’s sources, “imperial” by birth. Additionally, “imperial” may apply to the jointure itself, suggesting that what Gertrude has received in jointure is, in fact, Denmark.

Interestingly enough, like “jointure,” the adjective “imperial” had a particular significance for early modern England. The adjective is first applied to England in the 1532-33 Ecclesiastical Appeals Act, which is seen as the key piece of legislation in Henry VIII’s break from Rome. The term “imperial,” which had previously been

\[90\] Eggert, Showing, 106.
\[91\] The Act forbade appeals to Rome and was a key piece of Thomas Cromwell’s legal architecture in enabling Henry’s divorce from Catharine of Aragon, who would have otherwise appealed the divorce to the
applied to conventionally understood empires, like the Roman Empire or the Holy
Roman Empire, is applied to England in this Act, performing an “assertion of [England’s]
independence of and sovereign equality with the ‘Holy Roman’ Empire.”

_VIII_ opens, “Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is
manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire … governed by
one Supreme Head and Ling, having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of
the same.” The adjective “imperial” becomes part of a project to establish power, a key
rhetorical move in establishing England’s sovereignty and importance. Thus, in a speech
in which Claudius frames his marriage to Gertrude as a strategic political choice, ratified
by the “better wisdoms” of Denmark,” “imperial” works to establish Gertrude’s,
Denmark’s, and, by extension, Claudius’ political power.

Ultimately, however, the syntax of Claudius’ appellation suggests that Gertrude is
the jointress not of her first or second husband but of the kingdom: “th’imperial jointress
to this warlike state” is grammatically married to the “state.” Claudius’ understanding of
Gertrude as wedded to Denmark is also one of Gertrude yoked to a kingdom bracing for
war. As Horatio explains to Marcellus and Bernardo in both Q1 and Q2/F, Denmark is

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Pope. For an overview of the Act, see Graham Nicholson, “The Act of Appeals and the English
Reformation,” in _Law and Government under the Tudors_, edited by Claire Cross, et al. (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19-30; Tanner, J. R., ed., _Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-
1603_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 40.

92 “Imperial, n, 2a,” _OED Online_, May 2012 (Oxford University Press).

93 “Act in Restraint of Appeals” (24 Henry VIII, c. 12), reproduced in Tanner, _Tudor Constitutional
Documents_, 41. As Walter Ullman notes, “Few phrases in an English Statute can have left such an indelible
imprint as the opening words of the Act in Restraint of Appeals of 1533”: “This Realm of England Is an
Empire,” _Journal of Ecclesiastical History_ 30.2 (1979), 175.

94 The adjective “imperial” also evokes the Norwegian territory that Old Hamlet won of Old Fortinbras (and
that Fortinbras now attempts to recover), as well as the suggestion that England is a tributary kingdom of
Denmark (why Claudius sends Hamlet to England).
preparing against a potential attack by Fortenbrasse/Fortinbras. In Q2/F, Claudius offers an explanation for Fortinbras’ offense:

> Holding a weak supposal of our worth
> Or thinking by our late dear brother’s death
> Our state to be disjoint and out of frame.

(1.2.18-20)

Claudius posits two reasons why Fortinbras plots an attack: one, Fortinbras believes Claudius to be a “weak” king, presumably weaker than his brother, the “valiant Hamlet” (1.1.82); or, two, Fortinbras believes that the transition from one king to the next has left Denmark in a fragile state. Claudius’ description of this weakened “state” as “disjoint,” with its verbal echo of “jointress to this state,” hints at a key player in the power transition: Gertrude. Gertrude unites past and present Denmark, “joining” the present state with the power and patriarch of the former. Conjugal union with Gertrude presents both coital union to her body and conceptual union to her title – as if Gertrude joins the “two bodies” of the previous king, her deceased husband, Old Hamlet, with the “two bodies” of her current husband, Claudius. The physical and metaphysical bodies of the two kings are fused through Gertrude: a “jointress,” she shares not just her bed but also her power and property.

Gertrude operates as a literal kingmaker, ensuring that the state of Denmark does not mirror that of its northern rival, Norway. Claudius is neither an “impotent and bedrid”

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95 For more on the language of joinery and Gertrude, see Parker, “Rude Mechanicals,” in Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture, edited by Margreta de Grazia, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43-82. In her discussion of Hamlet, Parker highlights the language of “joining” contained in “The Ceremony of Holy Matrimony” from the Book of Common Prayer and its echoes in Gertrude as “th’imperial jointress,” Claudius’ “conjunctive” love for Gertrude, and other “joints” in the play. Following Parker, Eggert notes the link between “conjunctive,” “jointress,” and “disjoint”: for Hamlet, “the time is ‘out of joint’ – or, we might read, ‘out because of joint,’ the joining to the feminine that is the conjugal state,” Showing, 108.
(1.2.29) king, nor is Hamlet “of unimproved mettle, hot and full” and leading an army of “landless resolutes” (1.1.95, 97), yet the familial structure of the Danish and Norwegian court are the same: a dead king’s son, who is also his namesake, is not the ruler of the land; instead the brother of the dead king is the current king, while the son of the dead king bears his father’s name but not his title. A key difference between the two countries, however, is Gertrude. There is no mention of a Queen of Norway, and the image of the current King of Norway as “impotent and bedrid” suggests a sharp contrast with the virile, newlywed King of Denmark.96

While both Gertred and Gertrude share the royal bed with the King of Denmark, Q2/F emphasizes Gertrude’s shared rule over Denmark. Indeed, in stark contrast to Gertred of Q1, Gertrude of Q2/F has clear political power and seems to relish her role as ruler. Gertrude is an “imperial jointress” in all senses of the word: royal and in joint-command over Denmark, Gertrude weilds political and financial power with her husband. Gertrude and Claudius present a united front when they call Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the court, both speaking of Hamlet’s closeness with the two men. The scene offers a delicate political dance between two pairs of political allies – the King and Queen moving with each other and the two courtiers reacting in consort. Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “rest here in our Court” (2.2.13) and “glean” what “afflicts” Hamlet (16, 17), but Gertrude makes clear the reward their work will bring them:

96 In Q1, the King of Norway is described as “impudent,” not “impotent” (2.2).
If it will please you
To show us so much gentry and good will
As to expend your time with us awhile
For the supply and profit of our hope,
Your visitation shall receive such thanks
As fits a king’s remembrance.
(2. 2. 21-25)

Gertrude shows herself an adept politician, positioning the service Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will perform in flattering terms. Invoking their “gentry and good will,” Gertrude reiterates Claudius’ request that the two men stay in the Court, but in a way that emphasizes their proposed proximity to the King and Queen. “Expend your time with us awhile,” Gertrude beckons, turning the King’s blunt “rest here in our court” into an invitation of access to the innermost circle of the Court – the King and Queen themselves. Gertrude explains that their service will be “for the supply and profit of our hope,” but her elaboration of the reward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will receive for this service suggests that it will in fact be “for the supply and profit of their hope.”

While Gertrude does not promise outright a financial reward, the combined effect of “gentry,” “supply,” and “profit” make clear what kind of “thanks / As fits a king’s remembrance” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can expect. That Gertrude describes their remuneration as stemming from “a king’s remembrance” does not diminish her role in bestowing the reward: indeed, if anything, the line perhaps suggests that Gertrude, rather than Claudius, has control over the royal coffers. Rosencrantz’s response reinforces the shared rule of the King and Queen, invoking the “sovereign power” of “both your majesties” (26-27), to whom the two men pledge their “service freely” (31). The King expresses his gratitude and acknowledges their service: “Thanks, Rosencrantz, and gentle

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97 We might also think about Elizabeth I’s strategic deployment of “king” in reference to herself.
“Thanks, Guildenstern, and gentle Rosencrantz” (34). The appellation “gentle” reinforces the sense that the reward for their service will translate to increased prestige.

Gertrude’s repetition and alteration of Claudius’ line ensures that both men receive equal commendation, although, as the editors of the Arden Three Hamlet, Ann Thomas and Neil Taylor, note, Gertrude’s line has been a source of confusion. Pointing out that, since 1676, Gertrude’s line has frequently been cut from performance, Thomas and Taylor offer two explanations for why Gertrude reiterates Claudius’ thanks: “the reversal can be played simply as an example of courtesy, giving the two courtiers equal priority, or as a correction of the King, who has got the names wrong.” Thomas and Taylor then go on to elaborate on the potential for comedy that confusion of the two courtiers offers, but what they seem to miss is that Gertrude’s line is funny not because it suggests that the King is unable to remember the particularities of the two men’s titular status but because, in this scene, Gertrude and Claudius act like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Just as the two courtiers seem to parrot one another with their replies, so, too, do Gertrude and Claudius. The joke is that all four are consummate politicians, engaged in an unwieldy dance between four players, with each player responding not only to the motions of his (or her) partner but also to the couple facing them – an awkward pas de deux performed “à quatre.” To cement the sense that Gertrude is an

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98 Hamlet, 239n33-34.
99 In the parallel scene in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Tom Stoppard capitalizes on the comedy of this confusion, exacerbating Gertrude and Claudius’ confusion about the two men and having even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern unable to tell themselves apart: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
equal partner in rule, the scene closes with Gertrude ordering men to action. At
Gertrude’s behest, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are directed to Hamlet: “Go some of
you / And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is” (36-37). Not only does she exert
control over royal coffers, but also she exerts control over the actions of members of the
court, issuing commands, giving orders, and providing counsel.100

In the parallel scene in Q1, Gertred only speaks once, to thank the men as they
leave. Unlike in Q2, she requests no service from Rossencraft and Guilderstone and,
while financial reward is only obliquely hinted at in this scene (the King says that if they
find the “cause and ground of [Hamlet’s] distemperance,” then he “shall be thankful”
(7.7-8)), the reward is made explicit at their subsequent meeting. The King demands
Rossencraft and Guilderstone “increase [Hamlet’s] mirth” (8.14), bidding them, “Spare
no cost, our coffers shall be open / And we unto yourselves will still be thankful” (15-16).
Whereas in Q2/F, Gertrude not only articulates the reward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
can expect to receive but also can control the royal coffers, in Q1 it is both the King who
mentions the remuneration and the King who orders his “coffers…open[ed].” Gertred
follows the King’s promise of reward with her own offer to Rossencraft and
Guilderstone: “Thanks, gentlemen, and what the Queen of Denmark / May pleasure you
be sure you shall not want” (18-19). In a rare instance, Gertred calls attention to her status
as “the Queen of Denmark,” but she is careful to delineate the extent of her authority to
“what the Queen of Denmark may pleasure,” suggesting that the scope of her aid will be
confined to the limits of her role. That her offer is made alongside the King’s suggests

100 This stands in direct contrast to Q1, in which Gertred obeys commands, never orders them.
that “what the Queen of Denmark may pleasure” does not include the royal coffers: the
“our” of “our coffers” is the royal we, not the “our” of the King and Queen.

One reason why Gertrude’s role in Q2/F in controlling (either alone or in joint)
the royal coffers is so notable is that the world of Q2/F is one in which money is
paramount. Hamlet complains to Horatio that Osric owes his position in court to his
money: “he hath much land, and fertile … ’Tis a chough; but, as I say, spacious in the
possession of dirt” (5.2.72-75). As Hamlet’s dismissal – “’tis a chough” – makes clear,
Osric’s only redeeming quality is his “possession of dirt,” and, as Hamlet’s subsequent
teasing demonstrates, Osric yearns to curry the favor of Hamlet, the Prince and Claudius’
proclaimed heir. Both Hamlet and Horatio may deride Osric’s gentle aspirations, but
Osric’s very presence at the Court underscores the ability to pay for royal access in
Denmark. In a related complaint, Hamlet laments the breakdown of class structures in
Denmark, expounding on how “picked” (5.1.131) or refined the general populace has
become.101 These complaints, combined with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s
willingness to trade financial reward for Hamlet’s friendship, reinforce the sense that
money rather than gentle birth is what marks the upper echelon of society. The desire for
wealth – whether conceived of as the throne (of Denmark for Claudius and Hamlet; of
Norway for Fortinbras); the promised but denied patrimony (Hamlet, Laertes,
Fortinbras); royal patronage (Polonius, Osric, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern); or the
needs of the common folk (the “resolutes” Fortinbras assembles are hungry “for food and
diet to some enterprise / That hath a stomach in’t” (1.1.97-99); the people of Denmark,

101 “picked, adj.,” OED Online, May 2012 (Oxford University Press).
stirred up by both Ophelia and Laertes, are no less ripe for rebellion) – drives the actions of the men of *Hamlet*. But what if financial considerations matter not only to the men but also to the Queen of Denmark?

VIII. Gifts for the Queen

When the Ghost appears to Hamlet, he tells his son, in similar language across the three texts, that his murderer now wears his crown. In all texts, the Ghost confirms Hamlet’s accusation of his uncle as the murderer, yet the Ghost’s explanation, however, of how his murderer “won” the Queen’s affections registers a key difference between Q1 and Q2/F:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Quarto</th>
<th>Second Quarto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GHOST. Yea, he, That incestuous wretch, won to his will with gifts – O wicked will and gifts that have the power So to seduce – my most seeming-virtuous Queen</td>
<td>GHOST. Aye that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts, O wicked wit, and gifts that have the power So to seduce; won to his shameful lust The will of my most seeming virtuous Queen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5.35-38) (1.5.41-46)

Suggesting that Gertred was “won” and “seduce[d]” by his “incestuous” brother’s “wicked will and gifts,” the Ghost of Q1 emphasizes not only the sexual but also the moral deviance of his brother’s “will.” In contrast to what the Ghost says about Claudius in Q2/F, the Ghost’s complaint here seems a more diffuse charge of sexual immorality,

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102 Q1: “he that did sting / Thy fathers heart, now weares his Crowne” (5.33-34); Q2: “The Serpent that did sting thy father’s life/ Now weares his Crowne” (1.5.38-39). In response, Hamlet, in Q2, cries, “O my prophetic soul! My uncle” (1.5.39-40); his exclamation in Q1 is nearly identical: “O my prophetic soul! My uncle. My uncle” (5.33-34).
highlighted by his repeated invocation of the sexually-charged “will.” That this “will” is “wicked” and “incestuous” and that this “wretch” “won” and “seduce[d]” the “seeming virtuous queen” places the burden of blame on his brother’s “wicked” nature, rather than on his weak widow.

In Q2/F, the Ghost offers a slightly but significantly different response to Hamlet: while the Ghost of Q1 emphasizes his brother’s “will,” in Q2/F, the Ghost emphasizes his “wit.” As Samuel Johnson noted in his commentary on Hamlet, “wit,” at the time of the play’s composition, carried more of a sense of “understanding” or “mental capacity” or (in plural) “intellectual powers,” than its later sense of connoting “cunning.” This meaning of “wit” as a kind of capacity to understand suggests that what turns Claudius’ “wit” into “witchcraft” is his ability to know how to “seduce” and “win” Gertrude – with “gifts.”

The gifts of Q2/F are given greater weight than they receive in Q1, not only because the gifts of Q2/F are specified as “traitorous” but also because, as Thompson and Taylor point out in their edition, the Ghost in Q2/F uses the term “gifts” a third time in his speech, declaring that Gertrude “decline[d] / Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor / To those of mine” (1.5.50-52). Thompson and Taylor gloss the Ghost’s use of “gifts” in Q1 by noting, “Q2/F use this word three times in this speech to mean both

103 “will, n.1., 2” OED Online, May 2012 (Oxford University Press). Thomas and Taylor gloss “will” here as “sexual desire” (1.5.46n).
104 “wit, n. 2, 3c” OED Online, May 2012 (Oxford University Press). Johnson writes, “‘Wit’ was not in Shakespeare’s time taken either for imagination or acuteness, or both together, but for understanding, for the faculty by which we apprehend and judge. Those who wrote of the human mind distinguished its primary powers into wit and will,’ qtd. in The New Variorum Shakespeare: Hamlet, vol. I, edited by Howard Furness (New York: American Scholar Publications, 1965). This note is printed in reference not to the Ghost’s speech but to Polonius’ speech to the King and Queen where he declares, “Therefore, since brevity is soul of wit./ And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, / I will be brief” (2.2. 90-92).
'presents' and natural qualities, i.e. personal qualities” (5.2.36-37n). Q2/F certainly sets up contrast between the multiple meanings of “gifts,” but, in the context of wooing, “gifts” carry a legal weight that “presents” fails to indicate. In the legal writing of the period, “gifts” are the term commonly used to designate the pre-marital behest, usually in the form of land or annuities from the land, that would be a key part of marriage negotiations. The term “gifts,” therefore, register a specific legal function, connoting the language of land, inheritance, and contract. Notwithstanding this, scholars have been quick to dismiss the importance of “gifts,” suggesting that, as Old Hamlet’s widow, Gertrude could not possibly lack for material goods. That the “gifts” of Q2/F are “traitorous” compounds this sense, in that “traitorous gifts” suggest that whatever Claudius offers Gertrude is some way amounts to treason. My goal is not to speculate about what Claudius may have presented Gertrude with (or, to be more accurate, what the Ghost imagines Claudius presented Gertrude with), but rather to highlight the importance that “gifts” have in the Ghost’s description of how Claudius “won” the “seeming-virtuous Queen.”

The Ghost’s sense of how Claudius wooed Gertrude is echoed in Q2/F in The Mousetrap. In the dumb-show that proceeds The Mousetrap, Q2/F stipulates how and why the widowed Queen falls in love: “The poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile but in the end accepts love” (3.2.128.9-11). In Q2/F, “gifts” prove

106 Kehler writes, “if we are to believe the Ghost’s account of his brother’s successful courtship, a courtship in which Claudius ‘bought’ Gertred’s love, it is important to note that the gifts in themselves could not matter except as signifiers of Claudius’ desires, a reassurance to Gertred that she is not yet the ‘matron’ that in all three texts Hamlet would have her be,” “Widow Gertred,” 407.
crucial to winning the Queen, whereas in Q1, the Duchess simply “finds [her husband] dead and goes away with another” (9.83.4-5). While the Duchess (Q1) of *The Mousetrap* dumb-show appears simply to pass from one man to another, the Queen (Q2/F) of the dumb-show at first resists the advances of the poisoner and then “accepts love” – and part of what she presumably “accepts” are also the poisoner’s “gifts.”

The role of gifts and wealth in second marriage considerations is reinforced within Q2/F’s *The Mousetrap* itself. When the Player King suggests that the Queen will remarry, she vehemently protests, averring that only a murderess would wed again: “None wed the second but who killed the first” (3.2.174), and later, “A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed (178-9).” Sandwiched between these two sensational statements, both of which have been used to speculate on Gertrude’s complicity in Old Hamlet’s murder, is a telling comment on why a woman would remarry.

The Player Queen declares, “The instances that second marriage move / Are base respects of thrift, but none of love” (176-7), a point that reiterates the role of gifts in wooing the Queen of the dumb-show. Here, the Player Queen cites “thrift” or financial concerns as the factor that would drive a second marriage, and, while her tone is condemnatory (“thrift” lacks the value of “love”), the Player Queen does voice a legitimate and often overlooked reason for why women remarried.107 The Player King echoes the importance of wealth, suggesting that “fortune” and “love” are inextricably linked, noting, “‘tis a question left us yet to prove / Whether Love lead Fortune or else

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Fortune Love” (196-7). “Fortune” may mean “chance,” and the fact that “Fortune” is described as either leading or being lead by “Love” evokes the image of the goddess Fortune and Eros. Yet while “Fortune” carries this sense of “chance” or “hap,” because it follows the Player Queen’s binary of “thrift” and “love,” “Fortune” seems here to connote its meaning, either of “success” and “prosperity,” or even more recent meaning which more explicitly defined “Fortune” as “amount of wealth.” These layered meanings of “Fortune” thus build on the notion of “thrift,” expanding the motivation for marriage from purely monetary to something more comprehensive that accounts for both prosperity and status.

Paying attention to the allure that “gifts” are imagined to have for a queen, as well as the various ways these “gifts” are depicted, can point us to an alternate narrative about Gertrude’s desires. Rather than focusing on Gertrude’s sexuality, we might think about her sovereignty and her effort to shore up political and financial capital. Putting Gertrude back in context with *Hamlet* allows us to see that, while the language used to describe Gertrude’s desires may be sexual – the Ghost claims she is “won,” “seduce[d],” and that her “will” is given over to Claudius’ “lust” – what the Ghost declares “wins” Gertrude is not her lust for Claudius but rather Claudius’ “wit” and “gifts.” As critics, we have been

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109 One could say the Player King highlights here an earlier definition of “thrift,” synonymous with “good luck” (“thrift,” n1a.), in contrast to the Player Queen, who seems to use “thrift” in the sense of “economical management, economy”: “thrift, n3a,” OED Online, January 2013 (Oxford University Press). Notwithstanding this evidence, scant attention has been given to the financial considerations that could drive Gertrude to remarriage. One of the few critics to address Gertrude and wealth, Richard Levin is quick to dismiss the notion that Gertrude, like the Player Queen, could have been tempted to marry Claudius because he offered her gifts: “While proverbial wisdom had it that women are tempted by gifts, it is hard to imagine any gift that could tempt the Queen of Denmark, who presumably did not suffer from a dearth of worldly goods,” “Gertrude’s Elusive Libido and Shakespeare’s Unreliable Narrators.” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48.2 (Spring 2008): 309. Levin fails to imagine that “gifts” and “worldly goods” might still hold currency for Gertrude.
so focused on the sexual language used to describe Gertrude that we have overlooked what Gertrude can tell us about the practical reasons why women were imagined to desire marriage.

Moreover, heeding Gertrude’s efforts to exert and consolidate political power suggest the limits that certain types of gendered readings can impose on our ability to appreciate the full scope of what *Hamlet* has to say about women and their relationships to people and to concrete and abstract desires. Reading Gertrude primarily through the lens of her sexuality has hindered us from addressing Gertrude’s role in Danish politics as it has contributed to a tendency to read Gertrude as cultural figure, rather than a character embedded in a play. What may guide this understanding of Gertrude is our inclination to read *Hamlet* through the eyes of its eponymous protagonist, rather than see what the full play stages before our eyes. Because Hamlet spews so much sexual vitriol at women, we think about Gertrude as, first and foremost, a woman who exhibits a problematic sexuality, rather than as a queen who exerts a problematic (for her son) political will.

Attention to Gertrude’s political will forces us to confront aspects of her character that may, in fact, be problematic for certain types of feminist criticism. Key to the critical effort to understand and even rehabilitate Gertrude has been Gertrude’s relationship with Ophelia, which critics have read as guided by Gertrude’s private feelings rather than public concerns. In a desire to “save” Ophelia, we have seen Gertrude as Ophelia’s ally, their relationship as one of female camaraderie united against a cruel and patriarchal Denmark. Such a reading may be accurate when applied to Gertred and Ofelia in Q1; however, it misses what actually happens in Q2/F.
IX. Saving Ophelia?

The contrast between Gertrude of Q2/F and Gertred of Q1 is perhaps nowhere clearer than in their reaction to Ophelia’s/Ofelia’s madness. Here again we see Gertred as defined first and foremost by her maternal role, while Gertrude is defined by her monarchical role. The scene is set up differently in the three texts, offering a rare point of departure between the Queen of Denmark in Q2 and F. In Q1, the King and Gertred are alone onstage when mad Ofelia enters; in both Q2 and F, the King joins Gertrude only after Ophelia has been granted an audience. In Q2, the scene opens with Gertrude onstage with an unnamed Gentleman and Horatio; in F, there is no Gentleman, just Horatio and Gertrude.

As the scene unfolds in Q1, Gertred first reports news of Ofelia’s decline, lamenting to the King that “old Corambis’ death/ Hath pierced so the young Ofelia’s heart/ That she, poor maid, is quite bereft of her wits” (13.6-8). When Ofelia wanders into the chambers, Gertred calls attention to her: “O, see where the young Ofelia is!” (14), directing all eyes to turn to the “young,” “poor maid.”

Where Gertred demands that we “see” Ofelia, in Q2 and F, Gertrude, in contrast, strives to not “see” Ophelia. The scene in Q2 begins with Gertrude’s retort to the Gentleman and Horatio: “I will not speak with her” (4.5.1), she tells the men, no mention of who this “her” is.\footnote{Indeed, until Ophelia enters, we do not actually know whom the Gentleman, Horatio, and Gertrude are discussing. The scene begins identically in F, except that Gertrude addresses only Horatio. The lines} The Gentleman pleads, “She is importunate – indeed, distract. /
Her moods will needs be pitied” (2-3). Gertrude asks, “What would she have?” (3), and the Gentleman explains, “her speech is nothing / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move / The hearers to collection” (7-9). The Gentleman cautions that the people “botch the words to fit their own thoughts” (10), in effect, hearing what they want to hear. As Horatio makes clear, the “thoughts” of the “hearers” threaten the throne, and he urges Gertrude to speak with Ophelia: “‘Twere good she were spoken with,” Horatio tells the Queen, “for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds. / Let her come in” (15-16). Gertrude assents, not because of the Gentleman’s appeal to her imagined maternal (or humane) concerns but because Horatio appeals to Gertrude’s political concerns: it is not that Ophelia’s “moods will needs be pitied” but that her “moods” “strew dangerous conjectures” in the “ill-breeding minds” of the populace. Only after Horatio has pointed out the “danger” that Ophelia presents does Gertrude allow her to enter.

Gertrude appears even more calculating in this scene in F: there is no Gentleman, and thus Horatio speaks the lines assigned the Gentleman in Q2, imploring Gertrude to grant an audience to Ophelia. Upon hearing Horatio’s plea, Gertrude herself concludes, “‘Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds. / Let her come in (4.5.15-17). Whereas in Q2 Horatio is the one to counsel Gertrude about the threat Ophelia poses, in F, Gertrude needs no counselor to tell her the politically expedient action to pursue.

assigned to the Gentleman in Q2 are Horatio’s in F, thus Horatio is the one who declares, “She is importunate – indeed, distract. / Her moods will needs be pitied” (4.1.2-3).
Notwithstanding what Gertrude actually says and does in this scene, scholars have insisted on reading Gertrude’s treatment of Ophelia as evidence of Gertrude’s nurturing, maternal nature. Addressing Gertrude’s initial refusal to see Ophelia, Sardone explains, “Gertrude will not be used against anyone that she loves. For this reason Gertrude avoids Ophelia.”\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, R.S. White deflects attention away from Gertrude’s reaction to Ophelia, positioning Gertrude as Ophelia’s champion, the one who “takes the prospect [of Ophelia’s marriage to Hamlet] seriously” and the one “who, admittedly after initially refusing to speak with Ophelia, shows genuine concern in her language: ‘Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?’”\textsuperscript{112} For White, Gertrude is Ophelia’s sole potential ally, and thus “at least a part of the tragedy for both Ophelia and Gertrude is their gender solitude and separation from each other” (110). White begins “Ophelia’s Sisters” with an epigraph: “Her speech is nothing / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move / The hearers to collection” (93).\textsuperscript{113} What White misses in this otherwise thoughtful essay on Ophelia’s representation is the political and practical significance of those words for Gertrude, and thus the reason why Gertrude grants Ophelia an audience.

\textsuperscript{111} Sardone, “Gertrude,” 100. For a similar reading of Gertrude’s treatment of Ophelia, see, for example, Heilbrun, “Character of Hamlet’s Mother,” 203-2-4; Montgomery, “Enter Queen Gertrude,” 108-110; Maxwell, “Hamlet’s Mother,” 243. While Elaine Showalter’s essay “Representing Ophelia” does not consider the role that Gertrude plays in Ophelia’s mad scene (as either Ophelia’s salvation or enemy), thinking about the reasons for both Gertrude’s initial refusal to see Ophelia and eventual acquiescence seem to be an important part of the work that feminist criticism needs to do in asking, “How should feminist criticism represent Ophelia in its own discourse? What is our responsibility towards her as character and as woman?” Showalter concludes her essay, “But in exposing the ideology of representation, feminist critics have also the responsibility to acknowledge and to examine the boundaries of our own ideological positions as products of our gender and our time” (92). It would seem, perhaps, that acknowledging the political calculations that go into granting Ophelia an audience has, for too long, been beyond “the boundaries of our own ideological positions as products of our gender and our time”: “Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,” in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1995).

\textsuperscript{112} White, “Ophelia’s Sisters,” 109.

\textsuperscript{113} The quotation is from 4.5.7-9; see discussion above.
If scholars do not explain away why Gertrude denies Ophelia an audience, they tend to ignore this scene altogether when discussing the relationship between the two women, addressing instead Gertrude’s report of Ophelia’s death. This seems to be part of a larger reluctance in feminist criticism to address the ways in which women instrumentalize and even exploit other women (and men) for their own ends, especially when those ends are financial or political advantage. White concludes “Ophelia’s Sisters” by noting that “in the court of Denmark, where ‘the king’s to blame’ for muddying the waters of justice, the women’s story, undeniably present and sometimes disruptive, is always coerced into shadows of silence and tears.” Examining this scene suggests ways in which “the women’s story” – the story in which Gertrude refuses aid to Ophelia or only provides aid because it is politically expedient – may offer a narrative that disrupts our fantasies of female alliances and brings to light critics’ unwitting role in “coercing [such tales] into shadows of silence.” Attention to Gertrude’s treatment of Ophelia – at times seemingly-nurturing, at times cold – enables us to see the further work

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114 For example, in an article on Gertrude and Ophelia, Wallenfels bypasses any discussion of the scene in which Gertrude first refuses Ophelia an audience; instead, Wallenfels examines only Gertrude’s report of Ophelia’s death, concluding that Gertrude “constructs meaning for Ophelia’s death…verbally decks Ophelia with the May Queen’s garlands associated…with fertility…But she also appears to reinstate Ophelia’s chastity,” “Gertrude as a Character of Intersection,” 95-96. While, in “The Heart Cleft in Twain,” Smith catalogues almost every one of Gertrude’s lines, Smith makes no mention of Gertrude’s refusal to see Ophelia, focusing instead on how, “when relaying the news of Ophelia’s death, Gertrude characteristically disdains liberality and creates her bittersweet pictures in the language of the ‘cull-cold maids,’” 200.

115 Scholars are less reluctant to describe female-female relationships as complicated by jealousy; this is particularly evident in readings of Gertrude’s treatment of Ophelia, in which critics who do not read this scene as a moment of sisterhood instead cite Gertrude’s “cruel” treatment of Ophelia as evidence of her jealousy of Ophelia’s youth and beauty: see, for example, Harmonie Loberg, “Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer,” Atenea 24.1 (2004): 59-71; Stephen Ratcliffe, “What Doesn’t Happen in Hamlet: The Queen’s Speech,” Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 10.1 (Spring 1998): 123-44.

that remains to be done on the “traffic in women,” specifically the ways in which women traffic in other women and are guided by political expedience as well as ethics.  

Eventually, Gertrude grants Ophelia an audience, but it is too late to save Ophelia from her “distract[ion],” and it is also too late to stop the people’s rebellion. No sooner does Ophelia leave Gertrude and Claudius but a messenger bursts in, warning the King and Queen of the mob, led by Laertes, that has stormed the palace:

Save yourself, my lord.
… young Laertes in a riotous head
O’erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord
And, as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word,
They cry, ‘Choose we! Laertes shall be king!’ –
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds –
‘Laertes shall be king! Laertes king!’

(4.5.98-107)
The image of Laertes leading the “riotous head” evokes the play’s initial invocation of Fortinbras’ rebellion: the Danes are no less unruly than the “lawless resolutes” of Norway (1.1.97).  

The “rabble” cries for nothing short of a new form of monarchy, one elected not by the Court but by the people: “antiquity forgot, custom not known…they cry ‘Choose we! Laertes shall be king!’”

As the messenger’s entering cry, “Save yourself, my lord,” suggests, Claudius, not Gertrude, is the target of the people’s attack. Yet Gertrude, not Claudius, defends the throne: “How cheerfully on the false trail they cry. / O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!” (4.5.109-10) Condemning the “false Danish dogs” for following the “false trail”

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117 Newman, “Directing Traffic.” We could also argue that Gertrude provides an opportunity to think about how women may traffic in themselves.

118 “Landless resolutes” in Folio.
that indict Claudius in the death of Polonius, Gertrude suggests that the “correct” trail would lead instead to Hamlet. Any ambiguity in what Gertrude means by the “false trail” is clarified by Gertrude’s subsequent actions as she physically blocks Laertes from harming her husband. Twice Claudius exhorts Gertrude to “let [Laertes] go,” reassuring her, “do not fear our person” (122, 125). When Gertrude finally stops physically defending Claudius from Laertes, she verbally defends him, absolving him of Polonius’ murder. Again, Claudius admonishes Gertrude: “Let [Laertes] demand his fill” (128). A similar interchange occurs in Q1, with Gertred both physically and verbally protecting the King; however, because Gertred does not decry the Danes’ rebellion, her actions seem motivated by a desire to protect her husband, rather than to protect the throne. Moreover, Gertred’s verbal rebuke to Leartes receives no response from the King, so her move to physically defend her husband from Leartes is not in defiance of the King’s command.119

X. Gertrude’s Legacy

As Hamlet dies in Q2/F, he offers a final thought on his mother’s fate. Hamlet attacks Claudius, forcing the poison on the wounded King: “here, thou incestuous, damned Dane! / Drink of this potion. Is thy union here? / Follow my mother” (5.2.309-11). Hamlet’s final curse on Claudius is also a curse on his mother, for if “incestuous,

119 The subtle difference in Gertrude’s defiance versus Gertred’s obedience is important because it is echoed in Gertrude’s/Gertred’s death. As critics have noted, Gertred, in drinking from the poisoned chalice, does not actually disobey the King. The King warns Gertred after she has already drunk, while in Q2/F, Gertrude defies the King’s command. “Gertrude, do not drink” (5.2.273), Claudius warns, but she refuses to heed him: “I will, my lord. I pray you pardon me” (274).
murderous, damned” Claudius “follow[s]” Gertrude, then she must lead the way to Hell. Hamlet extends no salvation to his mother, pronouncing her a “wretched Queen” as he bids her dead body “adieu” (317).

In Q1, in contrast, Hamlet offers no curse on his mother; indeed, he offers no comment on her death, directing all his attention to the King, Leartes, and Horatio, respectively. Horatio, surveying the dead bodies and confronted with the invading Norwegian force, proclaims the scene a “tragedy” (17.121) and promises to relay the “sad story” (124) that led to the strewn bodies in Q1. In Q2/F, however, Horatio promises to tell of, among other things, “carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts” (5.2.365). The “carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts” point to Gertrude; the phrase suggests that Horatio is already shaping her story to conform to how Hamlet viewed her.

It is perhaps not coincidental that Horatio’s promise to recount “carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts” only appears in Q2/F, for only in Q2/F is Gertrude “th’imperial jointress.” The two phrases, I argue, are intertwined and are symptomatic of a larger tendency for female political power to be sublimated into a focus on depraved female sexuality. The “acts” of Q1 are no less “carnal, bloody, and unnatural” than they are in Q2/F – in both versions of Hamlet, the facts of the various murders and the royal marriage are the same. While the King in Q1 does not call Gertred “our sometime Sister, now our Queen,” she bears the same relationship to her current and former husband. The same cannot, however, be said about her relationship to politics and property in Denmark.

Ultimately, the last words about Gertrude are not her own, yet what emerges when we look at what Gertrude says and does and what others (not just her son and
deceased husband) say about her is a more full and nuanced portrait than has been seen by previous critics. What also emerges is the work that feminist criticism has yet to do and can do on “canonical,” “normaliz[ed],” “received readings,” especially as they pertain to female political desires.

CHAPTER TWO

DESIRING DIDO: GENDER, POWER, AND PLEASURE IN DIDO, QUEEN OF CARTHAGE

I. Introduction

Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* has, along with *The Massacre at Paris*, historically received the least amount of the attention devoted to works in the Marlovian canon.\(^{121}\) Traditionally dismissed as little more than a sophomoric adaptation of Virgil’s *magnum opus*,\(^ {122}\) in the centuries since its printing in 1594, the play has been neither staged nor studied with anywhere near the frequency of *Tamburlaine, Edward II, Doctor Faustus,* or *The Jew of Malta*.\(^ {123}\) Yet goaded, perhaps, by T. S. Eliot’s proclamation that *Dido* had been “underrated,” as well as in response to the Revels Plays publication in 1968 of an edition of *Dido Queen of Carthage*, edited by H.J. Oliver, twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have turned their attention to the play.\(^ {124}\) When these critics write on *Dido*, they invariably focus on how Marlowe adapts

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\(^{121}\) H. J. Oliver speculates that “problem of divided authorship” as furthered the lack of critical interest in the play (xix). For more on the play’s textual history and authorship, see Oliver, *Introduction to Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris: Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), esp. xx-xxv.

\(^{122}\) Mary E. Smith argues that *Dido* harks back not only to the *Aeneid* but in fact resembles those Dido plays of Italian Renaissance dramatists, “Marlowe and Italian Dido Drama,” *Italica* 53.2 (1976): 223-235.

\(^{123}\) Mary-Kay Gamel, in an article occasioned by the 2005 ART production of *Dido Queen of Carthage*, offers an overview of the play’s 20th century stagings, “The Triumph of Cupid: Marlowe’s *Dido Queen of Carthage,”* *The Journal of Philology* 126.4 (2005): 613-622; see also Oliver, “Introduction,” esp xxiii. For further speculation on why the play has been dismissed, see Deanne Williams, “Dido, Queen of England,” *ELH* 73.1 (2006): 43.

\(^{124}\) Eliot offered this pronouncement in his 1919 essay “Christopher Marlowe,” reprinted in *Christopher Marlowe (The University Wits)*, edited by Robert Logan (London: Ashgate, 2011). Eliot suggested that *Dido* was perhaps a “hurried play, perhaps done to order with the *Aeneid in front of him*” (54) and focused on the style rather than substance of Marlowe’s verse. The Revels edition contained both *Dido* and *The Massacre at Paris*. Some of this attention also seems attributable to the increased interest in Marlowe’s work occasioned by the four-hundredth anniversary of his birth and concurrent founding of the Marlowe Society; see [http://www.marlowe-society.org/society/about.html](http://www.marlowe-society.org/society/about.html).
his Virgilian source for, as scholars note, there is much contained in the work that cannot be found in Virgil.\textsuperscript{125} The various scenes, characters, and relationships invented in \textit{Dido} fuel their conclusion about Marlowe’s intent (no one seems to care about what Nashe wanted), be it to entertain to Cambridge chums, compliment or critique the Queen, or comment on English imperialism.\textsuperscript{126}

These readings, however, have turned our gaze away from the play itself and the promise of its title to stage Dido as Queen of Carthage. This has stopped us from seeing the complex ways in which the play presents its female protagonist as a political figure who understands herself as both a desiring subject and desired object. I find, however, the tradition of examining what is original to Marlowe and Nashe’s \textit{Dido} productive, and I begin by looking at two major alterations to the narrative, both of which are introduced in the play’s opening scene between Jupiter and Ganymede. One of these is the frame itself, the interaction between Jupiter, Ganymede, and Venus; the other is the nature of this interaction and the way in which Jupiter, Ganymede, and Venus pursue their respective

\textsuperscript{125} Most scholars write on \textit{Dido} as if it were the sole work of Marlowe.

aims. The issues and questions that are introduced at *Dido’s* beginning and are then
developed over the course of the play are central to what *Dido* has to say about desire,
power, and agency; moreover, attention to the way scholars have written on these issues
highlights ways in which certain critical practices, particularly tendencies to overlook
class, to view female protagonists as apolitical, and to read female desire through the lens
of cultural feminism, have limited the scope of what we can see in *Dido*.

What this frame scene establishes is, I argue, crucial to our understanding of
*Dido*. As anyone familiar with Aeneas and Dido’s tale, as well as that of the Trojan War,
might expect, and as the gods’ machinations within *Dido* quickly establish, the humans
within the play are subject to the wills – and whims – of the gods. Jupiter, Ganymede,
Venus and Juno vie for power over one another in ways that have led scholars to
proclaim *Dido*’s gods “Ovidian rather than Virgilian: selfish and petty, concerned only
with status and pleasure, using human being only to satisfy their desires.”\(^{127}\) This frame
scene reminds us, however, that the gods themselves are not autonomous agents and are
just as prone to being manipulated. *Dido* presents less of a top-down hierarchical model
of power but one in which agency and autonomy are always circumscribed and
frequently at odds with the desires of others. What is striking about *Dido* is that, while
characters may form strategic alliances with one another and may, at moments, share
motivations and work towards common goals, they rarely, if ever, simultaneously share

\(^{127}\) Gamel, “Triumph of Cupid,” 614. For the gods as Ovidian, see also Maurice Charney, “Marlowe and
Shakespeare’s African Queens,” in *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*,
eds. Jay Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 250; Joyce Green
MacDonald, “Marlowe’s Ganymede,” in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, eds. Viviana
Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 105. On the
triviality of the gods, see W. Craig Turner, “Love and the Queen of Carthage: A Look at Marlowe’s *Dido*,”
motives and goals. Jupiter wants to enjoy Ganymede, Ganymede wants to enjoy the gifts Jupiter’s love brings; Juno and Venus propose a marriage between Dido and Aeneas, each goddess believing the union will confer greater glory upon herself; Iarbus repairs Aeneas’ ships because both want Aeneas to leave: Aeneas is compelled to leave Dido and go to Italy, and Iarbus wants Dido for himself; and, at the narrative’s core, Dido wants Aeneas to stay, and Aeneas must go.

The opening scene also highlights the tension between public and private concerns. The rulers, be they on Mount Olympus or in Carthage, must negotiate their personal and political motivations, neither of which can be disentangled from the other. This has particular significance for a feminist reading of Dido, as part of a larger critical issue has been the tendency to read public women’s decisions and desires as governed strictly by private feelings. Dido may be pierced by Cupid’s arrow, but she is not blinded by it: her articulations of her desire for Aeneas, I argue, show great consciousness of herself as a public figure, and she relies more on her status as Queen of Carthage than on her great beauty in her pursuit of Aeneas. Dido’s love for Aeneas cannot be divorced from his fitness as her political mate, and vice versa. Not only is Dido politically motivated, but so, too, are all the play’s female protagonists. Venus and Juno each vie for dominion, and while Venus’s efforts to advance Aeneas’s interests and Juno’s efforts to advance Dido’s interests cannot be disentangled from their affective ties to the mortals, Dido makes clear that self-interest is the primary force driving each goddess.

While scholars have written on the Jupiter-Ganymede frame and have, to an extent, attended to the nature of human agency in Dido, what goes unremarked in
discussions of the various additions and alterations that Marlowe makes upon Virgil’s tale is the quite literal addition of the cornucopia of luxury objects present throughout play.\textsuperscript{128} The “gold,” “silver,” “jewels,” “treasure,” “riches,” “wealth,” “favors,” “fortune,” and “gifts” that circulate within the play are critical drivers of the action, from the opening scene through the final, spectacular dénouement. Unlike the \textit{Aeneid}, the flow of gifts in \textit{Dido} is essentially one-sided: the Trojans have nothing, and Dido graces them with her generosity.\textsuperscript{129} The first major gift exchanged between the Trojans and Carthaginians in the \textit{Aeneid} is Helen’s golden marriage gown, which Aeneas gives to Dido; in \textit{Dido}, however, the Trojans give nothing, and it is Dido who bestows a garment upon Aeneas – the robes her late husband, Sichaeus, wore. The gifts and goods that are promised, bestowed, stolen and bartered are key to the play’s interpersonal relationships. This is a world in which wealth and power are paramount, and desire, quite literally, objectified. Alliances are forged for mutual benefit, and friendships are ties of advantage as much as affect. Rather than reading the play as a “travesty”\textsuperscript{130} or “fine farce”\textsuperscript{131} or “camp”\textsuperscript{132} send-up of Virgil, I argue that, if \textit{Dido} offers contemporary commentary, it does so not only through valorizing or pillorying Elizabeth but also through a deeply


\textsuperscript{129} In the \textit{Aeneid}, however, the Trojans are in less dire financial straights: once all the ships have been located, Aeneas sends his son to fetch gifts to thank their hostess (and it is in the process of bearing these gifts that Venus kidnaps Ascanius and replaces him with Cupid, who, bestowing the gifts upon Dido, pricks her with his arrow)

\textsuperscript{130} Stump, “Marlowe’s Travesty,” 86.

\textsuperscript{131} Cope, “Titillating Children,” 316.

\textsuperscript{132} Bowers, “Hysterics,” 96.
cynical understanding of court politics. *Dido* depicts a world that operates according to Machiavellian principles; it is not a corrupt world, but it is a world marked by cupidity and duplicity.

Dido falls, on the one hand, because she must, because that is her fate according to both the gods and to the narrative. On the other hand, Dido falls not because she does not know how to negotiate the political landscape of Carthage but because the very qualities – namely, her access to and savvy management of wealth – that enabled her to be successful in this deeply commercial and strategic world prove to be her undoing. The goods and gifts she bestows upon Aeneas to win his love provide the means that ultimately cause her to lose him. Failure to appreciate just how important material wealth is in *Dido* leads scholars like Allen to proclaim that Dido “makes love like an adolescent, and curries her beloved’s favor by loading him with gifts and honors. This is how one wins lovers in a schoolgirl’s fantasy.”133 What *Dido* offers, however, is a clear-eyed understanding of Marcel Mauss’ theory of the gift, for in Carthage as on Mount Olympus, “gifts and honors” are critical not only to “win[ning] lovers” but also to exerting power – and the more one gives, the more power one seems to gain.134

Failure to appreciate the prime importance of wealth and riches to *Dido* has contributed to a larger tendency to read Dido as essentially apolitical. The assumption is that whatever political acumen Dido may possess is blunted when she is pierced by

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Cupid’s arrow. As such, Dido poses a cautionary tale about what can happen to a female ruler if she fails to appreciate the political ramifications of her sexual choices. I argue, however, that Dido well understands the link between her public and private lives. Dido leverages her substantial wealth and power to woo Aeneas, strategically offering (and revoking) the gifts she bestows upon him and his men to keep Aeneas with her. But for divine intervention, her plan would work: her offer of joint-rule, combined with the promise that Aeneas can build a bigger and better Carthage over which they will both preside convinces Aeneas to stay. Aeneas leaves, however, because joint-rule is not enough for Venus, who demands more from and more for her son: at Venus’ insistence, Jove commands Aeneas to fulfill his destiny to found an independent empire in Italy.

Despite the attention paid to Aeneas’ and Jove’s ambivalence towards ambition and rule, as well as Venus’ investment in it, what goes unremarked are Dido’s ambitions and her investment in her position of power. Dido is consistently aware of her superior social status to all who surround her, even at her moments of greatest folly. Not only do Dido’s fantasies express her investment in being “empress” Dido (3.1.68), “queen Dido,” a “goddess” (4.4.77), but also the very language she uses highlights and enforces her status.135 It is a position that Dido relishes. While Aeneas imagines that Dido will try to sail with him to Italy, Dido never once tells Aeneas she will abdicate and follow him. Dido hints at this possibility after Aeneas has left; she begs her sister to “bring him back and thou shalt be a queen, / And I will live a private life with him” (5.1.197-98), yet even in this fantasy of abdication, Dido remains in Carthage – Aeneas will be brought “back.”

135 Unless otherwise noted, all citations to Dido, Queen of Carthage are from Christopher Marlowe, The Complete Plays, edited by Frank Romany and Robert Lindsay (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).
she will not go forth. Dido may miscalculate what Aeneas wants, failing to realize that Aeneas needs a more, not less, public life than he has found in Carthage, but her miscalculation also reveals Dido’s commitment to Carthage. Against the traffic of princesses and would-be queens who move from their homeland to their future-husband’s, Dido insists on staying put. The problem for Dido is not that she is apolitical but that she is too political, too tied to her kingdom and role as Queen of Carthage.

At the heart of Dido are issues of agency, the entanglement of public and private concerns, the importance of wealth and gifts, what it means for something or someone to have “worth,” and the jostling for political power. By examining these issues, we find that the women of Dido are deeply political – something reflected neither in the play’s sources nor, more crucially, in the scholarship done on the play. While in the Aeneid, as Mihoko Suzuki argues, “female characters exemplify the personal impulse that opposes public imperatives,” in Dido, it is the male characters, in the form of Aeneas and Jupiter, who display a “personal impulse that opposes public imperatives,” while the female characters espouse “personal impulse[s]” that are directly informed by their “public imperatives.” This is not to say that the male characters are apolitical while the women are savvy rulers, but that, contra the critical tradition that has tended to read public women’s decisions and desires as governed strictly by private motivations, Dido offers us an opportunity to examine the nexus of desire, power, and the limits of agency.

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136 Of course, part of Dido’s backstory is that she not native to Carthage; for the play’s suppression of this and how that fits with its ambivalence towards empire, see Kinney, “Epic Transgression,” esp. 263.
and how powerful women and men are imagined to negotiate these at times conflicting, at times complimentary, forces.

II. Jupiter, Ganymede, Gifts and the Goddess of Love

The opening scene of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* has been much commented on and, in earlier criticism, much censured. Scholars responded to the scene, as Jonathan Goldberg describes, by labeling 1.1 as “an embarrassment, a joke or a symptom of [Marlowe’s] ‘pathological’ condition.”138 The play begins with the stage direction, “Here the curtains drawn; there is discovered Jupiter dandling Ganymede upon his knee, and Mercury lying asleep”; Jupiter entreats, “Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me” (1.1.1), and the ensuing exchange negotiates the terms of their “play,” with Ganymede demanding both presents and protection from the god, which Jupiter bestows, conditional “if thou wilt be my love” (49). In an oft-cited note to the scene, Oliver, editing *Dido* for the Revels edition, proclaimed, “The use of the Jupiter-Ganymede relationship (and of Juno’s resentment of it) as the framework for the tragedy of Dido seem to be original with the authors of the play; and it is debatable whether much is gained thereby in the long run.”139 Responding to Oliver’s question of “whether much is gained” by the scene’s addition, Godshalk objected to the “shocking[]” opening scene yet saw it as presenting a kind of perverse value:

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138 Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Standford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 126. Although MacDonald finds that when 1.1 is commented on, the scene tends only to be discussed in a cursory manner, acknowledged and dismissed with a sentence, “Marlowe’s Ganymede,” 97.
139 Oliver, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, 4, note to 1.1.1-2.
The words of an old homosexual pleading for the love of his young paramour – set the tone of the first part of the scene:

Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me:
I love thee well, say Juno what she will.

The lines indicate the extreme infatuation of the old man as well as revealing that he has deserted his natural orientation toward his wife, Juno, in order to pursue a child. Ganymede’s reply

I am much better for your worthless love
That will not shield me from her shrewish blows!

is, of course, openly ironic, but suggests, with the phrase ‘worthless love,’ more than he intends. Homosexual love is, by common judgment, completely without worth.  

For Godshalk, the “tainted framework” that this opening establishes is crucial to our understanding of Dido and Aeneas’ love, which he also finds to be “illegitimate” and “unnatural” (2). Declaring the first scene “a thematic microcosm of the play’s entire action,” Godshalk, contra Oliver, concludes that the “first scene is a meaningful part of the action, not a dramatic miscalculation” (3). Setting aside Godshalk’s dated and problematic declarations about homosexuality, he is, I argue, correct in seeing the opening scene as a “thematic microcosm” for Dido. The question of the “worth” of love is one that is central to the play, as are issues of (mis)rule and agency.  

While Godshalk identifies a parallel between Jupiter and Aeneas, focusing on how “Aeneas will succumb to an illegitimate love which will keep him from his duty, the founding of Rome,” the analogy is less clear-cut than Godshalk suggests. While Aeneas defers Rome for Carthage, Dido, too, ignores her duty as Queen of Carthage, suggesting a parallel between Dido and Jupiter. Sara Munson Deats is quick to note a link between the queen and the god, describing Dido as a “carnival world in which the norms of gender behavior, sexuality, and political responsibility are turned topsy-turvy”; after reading the Jupiter-

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140 Godshalk, “Marlowe’s Dido,” 4, 8.
141 For an alternate reading of this scene’s centrality to the play, see Goldberg, Sodometries, 126-36.
Ganymede opening scene, Deats declares, “the relationship between Dido and Aeneas provides the second example of inversion, this time with the woman - not the minion - on top.” What this reading misses is that, while Dido and Aeneas’ relationship may trouble certain gender binaries, their relationship does not present a power inversion. Deats’ comment presents a kind of “thematic microcosm” of how scholars have read Dido, namely that they have failed to account for the way in which Dido is the Queen of Carthage and is in a greater position of political power than any other mortal in the play.

The opening scene also establishes the transactional nature of love. Ganymede withholds present and future affection, demanding both protection from Juno that Ganymede already codes in economic terms, pitting Jupiter’s “worthless love” (3) against Juno’s “shrewish blows” (4), as well as gifts and promises of future reward. Jupiter pledges to protect “the darling of my thoughts” (9) by “bind[ing Juno], hand and foot, with golden chords” (16) if she so much as “frown[s]” (12) on Ganymede; the image of “that pretty sport” (16), that “game” (18) of bound and punished Juno delights Ganymede, who asks Jupiter for a further demonstration of his love’s worth:

Sweet Jupiter, if e’er I pleased thine eye,
Or seemed faire walled in with eagle’s wings,
Grace my immortal beauty with this boon,
And I will spend my time in thy bright arms.

(1.1.21-22)

Jupiter’s response demonstrates just how much value is attached to being the “darling of [the] thoughts” of the ruler of Mount Olympus:

What is’t, sweet wag, I should deny thy youth,
Whose face reflects such pleasure to mine eyes,
As I, exhaled with thy fire darting beams,
Have oft driven back the horses of the night,
Whenas they would have haled thee from my sight.
Sit on my knee and call for thy content;
Control proud Fate and cut the thread of Time.
Why, are not all the gods at thy command
And heaven and earth the bounds of thy delight?

…
Hold here, my little love. These linked gems
My Juno wore upon her marriage day,
Put thou about thy neck, my own sweet heart,
And trick thy arms and shoulders with my theft.

(1.1.23-45)

Jupiter’s offer merely prompts Ganymede to ask for even more: “I would have a jewel for mine ear, / And a fine brooch to put in my hat, / And then I’ll hug with you an hundred times” (1.1.46-48). As Kate Chedgozy notes, Ganymede is well aware of the “commercialized nature of his erotic transaction with Jupiter … [and] knows how to profit from his status as a sexual commodity.”144 Scholars have been quick to point to the parallels between Jupiter’s bestowal of Juno’s wedding jewelry on Ganymede and Dido’s gift to Aeneas of the jewels “wherewith my husband wooed me” (3.4.62)145; less attention, however, has been paid to the political power Jupiter offers Ganymede and the precise nature of Ganymede’s request.146 Jupiter places “Fate,” “Time” and “all the gods

146 Turner seems to be a rare exception to this trend, “Love and the Queen of Carthage,” 5.
at [Ganymede’s] command,” a particularly troubling promise given Ganymede’s predilection for “sport” and “game.”

The world evoked is a “topsy-turvy” scene of play, but not just because of the misrule inherent in having Ganymede control “heaven and earth.” What compounds this sense of play is the way people, promises and goods are described as circulating and the slipperiness of these very descriptions. Among other gifts, Jupiter offers an array of luxury feathers – “pluck[ed]” from Juno’s peacocks, her “spotted pride,” to make Ganymede fans, from Venus’ swans to “sweeten out the slumbers of thy bed,” and even violently rendered from Hermes’ wings: “if that thy fancy in his feathers dwell,” Jupiter pledges, “I’ll tear them all from him.” The feathers appear again in Venus’ promise to Ascanius, and in Dido’s fantasies of Aeneas. It is unclear what constitutes Ganymede’s “boon” – is it for Jupiter to punish Juno (what Jupiter has just promised) or is for the jewels Ganymede subsequently demands (after Jupiter has promised that there is nothing he can deny his “sweet wag”)? Or is it the combination of the two – a boon that demands Jupiter prove his love’s worth both materially and figuratively. Here, again, nothing is accomplished without reference to the world of luxury, for Juno will be bound “hand and foot with golden chords,” her submission manifest with opulent manacles – what Dido will offer Aeneas. What Ganymede offers Jupiter evokes a (voluntary) mirroring of Juno’s potential punishment – Ganymede will stay in Jupiter’s “bright arms,” a willing

147 Turner sees a parallel between Jupiter’s promise here and Dido’s crowning of Aeneas: “both rulers offer bounteous gifts – including power – and reveal their despotic disregard for their underlings in the cause of pleasing their sought-after lovers,” “Love and the Queen of Carthage,” 5.
148 Goldberg also reads their negotiations as “slippery,” although for Goldberg, it is the shifting construction of masculinity in relation to sodomy, anti-theatricality and misogyny that constitutes the instability (rather than, as I cite, the exchange of objects, people and promises), Sodometries, 130.
prisoner (a sense compounded, of course, by his kidnapped status – “walled in with eagle’s wings”), held in thrall by the “gems,” “jewels,” and other luxuries Jupiter promises to bestow.

Ganymede’s casual invocation of his mythological story presents the way in which not only objects but also people serve as goods for exchange and the violence that frequently underwrites those transactions. Capitalizing on the past and continued pleasure (“If e’er I pleased thine eye, / Or seemed fair walled in with eagle’s wing”) he brings Jupiter, Ganymede offers himself in the future to Jupiter (“I will spend”) in exchange for the goods and services of others now (“grace my immortal beauty with this boon”). The idea of people as commodities is born out not only in Ganymede’s description of himself or Jupiter’s promises but also in virtually all the relationships described in the play – from Dido’s would-be suitors, to her sister, to herself, to Aeneas, to Ascanius, to the people of Carthage. The rules of commerce encompass everything and everyone in _Dido:_ this is precisely why Ganymede’s charge that Jupiter’s love is “worthless” provokes such opulent recompense, yet this is delivered, however, with its own price: “And shall have, Ganymede, if thou wilt be my love” (49). As their exchange suggests, it is not just that love is “commercialized” but that, in fact, the transaction constitutes a key part of the turn-on. Jupiter’s promise and conditional, “And shall have, Ganymede, if thou wilt be my love,” pauses their flirtatious negotiation not because Ganymede has no counter but because Venus does, her perfectly-timed entrance momentarily fixing the price of their “play.”
Venus interrupts the lovers, condemning Jupiter for neglecting his duties as ruler. Crying, “Ay, this is it! You can sit toying there / And playing with that female wanton boy” (1.150-51), Venus laments that “my Aeneas wanders on the sea” (52), tormented by Juno. That Venus, Goddess of Love, chides Jupiter for luxuriating in pleasure over pursuing duty has led critics to see the scene as a challenge to traditional gender roles.\(^{149}\) Indeed, a marked difference exists between Venus’ characterization as she addresses Jupiter in \textit{Dido} versus in the parallel scene in the \textit{Aeneid}. In the \textit{Aeneid}, Venus conforms to what is traditionally categorized as stereotypically “feminine” behavior and concerns: her interaction with Jupiter highlights her softness, weakness, and maternity. Venus’ lament for her son and for herself is met with Jupiter’s verbal and physical reassurances, delivered in such a way that emphasizes his position of power and her feminine frailty. She appears to Jupiter as a crying supplicant (I. 311), and he comforts her with a smile (343), a kiss (346), and the assurance that she has “no need to be afraid” (347) since he will keep his promise and Aeneas will have his destiny, which the omniscient and omnipotent Jupiter then details.\(^{150}\) While in the \textit{Aeneid}, as in \textit{Dido}, there remains the question of Venus’ sincerity – is she genuinely so distraught and scared or is this tearful posture the most effective means of appeal before Jupiter? – Venus’s and Jupiter’s behavior aligns with ideas about women as ruled by passion, men, by reason.

Given the marked contrast between what the \textit{Aeneid} and \textit{Dido} each offers in its depiction of Venus and Jupiter in this scene, it is not surprising that Deats instead

\(^{149}\) We see this even in Goldberg’s discussion of how Venus is an “anti-theatrical … moralist” who insists on “male-male relations,” \textit{Sodometries}, 130.

proclaims that, in Dido, Jupiter, the “iconic patriarch” is a victim of “passionate love” and Venus is a champion of reason and rule. This conclusion leads Deats to read the scene as immediately working to destabilize ideas about gender, sex and sexuality. Yet even in reading the scene as a challenge to traditional gender roles, Deats still relies on a vocabulary that constructs a binary between male and female: Venus “elevates duty (conventionally gendered ‘masculine’) over passion (traditionally gendered ‘feminine’)”; moreover, the “telos inspiring Venus’ [love] machinations is not romantic fulfillment but heroic quest” (166). Deats concludes, “The Goddess of Love thereby colonizes ‘feminine’ passion in the service of ‘masculine’ honor” (167). While Deats employs this binary in order to show its deconstruction, Deats reads these categories as reified, so that merely by demonstrating an interest in “duty” or “heroic quest,” Venus would be read as unfeminine. As not only Dido but other works in the Marlovian cannon (along with much of early modern English drama) attest, male and female protagonists are driven by a quest for power, honor, and personal gain.

If scholars do not proclaim Venus as “masculine,” then they focus on the way in which Venus’ actions are guided by maternal concerns. Like Deats, Williams sees the conflict between Jupiter and Venus as that between passion and duty, “the rival claims of what [Henry VIII] called ‘pastime with good company’ and the pressing need to oversee the affairs of state.” Unlike Deats, however, Williams’ reads Venus’ behavior not as

151 Deats, “Gender Hierarchies,” 164. See also Deats, Sex, Gender and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 103; Alison Findlay, “Marlowe and Women,” in Christopher Marlowe In Context, eds. Emily Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 245.
152 Williams, “Dido,” 44.
“masculine” but as motherly: the opening scene presents “the lassitude of Jupiter, stupefied by desire, against the maternal watchfulness of Venus” (ibid.). What these readings of Venus share is an assumption about gender and behavior informed by certain tenets of cultural feminism: if Venus appears as forceful, she must owe that power to being either “masculine,” anti-passion and guided by reason and rule or a “nurturing yet threatening” maternal figure. Essentially, she is either a man or a “mama bear.” In adopting these readings, what gets overlooked is that Venus is an incredibly effective ruler who strategically mobilizes language, people and objects to achieve her desired aims.

III. The “Ticing Strumpet”

Of the goods and people that circulate in the play, the most frequently invoked (not withstanding her physical absence) trafficked person is Helen of Troy. The first words Aeneas speaks lament that not only “Priam’s misfortune” but also “Helen's rape doth haunt yet at the heels” of the Trojans (1.1.142-43), and Dido, upon hearing Aeneas’ tale of Troy’s downfall, demands “how scaped Helen, she that caused the war?” (2.1.292). Later, as Aeneas leaves Dido and Carthage for the last time, Dido reminds Aeneas that “all the world calls me a second Helen, / For being entangled by a stranger’s looks” (5.1.144-45) and then declares, “So thou wouldst prove as true as Paris did, / Would, as fair Troy was, Carthage might be sacked, / And I be called a second Helena” (146-48). In these references, Helen functions as one might expect, with some ambiguity

153 Deats, *Sex, Gender*, 122.
around the precise nature of her agency — as in the *Iliad*, it remains unclear what role Helen’s volition versus that of the gods plays in “causing the war.” As Suzuki details in her masterful work on Helen of Troy, Helen traditionally is identified as the prototypical figure of the traffic in women; the sacrifice and scapegoating of Helen and the women who are “cast in the role of the sacrificial substitute for Helen” (e.g. Iphigeneia, Polyxena, Dido, Cressida) makes possible the maintenance or affirmation of the “epic community among men” (6). In her discussion of how Virgil posits Dido as a kind of Helen, Suzuki sees Dido as the greatest threat to Aeneas’ imperative to found Rome, concluding that Dido’s “destruction as a sacrificial victim thus aims to exorcize the threats of irrationality and disorder against Jupiter’s (and Aeneas’) rational, orderly and masculine *fatum*” (93). Aeneas must abandon Dido to found Rome, maintaining the “epic community of men” of Troy and affirming their new empire; however, Suzuki finds Virgil so sympathetic to the victims of empire – Dido in particular – that it suggests Virgil’s “own ambivalence about the cost of empire” (148).

While Suzuki sees Helen and her substitutes as figures who, through their sacrificing and scapegoating, work (however problematically) to bring men together, Chedgozy focuses on how Helen drives men apart. Writing on the ways in which gender and sexuality can “be both orderly and disorderly” in Marlowe’s oeuvre, Chedgozy turns to Helen as an example of disruptive and destructive desire, arguing that while Helen spurs men to action and is exchanged between men, her exchange breaks down rather

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than builds male homosocial bonds. Traded between men who prize her unparalleled beauty, Helen is, as Marlowe’s Faust proclaims, “the face that launch’d a thousand ships” (14.90). Citing Helen’s depiction in Faustus, Chedgozy writes:

If the exchange of women between men is crucial to the maintenance of male homosocial power, it is becoming clear that women do not always serve as the compliant agents of men's plans, but can act as disruptive and disorderly forces. Several times, Marlowe invokes Helen of Troy as such a woman, one whose desirability has the power to undo the bonds and institutions of martial masculinity. The inability to control Helen offers a cautionary tale about the dangers of the traffic in women, for while Helen may be, in Chedgozy’s reading of Faustus, nothing more than an object, she is an object whose possession brings destruction to her owner. Indeed, Helena is so noncompliant as to be neither object nor agent but rather of a different ontological status entirely – a “force.”

Although Helen of Troy figures prominently in Dido, Helen never appears in the play, and Chedgozy confines her discussion of Helen of Troy to her appearance in Faustus. Chedgozy, however, sees the two iconic women as closely aligned in Marlowe’s writing: “like Helen of Troy, Dido is also associated with imperial power, femininity, and catastrophe.” Chedgozy seems to draw a parallel between the two women primarily as a way to transition from her discussion of one instance of “disorderly desires” to the next, but it is a telling reading in its alignment of Dido and Helen and the precise way Chedgozy sees that overlap working – through “imperial power, femininity, and

155 Chedgozy, “Marlowe’s Men and Women,” 245, 254
158 Ibid., 255.
catastrophe.” Chedgozy may cite Dido as an instance of disorderly desire, but if so it is a disorderly desire that operates in a rather orderly way: Chedgozy foregrounds her argument about Dido in its production, suggesting that whatever seems transgressive about Dido’s depiction of gender and sexuality stems from being written for a private theatrical company of boy actors (255). The disorder Dido offers is thus, for Chedgozy, literally and figuratively constrained and contained within its private theater production. The “imperial power” that Chedgozy sees as a link between Dido and Helen is not so much a wielding of political power that troubles our ideas of conventional masculinity and femininity but rather one in which Dido offers herself as an object to Aeneas, a female-authored rather than “male-authored objectification” (ibid.).

This tendency to read Helen and, by extension, Dido as traded objects (even if they are the authors of their objectification) is echoed in Findlay’s pronouncement about the role women occupy in Dido. Even as Findlay argues that Marlowe’s writing offers opportunities for women “to master the stage through powerful verse and offer tantalizing possibilities of a world elsewhere where difference can thrive,” Findlay still finds a “narrative of abandonment in Dido, Queen of Carthage … where women are left behind in favour of expanding male horizons.”159 In both Findlay and Chedgozy’s invocations of Helen and the traffic in and “abandonment” of women in Marlowe’s cannon, we see a traditional idea of the role Helen plays – the scapegoated and sacrificed victim of Suzuki’s study. What makes Helen such an important figure in Dido, however, is the way in which the play imagines and reimagines this locus classicus.

159 Findlay, “Marlowe and Women,” 250.
Helen is not just referred to by proper name, for Dido, upon learning of Helen’s fate, offers a telling epithet:

ACHATES. Helena betrayed Deiphobus,  
    Her lover, after Alexander died,  
    And so was reconciled to Menelaus.  
DIDO. O, had that ticing strumpet ne'er been born!  

(2.1.297-300)

Dido’s label of Helen as “that ticing strumpet” has been remarked upon by several critics, chiefly because the label is then applied to Dido. Achates advises Aeneas, who is reluctant to abandon Dido for fear of her reaction, to “banish that ‘ticing dame from forth your mouth, / And follow your foreseeing stars in all” (4.3.31-32). Godshalk notes this repetition and writes, of Achates’ appellation of Dido, “Ironically, she herself has become the temptress, the woman whose love destroys rather than creates.” For Godshalk, this “points to the continuity” between the two women, highlighted by Dido’s lament that she has become a “second Helen” (ibid.). What is striking about Godshalk’s pronouncement (setting aside, for now, his charge that Dido’s “love destroys rather than creates”) is that the adjective “ticing” is not reserved for women. Indeed, the first instance of its usage is in reference to a man: Aeneas, relating the fall of Troy, decries “false Sinon … A man compact of craft and perjury, / Whose ticing tongue was made of Hermes pipe” (2.1.143-45).

“Ticing” not only modifies men and women but also extends to objects. Dido, covertly plotting her suicide, tells her sister that the bonfire she wishes to build is in fact for Aeneas’ “ticing relics” (5.1.277). Oliver, in a note on the line, suggests that this shifting meaning is an artistic blunder: “the adjective used three times, earlier in the play,

of people is applied less successfully here to inanimate objects, which are thought of as having the same seductive appeal as their owner or donor, Aeneas.” Oliver seems to miss that, in *Dido*, “inanimate objects” *do* have, if not the “same seductive appeal as their owner or donor” then an equally potent “seductive appeal.” The way in which the adjective “ticing” circulates in *Dido*, describing first Sinon, then Helen, then Dido, then Aeneas’ “relics,” underscores precisely the transmogrification of people and things and their fungibility. The polysemous meaning of what it means to be Helen and what it means to be called “ticing” points to the instability of not only gender roles but also ontological status, highlighting the slippery division between people, objects, and their worth.

Critical commentary on Helen in *Dido* offers a kind of microcosm for how issues of, as Chedgozy describes, “femininity, imperial power, and catastrophe” are addressed or – just as crucially – fail to be addressed. Taking Suzuki’s formulation about the function of women as sacrificial victims in epic and applying it to *Dido*, we find that what is so interesting about the play is the way it resists the yoking of gender with victimization: if Dido is a sacrificial victim, it is not just because she is a woman. Dido dies at the play’s end, but so, too, do Iarbus, Anna, and the Nurse (whom Dido puts to death). Moreover, Dido’s suicide can be read as a statement not only of her power but also of her desire to make Aeneas a victim, praying for both his defamation and for the war between Carthage and Rome. While Aeneas survives, he, too, is a victim of the gods’

161 Oliver, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, 87, 5.1.277n
162 For scholars like Stump, *Dido* is “too full of youthful derision to advance any agenda as serious as valorizing English colonialism or offering a sobering critique of prevailing attitudes towards women and aliens,” “Marlowe’s Travesty,” 85.
desires, for, unlike in the *Aeneid*, in *Dido*, Aeneas so clearly longs to stay in Carthage.

Indeed, as Goldberg notes, “Aeneas is not allowed any desire except to heed the imperial call.”  

In *Dido*, to be agent or object, victor or victim, is not a matter of male or female.

IV. Dido’s Command

While scholars have tended to overlook Dido’s political power, the play underscores precisely that. Before Dido makes her grand entrance in 2.1, we hear her described in ways that both highlight her economic and political puissance and stand in contrast to the male characters’. Venus, disguised as a huntress, offers the first description of Dido, answering Aeneas’ question about his location: “It is the Punic Kingdom, rich and strong … Whereas Sidonian Dido rules as queen” (1.1.210-13). As will be emphasized again and again, Dido’s riches are inextricably tied to her strength as queen; conversely, Aeneas finds himself “poor and unknown” (227), complaining he has “not any coverture but heaven” (230). Venus-in-disguise assures Aeneas that “Fortune hath favoured thee, whate’er thou be, / In sending thee unto this courteous coast,” urging him, “haste thee to the court / Where Dido will receive ye with her smiles” (231-34). Her testament to Dido’s grace and hospitality – Dido receives “with her smiles,” Carthage is a “courteous coast” – is reflected in both Iarbus’ and Ilioneus’ description of the Carthaginian court. Iarbus, encountering Ilioneus’ party of shipwrecked Trojans, comforts them: “Brave men-at-arms, abandon fruitless fears / Since Carthage knows to

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163 Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 133.
164 The irony of this moment is that the “coverture” Aeneas enjoys from “heaven” will serve him well, while Dido, at the play’s end, will find herself with no “coverture but heaven” in a way that dooms her to tragedy.
entertain distress” (1.2.32-33). While Iarbus is quick to highlight the largess they will find at the court, the men’s “fears” are perhaps less “fruitless” than may seem (to either Iarbus or to scholars). The Trojans are acutely aware of their status as foreigners in this land, pledging that they come not “to wrong your Libyan gods, / Or steal your household lares from their shrines; / Our hands are not prepared to lawless spoil, / Nor armed to offend in any kind” (1.2.10-13). While Iarbus trusts the “wretches of Troy” and promises that “Carthage knows to entertain distress,” Sergestus explains that a problem persists: “the barbarous sort do threat our ships,” preventing them from coming ashore (34). Iarbus promises that “they shall not trouble ye. / Your men and you shall banquet in our court … Come in with me, I’ll bring you to my queen, / Who shall confirm my words with further deeds” (38-43).

Iarbus’ contrast between what he offers – “my words” – with what Dido offers -- “deeds” – defies gender stereotypes by having the woman, rather than the man, be associated with action. Dido, as Iarbus promises, does “confirm” Carthage’s ability to “entertain distress,” so much so that, when Aeneas comes across Ilioneus and the other Trojans, he mistakes them for “lords of this town” (2.1.39) rather than his own men; they, in turn, fail to recognize their leader in his destitute state. The brief confusion attests to the importance of appearance and status concerns: Aeneas is so careful not to offend the “nobleman” he greets, and Ilioneus cannot conceive that the ragged man before him is Aeneas: “I hear Aeneas’ voice but hear him not, / For none of these can be our general” (45-46). Once the confusion is resolved, Ilioneus attests to the good fortune they have found in Carthage and that Aeneas can expect: “here Queen Dido wears th’imperial
crown / Who for Troy’s sake hath entertained us all / And clad us in these wealthy robes we wear” (63-65). Dido’s wealth, power, and courtesy are emphasized yet again, reinforced this time by the harbingers of her entrance: “See where her servitors pass through the hall, / Bearing a banquet. Dido is not far” (70-71). The “wealthy robes,” the “banquet,” the “servitors” – the people and goods Dido controls all constitute, even before Dido physically appears, the proof not just of “th’imperial crown” she wears but also a testament to how she “wears th’imperial crown.”

Notwithstanding the ways in which Dido’s power is foregrounded in the text, particularly in ways that challenge gender binaries, scholars have tended to read Dido as anything but “imperial.” Instead, scholars have tended to write about Dido as if through the lens of cultural feminism, decrying or defending her for her sexuality, focusing on her victimhood, and, if discussing her power, finding it problematic rather than practical. Bowers, who reads Dido as a “wickedly theatrical little play … with a decidedly ‘camp’ sensibility,” finds Dido a “demanding passive-aggressive diva.” Godshalk finds Dido ineffective as both a ruler and lover, faulting her “reckless concern for her city,” and noting that “she does not succeed in her role as sexual aggressor.” For Williams, Dido’s depictions as “a negative example of enslavement by erotic love and desire for marriage offers a sophisticated theatrical compliment to the queen [Elizabeth I].”

Whereas Williams sees Dido’s unruly sexuality as a “compliment” to the chastity of the Queen of England, Hendricks reads Dido as almost a paean to the comparative chastity of

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165 Oliver, Introduction, xli; Rutter, Christopher Marlowe, 107.
168 Williams, “Dido,” 32.
all of England. Arguing that “spectators would view Dido, as a result of the allusions to Libya, Africa and Carthage, exactly as they might view a sixteenth century African,” Hendricks declares, “Dido would be subject to the same behavioral deficiencies: sexual promiscuity, heathenism, an inability to maintain a civil government, and a tendency toward irrational and degenerate behavior.”

While Hendricks may be unique in locating Dido’s downfall in her race, Hendricks, like the majority of scholars, sees Dido’s sexuality as inextricably linked to her tragic demise. Turner also cites Dido’s “sensual passion” as her “downfall,” invoking the “perverse passion,” the “unreasonable passion” and the “destructive … results of unreasonable passion” that he finds central to the play. Dido’s sexuality has been read as somehow age-inappropriate: her inability to “self-control” is, for Turner, part of “Dido’s apparent adolescence” (6). Along similar veins, Oliver upholds Don Cameron Allen’s pronouncement that Dido is “an attractive though immature woman”; Allen further notes that Dido “makes love like an adolescent.” Were these scholars less quick to see female sexuality, particularly sexuality that has as its sole goal pleasure rather than procreation, as somehow problematic, they might consider a different reason that Dido’s desires register as immature. In *Epic and Empire*, David Quint discusses the relationship between futurity and narrative form: “to the victor belongs epic, with its linear teleology; to the losers belongs romance, with its random or circular wandering”; in this formulation, “victors,” like Aeneas, have “a coherent, end-directed story told by their

own power,” while “losers,” like Dido, have “a contingency that they are powerless to
shape to their own ends.”172 What is read by scholars as “adolescent” in Dido’s ultimately
futile pursuit of Aeneas may attest instead to Dido’s status as a “loser” in the history of
Rome’s founding and the reason her desires can appear random, circular, incoherent and
non-linear. Yet, as Quint further argues of the Aeneid, “History’s losers only have the
short term and must make the most of it. Their fortunes become personalized, allowing
for the assertion of selfhood and the willfulness that make Dido and Turnus the most
vivid characters.”173 By keeping their discussion of Dido’s desires strictly at the level of
her sexuality, critics miss alternate underpinnings to Dido’s “assertion of selfhood and
willfulness” and the ways in which Dido adapts and stages Dido’s fortune.

If scholars move to recuperate Dido, they do so by positioning her sexuality as
about love, not lust. Charney, who, like Hendricks, reads Dido as African (albeit with a
very different idea of what that would mean), notes that the “imperious African queens”
Dido and Cleopatra “share a conception of love that is luminous and transcendent.”174
Deats, too, finds that the “Carthaginian Queen, in appropriate feminine fashion,
privileges love over duty, displaying the expected feminine readiness to sacrifice all—
ambition, rule, power—for passion.”175 For Gill and for Gamel, Dido, displays
unwomanly behavior while under Cupid’s spell, yet regains her feminine propriety by the
play’s end. Gamel maintains that, “once she fixes on suicide, her composure and dignity

172 David Quint, Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton (Princeton, NJ:
173 Quint, Epic and Empire, 93.
175 Deats, Sex, Gender, 102.
return.”176 Gill charts Dido’s course from “the bewildered woman and the suppliant queen” who has been struck by Cupid’s arrow but has not yet confessed her love to Aeneas to, post storm, “the triumphant conqueror who has, literally, taken Aeneas prisoner by stripping his ships of their tackle”; “resourceful and proud,” Dido starts to become a “tyrant … but before this trait becomes dominant the loving woman reappears.”177 Most recently, Findlay has written that “the play advertises an alternative history to Virgil’s: an emotionally driven herstory directed by women. Dido's pursuit of desire - vocalised in powerfully passionate speeches - shapes the action even though she is controlled by Cupid's arrow.”178 Findlay finds that the “herstory” of Dido gives voice not only to Dido’s passion but also enables the play’s “other female characters [to] emerge as power forces”: Anna “is expanded by Marlowe to create an outspoken, desiring subject,” while Venus spurs Jupiter to action.

What is notable is that all the critics, even when they see Dido challenging gender roles, see her challenging those roles in stereotypically female ways. Findlay argues that Dido “rewrites conventional ideas of femininity (and history)” (ibid.), yet Findlay and other scholars write about Dido in line with “conventional ideas of femininity and history.” Dido is described in terms of “passion” and “love” rather than as rational, politically savvy, or having desires that extend beyond her affective ties to Aeneas, her sister or Ascanius, Aeneas’ son. This is not to say that other scholars are wrong, but rather that an alternate reading of Dido exists in which Dido is not only acutely aware of

177 Gill, “Marlowe’s Virgil,” 152.
178 Findlay, “Marlowe and Women,” 245.
her political power and its allure but is also deeply invested in maintaining her “imperial crown.” Such a reading, moreover, reflects the concerns shared by the play’s other female rulers, Juno and Venus, each of whom makes clear her desire for dominion in Mount Olympus and on earth.

Perhaps part of the critical resistance to seeing Dido’s power stems from the impulse to read political acumen as inherently masculine and to overlook the critical role that class plays in shaping behavioral norms. In a telling example of this trend, Chedgozy writes that Anna encourages Dido “to think of herself in implicitly masculine terms, as a powerful ruler seeking a fit consort: ‘were you Empress of the world / Aeneas well deserves to be your love.'”

Chedgozy does not explain what about this is “implicitly masculine,” since the need for a “powerful ruler” to find “a fit consort” seems to speak to the condition of royalty rather than masculinity. Were Anna describing Dido as “Emperor,” rather than “Empress of the world,” perhaps Chedgozy would have a stronger case, but it seems important that Dido is consistently described with titles that attest to harmoniously gendered power: “queen,” “empress,” “patroness,” and “goddess,” with “queen” being the title used to describe her twenty-nine times.

Kinney finds that Marlowe, prior to the cave scene in which Dido confesses her feelings to Aeneas, “seems relatively uninterested in ‘gendering’ his representation of Dido,” finding that Dido

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179 Chedgozy, “Marlowe’s Men and Women,” 255.
180 The adjective “princely” is twice ascribed to her: Aeneas refers to her as “princely Dido” (4.3.17) and Dido assures Aeneas as they leave for the hunt that she has removed her “princely robes” to better “honor” her guest (3.3.1)
speaks with “the same hyperbolic discourse of desire … [as Marlowe’s] male overachievers”\textsuperscript{181}:

It seems that Dido's voice becomes gendered (insofar as it suggests that there is something improper in her very act of speaking) only at those moments when the queen talks directly to Aeneas about her desire for him. When, by contrast, she is celebrating her erotic object, dramatizing her own abandonment to that object, or displaying her power over less desirable objects, Dido shows little consciousness of herself as a female speaker.\textsuperscript{182}

What goes unremarked by Kinney and by other scholars is that Dido shows tremendous consciousness of herself as a \textit{royal} speaker.

Indeed, when reading \textit{Dido}, it is impossible not to notice how the language used by all is imbued by an awareness of royalty and rank. Of all the characters, none seem more aware of the relationship between language and power as Dido. Indeed, Iarbus’ initial promise to bring the Trojans “to my queen, / Who shall confirm my words with further deeds,” which sets up a nice contrast to traditional ideas of gendered behavior, in which women merely speak but men act, becomes an even more nuanced way of understanding how Dido might trouble gender roles when we see that Dido performs her power, in part, through an attention to language. Aeneas and the other Trojans have been told and have told one another of Dido’s majesty, and her approach is signaled, as Sergestus is quick to point out, by her retinue “bearing a banquet” (2.1.71). Aeneas says, ambiguously, “Well may I view her, but she sees not me” (72). Aeneas’ statement seems to suggest that he is somehow hidden in the crowd, hence why he can “view her” without

\textsuperscript{181} Kinney “Epic Transgression,” 264-65.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 271. Kinney also seems to have an odd/unfortunate payoff about performance, speculating that lack of gendered inflection in Dido’s speech is perhaps a reflection of the fact that Marlowe knew that “his hero and heroine would be impersonated by boy actors of perhaps similar size with equally unbroken voices” (271).
her “see[ing]” him, yet Dido’s first words negate Aeneas’ claim to be able to observe unseen: “What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus,” Dido demands (73). It is possible in performance that there is no contradiction in Aeneas’ claim, and that he stands aside, “view[ing]” Dido as she enters and then later steps forward voluntarily so she may “see,” but an interpretation that seems more consistent with the power dynamics between the “wretched Trojans” and the Carthage Queen would be in a multilayered meaning to Aeneas’ claim “Well may I view her, but she sees not me” (2.1.72). In its most straightforward and unambiguous reading it becomes a stage direction – Aeneas is on stage, hides himself so that he can see but not be seen, Dido enters, and Aeneas emerges so that he is within Dido’s sightline. In a second meaning, related to the idea of the line as stage direction, Aeneas believes he has hidden – either because he has actively placed himself out of Dido’s sight or because there are so many people on stage that he assumes he is hidden, and that she will not spot his face out of the crowd of passing “servitors,” her retinue, the Trojans who have already been welcomed to the court, and whatever other courtiers, servants, and supplicants may be expected within Carthage’s walls.

Whether Aeneas actively or passively hides, Dido spies him immediately, and her question, “What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus,” suggests the impropriety, even threat, of Aeneas’ gaze. “What stranger,” Dido labels him, evoking precisely the term Aeneas earlier used to lament their state (“we are strangers driven on this shore” (2.1.43))183; not only is he a “stranger” but a social inferior, as Dido’s use of the second-person informal, “thou,” makes clear; moreover, the embodied nature of the gaze, the

183 “Stranger” is also how Dido will refer to him as she prepares her suicide, telling Iarbus that the fire she builds is to “consume all that this stranger left” (5.1.285).
close scrutiny implied by “eye,” suggests a level of invasiveness inappropriate to what a “stranger” may do. Lastly, the final way Aeneas’s statement seems to function is as a recognition on his part of how divorced he is from himself – that Aeneas well knows that what Dido sees is a “stranger” when in fact she should see a famed Trojan warrior, or, as he replies, “Sometime I was a Trojan, mighty queen, / But Troy is not. What shall I say I am?” (75-76). Dido banishes his stranger status and returns him to his identity: “Aeneas is Aeneas, were he clad / In weeds as bad as ever Irus ware” (2.1.84-85). Aeneas’ lack of power and Dido’s superior status is made even clearer when examining the parallel scene in the Aeneid: there, Aeneas is shrouded in the safety and majesty of Venus’ protective cloud which dissipates at precisely the right moment for Aeneas to reveal himself to Dido and the court. Aeneas appears precisely as his status as the son of Venus should have him be – radiant in his godlike beauty and nobility. Not only does his physical presence assert his power, but he asserts the power to interpolate himself, declaring, “Before your eyes I stand, / Aeneas the Trojan” (I. 809-810). In Dido, Aeneas is, as he initially feared, “poor and unknown” (1.1.227) – clad in his “base robes,” he appears as an inferior and a “stranger.” Dido has the power to not only interpolate him as the “stranger” who “eye[s]” her but also to interpolate him as Aeneas – whereas he is unsure what to call himself (“Sometime I was a Trojan, mighty Queen; / But Troy is not; what shall I say I am?), Dido is the one who proclaims, “Aeneas is Aeneas.”

The opening banquet scene with Aeneas continues the performance of Dido’s power, such that Aeneas’ eventual labeling of her as “patroness of all our lives” (4.4.55) is accurate rather than hyperbolic. Upon learning that the “stranger” she chided is, in fact,
“warlike Aeneas, and in these base robes!,” Dido immediately sets out to entertain her guests precisely as Iarbus and Ilioneus each earlier promised. As she will later do when she crowns Aeneas, Dido grants access to and bestows her position of power, but this should be read not as an abdication of power but as a manifestation of it. Upon calling for Sichaeus’ clothes to brought to Aeneas, Dido turns her attention back to him:

Brave prince, welcome to Carthage and to me,  
Both happy that Aeneas is our guest.  
Sit in this chair and banquet with a queen.  
Aeneas is Aeneas, were he clad  
In weeds as bad as ever Irus ware.  

(2.1.81-85)

In the only instance in which Dido calls Aeneas “prince” (although, since “prince” is modified by “brave,” the title emphasizes his warrior rather than royal lineage), Dido welcomes Aeneas “to Carthage and to me” in ways that serve to highlight the metonymic relationship between the two, “both happy that Aeneas is our guest.” Her imperative is both a command and an invitation: “Sit in this chair and banquet with a queen”; her pronouncement, “Aeneas is Aeneas,” has the force of truth, and she will allow no argument to the contrary, despite Aeneas’ protests that “though my birth be great, my fortune’s mean, / Too mean to be companion to a queen” (87-88). Dido’s gracious response serves to further highlight her power: “Thy fortune may be greater than thy birth. / Sit down, Aeneas, sit in Dido's place” (90-91, emphasis added). Responding to his invocation of his demi-god status, Dido acknowledges that “great” “birth” but seems to diminish it by referring to it with the informal “thy.” Heightening her status, Dido suggests that, in being “companion to a queen” (if just at the banquet), his fortune may rise above that of his divine birth. Moreover, were this rhetorical feat not enough, Dido
switches the seat Aeneas was meant to take, stipulating now that he “sit in Dido’s place” (91), rather than simply sit “with” her. Aeneas’ objections, “This place beseems me not. O, pardon me!” meet with her command, “I’ll have it so” (94-95). The more Aeneas invokes his lowly status, the more Dido counters, building his status up and calling attention, indirectly, to her supreme power: “Lies it in Dido’s hands to make thee blest, / Then be assured thou art not miserable” (104-105).

This initial sequence culminates in Dido commanding not only Aeneas’ body but also his speech. Dido asks Aeneas to recount what happened in Troy, but Aeneas demurs, “A woeful tale bids Dido to unfold / Whose memory … makes Aeneas sink at Dido’s feet” (114-117). Dido, again reminding Aeneas of who he is, bids him do as she desires: “Look up and speak” (120). Aeneas obeys her command, beginning his tale of Troy, but it is worth noting that, in this moment, Aeneas “sinks” before Dido, perhaps kneeling, and she commands him both his body -- “look up” -- and voice -- “speak.” Again, this moment stands in striking contrast to its parallel in the Aeneid: there, Aeneas shows little reluctance to recount the tale of Troy; Dido has but to ask, and, while Aeneas notes the sorrow that reciting his history brings him, the power disparity that is so clearly conveyed in Dido appears wholly absent. This is reflected, too, in Aeneas’ contrasting physical postures: while internal stage directions in Dido suggest Aeneas gets on his knees before the Queen, in the Aeneid, Aeneas regales the court with his tales of Troy from his “high couch” (II.2). As with Helen’s marriage robe that goes from, in the Aeneid, being a symbol of Aeneas’s largess, to being, in Dido, Sichaes’ robes that Dido bestows on Aeneas (which are never mentioned in the Aeneid), here, too, we have a similar
metamorphosis of objects that emphasizes Dido’s power. The “high couch” that Aeneas speaks from instead seems to transform into the throne Dido commands Aeneas sit in during the banquet – and that he cannot be sitting in when he “sinks” in beginning his account of the Trojan War.

Dido’s control over this and other situations, particularly in the scenes in which she proffers gifts to the Trojans, has been read by scholars as an inversion of gender roles. For Williams, “Dido’s responses to Aeneas dramatize an alternative perspective on a foundational narrative of western masculinity. The ‘wealthie robes’ that she bestows on Aeneas’s sailors gives them the mark of her ownership as much as favor.”184 Williams writes this as if female monarchs (or noblewomen) were an anomaly, yet, as scholars have noted, sixteenth century Europe had an unprecedented number of female rulers185; it is unclear just how “alternative” a “perspective” is offered by having queen rather than king in charge, for what these narratives do *not* do is, however much they may trouble certain gender norms, is they do not trouble class norms. Deats writes, “In the series of interactions between the Queen of Carthage and the Trojan refugee. Dido reverses gender expectations to perform the role of the courtly lover rather than the coy mistress: she initiates and directs the action; she praises Aeneas; and she gives him gifts.”186 Deats is correct that Dido “reverses gender expectations” in the realm of courtly love, but does not discuss how Dido’s specific position as Queen, the head of the court and ruler over a mighty and wealthy kingdom, is inextricably bound up in how and why Dido “initiates

184 Williams, “Dido,” 46.
185 For how this phenomenon was reflected in English literature, see, for example, Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen*.
186 Deats, “Dido, Queen of Carthage,” 196; see also Deats, *Sex, Gender*. 
and directs the action,” “praises Aeneas,” and “gives him gifts.” However much this
defies gender norms, this does not defy class norms and may in fact speak to the ways in
which high-ranking women wooed and were wooed by lower-ranking men.

What is further striking about the critical failure to account for Dido’s royalty is
that Dido seems to so clearly relish her status. Dido knows that her power and wealth are
her assets, and she takes great pleasure in those riches. Struck by Cupid’s arrow, Dido
immediately begins fantasizing about not only the luxury objects she will craft from her
love, but about the goods and gifts she will bestow upon him:

I'll make me bracelets of his golden hair;
His glistening eyes shall be my looking glass,
His lips an altar, where I'll offer up
As many kisses as the sea hath sands.
Instead of music I will hear him speak.
His looks shall be my only library,
And thou, Aeneas, Dido’s treasury,
In whose fair bosom I will lock more wealth
Than twenty thousand Indias can afford.

(3.1.84-92, emphasis added)
The Queen composes the blazon to Aeneas’ beauty, yet it is a poem that attests to a
particularly commoditized fantasy, culminating in the image of Aeneas as a “treasury” in
which Dido “will lock more wealth / Than twenty thousand Indias can afford,” with India
serving as a stand in for country replete with gold (as Aeneas’ later invocation of “golden
India” attests (5.1.8)).

This metaphor of Aeneas as “Dido’s treasury” becomes manifest almost
immediately. Aeneas, responding to Dido’s prompt how she “might highly pleasure”
(3.1.101) him, appeals to her power: calling her “Queen of Afric,” he details the damage
to his fleet, declaring, “which piteous wants if Dido will supply, / We will account her
author of our lives” (104, 110-111). Aeneas’ appellation of Dido as “Queen of Afric” expands her empire beyond the Carthage walls, suggesting she rules the entire continent (or at least has access to its riches). The “wants” Aeneas details, while significant to Aeneas and his men, are inconsequential to Dido, and the largess she proposes turns Aeneas’ hyperbolic description of her as “author of our lives” into understatement:

Aeneas, I'll repair thy Trojan ships, 
Conditionally that thou wilt stay with me 
And let Achates sail to Italy. 
I'll give thee tackling made of rivelled gold, 
Wound on the barks of odoriferous trees, 
Oars of massy ivory, full of holes 
Through which the water shall delight to play. 
Thy anchors shall be hewed from crystal rocks 
Which, if thou lose, shall shine above the waves; 
The masts whereon thy swelling sails shall hang, 
Hollow pyramids of silver plate; 
The sails of folded lawn, where shall be wrought 
The wars of Troy, but not Troy's overthrow. 
For ballast, empty Dido's treasury. 
Take what ye will, but leave Aeneas here. 
Achates, thou shalt be so meanly clad 
As sea-borne nymphs shall swarm about thy ships 
And wanton mermaids court thee with sweet songs, 
Flinging in favours of more sovereign worth 
Than Thetis hangs about Apollo's neck, 
So that Aeneas may but stay with me. 

(3.1.112-32)
The riches that Dido offers are not only incredibly valuable (“rivelled gold,” “odoriferous trees,” “massy ivory,” “crystal rocks,” “silver plate,” “folded lawn”) but also inventive and playful. Dido delights in imagining the effects of the luxury she will provide and envisions a rewriting of Troy’s story: the sails will depict Troy’s triumphs, “not Troy’s overthrow” – even if the most famous thing about Troy is its fall. She becomes, as Aeneas suggested, the “author of [their] lives,” both creating the conditions that allow for
their future success and rewriting their past as triumph. Dido demonstrates her ability to transform fantasy into reality, imagining what should be figurative as physically manifest. Her control over luxury goods is further emphasized by her offer that “for ballast” they may “empty Dido’s treasury” – conditional upon “leav[ing] Aeneas here” in Carthage. Having moments before described Aeneas as “Dido’s treasury” and fantasizing about all the “wealth” she will “lock” into his “fair bosom,” Dido now imagines “empty[ing] Dido’s treasury” to enrich the Trojans, conditional upon Aeneas “stay[ing] with me.” It would be wrong, however, to assume that Dido envisions trading her material wealth for Aeneas’ love, since, according to the logic of Dido’s fantasies, the Aeneas she keeps is one with “more wealth than twenty thousand Indias can afford” “lock[ed]” in his “fair bosom.” The inability to extricate love from “wealth” evokes Ganymede’s earlier demand that Jupiter prove the value of his “worthless love,” not only by protecting Ganymede from Juno but also by showering Ganymede with gifts.

What enables Aeneas to be transformed into “Dido’s treasury” is the value she perceives him bringing to her. As scholars have noted, Dido’s description of her “wooers,” “many mightier kings” than even Iarbus, “king of rich Gaetulia” (3.1.11-12, 45), her gallery of portraits of her suitors, and her politic deferral of Iarbus’ suit (prior to being pierced by Cupid’s arrow, as well as after she has resolved to kill herself) offers a moment of resonance for a contemporary audience with Queen Elizabeth’s own policy of playing suitors off one another and deferring (and denying) marriage for strategic gain.187 Cupid proclaims, “Now, Cupid, cause the Cartheginian queen / To be enamored of thy

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187 See Rutter, *Christopher Marlowe*, 103-104; Stump, “Marlowe’s Travesty”; Williams, “Dido.”
brother’s looks,” which he accomplishes by using his “golden arrow” to “touch her breast and conquer her” (3.1.1-6). As the effects of Cupid’s arrow become manifest, Dido does, indeed, become “enamored of [Aeneas’] looks.” Declaring that Iarbus’s “loathsome sight offends my eye” (57), Dido asks her sister, “Is not Aeneas fair and beautiful?” (62), suggesting that physical beauty is suddenly of paramount importance to Dido, when once she focused on her suitors’ fortune, fame, or might. Yet, however enchanted Dido may be, she is not merely “enamored of [Aeneas’] looks,” and even her discussion of Aeneas’ beauty with Anna is imbued with political awareness:

DIDO. Name not Iarbas. But sweet Anna, say,  
Is not Aeneas worthy Dido's love?  
ANNA. O sister, were you empress of the world,  
Aeneas well deserves to be your love.  
So lovely is he that where'er he goes  
The people swarm to gaze him in the face.  
DIDO. But tell them none shall gaze on him but I,  
Lest their gross eyebeams taint my lover's cheeks.  
(3.1.66-73)

While the reason Anna provides for why Aeneas is “worthy Dido’s love” focuses on Aeneas’ beauty, the logic underpinning both the question and the answer is in keeping with Dido’s political strategy. Aeneas would be “worthy” were she “empress of the world” – a suitor who could compete against the “mightier kings” Dido has rejected.188 Dido’s concern about the “swarm” that will “taint” Aeneas with their “gross eyebeams”

188 This scene finds a parallel to Marlowe’s Tamburlaine I in Zenocrate’s discussion of Tamburlaine’s fitness as her mate. Tamburlaine, too, is careful to position himself as an appropriate match for the daughter of the Sultan of Egypt, and their marriage takes place only after Tamburlaine has secured her father’s blessing and crowned her Queen of Persia.
is not just about jealous or tyrannical desire but also attests to Dido’s sense of herself as an “empress.”

Dido is acutely aware throughout the play of her rank and how that impacts the things and people in her control – be it her crown, her scepter, her throne, her seat, her jewels, her garments, her servants, or her suitors – and her claim to Aeneas is an extension of that power. No matter how much Dido’s desire for Aeneas stems from physical attraction, she is careful to present her desire for him as a politically wise move. Explaining that she would have Aeneas remain with her “to war against my bordering enemies” (3.1.134), Dido emphasizes the Trojan warrior’s presence as a strategic asset to Carthage. Even her eventual offer of herself to Aeneas – “stout love, in mine arms make thy Italy” (3.4.51) – figures their relationship as an extension and repositioning of Aeneas’ military prowess, the “warlike Aeneas” (1.1.79) now in service not only to Carthage but also to its queen.

When the two meet in the cave, Aeneas protests that Dido’s heart is “so high … monarchs might not scale” yet Dido declares that she “saw no king like thee, / Whose golden crown might balance my content” (3.4.32-35). Aeneas, throughout this scene, highlights the disparity in their status. He repeatedly refers to her by her rank (“sweet queen” (3), “my queen” (23), “your majesty” (40)) and highlights her might: “what is it that Dido may desire / And not obtain, be it in human power?” (6-7). While Dido suggests that Aeneas is a “balance” to her, the difference in the language that they use to address one another in this scene and throughout the play underscores the disparity in

189 For Kinney, this moment is emblematic of Dido’s status as “Marlowe’s only female overachiever,” “Epic Transgression,” 267.
their estates, particularly in the striking and consistent deployment of the second-person singular pronoun: Dido always uses “thee,” “thou,” and “thy” for Aeneas, while he refers to her either by her rank (“your majesty”), by her name, or, occasionally, by the second-personal formal “you.” Moreover, Aeneas, in this scene, only uses that form of address once, when he states, “If that your majesty can look so low / As my despised worths that shun all praise, / With this my hand I give to you my heart” (40-42). At their most intimate moment, Aeneas, as he gives his “hand” and “heart” to Dido, comes closest to a direct address. Yet in this moment of unification, Aeneas continues to emphasize their inequality: he is “so low,” his “worths” are “despised” and “shun all praise.” Aeneas pledges himself to Dido, and while his vows allude to his divine birth (“by heaven and earth, and my fair brother’s bow / … and the purple sea / From when my mother did descend” (44-46)) and his military might (“by this sword that saved me from the Greeks” (47)), the emphasis is squarely on Dido’s power: he will never “leave these new upreared walls / Whiles Dido lives and rules in Juno’s town – / Never to like or love any but her!” (48-50). Dido has practical power Aeneas lacks, yet no matter his protestations of inferiority, he is a fitting consort, as is she for him.

Dido and Aeneas’ union is more than an alliance between two well-matched individuals: it is, for all players involved, conceived of as a highly strategic maneuver. Venus instructs Cupid to take the shape of Ascanius so

That she may dote upon Aeneas' love,
And by that means repair his broken ships,

In swearing by Dido and Juno’s power, Aeneas, in a moment of dramatic irony, creates a loophole that should release him from the vows when Dido crowns Aeneas or when Venus outmaneuvers Juno: see Kinney, “Epic Transgression,” 269.
Victual his soldiers, give him wealthy gifts,
And he at last depart to Italy,
Or else in Carthage make his kingly throne.

(2.1.327-331)

Venus presents a clear, calculated plan for why Dido must fall in love with Aeneas, and, given Venus’ earlier descriptions of the “courteous coast,” Carthage, as “rich and strong,” it would seem that the plan had always been for Aeneas to be rejuvenated and even bettered by his sojourn in Carthage. What is surprising is Venus’ suggestion that Aeneas might “in Carthage make his kingly throne.” While “or else” could function as synonymous with “lest” – that if Aeneas does not go to Italy then he will end up as King of Carthage – it would be consistent with the tendencies to instrumentalize others for individual game were Venus to view Aeneas’ reign as King of Carthage as a viable option for her son. If it is the case, then it would seem the reason Venus changes her mind and fixates on Aeneas’ departure is that Venus wants to assert her power over Juno.

The two goddesses, who make no secret of their animosity toward one another in soliloquy, resolve, in a scene replete with the most unctuous of political rhetoric, to unite their power in uniting Dido and Aeneas. Venus declares, “We two as friends one fortune will divide” (3.2.55), professing “desire is thine/ The day, the night, my swans, my sweets, are thine” if Juno “love[s] my Aeneas” (60-61). Juno concurs, countering that she will show “how highly I do prize this amity” with her proposal that Dido and Aeneas marry, an offer made “in quittance of thy love” (67, 69). While the goddesses speak of “love,” “amity,” and “friends,” this is political strategy, interchanging terms of affect with those of economic exchange – “fortune,” “prize,” “quittance,” “reconciliation” (81). This is not merely political for the goddesses; it is also presented as political strategy.
effected on behalf of Dido and Aeneas: by having the two “join marriage,” Juno proclaims they shall “bring forth mighty kings to Carthage town” (74-75). “Both our deities, conjoined in one, / Shall chain felicity unto their throne” (79-80), Juno states, the sinister irony of “chain[ing] felicity” not only foreshadowing Dido’s despair at her inability to chain Aeneas to herself and the throne in Carthage but also evoking the various other gold chains proffered throughout Dido -- the “chains of gold” Dido proposes Aeneas use as tackling which she “bestowed upon his followers” (4.4.161-62); the way, as Dido describes it to Aeneas, “Dido’s beauty chained thine eye to her,” (5.1.14); the “golden chords” that will bind Juno if she hurts Ganymede again; the “bracelets of [Aeneas’] golden hair” Dido will adorn herself with; the “golden bracelets” she offers as a wedding gift to Aeneas; and the “linked gems” that encircle Ganymede’s neck and arms. Venus does not immediately consent to Juno’s plan to “chain felicity” to Dido and Aeneas’ “conjoined ... throne,” demurring that Aeneas “will ne’er consent / Whose armed soul, already on the sea, / Darts forth her light to Lavinia’s shore” (82-84). This move seems entirely about Venus’ desires rather than Aeneas’, for Aeneas, as Achates and Mercury independently lament, is all too happy to stay in Carthage. Since, moreover, this scene has the goddesses vie for a position of dominance, with each seeking to top or outmaneuver the other’s generosity, it seems that this becomes the moment when Aeneas ceases to have an option to “depart to Italy / Or else in Carthage make his kingly throne.” For Venus to maintain the upper hand in Mount Olympus, Dido must suffer in Carthage; were Aeneas to “make his kingly throne” with Dido, Juno would triumph.
Curiously, little attention has been paid to the way Venus shifts the possibilities for Aeneas’ future, perhaps because this scene between the two deities is read as entirely apolitical. Allen writes that Venus and Juno talk like “charwomen” and finds them “not supernaturally divine but mortally comic,” while Gill describes the comedy of the scene as arising from the way in which “fishwife hatred turns to sugared friendship.” The comedy, however, seems to arise more from the empty and overblown rhetoric of diplomacy rather than the low-class world and work of fishmongering and domestic service. If the scene is read as having political consequences, then the political impact is one that is ancillary to the irrational desires of the actors. For Williams, Juno’s portrayal suggests that “the married woman is shown to be jealous, murderous, crazed with fury, and, most importantly, a serious threat to the course of empire.” Juno, in Williams’ reading, attempts to stymie Aeneas by having him remain in Carthage out of wholly irrational desires, rather than as a rational reaction that enables her to shore up power. Juno, prior to Venus’ entrance in this scene, proclaims that her plan will prove “that only Juno rules in Rhamnus’ town” (3.2.20). While execution of this plan may involve murder and be motivated by a desire to avenge herself against Venus, Jupiter, and Troy, it is no more irrational or apolitical than the Trojans’ desires to build Troy anew and avenge themselves against the Greeks. Rather than see Juno as proposing an alternate “course of

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191 Deats mentions that although Venus “briefly consider[s] the possibility of Aeneas remaining in Carthage, this plan assumes a low priority on her list of alternatives,” yet this is all that Deats writes about this moment, “Gender Hierarchies,” 167. Nor does Deats discuss this further in her other writings on Dido.
193 Williams, “Dido,” 46
empire” in which Carthage and Juno reign supreme, Williams sees Juno, and, by extension, all married women, as irrational and unpredictable dangers.

V. Dido’s Allure and the Crown of Carthage

While scholars have noted the parallel between Dido’s and Jupiter’s promise of gifts to their lovers, scant attention has been paid to the way in which Dido’s allure for both Aeneas and Iarbus comes from that power to bestow.\(^{194}\) Venus plots for Dido to “dote upon Aeneas’ love” so that she may “repair his broken ships, / Victual his soldiers, give him wealthy gifts” (1.1.327-329), and, when Juno and Venus meet, Juno suggests that these actions prompt Aeneas’ love, who “feeds his eyes with favors of her court” (3.2.71) – the primary allure comes from what she provides, not from her beauty.

When Aeneas does describe Dido’s beauty, it is inextricably linked with her wealth and the “favors of her court.” Picturing what would happen were he to tell Dido of his departure, Aeneas finds himself torn between his duty to his men and his destiny and his duty to Dido and love:

> I fain would go, yet beauty calls me back.  
> To leave her so and not once say farewell  
> Were to transgress against all laws of love,  
> But if I use such ceremonious thanks  
> As parting friends accustom on the shore,  
> Her silver arms will coil me round about  
> And tears of pearl cry, ‘Stay, Aeneas, stay.’  
> Each word she says will then contain a crown,  
> And every speech be ended with a kiss.  
> (4.3.46-54)

\(^{194}\) See, for example, Findlay, “Marlowe and Women,” which focuses on how women’s speech is overlooked in Marlowe’s plays, yet does not discuss how Dido evokes not only her beauty but also her gifts.
Struggling to separate Dido’s bodily beauty from the beauty of the material wealth she offers, Aeneas proclaims that “beauty calls me back,” yet the “beauty” Aeneas describes attests as much to the gifts -- the “pearls,” “silver” and “crown” Dido gives -- as to her personal “beauty.” In so doing, Aeneas highlights the precise and problematic nature of Dido’s allure: the inextricable link between Dido’s body, her sexuality, and her wealth – her lips offer both crown and kiss, her embrace promises silver and sex. Dido laments, as Aeneas finally does prepare to leave, “Why look’st thou toward the sea? The time hath been / When Dido's beauty chained thine eyes to her. / Am I less fair than when thou saw'st me first? (5.1.114-16). Findlay opens her essay on women’s speech in Marlowe with these lines, writing that Dido “realises, to her despair, that her speech has no more power than her looks: ‘And wilt thou not be mov'd by Dido's words?” 

Findlay uses this moment to launch in to how women’s speech gets overlooked in Marlowe’s play – but Findlay falls into trap of ignoring how Dido uses not only speech and beauty but, crucially, those “wealthy gifts” to “move” Aeneas.

This is also what draws Iarbus to Dido. Iarbus views his own rank and riches as why Dido should prefer him to Aeneas, proclaiming himself “king of rich Gaetulia” (3.1.45), a “man of majesty” (3.3.66), and one of Aeneas’ “betters” (3.3.17). Iarbus vows to revenge himself on Aeneas, deeming Dido too powerful a match: “that were to war ‘gainst heaven / And with one shaft provoke ten thousand darts” (3.3.71-72). While Iarbus may be incorrect in his estimation that Dido enjoys more protection from “heaven” than Aeneas, his perception of her great might is reflected in his desire for her. As part of

his plan to exact revenge on Aeneas, Iarbus prepares a sacrifice to Jove to “pacify” the god. Iarbus rehearses the story of how Dido claimed her kingdom and how she has now betrayed him:

The woman that thou willed us entertain,
Where, straying in our borders up and down,
She craved a hide of ground to build a town,
With whom we did divide both laws and land,
And all the fruits that plenty else sends forth,
Scorning our loves and royal marriage rites,
Yields up her beauty to a stranger’s bed,
Who, having wrought her shame, is straightway fled.

(4.2.11-18)

But what Dido yields is not just her “beauty” but also and more crucially, her “plenty,” eschewing the pomp and splendor promised in Iarbus’ “royal marriage rights” for “a stranger’s bed.” The focus on Dido’s disappointing if not depraved sexuality and the emphasis on her body, especially its “beauty,” tainted by her night “surfeit[ing] in sin” (4.1.20), “sporting in this darksome cave” (4.1.24), perhaps distracts both Iarbus and scholars from the greater problem Dido’s union with Aeneas presents – an upset of political rule. Dido prefers the “stranger” to the “royal,” upending, as Iarbus sees it, the natural order of things. It is for this reason that Iarbus must “pacify that gloomy Jove,” whose “gloomy hand corrects the heaven” (4.2.2, 4). Iarbus’ plaint is about political alliance and status – about, perhaps, a dream of uniting the kingdom in which “we did divide both laws and land” and forging a dynasty between himself and Dido – rather than what Dido has done in choosing Aeneas, which seems to irrevocably “divide” Iarbus’ kingdom from Carthage’s power and “plenty.” Not only that, but Iarbus reminds Jupiter (and us) of Iarbus’ royal and native status versus Aeneas’ lower and foreign, “stranger”
status. Perhaps a reason critics have not noted this aspect of Iarbus’ reasoning is that they read through lens of Virgil (and argue that Marlowe’s audience would have, too) in which Aeneas’ status is not as diminished; in this play, however, Aeneas does not occupy the social position of the *Aeneid*. Despite his past, his birth and promised future, while in Carthage, Aeneas is decidedly Dido’s social inferior in *Dido*, a fact neither he, Dido, nor Iarbus forgets – even if critics do.¹⁹⁶

Anna finds Iarbus and asks the cause of his prayers; Iarbus explains:

IARBUS. Anna, against this Trojan do I pray,
Who seeks to rob me of thy sister's love
And dive into her heart by coloured looks.

ANNA. Alas, poor king, that labours so in vain
For her that so delighteth in thy pain.
Be ruled by me and seek some other love,
Whose yielding heart may yield thee more relief.

IARBUS. Mine eye is fixed where fancy cannot start.

(4.2.30-37)

Iarbus’ problem, however, is not just that Aeneas “seeks to rob [Iarbus] of [Dido’s] love” but also to “rob” him of the riches and political power union with Dido would present. Anna ignores this, reasoning that Iarbus’ desire for Dido is about love and beauty. Anna thinks, therefore, that by offering Iarbus her adulation – her “yielding heart,” “Anna, that doth admire thee more than heaven” (46) -- she can win him over. Anna neglects, however, that she can never give him what Dido has while Dido is still Queen of Carthage: Anna fails to see that desire for Dido is about a desire for the Queen’s “two

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, MacDonald’s discussion of how Aeneas resists Dido’s gifts in preference for his martial honors, “Marlowe’s Ganymede,” 105, or Turner’s description of Aeneas’ desires to build a new Troy, “Love and the Queen of Carthage,” 7. Rutter, however, sees the “diminution of Aeneas as a character” stemming from Marlowe and Nashe’s awareness that they were writing for a children’s company and thus it would be inappropriate to have “the conquering hero Aeneas” portrayed by someone of precisely the same stature as the “female characters to be played by boys or youths,” *Christopher Marlowe*, 104. For Stump, Aeneas is diminished as part of a project to “debunk” Virgil and elicit laughs, “Marlowe’s Travesty,” 90. Yet Stump sees Marlowe accomplishing this not by having Aeneas be of lower status than he is in the *Aeneid* but instead by having the Trojan appear “dull-witted and inept” (91).
This is what makes Anna’s plea, “be ruled by me,” so ironic, for to “be ruled by Dido” is also to rule with Dido. Iarbus and Aeneas want both Dido’s physical and mystical body, Dido is acutely aware of that and she refuses to sacrifice one for the other. When Dido does offer herself to Aeneas, she posits the giving of her body as a giving of power: “Stout love, in mine arms make thy Italy, / Whose crown and kingdom rests at thy command” (3.4.56-57). Dido frames her sacrifice of her womanly body – in having sex with Aeneas – as a boon for her political body – Aeneas is worthy of being her consort, he will make a good King, he is a warrior who can defend Carthage. The additional irony of Anna’s protest to Iarbus “be ruled by me” is that Anna believes she operates under the norms of Petrarchan courtship, when, in fact, the world of love in Dido is Machiavellian. Iarbus’ “fixed fancy” is determined not only by Dido’s beauty but also by her crown, and the “course of [Iarbus’] desire” (4.2.48) is seemingly no less fixed on empire than is Aeneas’ (or, more accurately, than is Venus’ desire for Aeneas) – and thus Anna’s eyes, no matter how “alluring” (50), cannot compete with what Dido offers. Anna tragically fails to comprehend how un-“alluring” her promise of “I have honey to present thee with” (53) is for Iarbus. Whatever words, emotions, or acts that Anna’s “honey to present” encompasses cannot compete with the physical and metaphysical “presents” Dido’s love entails.

Dido’s love, as Dido well understands, comes linked to her throne, and the power to bestow the crown appears just as desired by Dido as it is by her would-be lovers. In a move that seems largely unremarked on by critics, Dido confers the “crown and

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197 Kantorowitz, The King’s Two Bodies.
kingdom” (3.4.56) of Carthage not once but twice on Aeneas; the first time, Dido bestows “jewels,” “golden bracelets” and her “wedding ring / wherewith my husband wooed me” on Aeneas, proclaiming, “be thou king of Libya by my gift” (3.4.60-63). The second time Dido offers the Carthage throne, she does so to “make amends” (4.4.33) for accusing Aeneas of trying to leave Carthage, a charge that, while accurate, Aeneas denies. That she is able to “gift” again the title of “king of Libya” suggests that perhaps a lack of sincerity or follow-through in the first instance of the crowning; alternatively, it may suggest that Dido now proposes Aeneas have a more substantive engagement with her power. She submits, “Wear the imperial crown of Libya. / Sway thou the Punic scepter in my stead, / And punish me, Aeneas, for this crime” (4.3.34-36). Aeneas appears as uninterested in this second crowning as scholars have and tenders an alternate idea of recompense: “this kiss shall be fair Dido’s punishment” (37). Dido, however, insists: “O, how a crown becomes Aeneas’ head. / Stay here, Aeneas, and command as king” (38-39). While Dido’s words (“command as king”) and actions (placing the crown on Aeneas’ head) suggest an renunciation of the throne, the force of her command and the pleasure that Dido takes in seeing Aeneas crowned and in the trappings of her power argue against reading this moment as a moment of Dido’s abdication.

Chedgozy reads Dido’s crowning of Aeneas as “rework[ing] a familiar image of female sexuality as a territory to be colonized and ruled by a powerful male,” finding it “unusual here in being employed by a woman of herself, rather than as a male-authored

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198 For Chedgozy, this is a “startling example of the play’s multiple instances of identity-crossings and regenderings,” “Marlowe’s Men and Women,” 255.
Moreover, for Chedgozy, this reworks ideas of domesticity, a "troubling of the normal hierarchy of husband-wife relationships" and a "remaking of family, in which Ascanius becomes their shared child" (255-56). Chedgozy helps us understand the way *Dido* engages with ideas of imperialism and women’s private relationships, but this moment must also be considered in the context of Dido’s continued investment in her public relationship. Furthermore, however much Dido may desire to be "ruled by a powerful male," she expresses that desire in ways that emphasize her own power and rule: even as she longs to submit to Aeneas' "command" and "punishment," Dido’s fantasies of submission to Aeneas are also ones of her domination over not just Aeneas but over "all" (55, 61, 77).

Indeed, status, for Dido, is a turn-on, and her second crowning of Aeneas is a public (and private) performance of a sexualized fantasy. Aeneas resists the "diadem" (4.4.40) and "golden scepter" (41) Dido bestows: “A burgonet of steel and not a crown, / A sword and not a scepter fits Aeneas” (42-43); Dido, however, insists that Aeneas keep the objects of her power. Her reasoning depends not on her earlier promise that Aeneas take the throne as her “punishment” or on any appeal to Aeneas’ capabilities as king (or warrior) but on her sensual pleasure:

O keep them still, and let me gaze my fill.  
Now looks Aeneas like immortal Jove.  
O where is Ganymede to hold his cup  
And Mercury to fly for what he calls?  
Ten thousand Cupids hover in the air  
And fan it in Aeneas' lovely face.  
O that the clouds were here, wherein thou fleest,

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199 Ibid.
200 For female fantasies of submission and domination, see Sanchez, “Use Me But as Your Spaniel.”
That thou and I unseen might sport ourselves.  
Heaven, envious of our joys, is waxen pale,  
And when we whisper, then the stars fall down  
To be partakers of our honey talk.

(4.4.44-54)

Seeing Aeneas cloaked in her power, “wear[ing] this diadem / And bear[ing] this golden scepter,” excites Dido, who insists, “let me gaze my fill,” turned on by the image she sees before her of Aeneas as king, an “immortal Jove” on earth. Looking is not enough, for Dido fantasizes that the same clouds that allegedly thwarted Aeneas’ flight from Carthage might shroud the lovers, allowing them to “sport ourselves unseen.” This fantasy is an inverse of the sex in the cave: whereas their assignation was hidden and private, this is an incredibly public declaration and a public act, for however “unseen” they might be as they “sport,” this fantasy is, for Dido, all about what she sees – and clouds, for that matter, obscure rather than obstruct a view. While this moment has primarily been read by scholars as troubling gender hierarchies, it is in fact a multi-layered moment of misrule, troubling social hierarchies, human-deity hierarchies, and presenting the threat of actual misrule – Aeneas does prove a bad ruler for the Carthaginians. In Dido’s fantasy, however, she and Aeneas become celestial lovers, demi-gods whose immortal beauty is heightened by worldly power. Indeed, the fantasy is not just literally but also figuratively grounded in that power: they remain on earth – “the stars fall down” to them, the lovers do not ascend to “heaven” – an extension of Dido’s consistent commitment to remaining in Carthage.

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201 This moment may to mind Cleopatra’s discussion of dressing Antony in her wares and donning his sword and the great pleasure Cleopatra takes in recounting their pleasure. Unlike Antony and Cleopatra, however, Dido stages this object transfer before our eyes, whereas Cleopatra merely relates.

202 See, for example, Chedgozy, who reads their relationship as “troubl[ing] the normal hierarchy of husband-wife relationships,” “Marlowe’s Men and Women,” 255.
While scholars have seen this moment as an abdication of power, Dido and Aeneas’ reaction suggests that giving away power to Aeneas actually reinforces Dido’s hold over it. This is not a move of, as Goldberg terms it, “Dido’s self-abandonment,” but rather one of self-interest, for Aeneas’s immediate response is to proclaim, “O Dido, patroness of all our lives” (55), thereby elevating Dido’s status above all others. It is as if, by ceding the throne of Carthage, Dido moves up rather than down in rank and becomes semi-divine. Dido as “patroness of all our lives,” Dido in control, Dido in a position to bestow power, is not merely something that Dido enjoys but also something Aeneas finds alluring. Speaking of Carthage and of Dido, Aeneas declares, “This is the harbor that Aeneas seeks,” the pun recalling Dido’s declaration, “Stout love, in mine arms make thy Italy” (3.4.56) and suggesting that Dido’s might is as much a turn on for Dido as it is for Aeneas.

Dido wants to do more than crown Aeneas in her court; she wants to make the spectacle even more public. Dido seeks to replicate, on a far grander scale, her earlier desire to “gaze my fill” at the crowned Aeneas, proclaiming to all not only Aeneas’ power but also her own:

DIDO. Not all the world can take thee from mine arms.
Aeneas may command as many moors
As in the sea are little water drops.
And now, to make experience of my love,
Fair sister Anna, lead my lover forth
And, seated on my jennet, let him ride

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203 Deats “Dido,” 196. Godshalk sees this as problematic for constructions of masculinity, “Marlowe’s Dido,” 8. For Williams, this scene undoes rather than proves Dido’s power: “the problem with Dido’s speech is not that the queen is speaking like an idolatress, but that she is not speaking like a queen. By taking Aeneas as her “Lord,” Dido has started to speak like a minion,” “Dido,” 48.

204 Goldberg, Sodometries, 133.
As Dido's husband through the Punic streets,
And will my guard with Mauritanian darts
To wait upon him as their sovereign lord.

ANNA. What if the citizens repine thereat?
DIDO. Those that dislike what Dido gives in charge,
Command my guard to slay for their offense.
Shall vulgar peasants storm at what I do?
The ground is mine that gives them sustenance,
The air wherein they breathe, the water, fire,
All that they have, their lands, their goods, their lives;
And I, the goddess of all these, command
Aeneas ride as Carthaginian king.

(4.4.61-78)

Dido performs her love as a performance of power: “to make experience of my love” is to
“experience” being “sovereign,” riding “through the Punic streets” on Dido’s mount. It is
not a private night of intimacy in Dido’s “arms.” Dido envisions her power as
extravagant and exponential: “as many moors / As in the sea are little water drops” will
be at Aeneas’ “command.” Indeed, so great is her power, which she envisions extending
over not only the “lands,” “goods” and “lives” of her subjects but over “the air wherein
they breathe,” that the only way she can quantify her power is to analogize it to what the
gods enjoy: “I, goddess of all these.” What is striking, moreover, about Dido’s
declaration is what she constructs as literal and what she constructs as figurative,
because, in fact, it is unclear whether Dido sees herself as a goddess or if, as her language
suggests here, she believes she is the goddess. “The ground is mine,” she declares, and
Aeneas, too, proclaims that she “is the patroness of all our lives.” When Dido, however,
refers to the power Aeneas will enjoy, she uses simile: Aeneas will be mounted on her
“jennet … as Dido’s husband,” the guard will “wait upon him as their sovereign lord.”
and he will “ride as Carthaginian king.” Indeed, the only relationship she envisions Aeneas embodying without recourse to simile is that Aeneas is “my lover.”

The more Dido gives away her power to Aeneas, the more she reinforces her ability to command and control.\textsuperscript{205} When Achates objects to Dido’s plan that “Aeneas ride as Carthaginian king,” protesting that “Aeneas, for his parentage, deserves / As large a kingdom as is Libya” (4.4.79-80), Aeneas suddenly seems to remember himself:

\begin{quote}
AENEAS. Ay, and unless the destinies be false,
I shall be planted in as rich a land.
DIDO. Speak of no other land. This land is thine.
Dido is thine; henceforth I'll call thee lord.
Do as I bid thee, sister. Lead the way.
And from a turret I'll behold my love.
AENEAS. Then here in me shall flourish Priam's race.
\end{quote}

(4.4.81-87)
Achates seems the only one in this conversation who remembers Aeneas’ destiny and wants more for Aeneas (and himself) than to remain in Carthage. Achates insists on Aeneas’ rank – “for his parentage” – something Aeneas does not seem to fixate on (or remember) to the same degree. As scholars have noted, the Aeneas of \textit{Dido} is not the hero of the \textit{Aeneid}; far less the king or conqueror, Achates and Venus are more insistent on his fulfilling his destiny than he is. Even Aeneas’ description of his future – “I shall be planted in as rich a land” – suggests a profound lack of agency on his part – “I shall be planted” – and he continues this tree metaphor when he talks about how “in me shall flourish Priam’s race.” These declarations offer a striking contrast to his insistence that the sword and steel burgeonet is what becomes him more, while also suggesting how aware Aeneas is of how little control he has over his fate. This passivity – and irony - is

\textsuperscript{205} See Kinney for a discussion of her “willful surrender of her power,” “Epic Transgression,” 269-270.
highlighted by Dido’s response to Aeneas’ imaginings, “Speaks not Aeneas like a conqueror?” (93) she asks her counselor after Aeneas leaves to be paraded in the streets. Dido’s command that he be her lord is also a performance of power – these are imperatives (for him), and they are imperatives that fix his body (“here”) and silence his voice (“speak of no other land”). That her fantasy culminates in her placing herself above the fray, where “from a turret I’ll behold my love,” furthers the emphasis on power in Dido’s fantasies.

Yet, just like Tamburlaine or Faust, Dido professes a desire overblown with her sense of control. Anna worries that the Carthaginians will not so willingly submit to a different rule. Highlighting their rationality, Anna calls them “citizens,” but Dido, highlighting their inferior status, calls them “vulgar peasants.” We see here the threat of tyranny, as Dido transforms from Queen to tyrant – or, goddess, really – and that behavior is entirely in keeping with what the gods of the play present. Dido here and when punishing the Nurse demonstrates a cruel lack of concern for the lives of those peasants who cross her. They, too, are her commodities – like the luxury goods she flings away, so, too, does she value their lives. Dido seeks to control something that she cannot, but her failure comes not from her ability to command men (which she can do) but from her inability to thwart the heavens. In presenting Aeneas with “my love” and the power that brings, she may be correct in stating that “not all the world can take thee from mine arms,” but her command does not extend beyond “the world”: she is “goddess” to the Carthaginians only figuratively. Dido is as subject to the whims and performances of

206 On Dido’s declaration of power as a classic example of the Marlovian over-achiever, see Kinney, “Epic Transgression,” 265.
power on Mount Olympus as the Carthaginians, those “vulgar peasants,” are to her own machinations.

VI. Dido’s Downfall

Dido miscalculates how and why Aeneas stays. While critics have tended to see Dido and, to a lesser extent, Aeneas as victims of the gods, there is a way in which Dido’s downfall is orchestrated by her own actions. When Dido discovers that Aeneas and his men have tried to leave Carthage (for the first time), she laments:

O foolish Trojans that would steal from hence
And not let Dido understand their drift.
I would have given Achates store of gold
And Ilioneus gum and Libyan spice,
The common soldiers rich embroidered coats
And silver whistles to control the winds,
Which Circes sent Sichaeus when he lived.
Unworthy are they of a queen's reward.
See where they come. How might I do to chide?

(4.4.5-13)

That seems to be Dido’s problem – her tragedy – that she is powerless “to chide” and that her largess must encounter lack if it is to have any effect. The more Dido performs her power, the stronger they become, and the more she creates the conditions for her abandonment. The Trojans are certainly “foolish” for not understanding how vulnerable Dido is, how willing she will be to fill their coffers, foolish for not asking more and taking greater advantage of her, yet she is not so foolish as to misunderstand the source of

207 Most scholars see Dido’s downfall as orchestrated by the gods: see, for example, Deats “Gender Hierarchies,” 169-172; Godshalk, “Marlowe’s Dido,” 17-18; Williams, “Dido,” 48. Williams further sees Dido’s as “the victim of a spell that invests her with stereotypically ‘wifely’ qualities: weakness, dependence, and obsession with commitment” (48). For Hendricks, Dido’s downfall stems from her “racial identity” as African, “Managing the Barbarian.”
her power: she holds men in her thrall and is a “ticing strumpet” because of the worldly goods and power she controls and confers, not just because of her beauty and body. As Aeneas prepares to leave for the last time, Dido reasons with him, reminding him of how her reputation has suffered, how “all the world calls me a second Helen / For being entangled by a stranger’s looks” (5.1.141-42). Aeneas apologizes, explaining that “if words might move me, I were overcome” (153-54), to which Dido responds, “And wilt thou not be moved by Dido’s words?” (155). The irony of this exchange is that “words” are not what have previously been able to “move” and “overcome” Aeneas, but rather the actions and goods that Dido’s words bring. As Aeneas earlier described Dido’s powers of persuasion, “each word she says will contain a crown” (4.3.53), yet Aeneas and his men are no longer in need of Dido’s gifts. Dido believes her “words” will have force, lamenting, “repaired not I thy ships, made thee a king, / And all they needy followers noblemen” (5.1.163-65). What Dido fails to see is that these actions are precisely what enable the Trojans to leave. Dido’s mistake was to become, as Aeneas in gratitude earlier termed her, “patroness of all our lives,” for, in enriching and enabling their lives, she created the conditions for her abandonment.

Dido further miscalculates her allure and power when she, in a desperate move to bring Aeneas, tells Anna she will abdicate the throne. Dido begs Anna to go to Aeneas, already aboard his ship, and repeat her earlier success in getting Aeneas to return: “Once didst thou go, and he came back again. / Now bring him back, and thou shalt be queen, / And I will live a private life with him” (5.1.196-98). The terms Dido presents are ambiguous: it is unclear whether Dido proposes that Anna “shalt be queen” as reward for
returning Aeneas to her or if Dido proposes “liv[ing] a private life with him” because she believes that is what Aeneas would want. Regardless, the fantasy is absurd because if a public life as King of Carthage is not enough for Aeneas’ destiny, then a “private life” as a citizen of Carthage will certainly not suffice. What makes this moment all the more poignant is how it evokes Aeneas’ description of what he imagined Dido would do when he fled Carthage, and how, just as Dido fails to understand Aeneas’ imperative to leave, he fails to see her imperative to stay in Carthage. Aeneas envisions Dido trying to stop him:

“Come back, come back,” I hear her cry afar,
“And let me link thy body to my lips,
That, tied together by the striving tongues,
We may, as one, sail into Italy.”

(4.3.27-30)

In the course of the play, Dido never once proposes accompanying Aeneas. Aeneas fantasizes that Dido will leave Carthage for him and his destiny, and Dido fantasizes that Aeneas will stay in Carthage for her and her destiny: their tragedy is their competing quest for power.208

Dido regains sight of herself and her strength when Anna prompts her to remember herself, but scholars have not used this moment to guide their readings of Dido, missing Dido’s political staging of her death.209 Anna prompts Dido to “remember who you are,” and Dido does, declaring “Dido I am, unless I be deceived” (5.1.263-

208 For how Dido’s duty to Carthage and Aeneas’ duty to Rome doom their union in the Aeneid, see Suzuki, Metamorphoses of Helen, 105.

209 See, for example, Gamel, who finds that Dido’s “composure and dignity return” once Dido determines to die, yet stops short of reading Dido’s affective shift as linked to an awareness of royalty, “Triumph of Cupid,” 618.
Dido realizes that she has created a situation in which she can exact no earthly revenge, nor can she join Aeneas, for “nothing can bear me to him but a ship, / And he hath all my fleet” (267-68). To reassert herself as “Dido” she “must be the murderer of myself” (270), and she executes her suicide in a way both unique to the play and entirely in keeping with her understanding of her power. As in the Aeneid, Dido builds a pyre, telling her sister that she will perform an unheard-of rite to purge him and his things from her. Dido declares the fire the means to “sacrifice [Aeneas’] ticing relics” (277), proclaiming, once her sister has left, that she, too, will “with these relics burn thyself” (292).

While Dido tells Iarbus that she performs a “private sacrifice” (286), Dido frames Aeneas’ betrayal in terms of herself as a public, not private, person. Consistent with her declaration “Dido I am,” Dido constructs Aeneas’ transgression as “perjury and slaughter of a queen” (294) and “treason to a queen” (307). The wrongdoing Aeneas is guilty of is not an emotional affront to a private individual, but the highest felony against a public figure. That Dido stages her suicide by first burning the gifts they exchanged – the “sword … he drew and swore by to be true to me” (295-96), the “garment which I clothed him in / When first he came on shore” (298-99), and the “letters, lines, and perjured papers all” (300) – seems tragically appropriate given how crucial gifts are within Dido. Even the precise manner and order in which Dido commits the objects to the

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210 This moment calls to mind the moment in The Duchess of Malfi when the Duchess declares, right before her death, “I am the Duchess still.”

211 For Hendricks, however, this suicide “serves only to concretize the absolute racial differences between Dido and Aeneas,” “Managing the Barbarian,”185. For Dido’s suicide in the Aeneid, see Suzuki, Metamorphoses of Helen, 116.
fire before throwing herself into the flames subtly shifts the power dynamic in Dido towards her control.

This is all the more striking when Dido’s suicide in Dido is read against her death in the Aeneid. Notably absent from the list of “relics” burned in Dido is the bed shared with Aeneas: in the Aeneid, the bed is described as their “marriage bed” (IV.486), and Dido not only tells her sister that she will burn it, but she dies on the bed, kissing it before she impales herself with Aeneas’ sword. While it is possible Dido omits the bed simply because it makes for a more economical stage production, it is in keeping with Dido’s management of her death that she deemphasize the domestic, intimate, and personal aspect of her relationship with Aeneas. Since Dido’s death on her marriage bed is so memorable in the Aeneid, it makes Dido’s omission of that detail loom large as one reads or watches the final scene. The imaginative void where the bed would be evokes how, contra Dido’s desires within the Aeneid to see Aeneas as her husband,212 Dido seems far less interested in Dido in the precise legal nature of their union, perhaps because the title Dido cares about the most is Queen of Carthage. While, as Suzuki notes, Dido’s death in the Aeneid is “a dramatic scene laden with eroticism … a death self-inflicted by her lover’s sword, surrounded by his garments, on the bed they once shared,”213 there is scant eroticism in Dido’s suicide in Dido. Rather than be penetrated by “her lover’s sword,” Dido takes the sword and declares, “thou shalt burn first” (5.1.297). Whereas Dido’s

212 In the Aeneid, Juno proposes to Venus that she will “arrange eternal peace and formal marriage” (IV. 143); in the cave when Aeneas and Dido meet, “High Heaven became witness to the marriage” (IV. 231); Dido “thought no longer of a secret love / But called it marriage” (IV. 235-36); Mercury chastises Aeneas for being a “tame husband” (IV. 362); Dido evokes their “pledge” (IV. 420) and “the marriage we entered on” (IV. 432) when Aeneas tells her he must leave; Aeneas denies that they were married, saying “I never held the torches of a bridegroom, / Never entered upon the pact of marriage” (IV. 467-68).
213 Suzuki, Metamorphoses of Helen, 116.
suicide in the *Aeneid*, accomplished with and surrounded by the remnants of her love, can figure her body as yet another object of that discarded union, Dido’s insistence, in *Dido*, on damning Aeneas’ relics before she damns him and their countries (“betwixt this land and that let be never league” (309)) points to the ways in which Dido attempts to use her death to return to her status as “author,” “patroness,” “goddess,” “prince,” “sovereign,” and “queen.”

While it is hard to read Dido’s suicide as wholly triumphant or as a full reclamation of her agency, Dido’s immolation on a pile of gifts, with her dying words a testament to her legacy – both to the *Aeneid* and of the Punic Wars – and her final proclamation, “Truest Dido dies. *Sic, sic juvat ire sub umbras*” [Yes, yes, it please me to go into the dark] (312-313), remind us of Dido’s power and pleasure. Whatever comedy arises from Iarbus and Anna’s rushed suicide (if it is indeed comic) does not undo the force of Dido’s suicide nor does it alter what makes Dido’s death so tragic. In a poem composed in memory of Queen Elizabeth, Anne Bradstreet compared the deceased Queen of England with various female luminaries; of Dido and Elizabeth, Bradstreet proclaimed, “Dido, first Foundress of proud Carthage walls / … A great Eliza, but compar’d with ours, / How vanisheth her glory, wealth, and powers.”[^214] What Bradstreet identifies as Dido’s defining characteristics – “her glory, wealth, and powers” – is precisely what *Dido*, too, offers, even as it simultaneously interrogates the idea of personal agency.

[^214]: Anne Bradstreet, “In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth of Most Happy Memory” (1643), l. 59-62; cited in Williams, “Dido,” 54n4.
CHAPTER THREE

‘WINKING’ AT ARDEN’S WOMEN: GENDER, JUSTICE AND AGENCY IN ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM

I. Introduction

In Raphael Holinshed’s account of the 1551 murder of Thomas Ardern, the infamous crime upon which the anonymously written Arden of Faversham (1592) was based, a marginal note in the 1587 edition of the Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland attempts to explain why Ardern tolerated his wife’s affair with Mosby.215 “Arden winketh at his wife’s lewdness and why!” proclaims the gloss alongside a description of Alyce Ardern’s social and economic capital: “for that she was wealthy and had friends.”216 Scholars writing on Arden of Faversham, the play which takes as its source not merely Holinshed’s account but likely the edition containing the explanatory marginalia,217 have perhaps paid this note less attention than is due. Or, rather, they apply this note to their reading of Arden by only thinking about how Alice is a conduit for Arden’s ambitions, “winking,” we might say, at the various ways in which Alice uses her social position to her own advantage. Further attention to not only Alice but also Susan, Mosby’s sister and Alice’s maid, also suggests the ways in which a seemingly

215 To help delineate between the historical and fictive central figures, I will refer to the characters in Arden of Faversham as Thomas and Alice Arden, while Thomas and Alyce Ardern will denote the actual personages. Ardern appears to be the way their surnames were spelled during their own time, and it is the spelling used in the official Wardmote Book account of their crime. To add to the confusion, Holinshed spells Ardern’s name as “Arden,” and refers only to his wife as “Mistress Arden,” never mentioning her first name. The two major recent editions of Arden of Faversham both reprint the 1587 Chronicles’ account (complete with marginal notes): Anonymous, The Tragedy of Master Faversham, ed., M.L. Wine (London: Methuen, 1973); Anonymous, Arden of Faversham, ed. Martin White (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2007). White’s edition (from which I cite) owes much to Wine.
217 Wine, Introduction, xl-xlii.
advantageous social position (Mosby is upwardly mobile, Alice is a gentlewoman) can constrict even as it opens up options for Susan to traffic in herself. Examining the ways Alice and Susan negotiate their world helps to complicate and resist constructions of the women of *Arden* as either passive, innocent objects to be trafficked, or as sexually manipulative and ruled by passion. *Arden* has been read as an important play for feminist criticism because Alice offers a strongly drawn female lead and engages with emergent ideas about marriage and the domestic sphere. Yet *Arden* should be important for feminist criticism not only because of Alice but also because of the all the women who appear within the play as well as who hover over, perhaps haunt, its edges: Susan as she appears in *Arden*; the historical figures Susan is based on; the dagger-wielding women of the frontispiece to the 1633 Quarto edition, itself printed and published by a woman; and the constructions of Alice and Susan in both the ballad and in the various historical accounts that told of the crime. Read on its own, the play attests to the full complement of desires that motivate both men and women and the ways in which class cannot be viewed divorced from gender hierarchies; read, however, in the context of its ample paratextual material – material, it should be noted, that routinely informs the work of literary criticism on *Arden* – it becomes just how much we have been missing by “winking.”

I want to begin by looking first at Alice Arden in *Arden of Faversham* before turning to Susan and other imaginings of Alice to offer a corrective to two persistent trends in discussions of Alice’s character in *Arden*: one, her relationship towards money; two, her attitude towards the institution of marriage. As I will show, Alice uses her social standing and her command over her domestic sphere to get what she wants, which is
Arden’s death and marriage to Mosby. That pursuit of this goal leads to disaster for almost all of the parties involved should not lead us to discount the ways in which Alice pursues her aims, since it suggests that the ambitious and mercenary world that scholars have seen defining the male homosocial interactions in Arden is one that Alice is equally adept at manipulating. Yet just as Alice works within the system, so too is her ultimate goal – marriage to Mosby – relatively conservative. Alice’s crime is, of course, a radical challenge to the social order and hence its designation as petty treason, but it is useful to think about how Alice negotiates, relies upon and enforces the social order in her pursuit of a crime that threatens to upend it.218 Moreover, while scholars have read Alice as a woman who “acts against marriage”219 I attend to the ways in which Alice can be seen as “pro-marriage,” thinking about not only how Alice anticipates widowhood and remarriage and but also how she uses the prospect of Susan’s marriage to her own advantage. The institution of marriage is not something Alice rebels against or even, necessarily, seeks to remake220; rather, if she is “monstrous” it is because her aims –

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218 See Kathyrn Schwarz’s work on women who aggressively, unflaggingly and at times subversively pursue socially conservative goals, in particular marriage; she finds that this wayward-yet-socially-sanctioned female “will” both reinforces and widens the cracks in patriarchal institutions and ideology, *What You Will: Gender, Contract and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).


220 While murdering one’s husband was not a common phenomenon in early modern England, remarrying was. Indeed, in Vivian Brodsky’s survey of remarrying widows, she finds that almost half of all marriages in late sixteenth century London were remarriages, and that the single largest subset of remarriages occurred between widows and never-married men. These widows were typically both slightly older than and in a better financial position (often thanks to their inheritance from their first husband) than the bachelors they married, than the bachelors they married: Brodsky, “Widows in Late Elizabethan London,” 128. Alice Arden and Mosby’s match in many ways fits this mold. Whigam, in *Seizures of the Will*, however, discussing how Alice and Mosby seem to rebel against marriage, suggests that “what Alice and
marriage for herself and for Susan – are so mundane. If anything, reading Alice as pro-marriage would in fact strengthen arguments Frances Dolan and Lena Cowlin Orlin have offered about the dangers lurking within the home. Moreover, as Julie Schutzman reminds us, the activities Alice engages in – managing her husband’s estate in his absence, running errands in town, entertaining guests, presiding over the kitchen, carrying the keys to the household, negotiating the marriage of her servants, offering her husband counsel and comfort – were all understood to be part and parcel of “wifely duties” for the lady of the manor. To arrange the death of the master of Faversham, Alice relies on the powers she holds as the mistress.

Few scholars who write on Arden have failed to remark on the ways in which money and class concerns are at the heart of the play, yet the assumption has been that those concerns matter chiefly to the men. Critics are quick to point out how marriage to Alice has financial and social benefits for Arden and Mosby, yet have paid scant attention to Alice’s manipulation of this allure. Instead, critics have tended to locate Alice’s power of persuasion in her sexuality and/or her way with words. Alice’s power, I argue,
comes from the fusion of these factors, and it is critical that Alice’s sexual allure and rhetorical acumen be understood as linked to the practical, tangible ways she has to move men – be it the financial reward she offers the assassins, the land she will ensure reverts to Greene, or marriage to her maid, Susan. This is not to say that Alice is a picture of reason or that her plans are all perfectly plotted, but that she is no more or less reasonable than the play’s male characters. What makes Alice so powerful and so dangerous is that she is both passionate and practical – she is not, as the Ferryman suggests all women are, “governed by the moon” (XI.16-17), but governed instead by a clear understanding of how to effect her desires.224

Alice has consistently been read through the lens of her sexuality, a reading the play’s title-page seems to invite. Proclaiming Arden’s murder was brought about “by meanes of his disloyall and wanton wyfe, who for the love she bare to one Mosbie, hyred two desperat ruffins Blackwill and Shakebag to kill him,” the advertisement to the 1592 Quarto (as well as the 1599 and 1633 reprints) further promises to show “the great malice and discimulation of a wicked woman, the unsatiable desire of filthie lust and the


224 Unless otherwise noted, all citation to Arden of Faversham are to Arden of Faversham, ed. Martin White (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2007).
shamefull end of all murderers.”

As scholars have been quick to note, *Arden* presents a far more nuanced and morally ambiguous tale than its “facile and melodramatic description.” In particular, as Schutzman points out, the play “will also reveal how the ‘wanoten wyfe’ exercises freedoms and power that exceed and defy the rigid moral framework” imposed by the title-page. The majority of scholars suggest, however, that Alice “exercises freedoms and powers that exceed and defy the rigid moral framework” presented by both the title-page and contemporary ideals of femininity through her sexuality; that is, her “wanoten[ness]” and “lust” form the source of her power – and pleasure – and her sexuality is what the play cannot contain. For Kathleen McLuskie, Alice is “an extraordinary dramatic creation. She enacts a kind of crazy, intemperate, unpredictable sexiness,” for Ian McAdam, it is “remarkable … that Alice is not at all demonized. Her struggle for self-determination emerges as comparable to the men’s; it is more desperate in that her avenues of expression are limited to the sexual.”; for Michael Neill, “What *Arden* suggests is that sexuality provides the only medium through which women can exercise the power that attaches to status, the only means by which they can pretend to act "without control" and exercise a claim to ‘rule’ or ‘government’”; or, for Catherine Belsey, *Arden* “pits true love against marriage” with Alice agitating “in favor

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226 Wine notes that other ‘news plays’ share similarly reductive and salacious title-pages, but finds *Arden* particularly notable for its lack of didacticism, Introduction, lx.
228 McLuskie, Introduction to *Plays on Women*, 36.
229 McAdam, “Protestant Manliness,” 59.
230 Neill, “This Gentle Gentleman,” 94.
of a free sexuality, unauthorized within the play as a whole, but glimpsed at isolated
moments."^231

Even Frances Dolan, whose invective to always think about class lies at the center
of not only my argument on Arden but at the heart of this dissertation, sees Alice
primarily if not solely through the lens of her sexuality. Writing on Arden of Faversham
and other accounts of domestic violence, Dolan finds that “stories of women who plot
against their husbands articulate and shape fears of the dangers lurking within the home,
of women's voracious and ranging sexual appetites and capacities for violence, and of the
instability of masculine privilege and power.”^232 To buttress Dolan’s conclusions about
why and how these tales of domestic violence “articulate and shape fears of the dangers
lurking within the home,” it is critical, I argue, to note the ways in which Alice operates
as a rational creature. Though sexually desirous (and desired) and violent, Alice is also a
savvy businesswoman adept at using both tangible and intangible resources to
accomplish her desires – desires that are not, it should be noted, merely appetitive. What
these readings which focus squarely on Alice’s sexuality miss is that, while Alice’s
sexuality may be problematic, equally or perhaps more threatening are the other sources
of Alice’s power. Indeed, as Dolan herself so usefully reminds us, class and economic
status “intersect with, interrupt, or evade” constructions of gender and sexuality.^233

^231 Belsey, Alice Arden’s Crime, 87-88.
^232 Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, 58.
^233 Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, 4.
II. Alice’s Allure

That Alice is a strong and powerful force within Arden appears a universally acknowledged fact. In Shakespere’s Predecessors in the English Drama, the nineteenth-century writer and social reformer John Addington Symonds declared Alice “the real strength of the play,” a “bourgeois Clytemnestra” and “Lady Macbeth of county family connections”:

She detaches herself after a far more impressive fashion from the reptile swarm around her. It is not that she is ethically estimable. Far from it. But she is morally superior to all the men around her – pluckier, more thoroughly possessed by passion. Her fixed will carries the bloody business through; and when she falls, she falls not utterly ignoble.234 Symonds later goes on locate the driving force behind Alice’s “fixed will” as her love/lust for Mosby. Writing of her reconcilement with Mosby after their quarrel in Scene VIII, Symonds finds that

The tigress-woman, spiteful in her penitence, becomes gentle in the renewal of her love; and this love, unhallowed, bloody as it is, explains her future conduct. She is in the clutch of Venus Libitina henceforth till the hour of her death.235 While Symonds descriptions of Alice may register as antiquated, they encapsulate in many ways what has, in effect, remained the reading of her. The tendency to see Alice as “possessed by passion” with a “fixed will,” as well as to see her as more compelling than the play’s other characters because of that passion is reflected in recent assessments of Arden. Jonathan Bate describes Alice as “woman of strong will” whose “brazenness will bring her to a sticky end”; she and Arden are in a “marriage on the rocks,” while she and

235 Ibid., 364.
Mosby engage in a “messy love affair.” When, in Scene VIII, Mosby finds Alice, prayer book in hand, she is “trying to be good,” but, at the sight of her lover, “the fire of her desire is rekindled” (4). Bate may believe Alice to be one of the “strongest female roles of the 1590s” but he locates all Alice’s strength in her love and fury, stopping short of every seeing that strength as buttressed by her rationality or her desires as extending beyond Mosby’s body. Addressing the role of the occult and the porous boundaries between the “natural and non-natural” in *Arden*, Mary Floyd-Wilson writes of Alice, “an archetypical ‘bold’ woman, Alice easily brings people into her murderous web. She negotiates Michael’s involvement, she relies on Susan’s loyalty, she persuades Greene to murder, and she has Black Will and Shakebag working to please her.” While Floyd-Wilson does not define what constitutes an archetypal “bold woman” in that essay, she elsewhere describes the “bold woman” as a woman “whose strong emotions infected those around her.” For Floyd-Wilson, therefore, Alice seems to “bring people into her murderous web” solely through affective pull: what is strikingly absent in her description of what Alice does (“negotiates,” “relies,” “persuades”) is an acknowledgement of the objects key to securing the “involvement,” “loyalty,” “murder,” and “work[].” Alice, contra Floyd-Wilson’s proclamation that the play’s female protagonist “wields a

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haphazard power that emanates from her person,“240 wields a direct and controlled power that emanates from her purse as much as from her person; moreover, the power of Alice’s person would seem to stem less from some kind of non-natural force that radiates out of her body but more from her status as “a gentlewoman,” something she and others continuously invoke. Floyd-Wilson believes that we should take seriously Franklin’s charge that Alice has enchanting powers,241 yet while Floyd-Wilson’s discussion of contagion and the play’s occult imagingings provides useful context for understanding Clarke’s as a “cunning man” or theories of cruentation, it seems that Floyd-Wilson reaches toward the supernatural to explain Alice’s power that is very much grounded in the material, not mystical, world.

Indeed, even Alice’s status as a gentlewoman is something that is described in worldly, practical terms: whereas Arden proclaims he is “by birth a gentleman of blood” (I.36), Alice describes her gentle status in ways that emphasize not some kind of bodily or interior gentle status (i.e. “blood”) but that point to the connections and fortune that status bestows. When arguing with Mosby, she asks how he can “countenance my love / Being descended of a noble house, / And matched already with a gentleman” (I. 202-203). The emphasis on Alice’s kin is again echoed when Greene, shocked at Alice’s charges against Arden, asks of Arden, “respects he not your birth, / Your honorable friends, nor what you brought?” (I. 489-91). Greene’s list of Alice’s assets becomes increasingly concrete, moving from her lineage to her circle of influence to the material wealth, title, and land marriage to Alice has conferred upon Arden. Even when Alice

241 Floyd-Wilson, Occult Knowledge, 49.
does gesture to some sort of ineffable characteristic of gentility, promising, for example, Clarke that, “as I am a gentlewoman” (I.286), he and Susan will marry the day after Arden’s death, that gentle status is bound up in her ability to enact practical action: she will cause her maid, Susan, to wed Clarke.

Sex, money and social status triangulate in and for Alice. And while scholars have not failed to see that in Mosby’s or Arden’s desire for Alice, they have not tended to see her as an agent with interest in creating that allure and with desires of her own that extend beyond lust or love. Even when scholars pay attention to how Alice manipulates her social status and sexuality to her advantage, they still perceive Alice’s power as sexual. Neill, for example, argues that “readings of Arden of Faversham that concentrate on the sexual intrigue between Alice and Mosby, pitching her ‘bourgeois Clytemnestra’ against his ‘low-pressure Macbeth,’ habitually overlook the imbrication of erotic desire (and indeed of affective relations generally) with the appetite for property and status that is everywhere apparent in the play.” Yet as Neill reads Alice, he offers analysis that seems to align more closely with precisely those readings he rejects. Pointing to Alice’s negotiations with Black Will, and Will’s description of the reward he wants for murdering Arden, Neill writes,

It is rank that appears to be the primary source of Alice's sexual attractiveness; and for that reason she experiences sexuality itself as legitimate mode of power – one that enables her to exploit the patriarchal hierarchy of social relations even as

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242 For more on how, for male characters in Arden, desire for women is bound up in desires for land and money, see, for example, David Attwell, “Property, Status, and the Subject in a Middle-Class Tragedy: Arden of Faversham.” English Literary Renaissance 21 (1991): 337; Neill, “This Gentle Gentleman,” 79; Garrett Sullivan, “‘Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground’: Surveying, Land, and Arden of Faversham,” ELH 61.2 (Summer 1994): 244; Whigham on how marriage to Susan is good for Michael, Seizures of the Will, 88.

243 Neill, “This Gentle Gentleman,” 90.
she helps to destabilize it. This is the power that we see Alice shamelessly exercising over Black Will as though instinct had taught her to respond to his sexually charged fantasy of ‘Sweet Alice Arden with a lap of crowns.’

Because Neill focuses on Alice’s “rank” and because of the way in which he writes about her power, particularly the description of her “shamelessly exercising” a power tied to “instinct,” Neill seems to miss the tangible, practical power that Alice wields. Rank is not enough to establish Alice’s power: the ‘lap of crowns’ Will dreams of point to the ways in which Alice makes her power manifest, namely, through money. If Neill were to quote the passage he references in Arden more fully, he would see not only that Alice’s attractiveness comes from the inextricable link between her rank and riches. Since, in early modern ideology, rank was understood to be something that was embodied, there is a way in which scholars’ insistence on Alice’s power as emanating from her rank is merely a different side of the same coin that sees Alice’s power as emanating from her sexuality: it is an insistence on reading Alice through her body.

Black Will’s desires, however, reveals that the bodies in Arden are sexed and gendered as much as they are classed and that “crowns,” not “instinct,” govern interpersonal relationships:

Tell me of gold, my resolutions fee;
Say thou seest Mosby kneeling at my knees,
Off’ring me service for my high attempt;

244 Ibid., 93-94.
245 We could understand this embodiment both in terms of blood and birth (for example, Arden’s claim that he is “by birth a gentleman of blood” (I.36)), as well as in terms of dress (Mosby, “a botcher, and no better at the first” to Arden’s fury, now “jets it in his silken gown” (I. 25, 30)). As Arden’s complaints attest, how social status was embodied was a hotly contested debate in early modern England, particularly as socio-economic forces (notably the dissolution of the monasteries) witnessed a shift away from feudalism and towards increased social mobility. For more on the phenomenon of the emergent “new man” as structuring Arden of Faversham, see Attwell, “Property, Status”; Randall Martin, “‘Arden winketh at his wife’s lewdness and why!’: A Patrilinetal Crisis in Arden of Faversham,” Early Theatre 4 (2001): 13-33; McAdam, “Protestant Manliness”; Neill, “This Gentle Gentleman”; and Whigham, Seizures of the Will.
And sweet Alice Arden, with a lap of crowns,
Comes with a lowly curtsey to the earth,
Saying ‘Take this but for thy quarterage;
Such yearly tribute will I answer thee.’

(III.83-89)

Explaining to Greene what will move him to murder, Black Will recounts a fantasy that is less “sexually charged” than it is *economically* charged. Like his earlier declaration that he wishes to be “set a work thus through the year and that murder would grow to an occupation that a man might without danger of the law” (II. 102-104), Will expresses a desire for a life in which he is served rather than is the servant; moreover, with the guarantee of the “yearly tribute” paid quarterly, Will would be ensured both financial stability and security. If Alice grasps and seizes on this, it is not because she relies on “instinct” but because she thoroughly understands the wealth and power that attaches to her person.

Alice pulls men and women into her plot by literally and figuratively capitalizing on her status as mistress of the Arden household and lands. While much attention has been paid to the ways in which, as Randall Martin describes, “Alice Arden skillfully exploits the roles of victimized wife and sexual rebel,” this focus has missed the key ways that class intersects with Alice’s sexual and social position. Alice details – or, more likely, invents – the abuse she suffers at Arden’s hands, yet the abuse in and of itself is

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246 Julie Schutzman in “Alice Arden’s Freedom” offers a compelling reading of the way Alice deftly manipulates constructions of her public and private lives that has aided my own understanding of how Alice operates as Mistress of Faversham; I depart from Schutzman, however, by focusing instead on how Alice’s riches and class position fuel both her desires and power.

247 Martin, “Arden winketh,” 15. Martin states this without contesting this claim; his interest lies in examining Arden’s character.

248 Such is the opinion of Schutzman, “Alice Arden’s Freedom,” 299-301; Dolan finds that Alice, a “skillful manipulator of effect,” perfectly ventriloquizes accounts of the abused wife, *Dangerous Familiars*, 53.
not what prompts Greene to offer his help. Martin argues that Alice “enacts the role of abused wife to gain sympathetic accomplices,” but it is critical to Greene’s reaction and to Alice’s plan that the Arden’s abuse is directed at a gentlewoman. Alice hints at her sufferings, lamenting “wonder not / Though he be hard to others when to me / Ah, Master Green, God knows how I am used!” (I. 485-87). Upon hearing of Alice’s “[mis]use,” Greene invokes not a husband’s duty to be a gentle and good governor, but rather Alice’s “birth,” “honorable friends,” and dowry, suggesting that the affront is not that Arden treats his wife this way but that he treats a gentlewoman this way.

Arden’s abuse registers because of its object, not its action: his violence violates public bonds of social class as much, if not more, than private ties of domesticity. Schutzman describes how Alice “constructs a fictional ‘private life’ [of abuse] and neatly exposes it to public view”; while Schutzman presents Alice as knowingly manipulating ideas of public and private and sees Arden’s abuse as figuring “a specific threat to social hierarchy and the expectations of class,” Schutzman suggests that it is “Greene’s judgment of Arden’s actions, as represented by Alice seems dependent on the public fact of her superior position,” but stops short of seeing Alice as consciously using her class position. For Schutzman, it’s is “Greene’s judgment,” not Alice’s, which locates the importance of her rank in Arden’s abuse. Yet given how aware Alice is of her gentle

249 Schutzman, in “Alice Arden’s Freedom,” describes how Alice “constructs a fictional ‘private life’ [of abuse] and neatly exposes it to public view” (300); while Schutzman presents Alice as knowingly manipulating ideas of public and private and sees Arden’s abuse as figuring “a specific threat to social hierarchy and the expectations of class,” Schutzman suggests that it is “Greene’s judgment of Arden’s actions, as represented by Alice seems dependent on the public fact of her superior position,” but stops short of seeing Alice as consciously using her class position (301-302). For Schutzman, it’s is “Greene’s judgment,” not Alice’s, which locates the importance of her rank in Arden’s abuse.
status, how quick she is to exploit it, and her subsequent negotiations, it would seem that Alice knows precisely how her allegations will register to Greene.

III. Managing Men

Alice and Greene’s exchange hinges not just on her status, but also on the land and wealth she has at her bestowal. Greene aids Alice in Arden’s murder because of the concrete benefits she promises he will receive.²⁵⁰ Alice tells Greene:

Hire some cutter for to cut him short;
And here’s ten pound to wager them withal.
When he is dead you shall have twenty more,
And the lands whereof my husband is possessed
Shall be intitled as they were before.

(1.521-525)

Alice furnishes Greene with the money to enlist the assassins, yet she withholds the principle until after the murder is committed. In so doing, Alice, as Martin Wiggins notes, “evokes the realities of Elizabethan commerce … use[ing] the common business practice of splitting a fee into two parts, payable in earnest and upon completion of the job.”²⁵¹ While Alice’s tactic of offering Greene deposit, rather than full payment, may reflect the realities of Elizabethan commerce, it does not, in fact, reflect the realities of the historical account. Holinshed’s *Chronicles* reports only that Alyce Ardern “concluded [with Greene], that if he could get anie that would kill him, he should have ten pounds for

²⁵⁰ There is also the hint, in his initial reaction to her tale of spousal abuse, that Greene might envision that, by ridding Alice of Arden, he might find himself as her husband, instead. His referral to Alice as “so fair a creature” (507) and his promise, “but frolic, woman; I shall be the man / Shall set you free from all this discontent” (511-512) furthers the flirtatious frisson; Alice, however, is quick to redirect Greene’s attentions away from her physical “fair[ness]” and towards the fair bargain she proposes – Arden’s life for land and money.

a reward”\textsuperscript{252}, no mention is made of further payment upon Arden’s death or of the land Arden stole. Alice in Arden incentivizes Greene’s cooperation by not only, as Wiggens notes, splitting the fee but also, and more crucially, with her pledge to turn the contested lands back to Greene’s possession; a more enticing and thought-through proposal than Holinshed reports. She also offers triple the sum (£30 versus £10): Alice is not only savvier than Alyce but also has far more capital at her disposal (or at least capital that she is willing to spend).

While Wiggens later declares, of the various assassins Alice hires, “the point is that Alice has made a series of contracts without considering their compatibility,”\textsuperscript{253} it would seem that Alice purposefully sets multiple men to the same task. After she engages Greene’s help, adding his services to those already pledged by Michael and Clarke, Alice declares, “And whosoever doth attempt the deed / A happy hand I wish, and so farewell. / All this goes well” (1.353–55). Alice seems to envision Arden’s murder as a kind of “may the best man win,” situation; rather than view the multiple contracts as incompatible, Alice suggests that they will instead be more efficient, increasingly the likelihood of and decreasing the length of time until Arden’s death. While Mosby may reprimand Alice for pulling Greene into their plot, fearing that “to acquaint each stranger with our drifts … ’tis the way / To make it open unto Arden’s self, / And bring thyself and me to ruin both”

\textsuperscript{252} Chronicles, 1024.
\textsuperscript{253} Wiggens, Journeymen, 126.
(I. 579-81), Greene, Black Will and Shakebag are crucially not only the ones who accomplish the murder, but also the ones who keep it secret.\textsuperscript{254}

Alice, it would seem, is a better businesswoman than critics have allowed – or, at least, she is no better or worse than the men who surround her. Indeed, the scheme of splitting the fee that Alice proposes to Greene is precisely what he, in turn, presents Black Will and Shakebag, hiring them for £10 now and “when he is dead / Ye shall have twenty more” (II.100-01). Wiggens faults Alice for failing “to consider her own ability to fulfill her side of the bargain— two men cannot marry the same woman,”\textsuperscript{255} yet does not address how Mosby goes along with this “bargain”; indeed, the play suggests that Mosby’s promise of Susan to Clarke postdates Michael’s suit since, as Mosby explains to Alice, he only “happened” on Clarke “yesternight” (I. 226). Wiggens finds, “Alice is a woman passionately committed to procuring a death; how she uses others to achieve that death is a matter of little concern to her” (ibid.). It seems that Alice’s willingness to instrumentalize others for her personal gain is precisely the point; in doing so, she proves herself business-minded in precisely the same manner as her husband, who shows arguably less concern than Alice does for the men and women whose lives his business practices impact.

In back-to-back scenes, we see Alice’s business practices contrasted with Arden’s. When Black Will and Shakebag suffer yet another disaster (and bodily harm) in

\textsuperscript{254} Schutzman argues that “acquaint[ing] each stranger with our drifts” is in fact part of Alice’s “deft manipulation of her society’s very public concern with her putatively private actions,” yet Schutzman stops short of seeing Alice as a fully conscious, rational actor, describing her as instead seeming “intuitively to understand” that her public airings will aid their plot, “Alice Arden’s Freedom,” 301-302.
\textsuperscript{255} Wiggins, Journeymen, 126.
an attempt to kill Arden, Alice keeps their morale up by paying for their “fire and good cheer” at the Flower-de-Luce, telling them to “rest yourselves until some other time” (XII. 53, 55). Alice maintains their good will while keeping them focused on the goal – Arden’s death – which, as she explains to Mosby, she has a “new device” (60) for, one that “those cutters” (66) will arguably be better able accomplish after their “rest.” (After all, they will need to be well fortified for Alice’s proposed street brawl.) This exchange is immediately followed by a glimpse at how Arden deals with business conflict. After just witnessing Alice’s largesse, we are presented with Dick Reede and his companion, a fellow sailor, who warns Reede that his suit is “to little end. / [Arden’s] conscience is too liberal and he too niggardly” (XIII. 2-3). The sailor’s words prove true, for Reede’s pleas on behalf of his “needy and bare” (17) wife and children are met with derision and threat; if Reede importunes again with his “clamorous impeaching tongue” (22), Arden promises to “lay thee up so close a twelve month’s day / As thou shalt neither see the sun nor moon” (24-25). Arden’s reaction is a rhetorical performance of class power that promises to inflict itself on Reede’s body. Likening Reede’s suit to “impeach[ment],” Arden’s threat to lock Reede up enforces the social order: in offering no formal criminal charge, the warning speaks to the power Arden imagines himself enjoying – able merely to tell the Mayor or Sheriff of an affront and expect to see justice enacted according to his will. Reede responds with the curse that becomes key to the historical murder’s notoriety, calling for the “plot of ground which thou detainst from me … [to] be ruinous and fatal unto thee!” (32-34); as Franklin’s epilogue and Holinshed’s Chronicles report, Reede’s
plot is precisely where Arden’s body was found. Pitting Alice’s negotiations against Arden’s highlights the way Alice uses her status and concurrent wealth to buy and maintain the compliant services of those around her, while suggesting that Arden over-relied on privilege and power without sweetening his dealings with a crown – as, for example, the Lord Cheiny does when he dismisses Black Will (IX. 122).

IV. Susan Considered

While Alice invests in securing the continued commitment and loyalty of the men she employs, Arden pays a curiously small amount of attention to how Alice maintains her relationship with Susan. Indeed, curiously little attention has been paid to Susan at all. Perhaps this is because it all too easy to dismiss Susan as a paradigmatic figure of the traffic in women, an object Alice and Mosby strategically offer and withhold until they get what they want with scant concern for Susan’s interest. Such a dismissal, however, misses the subtle ways Arden showcases Susan’s attempts to exert her agency. Susan has, it should be noted, a minor part in terms of actual stage time: she appears in only four of the play’s eighteen scenes, and, of those appearances, is entirely silent during one scene and has speaks no more than a few lines in the other three. Her speech is inversely proportional to her importance, however, for, as previously noted, she is critical to Michael and Clarke’s participation in the plot to kill Arden. Wine describes Susan, Franklin, and Clarke as unusual in Arden for being so one-dimensional, finding them to be one of the few “minor characters” that the playwright “has not enlivened in some

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256 For the power behind Reede’s curse and other supernatural phenomenon in the Arden story, see Floyd-Wilson, “Arden of Faversham” and Occult Knowledge, 49-72.
way,” noting that the Ferryman, Greene, and Bradshaw, for example, are all given a line or detail that hints at a fleshed out interiority.\textsuperscript{257} Wine speculates that Clarke’s “characterization probably suffers most from memorial construction,” and declares that the Franklin’s purpose is as “mostly a choral character and confident,” yet offers no explanation for what he sees as Susan’s flatness (ibid.).

Susan is by no means as dynamic a character as Alice, yet she is more than just the “innocent victim” that scholars have found her to be;\textsuperscript{258} even if her primary function appears to be as a pawn to be played by those with power over her. As Frank Whigam notes, marriage to Susan serves to improve the social standing of both Clarke and Michael, drawing her husband into a closer relationship with both Mosby and Alice.\textsuperscript{259} Alice and Mosby use this to their advantage, seeming to promise Susan to whomever will be most advantageous to them in the moment. Alice declares, when Clarke asks Mosby, “shall I have [Susan]?” (I. 228) that “’Tis pity but he should; he’ll use her well” (229). To “use [Susan] well” is a rich phrase, registering both a sexual pun (something that Clarke and Michael will later debate) and also a more general non-sexual sense of how Clarke will treat Susan. Neither Alice nor Mosby, however, seems to have little genuine concern for how Susan is used, since they present her with minimal choice in her marriage. Alice may note that it is a “pity” were Clarke not to have Susan for “he’ll use her well,” and, in a nicely ironic twist, it is a “pity” for Susan that she is so well used by Alice and Mosby.

\textsuperscript{257} Wine, Introduction, lxvi.
\textsuperscript{259} Whigham, \textit{Seizures of the Will}, 88-90.
Attention to how Alice uses Susan points not only to how Alice instrumentalizes the men and women around her for personal gain but also to how Alice (and Mosby) make the institution of marriage work in their favor even as their pursuit of one another may seem to resist it. Moreover, closer evaluation of Susan’s efforts to attend to her self-interest enriches not only our understanding of the ways in which women serve as objects and agents of patriarchy but also the ways in which *Arden of Faversham*, in adapting Ardern’s murder for the stage, imagines alternatives for a woman who appears to have no choices.

We hear of Susan before she appears on stage, and when she does finally appear, she barely says a word. The first mention of Susan comes when Alice pledges to Michael “here is my hand: / None shall have Mosby’s sister but thyself,,” conditional on Michael’s promise that Arden “shall not live above a week” (I. 146-47). It is at this point unclear why or how Alice has control over Susan’s marriage; we only learn that Susan lives in the Arden household when Clarke comes to sue for her, and that she is, definitively, a maid in the Arden household when Arden overhears Michael reading aloud the love letter he has commissioned to her. Arden expresses his vehement disapproval and exasperation with “Susan my maid, the painter, and my man, / A crew of harlots” (III. 23-24), demanding if Michael will be “married to so base a trull? / ’Tis Mosby’s sister” (27-28) and declaring his intent to “rouse her from remaining in my house” (29) once they return (a threat Arden never fulfills).260

260 That Arden fails to follow through on this threat seems, for Whigham, further evidence of Arden’s ineffective government, *Seizures of the Will*. 
Even for the original audience and readers of *Arden*, Susan’s identity must have been mysterious, since Susan in *Arden* is an invention of the playwright’s, an amalgamation of two, if not three, of the women involved in the historical Ardern’s murder. There was a maid, Elsabeth Stafford, in the Ardern household who was an accomplice in the murder, and Mosbie had a sister, Cisley Ponder, who was also tried as an accomplice to the crime. Moreover, as Holinshed recounts, “the cause that this Michaell conspired with the rest against his maister, was: for that it was determined, that he should marrie a kinswoman of Mosbies” (1026). It is not clear from Holinshed whether the “kinswoman of Mosbies” that Michaell was to marry was Mosbie’s widowed sister or some other relation; the Wardmote book of Faversham sheds no light on this, for it appears unconcerned with the motives of Alice’s accomplices and makes no mention of Michaell’s potential bride.

Susan’s identity, therefore, is as initially inscrutable as her desires remain throughout *Arden*. When Susan finally does speak, it is only after she has been directly addressed by her brother. To his question if “Clarke must be the man,” she refuses a direct response: “It resteth in your grant. Some words are passed. / And haply we be grown unto a match / If you be willing that it be so” (I. 600-602). These are the only words Susan speaks in this scene, and this is as close to an avowal of desire for marriage as Susan ever verbalizes. Everything else about Susan’s desires are hearsay, reported second-, if not third-hand. Michael earlier complains that “I hear the wench keeps in her chest” (I.154) a painted heart with a poem from Clarke, yet neither he nor we receive any

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261 Holinshed does not include the names of the two women, referring to them only as the maid and Mosbies sister; the Wardmote book supplies their names, however.
corroboration of this. Susan’s tepid response to Clarke’s proposal makes it hard to tell what or whom Susan desires. When Clarke comes to woo Susan, Mosby inquires of Alice, “How have you dealt and tempered with my sister? / What, will she have my neighbor Clarke or no?” (I. 540-41). Alice chides the men, “Let him woo himself. / Think you that maids look not for fair words?” yet reassures Clarke all the same that she has, effectively, “tempered with” Susan, telling him, “Go to her Clarke, she’s all alone within. / Michael, my man, is clean out of her books” (542-45). Greene mocks Michael to Shakebag and Black Will, declaring that Michael cannot Susan’s “love … unless Mosby solicit his suit” (III.113-14). Michael and Clarke subsequently come to blows over Susan, yet Susan never appears and neither man appears victorious (although Clarke does succeed in “break[ing] Michael’s head” (stage direction, X.72)).

Susan’s physical absence throughout all these discussions reinforces the sense that Mosby and Alice control access to both her heart and her body. The next reference to Susan finds her being promised, yet again, by Alice to Michael: “this night shall thou and Susan be made sure” (XIV. 42). The betrothal seems curiously undeserved, since Alice and Mosby have previously been so careful to make Susan’s wedding contingent on Arden’s death, and it is not until after Alice dismisses Michael that she learns, from Mosby, of the “complot” that will ensure Arden lives “no longer than this night” (XIV.87-89). In all these interactions, Susan is not merely an object, but an object whose acquisition depends upon a middleman/woman. Alice and Mosby will bestow Susan upon whomever most suits their aims; Alice pledges Susan to Michael not because

262 Alice reports to Mosby that she almost murdered Arden the night before in his sleep, so perhaps her plan was to kill Arden that night, too.
he is the better man but, seemingly, because she already has the poisoned painting from Clarke. Asserting that she will employ Clarke’s handiwork “if all the rest do fail” (X.79), Alice, secure in the possession of her desired object (the painted crucifix), no longer needs to leverage Clarke’s desired object (Susan) to engage Clarke’s compliance. The desires of the would-be bride and groom are consistently ancillary to those of their matchmakers.

The final betrothal not only bears no hint of Susan’s will, it is something she never even addresses, even as Michael invokes their pending marriage. After Arden’s body has been removed from the house and Alice entertains her husband’s guests, feigning distress over her husband’s unexplained absence, Michael and Susan confer in the corner until Mosby calls them to attention:

Michael, registering, perhaps, the way that the crime they have just committed subverts the social order, suggests further possibility for misrule. “Susan, shall thou and I wait on them?” he asks, “Or, and thou say’st the word, let us sit down too” (285-86). Susan

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263 That Clarke simply drops out of the play may be both authorial oversight (along with the other inconsistencies in plot); it may also be a testament to his mystery as a Renaissance “cunning man”: see Floyd-Wilson, “Arden of Faversham.”

264 Whigham, Seizures of the Will, 118.
keeps Michael in check: “Peace, we have other matters now in hand. / I fear me, Michael, all will be bewrayed” (287-88).

Of Susan’s reaction, Whigham writes, “Susan thinks to wait: everything seems so crazy” (ibid.), but Susan’s responses suggest less that she thinks “everything seems so crazy” but that she is both carefully evaluating the actions and speech of those around her and fully cognizant of how her actions will be read – as full guilt. Susan ignores Michael’s invocation of their wedding, seizing instead on his plan to buy ratsbane. When she learns he plans the poison not for himself but for their mistress, she is quick to quash his plans, assuring him “fear not her; she’s wise enough.” Susan’s pronouncement partially proves true, for the first piece of concrete evidence Franklin produces in proof of Arden’s murder is “this hand-towel and this knife” (XIV. 381) which Michael unwittingly left with the body. “Ah, Michael, through this thy negligence / Thou hast betrayed and undone us all,” Susan tells him; Michael can only respond, “I was so afraid I knew not what I did” (XIV. 382-84). In contrast, while Susan may protest that “fear frights away my wits” (324), she remains clear-eyed about the implications for their actions. Alice, beginning, perhaps, to regret their crime, draws Susan’s attention to the corpse of “sweet Arden, smeared in blood and filthy gore” (325). Susan responds, ominously and, to an extent, oddly, “My brother, you, and I shall rue this deed” (326). What makes Susan’s response peculiar is that she omits the other players in the act (notably Black Will, Shakebag, Greene, and Michael – and even, perhaps, Clarke), understanding the crime’s impact as falling more fully on herself, her mistress and Mosby. Susan, according to Alice, knows the full details of the plan: as Alice earlier
explains to Micheal, who wonders if Susan “shall know it [that Arden dies tonight],”
Susan “will be as secret as ourselves”; Michael registers this knowledge with odd glee:
“That’s brave!” (XIV. 160-62) Yet Susan seems to understand, as the Elizabethan court
system understood, that her mere presence in the home throughout Alice’s adultery
renders her liable in a charge of petty treason – that this adultery culminates in murder
seals her fate. Susan’s guilt, her complicity in Alice and Mosby’s crime, is something that
Arden seems particularly interested in exploring.

On the one hand, Arden ensures that we can make no mistake that Susan does
know something, even as the play does not reveal the full extent of her knowledge. The
first scene Susan appears in establishes that she knows of Alice and Mosby’s affair and
further suggests that she may know of their plot to murder Arden. When Susan responds
to Clarke’s suit by laying the decision at her brother’s “grant” (I.601) Mosby seizes on
Susan’s answer, promising to “grant” (604) her to Clarke if Clarke “grant[s]” (606) him
the poisoned crucifix. When Clarke inquires “but for whom is it” (620), Alice dismisses
the question, “leave that to us” (621). Susan remains onstage not only throughout this
exchange and discussion of the poison but also, after Clarke has departed, is present as
Mosby and Alice anticipate the what “cheer [Alice] keep[s]” (636) in her husband’s
absence: “I hope now Master Arden is from home, / You’ll give me leave to play your
husband’s part” (637-38), Mosby teases. Alice flirts back: “Mosby, you know who’s
master of my heart; / He well may be the master of the house” (639-40). That Susan is witness to this coquetry hints at a deeper awareness of in not complicity in their affair.265

V. Susan’s Other Lives

Indeed, in the ballad telling of Arden’s murder, Susan’s only crime appears to be her knowledge of the affair. “The Complaint and Lamentation of Mistress of Arden of Feversham,” published in 1633, offers an account of Arden’s murder told from the point of view of Alice266; the ballad appears based on the plot of Arden of Faversham rather than the historical account, for it adopts the names, key details, and plot alterations of the play rather than the true crime. One notable emendation the ballad offers on Arden’s telling is Susan’s involvement in the actual murder. Whereas Susan helps clean up and dispose of Arden’s body in Arden, in the ballad, Susan is not mentioned among those who commit or cover up the murder. In the ballad, Susan, as in Arden, is both Mosby’s sister and a maid in the Arden household. Likewise, marriage to Susan is the reward that prompts both a painter and Arden’s man to aid in Arden’s murder; unlike in Arden, however, Alice, not Mosby, is the sole contractor for both men. Mosby is presented first and foremost as Alice’s lover in the ballad; the murderous machinations appear to be all her own, excepting the final and fatal plan, which Alice describes as “Mosby and I, and all, our plot thus lay, / That he at Tables would with Arden play, / Black-will and Sakebag they themselves should hide / Untill that Mosby he a watchword cried” (145-

265 For the role of servants as witnesses against their mistresses in adultery trials, see Gowing, Domestic Dangers, 188-192.
266 Anonymous, [The] complaint and lamentation of Mistress Arden of [Fev]ersham” (London: C. W[right, 1633]). All citations to the ballad are to this text.
That “all,” however, does not seem to include Susan (nor does it seem to include Michael), and in the remaining account of the murder and disposal of the Arden’s body, Alice only names herself, Mosby, Blackwill and Shakebag.

Susan is not guiltless, for, as Alice details, while Susan may not have aided and abetted the murder, she was privy to the affair. Describing what happened when Arden was in London on business and the numerous if unsuccessful attempts made on his life during that sojourn, Alice recounts “Now all this while my husband was away / Mosby and I did revell night and day; / and Susan, which my waiting maiden was, / My Loves owne sister, knew how all did passe” (117-120). This is the full extent the ballad presents of Susan’s involvement; as in Arden, it is unclear prior to the murder what exactly it “kn[owing] how all did passe” entails: does it refer only to Mosby and Alice’s “revel[ry]” or are we to understand “how all did passe” as the plot against Arden’s life? What the ballad is clearer about – if only by omission – is that Susan is not named in the account of the murder. This difference presents no reduction in her final sentence, for, as in Arden, Susan is executed with her brother: “Mosby and his faire Sister, they were brought / To London for the trespasse they had wrought, / In Smithfield on a gibbet they did die. / A just reward for all their villanie” (173-76).267 In the narrowest interpretation of Susan’s guilt, her sole crime was countenancing Alice and Mosby’s affair, making the description of her “trespasse” as “villanie” and her hanging as “a just reward” seem extreme.

267 The punishment for women convicted of petty treason was to be burnt at the stake, not, as Susan is, hung “on a gibbet.” I read the ballad as staying true to its source – Arden of Faversham – in which Susan is executed along with her brother at Smithfield.
What makes Susan’s crime in the ballad all the more confusing is that the ballad’s accompanying woodcut (see Figure 1) shows what it does not tell. The woodcut, the same illustration as appears as the frontispiece to the 1633 Quarto of *Arden of Faversham*, clearly depicts two women with daggers in Arden’s murder scene. If the woodcut inaccurately renders Susan’s presence at the play’s climax, since she does not enter until after Arden has been murdered and Black Will and Shakebag have “la[id] the body in the countinghouse (XIV. 245), then the woodcut is even more in conflict with Susan’s actions in the ballad, since the ballad makes no mention of her presence during or immediately following the murder. The illustration, as R.A. Foakes so succinctly puts it,
is likely “simply inaccurate”\textsuperscript{268}, it is inaccurate, moreover, to both the play and the ballad, yet its inaccuracies suggest additional ways of reading Susan’s involvement in Arden’s murder. Susan’s omission in the ballad’s account of Arden’s murder, when read through the accompanying woodcut, suggests that her presence may merely be taken for granted. Part of being Alice’s dutiful “waiting maiden” entails waiting on Alice in all things – even murder.

The illustration, perhaps more than anything, is an eye-catching and exciting advertisement tool for both the ballad and the play, promising its purchasers a tale of chaotic violence. What seems to make the violence particularly titillating is the inclusion of not one but two murderous women. In her discussion of representations of petty treason and domestic violence in popular print, Dolan only cites accounts in which wives conspire with their male servant, who is also their lover, to murder their husband. Indeed, Dolan finds that “accounts of petty treason usually focus on a wife-servant conspiracy—which reproduces the heterosexual couple even as it overturns domestic hierarchy—and almost never depict women plotting together”; in contrast, she notes that “accounts of infanticide and witchcraft teem with women acting either alone or with other women.”\textsuperscript{269}

Despite writing on both Arden of Faversham and the related ballad, The complaint and lamentation of Mistress Arden, Dolan makes no mention of the accompanying woodcut, nor does she offer a discussion of Susan as she appears in any of the works. Susan’s presence in the woodcut would seem to argue against Dolan’s claim that the “wife-

\textsuperscript{268} Foakes, Illustrations of the English Stage: 1580-1642 (London: Scholar Press, 1985), 136. Foakes, whose primary concern is proving the woodcut original to the play rather than the ballad, offers what seems to be the most substantive (and longest) piece of scholarship on the image in his two page discussion.

\textsuperscript{269} Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, 14.
servant conspiracy” is of a “heterosexual couple” rather than “women plotting together,” since the illustration suggests that, in Arden’s murder, petty treason is a group effort, dependent not only on a heterosexual dyad but also on a network of domestic and commercial relations forged within and outside of the home. This is unfortunate because attention to Susan would seem, in fact, to strengthen Dolan’s larger argument about dangers lurking within the home. Not only that, but the woodcut’s failure to depict what the play will perform, its refusal, we might say, to be subordinated to the play’s plot, would add another layer to Dolan’s contention that, “in its feverish activity and large, industrious cast of murderous subordinates, Arden of Faversham, refusing to be simply Arden’s play, acts out petty treason.” The frontispiece that rebels against body of the playbook seems perfectly in keeping with the themes the play will, in fact, present.

If this is a marketing tool, then it is one feminist scholars should be particularly interested in, not only because of what the woodcut suggests about the selling power of female violence, but also because of the forces behind its production: the 1633 Quarto in which the woodcut first appears was printed and published by a woman. Elizabeth Allde printed the 1633 Quarto of Arden, having inherited the title from her husband, Edward Allde, who in turn had inherited it from the widow of Edward White, who had printed the 1599 Quarto (the play’s second edition). Elizabeth Allde’s involvement is all the more

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270 Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, 72.
271 DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks. Ed. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser. Created 2007. Accessed 3 July 2014. <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>. There are two issues of the 1633 quarto, one with Allde as printer (Greg 107c(*)), and one with Allde as printer and Stephen Pemell (also listed as Pernel and Pemel) as bookseller (Greg 107c(†)). According to Lesser, when only a printer is listed, it is usually an indication that the printer is also the bookseller; Lesser speculates that Allde enlisted Pemell in retailing and wholesaling the book, a common arrangement in the early modern English book trade. I am indebted to Zachary Lesser for his eagerness to answer my many questions and for his thoughtful research.
striking given the relative paucity of women as playbook publishers; indeed, in Zachary Lesser’s study of the early modern English book trade, he finds only four women (including Allde) who were printers and/or publishers of playbooks prior to the closing of the theaters in 1642. While we cannot know the extent of Allde’s involvement in the woodcut – did she commission it and, if so, did she stipulate the woodcut show what the play does not tell? – we do know that, as printer and publisher, she had a substantial role in bringing *Arden of Faversham* to press. If Allde did commission the woodcut, she may have been following what Claire Bourne identifies as a book selling practice of employing woodcuts that purposefully belie the action of a play; such a device, Bourne argues, served both to re-engage readers with familiar material and to heighten the suspense for naïve readers who would anticipate an incorrect outcome, inciting a kind of pleasurable confusion. Such a device would work particularly well for a play like *Arden*, with its true-crime plot. That, in 1633, not only a reprint of *Arden* appeared but also the ballad of Alice’s story attests to how notorious the murder remained nearly a century after the crime; at the same time, the passage of time stands to make the details of Arden and Alyce’s tale fade from memory. The woodcut may present a new twist on a familiar account, but it may also present an alternate familiar account – the crime as it

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272 Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)*, 12n29. As Lesser notes, women were by no means absent in the overall printing and publishing trade, but seem, for whatever reason, to have played a comparatively minimal role in bringing playbooks to market.

273 The woodcut was not the only innovation Allde’s edition featured. The previous two printings of *Arden* had employed black-letter for the play’s text; the 1633 quarto was set, however, in roman type. On what black letter may signify to early modern readers (as well as to scholars working on the early modern period), see Zachary Lesser, “Typographic Nostalgia: Play-Reading, Popularity, and the Meanings of Black Letter,” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Marta Straznicky, 99-126 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

274 Bourne, Claire, “‘High Designe’: Beaumont and Fletcher Illustrated” *English Literary Renaissance* 44.2 (2014): 292-93.
was, over eighty years after the fact, understood to have been committed. It, moreover, would be a kind of poetic justice to see Allde profiting from the specter of female violence, as if Allde exploits or traffics in Susan’s story in ways that parallel Alice’s use of Susan for her own gain.

What makes the woodcut’s imagining of Susan as wielding a weapon so much more disjunctive to what *Arden* offers is the way in which the author of *Arden* seems to in some ways minimize Susan’s crime. At the end of *Arden*, the Mayor condemns Alice, Mosby, Michael, Susan and Bradshaw. All assembled protest their guilt, blaming one another for their involvement. Susan exclaims, “Ah, gentle brother, where should I die? / I knew not of it till the deed was done” (XVIII.19-20), a statement that seems at odds with Susan’s presence during Alice and Mosby’s early conspiring or Alice’s promise to Michael that Susan shall “be as secret as ourselves” (XIV. 159). Rather, however, than highlight what appears to be Susan’s lie, the playwright shifts blame further away from her. As the Mayor pronounces their sentences, he declares:

> Bear Mosby and his sister to London straight,  
> Where they in Smithfield must be executed;  
> Bear Mistress Arden unto Canterbury,  
> Where her sentence is she must be burnt;  
> Michael and Bradshaw in Faversham must suffer death.  
> (XVIII. 28-32)

Susan’s method of death is a stark departure from the historical account, yet it is one that has, as far as I can tell, received no comment. Susan’s execution with Mosby in Smithfield presumably is meant to entail death by hanging, as the ballad makes explicit (“Mosby and his faire sister … in Smithfield on a gibbet did die”); as such, Susan suffers,
or, more accurately, benefits from, the fate of the historical Mosbie’s sister, Cisley Ponder, who was, according to the *Chronicles* “hanged in Smithfield at London.”

But Susan’s crime, as a servant who helps murder her master, was, according to early modern English penal code, petty treason, not murder. As such, her punishment should be, like Alice’s, to burn at the stake; indeed, this was the fate of the historical Ardern maid, Elsabeth Stafford, who was burned in Faversham. Holinshed recounts that the maid died “pitifullie bewailing hir case, and cried out on hir mistres that had brought hir to this end, for the which she would never forgive hir.” By sentencing Susan to hanging rather than the more gruesome burning alive, *Arden* not only imagines a less painful fate for Susan, but also imagines her complicity as something short of full guilt in Ardern’s overthrow. As Alice’s sentencing to burn at Canterbury attests, Ardern’s murder still registers as petty treason, but it is a crime only Alice’s punishment reflects. Susan’s final words have her resigned to her fate: “Seeing no hope on earth, in heaven is my hope” (XVIII. 36). Susan, throughout *Arden*, has had, effectively, “no hope on earth,” largely because her social and class positions place her in a subordinate position to a

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276 *Chronicles*, 1030.

277 Since the distinguishing feature of the punishment for petty treason versus for murder for men seems to be whether the convict was brought to the execution site on a hurdle (both sentences, along with many others, end in hanging), it is hard to tell whether Michael is adjudged to have committed petty treason. The *Chronicles* recounts simply that Michael “was hanged in chaines at Faversham” (130); the Wardmote book includes how Michael arrived at his execution – “the foresaide mighell Saunderson to be drawen and hanged in Chaynes w[ith]in the lib[er]ties of Fav[er]sham” (ctd. in Wine, *Arden*, 162) – and makes clear that Michael’s offense was understood, as one would expect, as petty treason.

278 Part of this stems from the way in which petty treason was a gendered punishment: women were burnt at the stake (as they were for high treason), while men convicted of petty treason were drawn to the execution site on a hurdle and then hanged (men charged with high treason were drawn and quartered); such a punishment, as Dolan notes, collapsed the distinction between petty and high treason for women, *Dangerous Familiars*, 21-24.
mistress and brother intent on using her for their own aims. By rewriting Susan’s crime as private and personal (aiding murder) rather than public and social (conspiring against her master), Arden imagines a justice unavailable to a domestic servant involved in her master or mistress’s murder. As Dolan has noted, tales of petty treason committed by servants depict subordinates “who are constituted and recognized as agents through their violent resistance to their master’s authority”; ironically, only by denying Susan the agency that might come from being adjudged to have committed petty treason can Arden offer Susan “hope.” To pass over Susan because she appears as merely an “innocent victim” is to miss the paradoxical richness of what has been read as flatness. Susan presents a cipher of tremendous import, pointing to the complex ways in which Arden engages in questions of gender, justice, and agency.

VI. Judging Arden

Scholars have offered thoughtful and nuanced readings of the way that Arden participates in contemporary debates about marriage, about notions of privacy and the home as a contested space increasingly seen as connected to the welfare of the polity; much attention has been directed at how male characters operate in Arden, particularly in relationship to issues of social and economic pressures and desires, on the historical

279 J. H. Baker usefully delineates how treason is adjudged: “There were no accessories in treason. Those who participated actively in a traitorous plot were principals; but other forms of implication in treason might constitute the distinct offense of ‘misprison.’ The prime meaning of misprison was bare concealment of treason, though it was also said to include a traitorous intent which was not accompanied by any overt act. Misprison of treason was not treason or felony but carried perpetual imprisonment and forfeiture of goods, chattles, and the profits of land during the offender’s life,” An Introduction to English Legal History, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 528-29. The petty treason charge could only apply to Alice and the servants in Arden’s household; all others who actively participate in the plot would be guilty only of murder.
background of the play, and of Alice’s rhetorical and sexual power: my argument is indebted to their scholarship. What has remained less fleshed out in scholarship on *Arden* is a reading of Alice and Susan that moves beyond a gendered ideology that focuses on women as objects or as agents only to the extent that they exert a problematic sexuality. It is vital to read the women in the play in light of their social status, noting, moreover that this is a status that they are keenly aware of, not simply something that the men who surround them exploit; heeding Alice and Susan’s positions in both the social/public and domestic/private hierarchies shows that the women are imbricated in the larger theme of *Arden* of money, land and people as things that can be “granted.” Lockwood astutely points out that “the kinds of commodities in which *Arden of Faversham* trades flicker between moral neutrality and moral charge: land, men, and murder complicate the boundary between persons and things; anything, it seems, can be granted, the same discursive figure governing both.” That Lockwood writes “men,” rather than “men and women” or “people,” is not merely grammatical convention, for, as earlier noted, Lockwood’s discussion of the “business-minded aspect of the play” (xii), reflecting broader trends in *Arden* scholarship, bears curiously little trace of Alice’s negotiations. For Lockwood, as for most critics, Alice and Susan are seen as operating and being operated differently than the male characters of *Arden*, and while gender certainly impacts their construction, it is, I argue, a mistake to not attend to the ways in which men and women “complicate the boundary between persons and things” through their traffic in themselves and in others. Moreover, when we do not attend to the ways in which as

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280 Lockwood, xix, emphasis in original.
Dolan reminds us, Alice and Susan have both social and class roles, we miss key elements of what *Arden* has to tell us about gender, marriage, and justice. We find that Alice is more than a sexually rapacious, passionate woman who seeks to upend the system she finds herself in and rallies against marriage; we press deeper than readings that have essentially dismissed Susan as “an innocent victim,” not only highlighting instead her role as trafficked by both her mistress and her brother and her seeming inability to traffic herself but also questioning just how much of “an innocent victim” *Arden*, in fact, allows Susan to be; and we see just how critical class is to women’s pursuit of justice – be it Alice’s allegations of abuse or Susan’s complicity in Arden’s murder.
CHAPTER FOUR

ALL’S [NOT] WELL: FEMALE SERVICE AND “VENDIBLE” VIRGINITY IN SHAKESPEARE’S PROBLEM PLAY

I. Introduction

Until recently, the protagonist of All’s Well That Ends Well failed to inspire the kind of critical admiration that the plucky, cross-dressing heroines of Shakespeare’s other comedies (Viola, Portia, Rosalind) enjoyed. Instead, Helena was derided by eighteenth-century critics as “cruel, artful, and insolent” and dismissed as “untrue to her sex” by nineteenth-century scholars for her “unwomanly” actions, particularly her pursuit of a man so much higher than she in rank. Frederick Boas, who coined and applied the term “problem play” to All’s Well, summed up one traditional view when he wrote that Helena “lacks the superb air of distinction which stamps Shakespeare’s heroines. She is, to say the truth, in the eyes of a generation unfamiliar with the feudal doctrine of service, a trifle

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282 Charlotte Lenox, Shakespear Illustrated: Or the Novels and Histories, on Which the Plays of Shakespeare are Founded, Vol I (London: A. Millar, 1753), 192.

283 Thomas Lounsbury, Shakespeare as Dramatic Artist (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 390. Lounsbury finds Helena’s pursuit of a man so much higher in rank than her particularly offensive, noting that the reverse situation would be far preferable: “Higher station or great superiority of fortune might justify a woman in going a long way in making advances to a lover of lower position who for that very reason would naturally be reluctant to put forward his pretensions But Helen has no such excuse” (390).
Helena’s determination to lose her virginity and her bawdy sparring with Parolles only added to the offense.

Small wonder, then, that feminist criticism of the late twentieth century found in Helena and the Florentine women a cause it could champion, for the dismissals of Helena were predicated on the belief that sexually desirous women were “bad.” For Carolyn Asp and others, Helena’s agency was inextricably linked to the play’s classification as a “problem play.” As Lynne Simpson noted in 1994, “Feminist studies celebrate [Helena] for actively pursuing the male love object, a gender reversal of the norms of patriarchal courtship.” Helena, in these readings, provided a model of female agency; moreover, the relationship between Helena, Diana, and the Widow emblematized the power of female relationships to stand up to patriarchal dominance. In the past decade, however, scholars have queried the reflexive assumption that Helena poses a threat to the status quo: for Jean Howard, “to read Helena as a protofeminist self-actualizing heroine”

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284 Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1900), 351-52. Boas characterized *All’s Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* as “Shakespeare’s problem-plays” because “the issues raised [within the plays] preclude a completely satisfactory outcome” and thus resist the generic confines of either tragedy or comedy (345).

285 Asp, “Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All’s Well That Ends Well,*” *Literature and Psychology* 32 (1986): 48. She notes that the majority of critics locate the problem at the “structural level rather than moving to the psychological level”; this move to the psychological level is what Asp is doing. Since Boas first offered this classification, nearly every scholar to write on *All’s Well* has grappled with identifying its “problem.” For more on *All’s Well* as a problem comedy, see David McCandless, *Gender and Performance in Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1997), 37; David Scott Kastan, “*All’s Well That Ends Well* and the Limits of Comedy,” *ELH* 52 (1985): 575-89; Paul Gleed, “Tying the (K)not: The marriage of tragedy and comedy in *All’s Well, That Ends Well,*” in *All’s Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays*, ed. Gary Waller (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 85-97; More recently, Ciara Rawnsley has turned to the darker side of fairy tales to illuminate the problems of *All’s Well*, “Behind the Happily-Ever-After: Shakespeare’s Use of Fairy Tales and *All’s Well That Ends Well,*” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 2 (2013): 149-154. In *What You Will*, Kathryn Schwarz begins her chapter on *All’s Well* by asking “what exactly causes the trouble” that leads to *All’s Well’s* designation as a “problem” (106).

is to misread Helena, whose “actions … shore up patriarchal structures.”²⁸⁷ Most recently, these questions have found their most provocative and exciting expression in Kathryn Schwarz’s work on Helena’s “constant will.”²⁸⁸ For Schwarz, the intensity of Helena’s “conservative motives” (107) works to “disable[] conventional distinctions between passive conformity and active impropriety” (111) and thus, contra Howard, lay bare the fault lines of patriarchal structures.

Focusing on the central yet overlooked place service holds in All’s Well, this chapter builds on the work that feminist scholarship has done to query our assumptions about the play, examining two intertwined threads previous criticism has not adequately addressed in its quest to locate the problem of All’s Well: the tendency to overlook the crucial roles money and class occupy in the play, and the tendency to romanticize the relationship between Helena, the Widow, and Diana. In an essay on the homoeroticism of Shakespeare’s comedies, Julie Crawford cautions queer scholarship to remember that “the fear of readings that are distasteful to us … can shut down reading practices”²⁸⁹; such a warning would seem equally relevant for feminist critics. Readings of All’s Well that move to “recuperate” Helena by praising her for pursuing her desires and for forging female solidarity miss two important features of Helena’s agency: it depends on her financial standing, and it comes at the literal and figurative expense of other men and women.

²⁸⁸ Schwarz, What You Will.
As I will show, criticism of *All’s Well* has turned a blind eye to the negotiations between Helena and the Florentine women, insisting on seeing the bonds between these women as ties of friendship rather than of finance. In a statement typical of these readings, David Bergeron writes of the “new solidarity with other women” that Helena finds when she “gets linked with the Widow of Florence and her daughter Diana, two crucial characters for determining Helena’s social identity and providing her with narrative options.” What this reading misses is that what gives Helena “narrative options” and “determines her social identity” is not friends but *money*. Helena does not “get linked with” the women – she employs them as her servants. Moreover, the sacks of gold and other markers that she is “great in fortune” (3.7.14) that Helena is able to produce – presumably bestowed upon her by the King and the Countess – are what give her the “options” to travel to Florence, to buy the Widow and her family a meal, to enter into contract with them, to buy a bed-trick, to return first to the Court and then to Rousillon, to get a message to the King, to enable Diana to post bail, and, ultimately, to claim Bertram as “doubly won” (5.3.314).

To redress the critical tendency to separate women’s relationships from their finances, this chapter examines female traffic in two of the key economies of the play, service and marriage, and their correspondent commodities, people (service) and virginity (marriage). By highlighting the economic dimensions of *All’s Well*, in particular the role

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291 References to the play, unless otherwise noted, are from William Shakespeare, *All’s Well that Ends Well*, ed. Susan Snyder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
Helena plays as a mistress to the Widow Capilet and her daughter, Diana.\(^{292}\) I show that Helena is not a passive victim of patriarchy who finds nurturing and egalitarian sisterhood with the Florentine women. Instead, Helena is a woman keenly aware of both her own financial situation and that of those surrounding her, fluent in the market value of virginity, and masterful at getting what she wants.

What Helena wants, however, does not necessarily align with what feminist criticism has wanted Helena to want. As Schwarz has argued, feminist scholarship has declared Helena a “disorderly woman” while missing that she is disorderly precisely because of the intensity of her “conservative motives”: “that she seeks legitimate endorsement of a socially sanctioned bond tends to slip the mind.”\(^{293}\) Schwarz’s work offers a useful corrective to feminist work that has idealized Helena; however, because Schwarz focuses solely on Helena’s pursuit of Bertram, she does not account for the ways in which Helena’s relationships with other women are socially and financially motivated. Building off Schwarz’s work, by examining the homosocial “socially sanctioned bonds” that Helena forges and strengthens, I demonstrate that issues of economics and self-interest govern not only male-female relationships but also those between women. Such attention highlights the role that service – conceived of as economic or sexual or both – plays in driving the action of *All’s Well*. Moreover, attention to Helena’s self-interest exposes the aspects of the play that do not fit comfortably with feminist ideals of mutuality and egalitarianism, from fantasies of

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topping and (ab)use to the packaging of people as commodities to the play’s insistence that asserting individual agency comes at the expense of the others. Helena is not, as Boas claimed, “a trifle bourgeoise” – she is thoroughly bourgeoise, as are the concerns of this play.

II. Class Fantasies

At the heart of All’s Well is not only, as previous scholarship has suggested, a battle between the sexes but also an intense focus on class and money. While critics have noted the ways in which Helena’s desire for Bertram is hindered by their class disparity, in particular how unusual the play’s drastic class-crossing is in Shakespeare’s canon, less attention has been paid to the ways in which her desire for him is predicated upon that very disparity. Helena’s first expression of her love for Bertram meditates on their difference in social rank and the consequent impossibility of their love:

'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me.
In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
Th’ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
The hind that would be mated by the lion
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour, to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls
In our heart’s table – heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favor.
But now he’s gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics. (1.1.87-100)

294 Northrop Frye emphasizes how unusual this disparity is in Shakespeare’s comedies, noting that “All’s Well is almost the only play in which there is an explicit social promotion in the foreground of the action,” The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 48.
As Crawford has noted, this passage is not just about Helena’s love for Bertram but “also concerned with social ambition” (2011, 41): but what if, to push Crawford’s point further, the “ambition in my love” is in fact what generates that love? In her declaration, Helena repeatedly describes Bertram in positions that place him either at a remove from or “so above” her. Her description of Bertram inverts the gender roles associated with chivalric romance (Bloom 2010, 15-16), rather than the knight who longs for the princess, here, the maiden composes the blazon. What would normally be the subject (Bertram) becomes the object, and yet, as subject, Helena demands to be placed in the object position.

Helena’s assertion that “the hind that would be mated by the lion / Must die for love” takes on a new meaning if understood in this context. The syntax of the sentence seems relatively straightforward: “the hind,” a female deer, is the subject, “that would be mated by the lion” its appositive, and “must die for love” the main verb clause: yet the imperative and agent-less action of the sentence – “the hind must die” – is so strong that it threatens to hide the rich perversity of the hind’s desire. The hind “would be mated” by the lion; it is not the lion that desires to mate the hind. “Mated” here seems to carry both of its contemporary denotations: “to render powerless; to overcome; to defeat; to kill” (OED v1) and also “to marry; to match with; to equal” (OED v3). The prior sense of the

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295 Crawford, “All’s Well That Ends Well: Or, Is Marriage Always Already Heterosexual?” in Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Works of William Shakespeare, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 41. Moreover, as Snyder writes in a gloss to the line, the additional meaning of hind as “servant or menial” further emphasizes the “disparity of rank on the chain of being between the valorous king of beasts and the timorous hind,” All’s Well, 1.1.93n
word is what we would expect a lion to do to a hind – namely, kill it – while the latter sense of the word is what Helena professes as her goal – “to wed” Bertram. Although “to mate” does not acquire its sense of “pairing animals for breeding” (OED v3 - 5a, b) until the nineteenth century, the way Helena uses “would be mated,” particularly her labeling of the hind’s desire as “for love,” connotes copulation. Such an interpretation is furthered by the sense that “die” carries of not only death but also sexual orgasm, *le petit mort*.

The image of the lion “mating” the hind – overcoming and rendering her powerless, while matching and marrying her – not only suggests a sexual union but also foreshadows precisely the experience that Bertram and Helena (pretending to be Diana) will recount. Diana instructs Bertram to remain lying “but an hour” after he has “conquered my yet-maiden bed” (4.2.57-58), and Helena, who takes Diana’s place in the “maiden bed,” muses after the fact that men can “such sweet use make of what they hate” (4.4.22). As Helena’s repeated invocations of Bertram’s superior status and her pairing of “sweet” with “use” suggest, the desire to be mated with (married to) Bertram is bound up in a desire to be mated by (overcome by) Bertram. Rather than the line being, for David McCandless, an expression of a “passive … ‘feminine’ posture”297 or, for Susan Snyder, a “despairing withdrawal” in striking contrast to Helena’s “energetic plan to follow Bertram to Paris” and cure the King (1988, 67),298 the analogy speaks of a desire for a

298 Snyder, “*All’s Well that Ends Well* and Shakespeare’s Two Helens: Text and Subtext, Subject and Object,” *English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 (1988): 67.
sexuality that is sado-masochistic and derives its pleasure from its capacity for annihilation.\textsuperscript{299}

This is not the only instance in which Helena expresses a fantasy to be topped by Bertram. Helena conceives of her relationship to Bertram in terms of service – which is, in fact, its basis – but Helena inflates the nature of her obligation. A “gentlewoman” of the Countess, “bequeathed” (1.1.38; 1.3.101) to the Countess by Helena’s father, Helena constitutes one of the many servants who make up the Countess’ household. Yet instead of seeing her service as circumscribed by bonds of domestic labor, Helena imagines what she renders as if it were a feudal duty.\textsuperscript{300} When the Countess tell Helena, “I am a mother to you” (1.3.137), Helena resists, insisting on the class difference between herself and Bertram:

The Count Rousillon cannot be my brother:  
I am from humble, he from honoured name;  
No note upon my parents, his all noble.  
My master, my dear lord he is, and I  
His servant live and will his vassal die.  
\hfill (1.3.155-59)

The most obvious reason why Helena does not want Bertram to be her brother is that she wants him as her husband; a sibling relationship posits her desired union as incest. Yet her insistence on their difference verges on the obsequious and depends on degrading her own lineage. Helena here asserts her “humble … name” and “no note upon [her] parents,” yet the Countess, Lafew, and even the King make much of her father’s name,


\textsuperscript{300} Boas finds this consistent with the “semi-religious element in Helena’s mission,” part of her “medieval conception” of the “service” in the “technical sense” that, “as a dependent of the great house [of Rousillon],” she owes Bertram, \textit{Shakespeare and His Predecessors}, 350.
and Helena herself uses it to her advantage when she comes to cure the King. Indeed, so great is the note upon her father that, when the King says, “I knew him” (2.1.100) she responds, “The rather I will spare my praises towards him. / Knowing him is enough” (101-2). While such protestations to the Countess may read as humility, Helena’s insistence that Bertram is “my master, my dear lord” and that she will “his servant live and will his vassal die” bespeaks an overinvestment in a service relationship.

Crucial to Helena’s formulation of her love for Bertram is her sense of his elevation above her. When she finally confesses her love to the Countess, she portrays her love for Bertram as a kind of (false) theology:

    Indian-like,
    Religious in mine error, I adore
    The sun that looks upon his worshipper
    But knows of him no more.

(1.3.204-7)

This essentially reiterates her prior description of her love as “idolatrous fancy,” the earlier “bright particular star” now morphing into “the sun.” In whatever form Helena’s analogies take, they consistently place Bertram above her: be he the sun, a star, a lion, her master, or her lord, Bertram is always on top. Moreover, in elevating their bond out of the domestic sphere and into the realm of cortoisie, Helena’s desire for Bertram replicates the class discourse of the traditional sonnet sequence while at the same time subverting the gender norms associated with such love poetry.301 Where, for Petrarch, Laura – whose name puns on both l’aura (the air) and la laurea (the poet’s laurels) – is both the

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Helena’s fantasy of loving what is above her collides with Bertram’s refusal to love what is beneath him. Helena insists, even in marriage, on seeing her relationship to Bertram as one of service. When Helena turns to Bertram and asks to marry him, she frames the proposal in the language she had earlier used to describe her love: “I dare not say I take you; but I give / Me and my service, ever whilst I live, / Into your guiding power” (2.3.103-5). Yet Helena’s service is precisely what Bertram does not want.\footnote{Later, when wooing Diana, Bertram will respond to Diana’s charge that he “owe[s]” his wife (Helena) “duty” (4.2.12-13), that he was “compelled to her, but I love thee / ... and will for ever / Do thee all rights of service” (15-17), to which Diana retorts, “Ay, so you serve us / Till we serve you. But when you have our roses, / You barely leave the thorns to prick ourselves, / And mock us with our bareness” (17-20). Diana’s charge proves true about the kind of “service” she can expect from the Count, who will dismiss her a “fond and desp’rate creature” (5.3.178) and “common gamester to the camp” (189) when she demands that he recognize her as his wife.}

Drawing on the domestic ties Helena alludes to, Bertram seizes on that service bond as grounds for why their marriage is outrageous.\footnote{On the complex and potentially threatening class positioning of servants in the early modern household, see Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, esp. 64-67.} In keeping with the play’s reliance on repetition and echo, the revulsion Bertram feels for marriage to Helena evokes the arguments Helena supplies to the Countess for why Bertram cannot be her brother. Bertram suggests that marriage to Helena is unnatural because she is of his household – as his servant, she is too far beneath him in rank to be his wife, and, moreover, as his servant, she functions as an extension of his family (Weil 2005, 67).\footnote{For more on parity in marriage on and off the early modern stage, see Loreen Giese, Courtships, Marriage, Customs and Shakespeare’s Comedies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), esp. 49-80. Some critics have also been dismissive of the significance of class concerns for Bertram and Helena: see, for example, McCandless, Gender and Performance, 52-53.} Bertram protests the proposed marriage, answering the King’s claim, “Thou know’st she has raised me
from my sick bed” (2.3.112), with the retort, “But follows it, my lord, to bring me down / Must answer for your raising? I know her well: / She had her breeding at my father’s charge” (113-15). Bertram’s statement plays on the meanings of both “breeding” and “charge,” emphasizing her inferiority to him and further suggesting that Helena is not so much a servant in his household as an animal, a complaint that echoes the bestial language Helena herself uses to theorize their class difference.

But while for Helena, being “the hind that would be mated” is thrilling, for Bertram, matching with his servant holds no appeal. Bertram’s reminder that Helena was raised “at my father’s charge” works, like the Countess’ repeated description of Helena as “bequeathed” to her, to concretize service ties as commercial relationships. That Helena “had her breeding at my father’s charge” suggests not only the Count of Rousillon’s command over Helena’s parents but also his financial responsibility for them (OED charge n10a). This reality of domestic service, in which bestowing permission to marry (and thus permission to procreate) was the prerogative of the master or mistress, is glimpsed, comically, in Lavatch’s request to the Countess to marry Isabel (a request, it should be noted, that the Countess does not grant – and that Lavatch eventually withdraws). Yet while Bertram’s rejection of Helena may seem distasteful, it is not inaccurate – from a legal standpoint, as maid to and possibly ward of the Countess, Helena is essentially a commodity of the Rousillon household.305 Bertram, however, is also a servant: as the King’s ward and vassal, he is powerless to refuse the King’s

305 Which is also why she must secure permission from the Countess before she can go to the court. For a discussion of wardship as it pertains to both Bertram and Helena, see Terry Reilly, “All’s Well, That Ends Well and the 1604 Controversy Concerning the Court of Wards and Liveries,” in All’s Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays, ed. Gary Waller (New York: Routledge, 2007), 208-20.
command that he marry Helena. Helena and Bertram’s marriage highlights the limits of seeing female agency as a proxy for gender parity, for Helena’s agency comes at the expense of Bertram’s, as it will later come at the expense of Diana’s. The irony of this marriage is that, in promising to raise Helena up to Bertram’s status, the King creates a situation that neither Helena nor Bertram wants: she does not want to be raised, and he does not want to be brought down.

III. Helena’s Household

Refusing to consummate his marriage to Helena, Bertram deserts both his bride and King to fight the war in Florence; Helena, under the guise of pilgrimage, follows him to Florence, where she enlists two of the women she meets, a widow and her daughter, in a plot to win Bertram. Money is the key element to the relationship between Helena and the Florentine women, yet readings of this relationship have essentially disavowed its economic basis. Crawford sees the women as Helena’s “homosocial coterie,” while McCandless describes Helena’s stay in Florence as a “kind of secular nunnery,” where Helena “join[s] a confederacy of women who assist her.” Asp avers that Helena finds in Diana and the Widow “the loyalty, support, and kindness of women” and repeatedly characterizes their relationship as “bonding” (55, 56, 59). Likewise, Snyder has written that “what Helena walks into, and quickly joins, is a …

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308 McCandless, Gender and Performance, 49.
self-confirming friendship … Solidarity strengthens Helena; it empowers Diana. Bergeron, too, invokes the “new solidarity with other women” that Helena finds in Florence. Such formulations conflate bonds of economic service with sisterhood and fail to do justice to the complex class negotiations between the women. Closer attention, however, to the interactions between Helena, the Widow and Diana suggests that the truisms of cultural feminism do not account for what we witness. If anything, as Schwarz’s argument on All’s Well would suggest, female characters can be just as invested in the systems of power as male characters are and may work hard to perpetuate patriarchal structures because, in fact, these structures work for them.

Like Helena, the Widow’s actions are driven by social ambition. When the Widow first appears, she is in the company of her daughter, Diana, and their neighbor, Mariana, clamoring for a view of the marching troops. While Mariana cautions Diana to “beware of them” (3.5.18), the Widow and Diana’s admiration of the men, which fixates on Bertram’s nobility, suggests just how aware the women are of the financial gain they stand to earn from Bertram’s suit. The Widow later tells Helena that Bertram serenades Diana nightly and that, despite their best efforts, “it nothing steads us / To chide him from our eaves; for he persists / As if his life lay on’t” (3.7.41-43), but here we find Diana and the Widow “persist[ing]” in their effort to spy the Count. The Widow urges Diana and Mariana to “come” lest they “lose all the sight” of the troops, only to lament “we have lost our labor” when she realizes the men have “gone a contrary way” (3.5.1-9). As the women “labor” to see the soldiers, the Widow and Diana speak admiringly of Bertram;

310 Snyder, “Shakespeare’s Two Helens,” 77.
indeed, Diana’s first words are in praise of Bertram: “They say the French count has done most honorable service” (3-4), and her mother responds with reports of his military prowess. Only Mariana voices skepticism about Bertram, warning Diana to “take heed of this French earl. The honor of a maid is her name, and no legacy is so rich as honesty” (11-13). In this quip, we see perhaps a glimpse of why the Widow seems less determined to deter her daughter than Mariana does. The emphasis on Bertram’s nobility – he is “the French count,” the “French earl,” he has “done most honorable service” – and Mariana’s invocation of the “rich” “legacy” Diana stands to lose also hints at the rich legacy Diana could claim from a liaison with the Count. Perhaps for this reason the Widow vacillates between encouraging and discouraging Diana’s interest in Bertram.

The potential boon Bertram’s attentions present for the Capilet household are first and foremost on the Widow’s mind, as she shrewdly calculates how to leverage Bertram’s interest for her financial gain. Upon learning that her newest lodger, Helena, “know[s] the [Count’s] lady” (3.5.55), the Widow informs Helena of Bertram’s interest in her daughter: “this young maid might do her [the Count’s wife] / A shrewd turn, if she pleased” (56-57). The Widow not only suggests that it is entirely up to Diana whether to sleep with the Count but also that Diana’s actions would affect not Diana, her mother, or the Count, so much as they would affect the Count’s wife. The Widow’s understanding of the impact of Diana’s actions on the Count’s wife suggests that the Widow envisions a kind of female economy of exchange. This is fitting in multiple ways: the bed-trick plot relies on collaboration between women, and it is predicated upon an exchangeability of women that benefits women as well as men. Not all women benefit equally from this
exchange, for while the Widow here suggests that Diana may do as she “please[s],” the Widow and Helena are in fact the agents of the transaction, and Diana their object. Finally, the Widow’s formulation of the “shrewd turn” her daughter could do to the Count’s wife ironically anticipates the “shrewd turn” that Diana will do for the Count’s wife (Helena) and, of course, the “shrewd turn” that Diana and Helena will do the Count. Together, these points add up to a plan that will enable the Widow, through cooperation with Helena and manipulation of Diana, to move closer to her former “well born” estate (3.7.4).

What may come as a surprise is that, for the Widow, moving up the social ladder actually entails entering the service economy. An independent household manager (and possibly owner), the Widow abandons being the head of her own household in Florence for the opportunity afforded her and her daughter to become a part of the household headed by Helena. By forsaking the position of mistress of her own home for servant in the Count of Rousillon’s household, the Widow makes a trade-off that stands to bring her and her daughter significant social and economic capital. In so doing, the Widow’s move from independence to dependence challenges the traditional telos about service, marriage, and financial security. While scholars have written about the flexible nature of the service economy in the Renaissance, they tend to focus on how periods of service provided young men and women with the skills and capital needed to establish their own households.312 The typical trajectory for service – what young men and women do before

312 David Schalwkwk, *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 20-22. I write here of lower-class service models. The gentry also would send their children to the homes of other members of the upper-class to gain skills, but we might think of this sending-out model as predicated more
marriage – suggests that marriage is the end goal, and that service provides the means and money to achieve it. This is a plot played over again and again in comedy: the reward for dutiful service is marriage and independence.\textsuperscript{313} What the Widow’s turn from merchant to servant tells us, however, is that the goal is not necessarily marriage or independence but rather financial security. This adds to the wealth of evidence found both in the historical record and in this play and others that attests to the tremendous weight women placed and were imagined to place upon financial considerations as they evaluated life decisions – whether that be marriage, work, or interpersonal relationships.

Helena and the Widow immediately forge a bond, albeit united not in “an instant friendship”\textsuperscript{314} but in mutually beneficial self-interest. In what we might understand as the first instantiation of Helena as the Widow’s mistress, Helena seizes on the information the Widow offers about Bertram’s designs on her daughter and bids her hostess to invite Diana and Mariana to dine with them, not only pledging to pay for their meal but also suggesting that further remunerations are in store. Helena promises the Widow: “to requite you further, / I will bestow some precepts of this virgin / Worthy the note” (3.5.95-97). The suggestion that the “precepts” or orders Helena will give Diana provide additional recompense illustrates that Helena is already framing the service Diana and the


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{313} At least, we could say this about city comedy. For comedies that focus on the households of the nobility, the servants who marry remain within the household (for example, Nerissa and Gratiano in \textit{The Merchant of Venice} or even Maria and Sir Toby Belch in \textit{Twelfth Night}).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{314} Judith Weil, \textit{Service and Dependency in Shakespeare’s Plays} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65.}
Widow will perform in terms of financial gain. Addressing the Widow in the second person, while referring to Diana as “this virgin,” creates a distinction in the impact of Helena’s action: the “virgin” gets the precepts, but the Widow reaps the rewards. Furthermore, Helena’s language deploys social class in a way that highlights the difference between the women. The basic premise of her thought – that she should “requite [the Widow] further” – positions Helena as the overly courteous benefactress and the Widow as her magnanimous host, when in fact the only “requital” Helena owes the Widow is fee for lodging. This is not unlike what Helena does with Bertram and the service she owes him, rhetorically transforming economic and domestic bonds with the language of courtesy and chivalry. The oddity of Helena’s offering to the Widow is highlighted by the dissonance produced by her use of the formal “you” rather than “thee” to address a subordinate; this underscores the newness and strangeness of Helena’s social position, as if she were unaccustomed to the language she can now speak of mastery – or, perhaps, this is a deliberate move on Helena’s part, designed to flatter the Widow. Most importantly, Helena’s offer of overcompensation for the service the Widow renders as Helena’s hostess puts the Widow in a kind of debt to Helena, which the Widow and Diana can (and will) repay upon receiving the “precepts” Helena “bestow[s].”

The connotation of “precept” seems out of keeping with what Helena will tell the Widow and Diana, but it is notable that Helena describes what she will relay as “precepts.” “Precept” means not only a “command” but often carries a religious connotation, such as a divine injunction or an order for moral conduct. Helena is careful to set up the illicit activity she plots in terms that present Diana’s proposed conduct with
Bertram as in keeping with the Ten Commandments, themselves often referred to as the “ten precepts” (OED n1a). In addition to its religious connotation, a “precept” also has forensic and fiscal applications: a “precept” may describe a written legal order, issued by a legal authority (e.g. judge, monarch, sheriff); a written legal order for a payment; “a document granting possession of something or conferring a privilege”; or “a written letter of credit or similar document authorizing a payment to be made from funds” (OED n4a, b, c). In a sense, obeying the “precepts” (as in command) that Helena “bestows” upon Diana generates another “precept” – the warrant for “payment to be made from [Helena’s] funds.” Helena’s use of the verb “bestow” further distances her from the Widow and Diana by implying that the “precepts” she tells them of are in fact gifts. Of course, a gift is never just a gift and, in fact, demands the receiver “recompense” she who bestows.315 This layered meaning of “bestow some precepts” offers a microcosm of the complex negotiations between Helena, the Widow Capilet, and Diana, in that underlying what is presented as simply moral and friendly is, in fact, a shrewd economic transaction.

When we next see Helena and the Widow, Helena is in the midst of “bestow[ing] some precepts,” but noticeably absent from the dialogue is the “virgin,” Diana. Instead, Helena explains to the Widow how Diana can help her – and how, in turn, she can help them. The discussion between the two women, from the start of the scene, is a kind of coded financial negotiation; it is not, as Snyder writes, a scene of “conference and mutual

assurance among the women to remind us how important their solidarity is.”

In response to the goods Helena produces and the story she has told, the Widow exclaims:

Though my estate be fall’n, I was well born,  
Nothing acquainted with these businesses,  
And would not put my reputation now  
In any staining act.

(3.7.4-7)

The Widow takes pains to contrast her former “well born” position with her current “fallen” “estate,” while emphasizing that even in this diminished status, she is not only above but also “nothing acquainted with these businesses.” While “these businesses” lacks a clear antecedent, the Widow draws a clear connection between Helena’s proposal and “staining act[s],” suggesting that the “businesses” of Helena’s proposal are tantamount to pandering. In this scene, the Widow highlights the impact Diana’s actions will have not on Diana but on herself. This stands in direct contrast to the Widow’s initial discussion of Bertram and her daughter. Earlier, the Widow relates that Diana might sleep with Bertram “if she [Diana] pleased” (3.5.68), implying that the decision to have sex with Bertram was Diana’s and Diana’s alone. Furthermore, when the Widow earlier discussed Bertram’s “suit,” she noted that it might “corrupt the tender honor of a maid,” but assured Helena that Diana “keeps her guard” (3.5.71-73). In this initial discussion of her daughter and Bertram, the Widow lays both the responsibility and impact on her daughter: it is Diana’s “pleas[ure],” “honor,” and “guard” that are at stake. But when propositioned by Helena, the Widow emphasizes the impact of her daughter’s actions on herself: professing herself “nothing acquainted with these businesses,” she declares, “I … would not put my reputation now / In any staining act” (emphasis added).

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316 Snyder, “Shakespeare’s Two Helens,” 77.
But what if reputation means something different for the Widow than it does for her daughter? Yes, women’s chastity was seen as inextricably linked with their reputation, but that does not mean that the Widow’s “reputation” is as bound up in “[un]stained” sexuality as is Diana’s “honor.” The word “businesses” points to what may actually be at stake for the Widow if her “reputation” is “stained”: her business. The Widow’s livelihood depends on her lodgers and, given the reputation that inns and hostels had for being de facto brothels, it starts to seem that the “reputation” the Widow does not want “stained” is that of her “business[ ],” not her body.317

The Widow’s concern elicits Helena’s assurance that the Widow will not “err in bestowing” the “good aid that I of you shall borrow” (3.7.11, 12), but Helena’s words are not enough: the Widow requires more concrete (and permanent) collateral – money – and carefully calibrates her words and actions to maximize the payment she will receive. The Widow moves the conversation towards what kind of “good aid” she will receive in return by reminding Helena of her wealth: “I should believe you,” the Widow demurs, “For you have show’d me that which well approves / You’re great in fortune” (12-14). The calculated hesitancy of the Widow’s “should believe” ups the ante, forcing Helena to show her hand and hand over the money:

Take this purse of gold,  
And let me buy your friendly help thus far,  
Which I will over-pay and pay again  
When I have found it.  
(3.7.14-17)

317 For the vulnerable nature of women’s words, bodies, and the inextricable link to perceived chastity, see “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 123-42; see also Gowing, Domestic Dangers.
Helena abandons her earlier abstract verb of “bestowal” and switches to the language of commerce, but the “friendly help” is not purely “friendly,” it is bought. Furthermore, Helena not only asks to “buy” the Widow’s cooperation but also promises that, in return for that help, Helena will “over-pay and pay again.” After Helena explains what Diana is to do, still the Widow does not consent – instead, she simply acknowledges that she understands what and why Helena is asking: “Now I see the bottom of your purpose” (28-29). Crucially, the Widow’s reply not only continues to withhold consent but also emphasizes the nefariousness of Helena’s plot. By stating that only “now” can she “see the bottom,” the Widow stresses the dark, murky nature of Helena’s “purpose,” reinvigorating the Widow’s earlier charge of her unwillingness to jeopardize her “reputation” with “these businesses” and “any staining act.” Again, Helena verbally assures the Widow, explaining that her plan is “lawful” (30) and that Diana will be “most chastely absent” (34) at the appointed “encounter” (32). Words carry less weight with the Widow, however, for Helena only secures the Widow’s cooperation by promising to deliver more money upon completion of the plan: “to marry her, I’ll add three thousand crown / To what is passed already” (35-36). Not until this point does the Widow actually acquiesce: “I have yielded” (36).

What the Widow has “yielded” and Helena “buy[s]” is, in fact, Diana – who, it should be noted, is entirely absent from the scene. For a “purse of gold,” “three thousand crowns” and the further promise of more “over-pay[ment],” the Widow rents her daughter out to Helena for the evening. Notwithstanding the money that physically changes hands in this scene (“take this purse of gold”), critics insist on overlooking what
the play stages before our eyes, reading Helena’s relationship with the Widow and Diana as one of friendship and camaraderie, rather than of service and commerce. So persistent is this resistance that even when critics acknowledge the financial dimension to the women’s relationship, they fail to follow the money. In the introduction to the Oxford edition of All’s Well, Snyder notes that the Widow’s help is secured with a “large bribe,”318 but, when reading 3.7, she nonetheless romanticizes the bond between the two women. In a final push to convince the Widow, Helena exclaims:

You see it lawful then, then: it is no more
But that your daughter, ere she seems as won,
Desires this ring; appoints him an encounter;
In fine, delivers me to fill the time,
*Herself most chastely absent. After*,
To marry her I’ll add three thousand crowns
To what is passed already.

(3.7.30-36, emphasis added)

Snyder points out, in her notes to the text, that the line in which Helena describes where exactly Diana will not be during the bed-trick (“Herself most chastely absent. After”), is metrically “somewhat short” – one beat short of pentameter (3.7.34n). Snyder posits that if the shortness is “intentional, the pause would naturally occur after *absent*, as Helena passes over the actual *encounter* in agitated silence” (ibid., emphasis in original). But what if the pause after “absent” is not, as Snyder speculates, Helena’s “agitated silence” at the thought of the “actual encounter” but Helena’s pause as she waits for the Widow to agree to her plan? When the Widow does not immediately acquiesce, Helena then resorts again to “buy[ing]…friendly help,” and promises the additional “three thousand crowns.”

This money, in theory, goes not to the Widow but to furnish Diana with an ample

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318 Snyder, Introduction, 6.
dowry, but Diana’s desires are never mentioned, and it is taken for granted by the Widow, Helena, and the King that Diana’s greatest reward will be her own marriage. Diana, however, is far less keen to marry than those around her seem to notice. After Diana and Bertram arrange their “encounter” and he leaves, Diana declares her intent to remain a virgin: “Marry that will, I live and die a maid” (4.2.74). Her distaste for marriage goes unacknowledged by the other characters: in the exchange economy of the play, the only way to requite Diana is to marry her. Helena later assures the Widow:

Doubt not but heaven
Hath brought me up to be your daughter’s dower
As it hath fated her to be my motive
And helper to a husband.

(4.4.18-21)

The implication is that, without Helena, Diana would have no dowry; with Helena as “helper,” Diana will have the means to marry up and thereby recoup the losses of the Widow’s “fallen” estate. The “nobly born” Widow may be able to “nobly” marry Diana, creating a better life for both mother and daughter. What further complicates Helena and the Widow’s plan to marry off Diana is that both women have experienced a change in fortune due to marriage. Helena, from “humble…name” (1.3.156), aided by the “honor and wealth” (2.3.145) bestowed upon her by the King, marries a Count. The Widow, “nobly born” yet reduced to renting rooms in her home to lodgers, seems to owe her “fallen” estate to her condition of widowhood.319 Helena thus aims to recreate, in miniature scale, for Diana what the King has done for her.

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319 For widowhood as a time of economic difficulty, see Erickson, *Women and Property*, esp. 200-203; Brodsky “Widows in Late Elizabethan London.”
IV. Diana’s Service

What Helena notably fails to recognize, however, is that Diana expresses no desire to marry, preferring to emulate her namesake. Indeed, the only desire for her future that Diana expresses is to remain with Helena. When Helena informs Diana that she must still “suffer / Something in my behalf” (4.5.27-28) Diana responds:

Let death and honesty
Go with your impositions, I am yours
Upon your will to suffer.
(4.4.28-31)

Diana’s pledge to Helena and bestowal of herself – “I am yours” – evokes the language Helena earlier uses with Bertram. When choosing Bertram as her husband, Helena avers, “I dare not say I take you, but I give / Me and my service, ever whilst I live / Into your guiding power” (2.3.103-5). Helena’s pledge of “service,” with its pun on both domestic duty and sexual pleasure, finds a parallel in Diana’s assertion that she is “upon [Helena’s] will to suffer,” and, furthermore, echoes Helena description of her position to her husband: Helena tells Parolles, “In everything I wait upon his [Bertram’s] will” (2.4.55).

In Diana’s declaration, we also see a parallel grammar to Helena’s fantasies of submission and self-abnegation. The most straightforward reading of the line, “upon your will to suffer” suggests that Diana will do whatever Helena “will[s]” or desires; a second, darker reading of the line foreshadows how Diana will suffer because of Helena’s “will.”320 Both meanings work together to infuse Diana’s vow “to suffer” with the

320 The contemporary pun on “will” and genitals further imbibes Diana’s declaration with a sexual charge. Shakespeare’s Sonnet 135 has inspired much discussion of the sexual meanings of “will”: see, for example, Joel Fineman, Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), esp. 242-296; see also Schwarz, What You Will, for readings of “will.”
masochistic energy that we see in Helena’s fantasy of “the hind that would be mated by the lion / Must die for love.” The similarity between the representations of Diana’s desire for Helena and Helena’s desire for Bertram demonstrates that relationships between women are not necessarily more egalitarian than those between men and women. Moreover, in presenting us with an erotics in which subject position, rather than object gender, defines desire, *All’s Well* offers a counter-narrative to assumptions around heterosexuality and female desire, suggesting both the possibilities for and limits of female autonomy in fantasies of submission.

While scholars have turned to Helena and the Florentine women to locate egalitarianism in a play preoccupied by if not predicated upon difference, the female homosocial relations of *All’s Well* do not seem to offer what critics have projected onto them. If what scholars seek is egalitarianism in relationships typically bound by uneven power dynamics, then they have been looking at the wrong gender, for if *All’s Well* offers this potential, it is in Bertram and Parolles’ early relationship. Whereas Helena longs, in all senses of the verb, to serve Bertram, Parolles refuses to see his relationship to Bertram as one of service, vehemently objecting to Lafew’s repeated description of Bertram as Parolles’ “lord and master” (2.3.187, 243). Instead, Parolles and Bertram speak a language of companionship and affection, marked by invocations of “sweetness”

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321 Indeed, scholars often do not conceive of Parolles as Bertram’s social inferior. See, for example, Howard, who describes Parolles as Bertram’s “friend,” “Female Agency,” 55; Michael Friedman, who describes Parolles as Bertram’s “mentor,” “Male Bonds and Marriage in All’s Well and Much Ado,” SEL 35.2 (1995): 81; for more on Bertram and Parolles, see also Friedman, “Service is no heritage’: Bertram and the Ideology of Procreation,” *Studies in Philology* 92 (1995): 40-51.

322 This is part of an extended debate Lafew and Parolles have on Parolles’ subordination to Bertram, with Lafew insisting that Parolles is the “count’s [Bertram’s] man” (2.3.195) and Parolles insisting on his independence. The irony is that Parolles will end the play in Lafew’s service, as Lafew instructs the deflated braggart, “Wait on me home, I’ll make sport with thee” (5.3.322-23).
and possessive articles. Immediately after Lafew informs Parolles of Bertram’s marriage, Bertram enters, and Parolles greets him twice with the appellation “sweet heart” (2.3.270, 272). For his part, Bertram calls Parolles “my Parolles” (273) and bids him to “go with me to my chamber, and advise me” (295). That Parolles turns out to be, in the words of Jean Howard, a “bad friend” (2006, 55) has, perhaps, blinded us to the ways in which the men use a discourse not unlike that which Laurie Shannon describes in her work on early modern friendship. More to the point, the way Parolles and Bertram conceive of their relationship and the way service is imagined in a male homosocial context highlights what we do not see in Helena’s relationship with Diana and the Widow. In particular, what is missing is the reciprocal nature of the affection: Diana is never once, for Helena, “my Diana,” nor does Diana provide counsel to her mistress.

What Diana provides is utility to Helena, whose interest in Diana, despite the desires of feminist critics, goes no deeper than self-interest. While Helena never rejects Diana’s pledge, “I am yours,” Helena’s response to Diana does not, in fact, respond to Diana’s testament. Instead, Helena hurries them along, promising, “All’s well that ends well” (4.4.35). Helena is no more concerned with Diana’s actual desires than the other characters of All’s Well are: Diana functions as an object trafficked to cement alliances, accrue capital, and demonstrate power – be it for Helena, the Widow, Bertram or the King. In particular, this reading points to the ways in which Helena’s understanding of

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the workings of the world align with that described by Marotti, Warley, and Stephen Greenblatt. Contra Alexander Legatt, who characterizes Helena’s relationship with the Capulets as a restorative alternative to the harsh, patriarchal world of court, proclaiming, “Helena, after being argued over by men, surrounds herself by women,” Helena belies any dichotomy between the rules that govern men and those that govern women. As the interaction between Helena and the Florentine women almost immediately reveals, investment in patriarchal systems of power, particularly systems of class and wealth, cross gender lines. Like the courtiers Marotti, Warley, and Greenblatt describe, Helena demonstrates a profoundly economic and instrumental view of personal relations, carefully calculating the value of those surrounding her to maximize her own personal worth.

If Diana’s desire really is to remain with Helena, then all does not end well for Diana, for no less than the King pledges to marry her off (conditional, of course, on her being a virgin). While Crawford has argued that the dowry Helena bestows upon Diana enables Diana to refuse the King’s offer to endower her and to choose, instead, to remain with Helena, this presumes an agency that Diana never has. Nothing in the play indicates that Diana will be able to refuse the King’s marriage offer or that Helena will intervene on Diana’s behalf unless it is in Helena’s interest.

Indeed, the reason no precedent exists to suggest that Diana will get her wish is

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that, in *All’s Well*, consent to marry depends not on the will of the bridge and groom but rather their master or mistress. Of the four marriages proposed or enacted over the course of the play (Bertram and Helena; Lavatch and Isabel; Bertram and Maudlin; Diana and a French lord), not one of them takes place without the consent of the master or mistress of the bride and groom. The desires of the marrying couple are ancillary to those of their social superior: the King forces Bertram to marry Helena; the Countess defers Lavatch’s suit to Isabel; and Lafew pushes the marriage between Bertram and his daughter, Maudlin, which first requires approval of the King. In *All’s Well*, marriage is a top-down affair, a manifestation of the power that people have over one another.

V. The Marriage Market

Helena is acutely aware of the market value of virginity, and it is integral to her plans that both she and Diana are virgins. Helena points to her virginity as why the King should trust her and allow her to cure him, offering up her “maiden’s name” (2.1.170) as collateral; later, when presented before the young lords of France, she attests, “I am a simple maid, and therein wealthiest / That I protest I simply am a maid” (2.3.67-68). As a physician’s daughter who lacks the money and title required to match her with a member of the nobility, Helena locates her “wealth” in her intact hymen. Her formulation is on point, as the King later echoes Helena’s emphasis on the value of her virginity. The King promises Bertram that he will create a “counterpoise” (2.3.176) in Helena’s estate, bestowing title and wealth upon her: “if thou canst like this creature as a maid, / I can create the rest” (143-44). What the King cannot “create” is Helena’s maidenhead, and yet
Helena’s protest that being a “simple maid” makes her “wealthiest” is not quite true: being a virgin does not make her wealthy but, rather, allows her to be made wealthy.

At the play’s end, Diana finds herself in a similar situation: the King pledges to Diana that, “if thou be’st yet a fresh uncroppèd flower … I’ll pay thy dower” (5.3.327-28), but Diana’s marriageability is not the only thing dependent on her virginity. Diana’s entire utility to Helena is predicated upon her being like the “titled goddess” (4.2.2) with whom she shares a name. The first time Helena refers to Diana in conversation with the Widow, she calls Diana “this virgin” (3.6.96), reducing Diana to her maidenhead and echoing Helena’s earlier description of herself to the King as “simply a maid” (2.3.68). As perhaps Helena already anticipates, Diana’s virginity proves critical to getting Bertram to comply with the plot. When the Widow finally “yield[s]” to Helena’s plan, she tells her to “instruct my daughter how she shall persevere” (3.7.40-41); presumably part of what Helena “instruct[s]” Diana to do is to emphasize her maidenhead when negotiating with Bertram. By leveraging her virginity against Bertram’s lust, Diana secures Bertram’s ring, arguing, “Mine honor’s such a ring, / My chastity’s the jewel of our house” (4.2.45-46). Confronted with this, Bertram capitulates, handing Diana the ring, performing exactly as Helena earlier predicts when she tells the Widow that, “in his idle fire, / To buy his will,” Bertram will dispense with the family heirloom (3.7.26-27). Helena orchestrates their encounter so that Bertram believes he barters his “ring” for Diana’s “ring,” with the classic pun on ring as vagina, when in fact he exchanges his ring

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for Helena’s two rings – both the ring she wears on her finger, bestowed upon her by the King, and her maidenhead.329

The reward – marriage – that Diana receives for “keep[ing] a wife herself” and herself “a maid” (5.3.330) suggests the obsessive and odd relationship that the play has with virginity, simultaneously the most important thing a woman can possess but must also dispense.330 Helena, before she has fully formulated her plan to cure the King and win Bertram, asks Parolles, “How might one do, sir, to lose it [virginity] to her liking?” (1.1.152-53). Parolles dodges the question: “’Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth. Off with’t while ’tis vendible” (1.1.155-56). This is the resounding sentiment of the play. Virginity is a “commodity” with a clear expiration date: as the King warns, a woman must be not merely an “uncroppèd flower” but a “fresh” one at that (5.3.327). Parolles’ injunction “off with ’t while ’tis vendible” not only highlights the good fortune Diana and Helena have to be virgins at the right place and time but also suggests Helena’s near inability to lose her virginity “to her liking” and Diana’s seemingly certain failure to keep hers “to her liking.”

What makes virginity such a complex commodity is that, unlike the play’s other trafficked goods, virginity only bears its initial exchange value: it cannot be circulated. The relative low value of female bodies that can be circulated (versus virgin bodies) is highlighted by Diana’s initial treatment at the French court. Dismissed by Bertram as a

329 On the erotics of the exchanged rings, see Nicholas Ray, “’Twas mine, ’twas Helen’s’: Rings of desire in All’s Well, That ends Well,” in All’s Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays, ed. Gary Waller (New York: Routledge, 2007), 183-93.
“common gamester to the camp” (5.3.214), Diana immediately objects to the charge and offers proof against it:

If I were so,
He might have bought me at a common price.
Do not believe him. O, behold this ring,
Whose high respect and rich validity
Did lack a parallel. Yet, for all that,
He gave it to a commoner o’ th’ camp
If I be one.

(5.3.189-95)

Diana has no way intrinsic ability to refute Bertram’s label and must rely instead on extrinsic proof, provided by the ring, to demonstrate that she is not a “commoner o’ th’ camp.” The qualities she identifies in the object – its “high respect,” “rich validity” and uniqueness – are antithetical to “common[ness]” and to how Bertram describes her. Diana reasons that she cannot be a prostitute because, if so, he would have “bought me at a common price,” yet the value of the ring far outweighs the cost of a “commoner,” ergo she cannot be a prostitute. Bertram has an easy rebuttal that picks up on and deflates Diana’s invocations of economics. Acknowledging their dalliance, Bertram explains

Her inf’nite cunning and modern grace
Subdued me to her rate. She got the ring,
And I had that which any inferior might
At market price have bought.

(5.3.216-19)

Bertram points to the logical fallacy in Diana’s argument: she has assumed he is a rational actor in the market and thus whatever price he paid for her must reflect her true value. As Bertram clarifies, he simply overpaid. Indeed, Bertram formulates Diana’s financial savvy as further proof of her profession, able to use both her “infinite cunning and modern grace” to “subdue [him] to her rate.” The juxtaposition of “infinite cunning”
and “modern grace” adds a subtle dig to Diana, with “modern” suggesting Diana’s “grace” is characterized by “employing the most up-to-date ideas and techniques” (*OED* adj3a) and also “everyday, ordinary, commonplace” (*OED* adj4): her “cunning” is “infinite” as she employs her *au courant* tactics to sell something – herself – for a far higher “rate” than its ordinariness should command. As Bertram is quick to note, “any inferior might / At market price have bought” Diana: the only crime Bertram is guilty of is paying more than “market price.”

There is no way for Diana to argue against Bertram, for all her answers lend credence to his accusations of her as “common”: socially inferior, publicly available, and cheap. This is not, however, just about the weight women’s words have against men’s, for class distinctions are critically important in this climactic scene. The charges leveled against Diana are as much about her social class as they are about her chastity. Bertram defends himself against Diana’s statement that he promised to marry her by pointing out their class differences: “Let your highness / Lay a more noble thought upon mine honor / Than for to think that I would sink it here” (5.3.179-81). Bertram emphasizes their disparity by noting the “noble[ness]” of his “honor” in contrast to Diana’s, whom he describes first as a “fond and desperate creature” (178) he merely “laugh’d with” (179) and then, when she continues to protest her suit, as a “common gamester to the camp” (188). Furthermore, by calling her a “creature” and equating relations with her (be it sex or marriage) to “sink[ing] it here,” Bertram emphasizes Diana’s low status, degrading her to a nearly sub-human level and evoking his earlier description of Helena’s “breeding at my father’s charge.”
Diana’s counter-arguments continue to get her into more trouble, and here, again, we see how critical class is. Frustrated by Diana’s confusing answers to the King’s questions, Lafew pronounces her a kind of verbal “common gamester”: “This woman’s an easy glove, my lord; she goes off and on at pleasure” (277-78). The King, unable to determine whether Diana or Bertram is telling the truth, threatens them with punishment: “to prison with her, and away with him” (282). But whereas Bertram is merely taken “away” (he was earlier sent “away” in the scene only to be called back momentarily – evidently “away” is not necessarily that far), Diana is not only sent “to prison” but also will be executed “within this hour” unless she explains how she obtained the ring (284). When Diana refuses to explain the ring’s origins, the King repeats his charge, “Take her away” (285), to which Diana replies, “I’ll put in bail” (285); however, an offer of money only serves to highlight her low social status. The King responds to her pledge by joining in calling her a prostitute: “I think thee now some common customer” (286), as if the ability to participate in a cash economy were proof that a woman earned the money by sex. The irony of the statement is that Diana has, in fact, been bought and sold by the men and women around her, but she is no “customer” in these transactions – she is what is being consumed.331

The state of being a virgin allows the virgin’s body to be transformed into value: it is what enables the King to make Helena wealthy and to marry off Helena and Diana. It

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331 While the phrase “common customer” is slang for “prostitute” (OED 4b), “customer” could also mean “one who frequents any place of sale for the sake of purchasing” (OED 3a), a title which effectively describes both Helena and Bertram in the Capilet lodge, where they each “purchase” Diana’s services for the night.
is also what transforms the virgin’s words into value: scholars are quick to note the way the potency of Helena’s cure appears linked to her virginity. Moreover, the credibility of Diana’s accusations against Bertram is dependent on her perceived chastity. In contrast to all the money and bodies that circulate through service, pilgrimage, travel, marriage, war, and politics, virginity, unlike the glove to which Lafew likens Diana, cannot “go off and on”: once “off,” it is no longer “vendible.”

VI. All’s Not Well

At the play’s end, Helena’s savvy marketing of not just her own but also Diana’s “commodity” of virginity “while ’tis vendible” gets Helena what she wants – namely, to be both “name and thing” of wife to Bertram – but it does not get Diana what she wants. What Diana seems to want is to remain Helena’s servant and a virgin, neither of which she will be if she marries a French nobleman. Paying attention to both Helena’s and Diana’s desires invites us to examine Asp’s formulation that, “singular among the plays of Shakespeare’s canon, All’s Well That Ends Well is written out of the history of the female subject, and this history is the history of her desire” (1986, 48). I find this formulation productive: as the women of All’s Well suggest, the “history of the female subject and … her desire” requires a female object, and therein lies the true “problem” of the play. By focusing on the complex class and status relationships amongst the women,

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we can see how Helena, the Widow, and Diana are variously imagined to not only resist but also participate in, benefit from, and perpetuate patriarchal structures of marriage and the household. What makes the ending of *All’s Well* not “end well” is not simply Helena’s (re)union with Bertram but also the way the play exposes the willingness of women to traffic in women – and in themselves.

Ultimately, this analysis challenges us to reconsider the problem of this play, suggesting that *All’s Well* is a “problem play” not because, to quote Asp, “the frog prince remains a frog and the princess chooses to overlook his slimy skin”\(^{333}\) but because of its refusal to romanticize the negotiations not only of heterosexual coupling, but also of female friendship and service. This is a play in which people are commodities, transferable objects that can be traded, “bequeathed,” and purchased “at market price.” And yet the problem is not, as Kastan suggests, that “what should be freely given must be bought,”\(^{334}\) but rather that what should be bought is given and what should not be for sale is a prized commodity. As such, *All’s Well* defies our expectations of comedy, insisting on laying bare the female-authored transactions it takes to get the conjugal couple to wed.

\(^{333}\) Asp, “Subjectivity,” 48.

\(^{334}\) Kastan, “Limits of Comedy,” 585.
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