

Whores and their Metaphors in Early Modern English Drama

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Abstract

Several clusters of metaphors were routinely used to represent the sex trade onstage in early modern England. Close philological study of these figures reveals that even the most conventional metaphors for whores and their work were capable of meaning many things at once, especially in the discursive context of the drama. This project follows a practice of reading that admits multiple significations for the words used by characters on the early modern stage. I argue that metaphors are social phenomena with consequences as varied and complex as the human interactions they're meant to describe. Each chapter treats a different set of images: commodities and commercial transactions, buildings and thoroughfares, food and drink, and rhetorical and theatrical ingenuity. Using methods based on the study of conceptual metaphor in the field of cognitive linguistics, I trace the deployment of conventional figures for prostitution in plays by William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, and John Marston. I also introduce occurrences of these metaphors in other genres (news pamphlets, prose narratives, homilies, medical manuals, and so on) to show that they were part of pervasive cultural patterns. The readings below dwell on the figurative associations that were most available to early modern writers as they fashioned prostitute characters for the stage—metaphors commonly taken for granted as literal descriptions of sex work. An understanding of the social force of metaphor begins with the realization that words convey more than any writer, printer, or actor intends. The language of prostitution in the early modern theatre is therefore both common and complex, much like the characters it conjures.

Résumé

Pendant la Renaissance, divers grappes de métaphores étaient utilisées couramment dans les représentations théâtrales de la prostitution en Angleterre. Des études minutieuses philologiques des métaphores pour les putains et leur travail révèlent que même les plus conventionnelles pouvaient signifier plusieurs choses à la fois, particulièrement dans le contexte discursif du théâtre. Le projet suit un procédé de lecture qui admet plusieurs significations pour les mots utilisés par des personnages de la Renaissance. Je soutiens que les métaphores sont des phénomènes sociaux qui ont des conséquences aussi variées et complexes que les interactions humaines qu'elles sont censées décrire. Chaque chapitre met en évidence une différente série d'images: les marchandises et transactions commerciales, les bâtiments et les voies urbaines, la nourriture et les boissons, l'ingénuité rhétorique et théâtrale. En utilisant des méthodes basées sur l'étude des métaphores conceptuelles dans le domaine de la linguistique cognitive, je retrace le cortège des figures conventionnelles de prostitution dans les pièces de théâtre de William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, et John Marston. Je signale aussi l'existence de ces métaphores dans d'autres genres littéraires (pamphlets de nouvelles, narratives en prose, homélies, manuels médicaux, etc.) pour démontrer qu'elles faisaient partie des tendances culturelles omniprésentes. Les explications ci-dessous s'entendent sur les associations figurées qui étaient les plus à la disposition des écrivains de la Renaissance en façonnant les personnages des prostituées—les métaphores qui étaient souvent considérées comme constituant les descriptions littérales du travail sexuel. Pour bien comprendre la force sociale de la métaphore, il faut réaliser d'abord que les mots communiquent beaucoup plus qu'un écrivain, un imprimeur, ou un acteur les destine. La langue de la prostitution dans le théâtre de la Renaissance est donc également commune et complexe, toute pareille aux personnages qu'elle crée.

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Contents

| | |
|---|--------|
| Abstract | i |
| Résumé | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Introduction | I |
| I. Custom | 15 |
| Inflation and Depletion in <i>Measure for Measure</i> | 17 |
| Selling Sex and Textiles in <i>The Honest Whore</i> | 26 |
| <i>Bartholomew Fair</i> Trade | 32 |
| Aunts and Uncles in the Prodigal Plot of <i>A Trick to Catch the Old One</i> | 38 |
| <i>A Chaste Maid</i> and Others Kept in <i>Cheapside</i> | 47 |
| II. Drives and Dwellings | 58 |
| The Matted Chamber, Common Coach, and Kept Women of <i>A Mad World, My Masters</i> | 59 |
| Doors Open and Closed in <i>The Honest Whore</i> | 71 |
| A Doll's House in <i>The Alchemist</i> | 83 |
| III. Meat and Drink | 95 |
| The Roasted Bawdy of <i>Bartholomew Fair</i> | 97 |
| Stewed Prunes and Stewed People in <i>Measure for Measure</i> | 110 |
| The Whore's Appetite in <i>Northward Ho</i> | 121 |
| Intoxication and Purgation in <i>The Second Part of</i> <i>The Honest Whore</i> | 134 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| IV. Cunning | 149 |
| The Close Courtesan and her Functions | |
| in <i>A Mad World, My Masters</i> | 151 |
| Wit, Fit, and Common Knowledge in <i>The Alchemist</i> | 162 |
| The Whore's Will in <i>The Dutch Courtesan</i> | 173 |
| Conclusion | 182 |
| Works Cited | 189 |

Introduction

In 1622 Henry Gosson published a small quarto called *A Common Whore*, which consists of a lighthearted polemic against illicit sex, composed in verse by the popular poet John Taylor. The text was packaged with promises about its ameliorative social force, addressed “To no matter who” (A2), and sold in London’s Pannier Alley. Its author revels in the seemingly boundless potential of the central metaphor he’s chosen, enjoying both the irony of naming his invective after its subject and the fruitful comparison of whore to book. For the conceit to work, Taylor has to present his *Whore* as “strange,” “common and yet honest” (A3v), the exception that proves the rule. Through the easy availability of the pamphlet, women’s promiscuity will be halted; textual circulation will counteract sexual circulation. Taylor’s readers are beneficiaries of a system of distribution, and whores are its victims:

All, from the Cottage, to the Castle high,
 From Palatines unto the peasantry,
 (If thei’le permit their wisdomes Rule their will)
 May keepe this *Whore* and yet be honest still.
 Yet is she *Common*, unto all that crave her,
 For sixe pence honest man or Knave may have her,
 To be both turn’d and tost, she free affords
 And (like a prating *Whore*) she’s full of words,
 But all her talke is to no other end,
 Then to teach *Whoremaisters* and *Whores* to mend.
 She in plaine termes unto the world doth tell,
Whores are the Hackneyes which men ride to hell,
 And by Comparisons she truly makes

A *Whore* worse then a common *Shore*, or Jakes. (A3v)

Within the framing conceit—pamphlet as whore—the poet advertises the kinds of metaphors that make up the text: whore as horse, whore as toilet. The “plaine termes” in which Taylor’s *Whore* speaks are not unmetaphorical; they are, rather, the most conventional figures for illicit sexuality available in the language of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. But such expressions are no less convincing for their familiarity—Taylor boasts that “by Comparisons” his pamphlet “truly makes” whores appear differently. The reader (“no matter who”) is expected to seek such persuasiveness and to take pleasure in it. Like *A Common Whore*, the study at hand isn’t just about conventional morality; it’s also about metaphor. And my text has instructive aspirations of its own—it seeks “to mend” certain academic habits of emphasis by being differently “full of words.”

Behind and throughout this project is a belief in the social force of metaphor. My reading is motivated by a desire to see what language might reveal about culture and ideology without the speaker’s or writer’s full awareness. The goal of the chapters that follow is to begin to gauge the gathered force of repeated but seemingly inconsequential figures of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. In pursuing and parsing such commonplaces in a number of early modern plays, I follow the implicit readerly advice of cognitive linguists like George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Mark Turner, and Zoltán Kövecses. These thinkers urge us to set aside our previous assumptions about metaphor and turn instead toward our own everyday expressions. As their studies make clear, it can be difficult to recognize the metaphorical in our own thinking. To read Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal book *Metaphors We Live By* is to be amazed at the total ubiquity of unlikely comparisons in casual, modern English. Suddenly we see

that “up” and “happy” are not the same thing, but are related through a culturally embedded and seemingly inevitable metaphorical construct (15).

The arbitrariness of metaphor, its emergence in spite of common sense and its ability to eclipse what we know about the phenomena that surround us, is what troubles Susan Sontag in her two essays on the metaphorical deployment of illness in popular discourse, “Illness as Metaphor” (1977) and “AIDS and Its Metaphors” (1988). She reminds us: “Only in the most limited sense is any historical event or problem like an illness” (85).¹ Sontag’s purpose in “Illness as Metaphor” is to show that the exploitation of cancer as a figure for evil can have negative—in her terms, violent—repercussions for those living with the disease. Her largely literary study has as its goal “an elucidation of those metaphors, and a liberation from them” (4), because “[n]othing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning—that meaning being invariably a moralistic one” (58).

Reading across genres from novels to newspapers, Sontag traces the insidious and persuasive use of cancer in representations of all kinds of badness. Perhaps the most poignant moment in the essay comes when the writer admits that the metaphor is “hard to resist” and quotes herself at the end of a long list of instances: “...and I once wrote, in the heat of despair over America’s war on Vietnam, that ‘the white race is the cancer of human history’ ” (84). Amid all her careful analysis of other people’s sentences, this

¹ Sontag’s reminder about the non-likeness of illness and historical events is echoed in Kövecses’ account of “the basis of metaphor.” He describes “the similarity constraint,” an aspect of the traditional view of metaphor that maintains that metaphors are based on some preexisting similarity between two things. Kövecses asks what a journey and love have in common, or what digesting food has in common with assimilating information (69). Instead of subscribing to the traditional view, he argues that “some metaphors are not based on similarity but generate similarities” (72). That is to say, certain figures can suggest the existence of similarities or correlations which are not actually true to experience.

sudden glance at one of her own is what proves Sontag's dedication to the matter at hand. The rhetoric of the essay is purgative: "the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking" (3). But in scrutinizing even her own prose Sontag encourages a kind of vigilance that is not only outward-looking. If we want to be able to gauge the social effects of our language, we must first begin to hear our own words.

In the context of this study, that means doing away with the notion of the "dead metaphor." Zoltán Kövecses offers a more nuanced story of the commonplaces whose metaphoricity is no longer heard:

The "dead metaphor" account misses an important point; namely, that what is deeply entrenched, hardly noticed, and thus effortlessly used is most active in our thought...[These metaphors] may be highly conventional and effortlessly used, but this does not mean that they have lost their vigor in thought and that they are dead. On the contrary, they are "alive" in the most important sense—they govern our thought—they are "metaphors we live by." (ix)

The image clusters that I examine in this study could all have been called "dead metaphors" by the early moderns, if they'd had such a term at their disposal and had regarded the most deeply embedded imaginative devices in their language as somehow expired or ineffectual. Things like food and lodging were such standard metaphors for the sex trade and its workers that they may well have gone unnoticed in everyday speech.

Further, Kövecses recognizes and emphasizes the fact that literary writers get their metaphors from everyday language, not from some special store of figurative expressions available only to them. In the chapters that

follow, we find early modern dramatists exploiting the potential of various household metaphors. In some cases, these writers prove themselves unusually canny in their special deployment of everyday expressions. Elsewhere, their use of metaphors to describe the sex trade is purely conventional. As Raymond Gibbs has argued, metaphorical thinking can either increase or decrease the range of possible ways of representing something:

[M]uch of our conceptualization of experience is metaphorical, which both motivates and constrains the way we think creatively. The idea that metaphor constrains creativity might seem contrary to the widely held belief that metaphor somehow liberates the mind to engage in divergent thinking. (7, qtd. in Kövecses: 46)

Susan Sontag would appreciate this claim, since her project in both “Illness as Metaphor” and “AIDS and Its Metaphors” (her own response to the earlier essay) is to demonstrate the ease with which disease metaphors are applied to social problems. Her quarrel is precisely with the conventional nature of such figures—there is a cost to morality and a loss of human life that necessarily results from the unreflecting use of cancer and AIDS as metaphors. This is the case, we assume, in spite of the fact that these illnesses are already what some would call “dead metaphors” by the time of Sontag’s writing. It is the very ubiquity and ordinariness of illness metaphors that requires Sontag to state her case so clearly: “My point is that illness is *not* a metaphor” (3).

Like Sontag, I am interested in the bi-directionality of metaphor, the way a habitual representation of one thing in terms of another can turn around. The focus of her essays is the use of cancer and AIDS as metaphors for other things, but she’s also concerned with the effects of these standard

associations on our collective understanding of the illnesses themselves. Similarly, one of the aims of this dissertation is to show how prostitution is used on both sides of the representational divide. The chapters that follow are structured according to clusters of what cognitive linguists would call “sources”—images with prostitution or prostitutes as their “target.” That is, this study consists of readings of metaphors *for* the sex trade and the people associated with it. But I also observe the equal and opposite trajectory of meaning, through which prostitution becomes a symbol for other things. Furthermore, I take it for granted that the metaphorical figures applied to illicit sex influenced the way prostitution itself might be used as a metaphor.

For example, in reading the address with which John Taylor introduces *A Common Whore*, it becomes difficult to determine whether the notion of publishing pertains most to the whore or to the book she represents. Two kinds of publication are described at once: the printing and distribution of a text and the punitive exposure of a prostitute.

[T]he Printer hath us'd her as he would be loth to bee us'd
 himselfe, for he hath publish'd and proclaim'd all her faults to
 the view of the world, and yet I know the poore Whores pain is
 not past, for now she is to be examin'd a thousand wayes, &
 tortured upon The Rack of censure... (A2-A2v)

Although *whore* is certainly the source and *book* is certainly the target in Taylor's conceit, this account of textual production, distribution, and consumption also invites a comparison with the opposite emphasis. Popular involvement in the public shaming of whores begins to resemble a form of reading, complete with the curiosity and complicity that characterize any engagement with a narrative. Not only is a book like a whore; a whore, who

can be seen for free or held for a fee, is (at least “in the most limited sense”) like a book.

The task of telling the figure from the referent is all the more complicated if we remember that the word *whore* is often metaphorical without seeming so.² It’s hard to make accurate claims about the representation of sex workers without attending to the fact that women who did not sell sex were regularly called whores. Laura Gowing explains:

In the language of insult, women and men described sexual misconduct, characterizing it through a central picture of the whore, delineating the emotional, material, and sexual dislocations that whoredom was supposed to effect, and calling for whores to be named and punished. They referred, sometimes, to actual sexual misconduct or rumours about it; but the word ‘whore’ rarely meant a real prostitute, and the words of insult were understood to be related only opaquely to actual sex. (*Domestic Dangers* 59)

In early modern English, “whoredom” was a metaphor for all kinds of transgressive sexuality and more. Thus it is necessary to make a statement much like Sontag’s here at the outset: whores are *not* metaphors. Further, there may be an imaginative cost to the use of prostitution as a symbol for something else, especially when the nature of commercial sex is itself so poorly understood.

This is not to say that the characters who are bawds and whores in early modern drama should be recognized as real people and granted rights accordingly. I do not listen to these characters for the voices of real women.³

² This is true too in our own language, on a somewhat reduced scale.

³ My methods stand in contrast to those of Gustav Ungerer, who understands his historical research as follows:

Rather, I attend to the playwrights' manipulation of stock material. The idea is to better recognize patterns when they emerge, and to be able to identify a departure from convention as such. The project can be called a social history only insofar as it is a study of discourse and an attempt to catalogue common imaginings. My frequent use of the adjective *imaginary* is meant to resonate with the nominal function of that word—these readings are investigations into a shared *imaginary*. The term can be defined here with reference to two thinkers. First, in the work of cultural studies theorist Graham Dawson, “cultural imaginaries” are “those vast networks of interlinking discursive themes, images, motifs, and narrative forms that are publicly available within a culture at any one time, and articulate its psychic and social dimensions” (48).⁴ Early modern playwrights drew from and paid into a changing supply of shared notions.

Second, the philosopher Charles Taylor uses the phrase “social imaginaries” to name “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (106). For Taylor, an important threefold difference abides between *imaginary* and *theory*:

I speak of *imaginary* because I'm talking about the way ordinary people “imagine” their social surroundings, and this is often not

In view of the vast territory still left unexplored and unmapped, I have chosen to rescue from oblivion and anonymity a group of women who have been denied their individual voices. I have ventured to unlock, empirically and paradigmatically, the reality as experienced by the following bawds and prostitutes, to wit, Eleanor Dethick, Anne Miller, Agnes Wilkinson, Mrs Cesar, [etc.]. (139-40)

⁴ For his purposes, Dawson prefers *cultural imaginary* to Said and Foucault's *discourse* because it describes “a less monolithic, more complexly structured and contradictory formation” (50).

expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends. But it is also the case that theory is usually the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. (106)

For example, by Taylor's reckoning, the modern understanding of "the public sphere" is the result of "a mutation in the social imaginary, inspired by the modern idea of order" (114) and so transformative of our thinking that "we have trouble recalling what it was like before" (116).

While we might have trouble recalling our former ways of thinking in certain areas, it is equally true that some parts of the social imaginary stay more or less the same for long periods of time. A careful analysis of early modern metaphors can instruct us in the origins and operations of those notions which have endured. Why are whores so often depicted as fat? Why do we speak of prostitution as a *profession*? What makes sex work so funny? The work of Sontag and others suggests that we have a real need to study our own language, to ask if what comes most readily into speech and print is necessarily the most accurate and just mode of expression. If we don't ask this question, we may very well perpetuate the violent metaphors of the past.

But not all metaphors are violent; not all limit our thinking. The history of a language is also a history of possibilities. In a chapter devoted entirely to dramatic representations of London prostitution, Jean Howard reads with a deliberate focus on "the power of stories to confirm or expand social subjects' imaginative parameters and their modes of rendering

experience intelligible” (*Theater of a City* 114). Her work thus constitutes a revision of those accounts of early modern prostitution that would regard the sale of sex as inherently related to “women’s social death and abjection” (114). There is room in Howard’s careful analyses not only for the suffering and alienation of whore characters, but also for their resourcefulness, cosmopolitanism, erudition, and resilient morality. While some characters emerge as representatives of a particular stock tradition, it is just as common for whores in early modern drama to be innovative characters, expanding the range of imaginable behaviours rather than confirming the rigidity of the codes that govern social and sexual relations in early modern London.

Instead of mining city comedy for evidence of how prostitutes actually lived and worked, Howard sets out to reveal patterns in discourse that might illuminate a way of thinking. Her interest is not limited to the way whores and their work are conjured onstage, as these depictions are so intimately intertwined with other going concerns like the market and the changing demographics of the city. In providing an account of the rhetorical interdependence of these topoi, Howard comes to echo some of the thinking we’ve already visited. Her methods resemble those employed by Sontag in the essays on illness:

I take for granted that whore plays, while they partly reference the actual social problem of prostitution in early modern London, also use the whorehouse and its central actor, the whore, to examine other troubling or novel aspects of urban life such as the quickening and expansion of the market economy...

(*Theater of a City* 120)

She urges us to take up a reading practice that “resists unitary interpretation of the sort that assumes that stage prostitution must be either ‘about’ real-life

prostitution or about something else, like the market or disease or cosmopolitanism” (120). The alternative is to recognize, “instead, that whores and their places of work are capable of bearing several significations at once, or, to put it another way, are simultaneously part of more than one discursive struggle” (120). Howard’s openness to multiple significations pairs nicely with the interest in “polysemy” that appears in cognitive linguistics, and with Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas about *raznorecie*, or “heteroglossia.”⁵ Each of these concepts entails a basic faith in a single utterance’s ability to mean several things. When Howard invites us to admit multiple meanings for a word like “wholesaling,” she does so with the unseen support of both the Bakhtin circle and the pioneers of conceptual metaphor theory—all thinkers who work to understand and expose mechanisms of thought and speech.

Although Howard is careful to position herself as a literary scholar rather than a social historian, her approach represents a step forward in the informed imagining of early modern London. She introduces her study of the drama with statements about the ubiquity and fluidity of the sale of sex in the period, explaining that the people and places associated with prostitution were, like the trade itself, always changing. When we try to bear witness to the conditions of early modern sex work, we have to remember that such work was by no means an exclusive or fixed aspect of identity. It took many forms and was practised in various ways by all kinds of people. Coppélia Kahn notes that the drama was uniquely suited to the portrayal of sexual conduct and sexual identity in such a context:

[P]laywrights frequently fix and unfix, separate and confound the polar oppositions of wife and whore, virgin and whore.

Because the theater wantonly, deliberately confuses categories

⁵ Kövecses 213, Bakhtin 263.

held elsewhere to be clear and firm, it offers fertile ground for exploring the discursive instability of sexual difference in Renaissance culture. (251)

The intentional obfuscation Kahn finds in the plays invites from readers both an incisive engagement with received standards of characterization and a willingness to be confused. We have to look closely but resist the urge to make distinctions where the dramatists have not. My study of stage whores does not conform to any tidy taxonomy, as the boundaries that seem to separate one form of sex work from another are repeatedly broken down.

Because of the total mutability of conditions and participants in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century prostitution, the terms employed here to describe commercial sexual exchanges are often vague. I use “illicit sexuality” as a modern equivalent to *whoredom*. Both terms signal a broad prohibition of sexual behaviour outside the bounds of marriage. In general, I avoid the use of slang terms for “prostitute” (*harlot*, *strumpet*, *trull*, *punk*), not wanting my tongue in my cheek as I try to articulate ideas about the patterns of utterance before me.⁶ *Whore* is chosen not for its coarseness or its irony, but because it was commonly applied to sex workers, while “prostitute,” for example, was not. The ambiguity of the term—its “polysemy”—is something

⁶ Kay Stanton has argued for the special status of *whore* in both early modern and contemporary usage, distinguishing it from other words for sexually transgressive women:

The word “whore” is not the only word in the Shakespeare canon used for denigration of female sexuality..., but it is one of particular interest because, whereas “strumpet,” “harlot,” and “minion” are still recognized, they are considered old-fashioned, and terms like “callet,” “drab,” and “stale” are unknown among the general populace. Whore is the one that endures, and, even among the many near-synonyms found in Shakespeare’s works, it is the term with the most abusive punch, the “dirtiest” word. (81)

In fact, *whore* seems to be the most explicit of these terms, even though it is also the one most often used metaphorically for women whose transgressions are not necessarily sexual. A useful point of comparison is the word *ho* in modern English.

we must reckon with if we are to understand how the sex trade was imagined in the period. Where *whore* appears in the critical prose that follows, it means a person who regularly earns money, lodging, or goods by having sex with someone to whom she is not wed. Here, the word always refers to a woman, partly because of the scarcity of evidence about early modern male prostitutes (and their almost total absence from the drama), and partly because *whore* is etymologically gendered female.⁷ The word's function was to identify either a woman or a feminized man, exclusively.⁸

In taking up a study of lexical systems, I imitate the efforts of other readers. In particular, this project owes much to Patricia Parker's emphasis on "[t]he need to learn a language" (*Shakespeare from the Margins* 18) in order to read early modern drama well. For Parker, this process of acquisition is dependent upon a willingness "to read widely and without a foreclosing sense in advance of what is to be found" (19). Similarly, Margreta de Grazia lets words and phrases guide her analysis in multiple directions, "follow[ing] philological lead[s]" (29) that reveal "homonymic cluster[s]" and "semantic overlays" (31) in the drama and beyond. Reading plays alongside many other kinds of early modern texts can be productively disorienting—we lose ourselves in language on the way toward fluency. If the idea is to recognize deployments of everyday metaphors in the drama, it's necessary to sometimes leave the imaginary theatre and visit other common venues of cultural production.⁹

⁷ MED "hor(e [n.2])."

⁸ The reported narrative with which Laura Gowing opens her book *Common Bodies* shows that the epithet *whore*, when applied to a man, takes both masculinity and dignity from the interpellated party.

⁹ One forum I don't enter is the recorded history of court proceedings, as these have been so thoroughly studied by other researchers (Ian Archer, Paul Griffiths, and Gustav Ungerer, for example), and the focus on corrections shifts attention toward prostitution as a criminal activity. Mine is not a study of crime.

At the end of his poem, after hundreds of couplets on the subject of illicit sex, John Taylor happily returns to the notion of the published prostitute:

This Booke my *Whore*, or else this *whore* my Booke,
 (Shee beares both Names, so neither is mistooke)
 Respects not all her enemies a straw,
 If she offended, she hath had the Law,
 She was examin'd, and she did Confesse,
 And had endur'd the torture of the Presse:
 Her faults are Printed unto all mens sight,
 Unpartially declar'd in blacke and white,
 And last in *Pauls* Church-yard, and in the streets,
 She suffers Pennance up and downe in Sheets. (B8v)

Still content to let his conceit work both ways, the poet explains that his whore-book is penitent and therefore poses no threat to popular morality. She can circulate harmlessly throughout the city. But there is a danger in Taylor's rhyming lines, because they derive their authority from a claim to the administration of violent punishment. What the poet conjures is the literal crushing of a criminal—a vision that is linked by means of a pun to the action of a printing press. If the press that tortures is made less grave by its comparison with the press that prints, the opposite is also true: the “blacke and white” of Taylor's text take on a grim second significance. For the words that figured forth the life and work of whores had some real effects on the fate of real women. And yet all that's left to us is the record in black and white, simultaneously violent and jubilant, dense with possibilities for new ways of seeing.

I. Custom

The aim of this project as a whole is to examine certain customs of the stage: the patterns of plot, character, and language that emerge in London's playworlds. Metaphors circulate within the fictional worlds conjured by early modern drama. They constitute a form of linguistic currency whose movements can be traced from one speaker to the next. They also shape plots, providing frameworks for the action. If we can view metaphor itself metaphorically, as a constituent of a play's economy, it's possible also to regard the drama as one part of a broader linguistic field in which these metaphors circulate.

In all kinds of writing the trade in sex was used, much as it is now, as a metaphor for a wide range of social interactions, commercial and otherwise. Prostitution has a curious way of epitomizing trade—illicit, unwholesome, or duplicitous trade in particular. The notion that there might be an area where “wife” and “whore” overlap was troubling and titillating enough to turn the sex trade into a recognizable symbol for the selling of anything that shouldn't be sold. At the same time, figurative language seems to have flocked to the whore, the bawd, and the brothel as though they were in need of perpetual obfuscation or illumination. Prostitution is at once a useful symbol for other kinds of exchange and a bewilderingly difficult economic phenomenon to pin down.

Among the factors altering the actual and imagined space of early modern London was the increasing involvement of women in commerce.¹⁰ Wives of shopkeepers would stand in windows and doorways in order to draw customers, and this kind of display—on the threshold of a building—was by

¹⁰ Howard 116.

no means limited to the advertisement of legitimate merchandise. To “keep a door” was to stand at the place between inside and out, offering one’s body to the view of passers-by. This positioning at an entryway was also essential to the transmission of sexual slander from one household to the next.¹¹ One could demonstrate her sexual availability or accuse others of being sexually available from her doorway. But she might also stand there simply to discuss the affairs of the neighbourhood with the other women on her street. Thus the placement of a woman in her own or her husband’s storefront suggests that she is connected to ordinary housewives (neighbourhood women who share news across the street) and to bawds and whores, who advertise their own bodies or the bodies of other women from a similar in-between position.¹² It is never easy to distinguish sexual advertisement from other forms of discourse.

For early modern writers the whore is often a public (or *published*) figure, one who has been put on display by her own volition or through someone else’s enterprising will. The notion of publication forges a semantic link between sex and text, an association that in turn points up similarities among various forms of paid performance. The etymology of “prostitute,” a word used in this period as an adjective and a verb, reminds us of the gestural element in commerce: what is *prostituted* is put forth or set up for a customer’s

¹¹ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers* (59).

¹² Furthermore, even the seemingly straightforward notion of a wholesome housewife was vexed. In an essay on sexual slander in the period, Mario DiGangi writes,

In plays like *The Roaring Girl*, the early-seventeenth-century London theater reveals the contradictory position of citizen-class working women: on the one hand, contributing to the household economy through the production and sale of goods; on the other hand, regarded with suspicion and anxiety due to their public mobility and economic agency. This ideological contradiction becomes visible in the overlapping meanings of “housewife”—a thrifty, productive woman—and “huswife”—a hussy or prostitute. (150)

consideration.¹³ When we enter the markets portrayed on the early modern stage, it is useful to remember that the commercial frame was double for the contemporary audiences who paid to attend advertised performances. Plays were prostituted, and audiences were hailed as customers.

The readings that follow focus on metaphors of buying and selling, or *custom* in the sense of commercial exchange. But the purpose of these short studies is equally to discover how commercial transactions were *customarily* represented. In each case, I consider both the habits of the play's characters and the rhetorical habits of the playwright in conjuring trade onstage. Plays which feature prostitution inevitably feature other kinds of sale as well, and jokes and puns emerge easily from the comparison of sex to almost any other service or commodity.¹⁴ Such commercial metaphors can themselves be put on display and evaluated by curious passers-by.

Inflation and Depletion in *Measure for Measure*

Measure for Measure is characterized by patterns of substitution, manipulation, and mediation.¹⁵ It's possible to understand many of the play's interactions as versions of prostitution, since the characters are so often persuaded to perform in ways that generate a profit for someone else. Angelo's representation of Vincentio, and Isabella's advocacy for her brother are both

¹³ OED "prostitute, *v.*"

¹⁴ Simon Morgan-Russell argues that Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho*, "[l]ike many city comedies that consider the 'merchant-citizen,'" characterizes the sexual relationships which constitute its intrigue "as economic transactions," and, further, "as transactions that take place in a competitive and congested market" (71).

¹⁵ Katherine Eisaman Maus cites numerous sources for this idea in her work on "Sexual Secrecy in *Measure for Measure*." She writes, "In this play the bed-trick and the sleight-of-heads are only two instances of a pervasive and complex pattern of substitutions, deputations, and interchanges by which one person or thing is "taken for" or made to stand in the place of another" (208 and note 14).

examples of characters having to fill roles that are awkward, compromising, and potentially hazardous. Angelo and Isabella, with all their differences, are both engaged in dirty work. The language that is used to draw Isabella into the effort to exonerate her brother, and the whole shape of the persuasive work carried out by both Lucio and Isabella herself, is decidedly sexual. That it has sexual repercussions for Angelo is perhaps a coincidence, but Isabella's rhetorical contribution is sexual before she even speaks. Her brother recognizes in her two gifts that will contribute to her success with the deputy: "in her youth / There is a prone and speechless dialect / Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art / When she will play with reason and discourse, / And well can she persuade" (1.2.180-84).¹⁶

The difficulty with proposing to analyse the depiction of the sex trade itself in *Measure for Measure*, then, is the way in which a discourse of prostitution permeates the whole narrative and dialogic structure of the play, insinuating itself into the plainly political and otherwise sexless aspects of the story. This is a work obsessed with transgressive sexuality, with the border that supposedly separates prostitution from other, more legal convergences of sex and power.¹⁷ The deal Angelo proposes to Isabella is never called "whoredom," but it is related in a complex way to the commercial pursuits of Mistress Overdone and Pompey. To view the work of the bawd and pimp as

¹⁶ Quotations are from N. W. Bawcutt's edition of the play.

¹⁷ At the same time, there are no prostitute characters as such. Jonathan Dollimore writes,

[T]here is a limit to which the text can be said to incorporate those aspects of its historical moment of which it never speaks. At that limit, rather than constructing this history as the text's unconscious, we might instead address it directly. Then at any rate we have to recognise the obvious: the prostitutes, the most exploited group in the society which the play represents, are absent from it. Virtually everything that happens presupposes them yet they have no voice, no presence. And those who speak for them do so as exploitatively as those who want to eliminate them. Looking for evidence of resistance we find rather further evidence of exploitation. (53)

a comically overt version of the trade that Angelo imagines is to begin to understand the narrative function such silly characters might serve in a largely serious play. But we stand to gain something by studying Mistress Overdone and her tapster in their own right, because they also represent themselves, and they too are both funny and strangely serious. In a play laden with trades and transactions, they are the only characters who make exchanges *by trade*. Their actions are in keeping with their vocation, and that vocation—until it is threatened by Angelo—is part of the established social fabric of their Vienna.

In the second scene of *Measure for Measure*, Mistress Overdone interrupts Lucio and his friends as they exchange taunting puns about which one of them is the most riddled with venereal disease. Her words bring sudden gravity to the banter about sex and death—to the gentlemen's awareness of a general proclamation she adds news of Claudio's impending execution. They are shocked to hear that Claudio will lose his head for having impregnated Julietta, but they seem to think this harsh verdict accords with what they've heard of the proclamation already. Despite their knowledge of a general decree on the subject of sexuality, Lucio and the gentlemen don't pause to tell the bawd about it. Instead, they rush off to deal with the more immediate and personal matter of Claudio's death sentence. Mistress Overdone is left to reflect on the sudden departure of these sometimes-customers. Sex and death are linked again in her unheard response to the gentlemen's shift in focus.

When everyone turns away to see what's happening with Claudio, Mistress Overdone sighs out the famous complaint, "Thus what with the war, what with the sweat, what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk" (1.2.80-82). In her view, each of these conditions or activities reduces her clientele, and her trade wanes. Her catalogue seems

straightforward: Overdone's business suffers when men get called away on military duty, or have to work, or are too poor to afford the services she offers. But there is some complexity to the bawd's complaint about the role of "the gallows" in shrinking her income. This could refer to the harsh punishment being levelled at people who have been having sex out of wedlock, like her customers or Claudio. It could equally—and simultaneously—refer to the enthusiasm for hangings as a source of public entertainment.¹⁸ If the bawd does mean to signal the popular diversion offered by public execution, "the gallows" is the only term in her list of factors that is directly comparable to the services she offers. Each of the things that have rendered her "custom-shrunk" could be placed, with prostitution, on a continuum of threats to wellbeing, especially if "the sweat" refers to the plague or the sweating sickness. The gallows, read this way, is merely the most certain and immediate mechanism interposed between sex and death. But execution is also the only item on Overdone's list that constitutes competition in the form of an alternative source of entertainment. It eliminates clientele in two ways, therefore—by drawing audiences and by ending the lives of individual customers.

The shrinkage of Mistress Overdone's client base can be seen as the equal and opposite reaction to the burgeonings that shape the early phase of the play: both Angelo's bombastic mode of governance and Julietta's teeming belly, swollen with the "character too gross" (1.2.153) that expresses her unlawful sexual behaviour. The visible pregnancy of the unwed woman is blown out of proportion by the puffed-up will of the deputy. Julietta's big belly and the even bigger deal that's been made of it are linked to the

¹⁸ For a summary of the critical debates relating to the potential topical references in Angelo's proclamation and Mistress Overdone's complaint, see N. W. Bawcutt's introduction to the Oxford edition of the play (2-4) and his note to 1.2.80-82 (95).

depletion of Overdone's trade. The bawd indicates that her own body, representing her entire business and perhaps the trade in general, is diminished by a lack of custom that is tantamount to a lack of sustenance. Under the new rule of Angelo, both the flourishing of Overdone's business and the growth in Julietta's womb are unwanted. At least one of these can be fairly stopped, according to the deputy's inflated interpretation of the law.

Thus Mistress Overdone's predicament is part of the overall pattern of waxing and waning, rising and falling that characterizes the first acts of the play. The depiction of a suburban sex trade that suddenly has to face its own demise not only strikes a chord with an audience who has recently heard of royal proclamations to control housing in London slums;¹⁹ it also partakes of the play's inherent semantic landscape, where power shifts quickly and completely from one party to another. Overdone is right to interpret the decree as evidence that she has just lost a zero-sum game. The bawd's interest is necessarily in the continuation of a system of governance that has allowed her trade to succeed and her house to stand. Whereas the Duke speaks to the Friar about having let things go—"twas my fault to give the people scope" (1.3.35)—, Overdone's preoccupation is now more than ever the set of obstacles that prevent people from bringing her their custom. Vincentio and his deputy are interested in arresting activities that they deem unsalutary to the state, while the bawd recognizes the proclamation as a threat to the status quo and fears it for that reason.

When she hears that the brothels within the city walls will be protected because of the monetary intervention of a "wise burgher" (1.2.99), Overdone bristles at the plain unfairness of the situation: "Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth! What shall become of me?" (1.2.104-

¹⁹ Bawcutt 2-4.

05). In the context of Mistress Overdone's complaint, there are two ways to read "commonwealth." The first is to think of the bawd as we might think of any other speaker who has an interest in the structure of his or her social world—the commonwealth is a group of people and the systems by which they are governed. Overdone uses the idea of the common good to point up the unfair differentiation of inner-city and suburban brothels. Where special dispensation can be purchased, rights are not held in common. Alternatively, Overdone may be thinking of her trade itself as not only a component but a source of commonwealth, because she makes her living on something that is viewed as basic and inevitable. (*Common* resonates with prostitution by calling up notions of distribution and class difference.) In polemical pamphlets, the *commonwealth* is often that which is threatened by the practices of prostitution.²⁰ In one reading of the bawd's exclamation, prostitution is itself a commonwealth, a system of recognition and distribution that needs to be protected.²¹

As her trusty tapster and assistant, Pompey reassures Overdone that there will be opportunities for her in the city, although the suburban brothels are being destroyed. His response comically figures Overdone as a wise old citizen:

²⁰ For example, Robert Greene's fanciful 1592 pamphlet bears the title, "A disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher whether a Theefe or a Whoore, is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Common-wealth." In an epistle dedicating the work "To all Gentlemen, Marchants, Apprentises, and Countrey Farmers health" (A2), the author refers to whores as "the caterpillers of the Common-wealth" and explains that his dialogue is meant to "discouer their villanies" (A3).

²¹ When the foolish constable Elbow brings Pompey and one of his customers, a Master Froth, before Angelo and Escalus, he uses terms that echo Mistress Overdone's, but to the opposite effect. His purpose is to argue that brothels are antithetical to the public weal. "Come, bring them away," he says; "If these be good people in a commonweal, that do nothing but use their abuses in common houses, I know no law" (2.1.41-43).

Come, fear not you; good counsellors lack no clients. Though you change your place, you need not change your trade. I'll be your tapster still. Courage, there will be pity taken on you; you that have worn your eyes almost out in the service, you will be considered. (1.2.105-10)

Overdone's traffic is, by Pompey's reckoning, one that can be transposed from one place to another. The tapster has absolute faith in the people's need for the services provided by his employer. When he is questioned in the next act about the legality of prostitution, Pompey explains to the old lord Escalus that illicit sexuality is not produced by bawds, but results rather from the predilections of the people. He offers an inverted solution to the supposed problem: "If your worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not to fear the bawds" (2.1.223-24), but he is confident that laws so stringent would not be sustainable, and by the same token, he knows that Mistress Overdone will never be completely "shrunk."

In Pompey's view, the strict new response to brothels is economically and socially untenable. He asks Escalus, "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?" (2.1.219-20), as if to suggest that nothing short of mass genital mutilation will curb the people's tendency toward illicit sexual behaviour. A punitive approach would seriously decrease the population: "If you head and hang all that offend that way but for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a commission for more heads" (2.1.227-29). Further, it is only the law's lagging far behind the customs of the people that prevents prostitution from being a "lawful trade" (2.1.212-16). This failure on the part of lawmakers and officers to accept the reality of the city is a source of comedy for the lighthearted tapster and parcel-bawd. The idea that his place in the economy should be outside of the law, while "headings and

hangings” are a matter of course, remains ridiculous to Pompey throughout the play. This particular hypocrisy is the focus of his conversations with both the Provost and the executioner when it comes time for the tapster to learn a new line of work.

Following Pompey’s arrest, the Provost realizes that it is possible to extort labour from him. Two executions are scheduled for the next morning, so Pompey can be made useful. The Provost’s choice of words emphasizes the fact that these killings are carried out by a public employee, a man whose work is regarded as essential to the proper functioning of society: “Here is in our prison a common executioner, who in his office lacks a helper” (4.2.8-9). Thus, instead of being incarcerated and whipped, Pompey will be required to help kill convicted criminals. The tapster is amenable to the arrangement, despite the nonsense he recognizes in Viennese law:

Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I
will be content to be a lawful hangman. I would be glad to
receive some instruction from my fellow-partner. (4.2.14-17)

Pompey’s former occupation was not officially sanctioned, and yet its repercussions were (to borrow Mercutio’s fatal pun) much less grave. Earlier in the play, when he still has his freedom, Pompey finds it easy to dismiss the threat of whipping—under his breath, he mutters, “Whip me? No, no, let carman whip his jade; / The valiant heart’s not whipped out of his trade” (2.1.243-44). He’s now about to learn a “trade” that is legitimate in the eyes of the state, and he will see soon enough how intertwined these two fields of expertise really are.

The former employment of Pompey and the work of Abhorson are related in at least two ways. First, the executioner, under the strict new governance of Angelo, punishes people for the kinds of acts that Pompey

would have abetted. (Through Pompey's careful cataloguing of the inmates he recognizes, the brothel takes its place on a teleological scale of depravity leading to execution: "I am as well-acquainted here as I was in our house of profession. One would think it were Mistress Overdone's own house, for here be many of her old customers" [4.3.1-4].) Second, both kinds of work can be figured as "trades," since the bawd and the executioner provide specific services for pay. Even Abhorson's name suggests a connection to prostitution—it echoes both "whoreson" and "abhor." If we follow Shakespeare's wordplay, Abhorson certainly is a *whoreson*: a person of illegitimate origins and limited social mobility. As for *abhor*, that's the word Isabella uses repeatedly in place of the rhyming *whore* that is so impossible for her to speak: "a vice that most I do abhor" (2.2.29), "such abhorred pollution" (2.4.184), "what I abhor to name" (3.1.103).²²

In fact, the executioner feels protective of his occupation as well—because Pompey is a bawd, Abhorson thinks "he will discredit our mystery" (4.2.25-26). The tapster argues that the execution of criminals does not constitute a mystery, whereas whores, "using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery" (4.2.34-35). That is, prostitutes are more like members of a guild because they paint their faces, just as painters paint buildings. Although this exchange is meant to make a joke of both prostitution and execution, it does raise questions about the extent to which these services can be compared to those of the twelve companies of London, and the extent to

²² In *Othello*, Desdemona is more explicit: "I cannot say whore: / It does abhor me now I speak the word" (4.2.163-64). Incidentally, the verb appears here as an accidental echo of Iago's rhetoric. The villain uses it in his eroticized gulling of Roderigo, starting from his very first lines: "If ever I did dream / Of such a matter, abhor me" (1.1.4-5); "...her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor" (2.1.229-31). *Whore* sounds through the *abhors* of non-dramatic sources, too, like the following verse from Richard West's instructions to children: "Let not thy privy members be / layd open to be view'd, / It is most shamefull and abhord, / detestable and rude" (*The Schoole of Vertue, the second part* [1619], B2v).

which death and sex can be considered purchased commodities in any commonwealth.

Selling Sex and Textiles in *The Honest Whore*

In Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore*, urban customers take their business to two primary locations: a linen-draper's shop and a whore's lodging.²³ These two venues for commercial exchange have radically different places in the social structure of a fictional Milan, and yet they're analogous to one another. The two businesses seem to be only a short distance apart, since characters travel from one to the next in contiguous scenes. Early in the action, a strong parallel is drawn between the two locations, and the connection is made stronger by the play's consistent balancing of Candido (the patient linen-draper) and Bellafront (the honest whore) as its two unnaturally virtuous protagonists. The similarities between these two characters have been noted elsewhere;²⁴ what needs further attention is the language employed in both the whore's chamber and the linen-draper's shop by the group of swaggering gallants who introduce the audience to each place of business. The consistency of their rhetoric warrants close consideration, as it suggests a certain equivalency between the sex trade and the trade in textiles.

Dwelling and selling right down the street from Bellafront is another character who puts up a good front: the linen-draper Candido, whose unparalleled patience is the reason for the gallants' visit to his shop. He is

²³ I use Paul Mulholland's recent edition of the play, but choose the simpler title "*The Honest Whore*" rather than "*The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*." Dekker's sequel, *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, is discussed in the third chapter.

²⁴ See especially Jean Howard's analysis in *Theater of a City* (119-20).

well known for his calmness, and they take great pleasure in attempting to topple him from his comfortable perch above all frustration. Candido's journeyman, George, shrewdly speaks to the gallants in a language they understand and delight in. He speaks first with cadent rhymes, using a certain amount of personification, but no obvious bawdy: "I can fit you gentlemen with fine calicoes too, for doublets, the only sweet fashion now, most delicate and courtly, a meek, gentle calico, cut upon two double affable taffetas—ah, most neat, feat, and unmatched" (5.22-25). It is only after one of the gallants refers to the linen as "she" that George lets flow a current of bawdy metaphors. To Castruchio's question, "What, and is this she, sayst thou?" he responds, "Ay, and the purest that ever you fingered since you were a gentleman. Look how even she is, look how clean she is, ha!—as even as the brow of Cynthia, and as clean as your sons and heirs when they ha' spent all" (5.29-34). Then, misunderstanding his own Latin, George offers a second bolt of fabric for comparison: "Compare them, I pray, *compara Virgilium cum Homero*: compare virgins with harlots" (5.39-41). When Castruchio claims to have "seen better," George keeps up his pimping conceit, declaring, "You may see further for your mind, but trust me, you shall not find better for your body" (5.42-45).

Because it is the gallants' wish to test (and mock) Candido's patience, they pretend to be on their way to another shop just as he enters, and George has to explain to his master that "the gentlemen find fault with this lawn" (5.49). This "fault" begins as an element in George's bawdy conceit, according to which the gallants find in the lawn a roughness equivalent to the baseness and openness of female sexuality.²⁵ But the fault becomes real and visible

²⁵ A comparison between women and fabrics appears also in the first scene of Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, when Master Yellowhammer chides his wife for using the word "errors" to describe their daughter's rebelliousness.

when the gallants demand that Candido cut a pennyworth out of the middle of his best fabric, rated at “eighteen shillings a yard” (5.63). The idea of ruining something by taking from the middle bears a resemblance to standard tropes about prostitution. Thus, this bit of tomfoolery foreshadows what is going to happen in the rest of this play and in *The Second Part of The Honest Whore* with the titular character. The scene at the linen-draper’s shop prepares us for the next scene, at Bellafront’s, by introducing a group of customers who are well aware that certain kinds of custom will damage the goods, and who are eager to take advantage of their position.

Candido’s wife Viola, who is clearly involved in the management of the shop, is appalled at his willingness to destroy the linen; she curses both his patience and the gallants’ abuse of it. The problem is that Candido and Viola define *custom* differently. The linen-draper considers these gallants “customers” before they’ve bought anything. He chides his wife for speaking harshly to them: “Such words will drive away my customers,” and as he hands over the pennyworth of linen he says to the gallants, “Pray know my shop; / Pray, let me have your custom” (5.100, 108-09). Viola responds to these usages with outrage: “‘Custom’, quoth’a!” (5.110). She understands as well as the gallants do that they intend not to spend but rather to be entertained at someone else’s expense. The licence they take in her husband’s shop is, in fact, the licence they take everywhere, and the language they use constantly signals both their sense of humour and their sense of entitlement.

The rhetoric used by shoppers and vendors in this scene would hardly be relevant to the present study if it weren’t for its proximity in time and tone to the scene at Bellafront’s chamber, which happens next. The two adjacent

Rather than adopt this new terminology, Yellowhammer contents himself with a metaphor for the girl’s “faults or cracks in duty and obedience”: “As there is no woman made without a flaw, / Your purest lawns have frays and cambrics bracks” (1.1.28-31).

scenes open similarly and feature parallel social exchanges. Both are set in places of business that constitute the livelihood of one or more characters, and each of the scenes has as its main event a visit from the slaphappy gallants. By means of these characters, tropes are imported from one setting to the next, inviting comparisons between the trade in linens and the trade in sex.²⁶

The scene in the linen-draper's shop opens with Viola's commands to the journeyman and apprentices about tidying up the displayed goods: "Come, you put up your wares in good order here, do you not, think you? One piece cast this way, another that way!" (5.1-3). The next scene opens with some elaborate stage business: Bellafront's servant Roger enters with several items, including Bellafront's cosmetics, which he places on a table with a lit candle, as though he were arranging props on a stage that isn't yet in view. The initial dialogue of this scene, like that of the previous, deals with the intersection of sale and display. And, as it happens, some mention is made of a piece of fabric with a hole in it. Roger explains to Bellafront, who is offstage, that he's busy "drawing up a hole in [her] white stocking" (6.4-5). In fact he isn't mending at all; he's doing himself up with her cosmetics and looking at himself in the mirror. When Bellafront enters, she is "*not full ready*" (6.15) and she chides Roger for not having brought in her ruff and poker. Then we watch the whore apply her makeup and arrange all the other aspects of her *front*, with Roger's help. Someone knocks on the door, and Bellafront insists that Roger tidy up before letting the visitor in. Her words echo Viola's: "And all these baubles lying thus? Away with it quickly" (6.63-64).

Viola and Bellafront both strive to maintain profitable businesses in spite of the challenges before them. For the linen-draper's wife and the

²⁶ Paul Mulholland makes this observation in his introduction to the play (281).

where alike, these challenges include the customers themselves. It is evident, for example, that neither Viola nor Bellafront wishes to waste wine on the gallants. The former bemoans the fact that her husband thinks these would-be customers are worthy of a drink (“God’s my life, / We shall have all our gains drunk out in beakers / To make amends for pennyworths of lawn” [5.142-44]), and the latter insists that her servant cheat her guests of their full portions (“Go fetch some wine, and drink half of it” [6.86]). Both Bellafront and Viola are shrewd and capable of withholding, unlike Candido. In the shop and at the whore’s house, it is the women who demonstrate commercial pragmatism. The audience’s introduction to Viola ensures that we will recognize Bellafront in the following scene as someone who means business. When the whore first emerges, the radical difference between the products for sale in the linen-draper’s shop and the services for sale at Bellafront’s is diminished, and the emphasis falls instead on the shared concerns of the female vendors.

Hippolito, who has never seen Bellafront before, and is ignorant of her profession, finds her “goodly” (6.207). Fluello responds, “By gad, when you know her as we do, you’ll swear she is the prettiest, kindest, sweetest, most bewitching honest ape under the pole. A skin—your satin is not more soft, nor lawn whiter” (6.208-11). These similes play backwards the banter we’ve just heard at the linen-draper’s shop, emphasizing the parallel between the two places of business and allowing Hippolito to recognize where he is: “Belike, then, she’s some sale courtesan” (6.212). Fluello’s confirmation of the fact also confirms the importance of the cosmetic preparation which took place at the beginning of the scene—“all your best faces,” he says, belong to prostitutes (6.213). Bellafront’s front—her good looks and her effort of

display—make her identifiable, according to Fluello, as the seller of her own services.

The comparison of the prostitute to a length of cloth recalls the events that have taken place already at the linen-draper's shop.²⁷ Bellafront already has a hole, and she seems relatively content to make her living by it. But the woman/textile metaphor reveals that the fabric of Bellafront's life is totally determined by the perceived status of this orifice. Like a pennyworth of lawn cut from the middle of the bolt, the sex for sale at Bellafront's lodging costs the seller more than it costs the customer. Just as the removal of a tiny sample of cloth renders the whole length worthless, the use of Bellafront's "middle" makes her less valuable in the marriage market and determines her place in an imagined spiritual economy. A prostitute, by this logic, is a woman with something cut out.

It is this understanding of the sex trade that Hippolito uses against Bellafront when she claims to be capable of "honesty," or exclusive affection, toward him. In his view, the use of a whore's hole by multiple men creates another opening, a gap instead of a soul, a moral and spiritual fault:

You have no soul:

That makes you weigh so light; heaven's treasure bought it

And half a crown hath sold it. For your body,

It's like the common shore, that still receives

All the town's filth. The sin of many men

Is within you; and thus much, I suppose,

²⁷ In formulating this reading of the hole in the cloth and the hole in the prostitute, I have benefited from Jean Howard's smart discussion of the "(w)holesaling" pun in Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*. Of that play, she writes, "It is hard to say whether the wicked pun on wholesale and holesale does more to discredit merchants or to elevate the whore's trade, here explicitly rendered as a selling of holes, a product much sought after and yet eerily empty, the 'no thing' of other Renaissance puns" (133).

That if all your committers stood in rank,
 They'd make a lane, in which your shame might dwell,
 And with their spaces reach from hence to hell. (6.374-82)

Hippolito imagines not a mere opening but an abyss, a hollow where the whore's chastity once resided. Her sin has been in underestimating the value of a gift from God, and in selling what was never really hers to begin with at a low price. Her body is a sewer and a conduit of sin whose depths cannot be fathomed. In his struggle to assimilate the fact of Bellafront's long sexual history, Hippolito replaces the image of repetitive penetration with one of dark emptiness. The "sin" of all the men who have been "within" her becomes an outward trajectory leading to perdition. Her fate is measured out by the bodies of her customers, whose payment has done little to protect the prostitute from the repercussions of sacrificing her own virtue. This, at any rate, is what Hippolito posits when he is overcome with sudden, simultaneous love and hatred for someone whose circumstances are so totally different from his own.

Bartholomew Fair Trade

One of the central themes of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* is that people and representations of people can be bought and sold. Joan Trash sells gingerbread people, her competitor Lantern Leatherhead sells dolls, and Grace Wellborn explains that she herself was "bought" by Justice Overdo (3.5.260).²⁸ The play also emphasizes, through the character of Bartholomew Cokes, the extent to which a person can assert his identity through commercial exchange. Cokes' purchases, by his own reckoning, make him

²⁸ Quotations are from Gordon Campbell's edition of the play.

who he is. *Bartholomew Fair* does not belong to a genre of “whore plays,” because whores are not central characters and the focus of the action is not a relationship between a man and a prostitute.²⁹ Instead, *Bartholomew Fair* is about dozens of people circulating outdoors, interacting with one another in a variety of ways. No single character is allowed the time to deliver a speech on the subject of prostitution, such as we find in *The Honest Whore*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, and *A Mad World, My Masters*.³⁰ Whores and bawds are present at the fair, but so are puppets, puritans, and pickpockets. Everyone speaks, everyone buys, sells, or steals something, and almost everyone’s identity is either deliberately or inadvertently obscured. At the same time, it isn’t accurate to say that prostitution has a marginal position in the world of *Bartholomew Fair*, as it does in *Othello* or *Measure for Measure*; this is a world without margins, an open stage. But if there is a part of the play in which the idea of the sex trade becomes central, it’s the puppet motion written by Littlewit and performed by Leatherhead near the end of the action.

In the puppet show, the famous story of Hero and Leander is transposed so that it flanks not the Hellespont but the Thames. Thus, Hero is said to come from the South Bank, which is always associated with brothels (5.4.141-43)³¹. If this isn’t clear enough, we have evidence that both Puppet Pythias and Puppet Damon have “lain with her” (5.4.221), that they share “but one drab” between them (5.4.229). Eventually, Hero’s name is scrambled and punned into the slant anagram *whore* (5.4.308), as the jealous Pythias and

²⁹ “Whore plays” and “whore plots” are Jean Howard’s terms for drama in which prostitution is a central concern (116, 114).

³⁰ *The Honest Whore* (6.371-495, 9.47-66), and *The Second Part of The Honest Whore* (4.1.256-401); *The Dutch Courtesan* (1.1.56-91); *A Mad World, My Masters* (1.1.140-69). By contrast, Jonson’s play includes prostitution as one of many fair activities, much as “Whores and whoremongers” are listed amid multitudes of other personages in Richard West’s poem *Newes from Bartholomew Fayre* (1606, A3).

³¹ Henry Ansgar Kelly provides the long history behind this association in his article “Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark.”

Damon kick and slander her until she ceases to speak. This comic abuse recalls the violence of an earlier scene in which the character known as Punk Alice “*enters, beating the Justice’s wife*” (4.5.58 [stage direction]), rants and raves about Mistress Overdo’s interference with her trade, and is kicked out by the rowdy pimps Whit and Knockem. The two episodes emphasize the potentially unsettling similarity between sold representations of people on the one hand (including dolls and puppet motions), and the kind of representation entailed in prostitution, on the other. There is an outright comparison between punk and pig early in the play (2.5.38-39), which will be discussed later; here, in the overlapping narratives of Hero and Alice, we find a subtler comparison between punk and puppet.

Puppet Hero talks back to the characters who call her a whore; Punk Alice rails against those gentlewomen such as Mistress Overdo who can so easily adopt the guise of a prostitute, while she depends upon that identity for her livelihood: “The poor common whores can ha’ no traffic for the privy rich ones. Your caps and hoods of velvet call away our customers, and lick the fat from us” (4.5.63-65). While the puppet spurns the title, the punk protects it. Alice’s complaint, with its emphasis on costume, is an inversion of the notion that prostitutes often masqueraded as gentlewomen in order to draw custom. In Stephen Gosson’s verse invective *Pleasant quippes for upstart newfangled gentle-women* (1595), for example, lavish dress is linked explicitly to sexual licence.³² And in the plays of both Jonson and Middleton, the title “gentlewoman” becomes a euphemism for whore.³³

³² The text runs:
 They say they are of gentle race,
 and therefore must be finely deckt,
 It were for them a great disgrace,
 to be as are the simple sect.
 Fine Gentles must be finely clad,
 All them beseemes, that may be had.

Alice speaks as a representative for a segment of the population that is otherwise absent from the dialogue of the play. There is plenty of sex being traded at the fair, primarily in and around the booth run by the formidable pig-roaster Ursula. But the kind of trafficking in which Ursula is engaged does not include “poor common whores;” her trade entails primarily the debauchery of fairgoing wives like Win Littlewit, to whom extramarital affairs seem totally foreign. Ursula participates in the backlash against Punk Alice’s violent tirade, because the common whore is making a scene that threatens to interfere with her business. There are at least three characters in *Bartholomew Fair* who make their living partly by procuring sex. These are the roaring Jordan Knockem from Turnbull and the Irishman Whit (both of whom are called “Captain”), and the pig-woman Ursula. The relationship shared by these three bawds seems to be one of collaboration rather than competition. Certainly Ursula holds a prior claim to the territory of the fair—she belongs at Smithfield, and, we assume, she lives and works there whether it’s Saint Bartholomew’s Day or not. But the pig-woman is not offended by the

They gentle are both borne and bred,
 they gentle are in sport and game:
 They gentle are at boord and bed,
 they gentle are in wealth and name.
 Such gentles nice, must needs be trimme,
 From head to foot in euerie limme.

But husbands you, marke well my sawes,
 when they pretend their gentle blood:
 Then they intend to make you dawes,
 in vaine to spend your wealth and good.
 You better were the clowne to cloath,
 Then Gentles which doe vertue loath... (B2v)

³³ For instance, the dramatis personae of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* include a “Welsh Gentlewoman” who has been the kept whore of a lascivious knight, and the clever entrepreneur Doll in *The Alchemist* pretends to be an over-educated “gentlewoman” in order to titillate the ridiculous Sir Epicure Mammon.

presence of Whit and Knockem at the fair; it is only the self-promoting Punk Alice who must be driven away.

Ursula is keenly aware of her competition. When two potential customers begin to mock her, Ursula responds by mocking *them* for their assumed preference for leaner prostitutes:

Aye, aye, gamesters, mock a plain plump soft wench o' the
suburbs, do, because she's juicy and wholesome. You must ha'
your thin pinched ware, pent up i' the compass of a dog-collar—
or 'twill not do—that looks like a long laced conger, set upright;
and a green feather, like fennel, i' the jowl on't. (2.5.75-79)

Knockem, familiar with her rhetorical skill, encourages the pig-woman to continue with her insults: “Answer ’em, Urs. Where’s thy Bartholomew wit now?” (2.5.91). She resorts to the standard trope of venereal disease for a set of colourful curses, framing such infections as deriving from “playhouse poultry” (2.5.94-95), the skinny prostitutes who haunt the theatres. Ursula’s “Bartholomew wit” is employed not only against her interlocutors, but against the other women who may have received their custom. Her trade, like that of the gingerbread-woman or the hobbyhorse-man, needs to be sufficiently advertised and protected from the lures of other nearby vendors.³⁴

Ursula’s harping on size and shape is echoed in Justice Overdo’s repeated discoveries of “enormity” at the fair (2.1.36, 2.2.10, etc). This word is funny from the first instance of its utterance, but it becomes even funnier when applied to Ursula, because she is actually enormous and because she is satisfied with her dimensions. She complains that Mooncalf has not let out

³⁴ Joan Trash and Lantern Leatherhead’s constant threats to take one another to the Piepowders—the temporary court set up to resolve conflicts arising at the fair—demonstrate the degree of self-interest that is required of one who wishes to do business at this venue. Incidentally, Joan Trash’s name and Leatherhead’s chief product (hobbyhorses) both echo the theme of prostitution in their own ways.

the sides of her stool, “that my hips might play” (2.2.63-64), and she expresses her opinion that prostitutes elsewhere are simply too thin. In an aside, the disguised Justice of the Peace is sure to take note of Ursula’s bad behaviour: “This pig-woman do I know, and I will put her in for my second enormity; she hath been before me, punk, pinnace and bawd, any time these two and twenty years, upon record i’ the Piepowders” (2.2.69-72). As Overdo’s language suggests, Ursula’s fatness is tied up with her trade. It is part of how she views her work as a bawd, and it is certainly one of the outward markers people use to identify her as one.³⁵

Conversely, Punk Alice is associated with straightness and slenderness; she is one of the strangely phallic, bony prostitutes whom Ursula finds so repulsive. When she complains that the “privy rich” whores “lick the fat” from common prostitutes like herself, she suggests that this matter of shape and size can be explained in simple terms. In drawing custom away from poorer workers, gentlewomen and their bawds take the sustenance that comes with it. While Ursula drips fat, Alice goes hungry. Moreover, the comic drift of the play lifts the seriousness from the punk’s complaint and adds her chagrin to the roster of individual concerns that are not allowed to impede the momentum of the fair. The version of Alice we encounter in the final act of the play is a puppet whose voice and motion are not her own. Leatherhead’s performance might leave an audience with the sense that these two characters, both decidedly comic and both violently driven offstage, represent in tandem a demographic that is an inextricable part of the actual economy.

³⁵ The whore Rahab (Hebrew for “wide” or “broad”) is the starting place of Patricia Parker’s *Literary Fat Ladies*, a study whose methods of readerly dilation I have sought to emulate here.

Aunts and Uncles in the Prodigal Plot of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*

In Middleton's comedy *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, the clever and unscrupulous protagonist Theodorus Witgood makes a trade: he begins the play with one woman and ends it with another. More specifically, he trades his whore for a wife, and in so doing, he switches out of a life of dissipation and into one of economic comfort. The shape of the drama is dictated by this basic exchange and the rather complex network of negotiations that allow it to take place. *A Trick* is a version of the parable of the prodigal son, and in this particular telling prostitution is an identifying feature of prodigality. At the same time, the prostitute's sexual choices are represented as a different kind of prodigality—an exclusively feminine expense that can never be fully reclaimed.

It's hard to understand the trade Witgood makes without first considering the nature of his existing relationships with both the unnamed "Courtesan" and his uncle, Pecunius Lucre. These two relationships affect one another, and together they emphasize the play's paralleling of sexual and financial arrangements. In the broadest terms, the theme of *A Trick* is debt. Sex and money are related through prostitution, but they are also connected in that they both generate obligations, even if those obligations—as in the case of the prodigal—are ignored. For Witgood, financial and sexual matters are deeply intertwined, if not simply identical. From the very beginning of the play, in his conversation with the Courtesan, the protagonist's rhetoric is laden with commercial concerns.

Witgood addresses to his courtesan a steady stream of invective, charging her with the disappearance of his wealth. "My loathing! hast thou been the secret consumption of my purse? and now com'st to undo my last

means, my wits?" (1.1.28-29).³⁶ He calls her a "round-webbed tarantula,/That dryest the roses in the cheeks of youth!" (1.1.31-32). According to Witgood, all of his resources have been drawn from him by this wily young woman, and he is now on the verge of ruin. To the audience, however, it is clear that the Courtesan is innocently devoted to him. In response to his complaints about poverty, she offers an account of what she has lost through their arrangement: "I have been true unto your pleasure, and all your lands thrice racked, was never worth the jewel which I prodigally gave you, my virginity" (1.1.33-35). Switching to verse, she concludes with a couplet on the subject of this sacrifice: "Lands mortgaged may return and more esteemed,/But honesty, once pawned, is ne'er redeemed" (36-37).

If Witgood can frame their relationship as a strictly economic one, so can the Courtesan. After this confident response to his abusive rhetoric, he soon realizes that he needs to enlist *her* good wit in order to regain financial stability. Thus, she will be instrumental not in the "secret consumption" but in the secret recuperation of his purse. The Courtesan's declaration of loss draws attention to Witgood's money trouble and at the same time dismisses his claim to the audience's sympathy. In describing her own sexual giving, she uses the adverb "prodigally" simultaneously to confirm our suspicion that Witgood is a prodigal and to suggest that his predicament is much less dire than hers. Further, we hear in her response an emphasis on "honesty" and on having been "true." These are measurements of feminine virtue to which Witgood is plainly not subject, but the mention of loyalty and sexual exclusivity does something to sharpen the Courtesan's testimony.

Because *spending* is often used as a metaphor for ejaculation, the whore (or any woman who isn't one's wife) gets represented in many kinds of writing

³⁶ I follow G. J. Watson's edition of the play.

as a hole into which both semen and money are deposited—not an investment, but a waste. To spend time with prostitutes is to squander not only the hours, but two other kinds of wealth that ought to be put to productive use. A man’s “purse,” in early modern usage, can contain either of these substances. When Witgood accuses the Courtesan of having consumed his purse, he suggests that their private encounters have subtracted something not only from his capital but also from the stores with which he is naturally endowed. The Courtesan insists, however, that no loss of Witgood’s matches the sacrifice of her “jewel,” which, according to some contemporary notions of virginity, cannot be recuperated.

Moreover, despite Witgood’s complaint and the title given to his acquaintance, there is little evidence that this young woman has earned either the epithet “courtesan” or the money that ought to accompany such a description. Although her role in the economic frame of the drama may not be clear at the outset, near the end of the play Witgood explains that he has been her sole client—“Excepting but myself, I dare swear she’s a virgin” (5.2.148-49)—and she declares that she has nothing (5.2.94, 128). Of course, this near-virginity is not good enough for Witgood. The protagonist has no intention of marrying the woman with whom he is sexually involved, and expects instead to marry Joyce Hoard and her goodly “portion.” This situation alone, determined by the interlocking economies of feminine virtue and monetary wealth, is what defines the young lover as a courtesan. Aside from her being used and discarded by Witgood, she has little to show for her supposed occupation.³⁷

³⁷ Valerie Wayne’s response to the designation of this character as a *courtesan* is to change her speech headings to the name *Jane*. Justifying this editorial decision with a taxonomy of prostitution that differentiates “courtesans” from “strumpets,” she asserts that “Jane is not a professional prostitute but Witgood’s mistress” (375). “We never learn her ‘real’ name,” Wayne admits,

Nor is “courtesan” the only epithet attached to this anonymous character. The usual smattering of synonyms is applied to her: “strumpet,” “quean,” and “whore” are all used in the final revelation of her identity to the unlucky man who has married her (5.2.88, 90, 101). The Courtesan is enjoined to perform the role of a wealthy widow in order to carry out the eponymous “trick” of the play, whereby Witgood reclaims his former wealth from the clutches of his uncle, weds the woman of his choice, and marries his whore off to his father-in-law. Her crucial function in the execution of Witgood’s plans makes the Courtesan, as the widow, the centre of attention. Suddenly, she is the most desirable kind of goods available on the marriage market. The significance of the identity she adopts—that of Widow Medler—will be discussed later in this section. First, we turn to the complex of familial and economic bonds which the Courtesan is, like us, forced to navigate.

A Trick to Catch the Old One is a tangle of uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces. The rival usurers Hoard and Lucre are both uncles who are involved and invested in the future of their siblings’ children. Hoard is hosting his niece Joyce in London, where she is busy learning music and manners, and being visited by suitors. Lucre, for his part, has taken advantage of his wastrel nephew, and now holds the mortgage to his lands. Hoard complains not only of the trick his rival played on him by moving in on a deal he was about to close three years ago, but of the liberties Lucre has taken with the wealth of

...But the speech heading ‘courtesan’ fixes her in ways that make it difficult for readers to observe [her] shifts in identity and grounds a misconception of the character’s sexual inconstancy, constructing for the contemporary reader a woman who makes her living by sexual commerce and is generally available to men. (375)

In my reading, the exaggerated epithet accords with the play’s portrayal of sexuality as deeply and troublingly commercialized. The notion of a courtesan’s sexual exclusivity is not a contradiction in terms, any more than readerly sympathy is denied a character who profits by sexual relations with one or more men. There’s no need to defend the Courtesan on such grounds, especially since she can so obviously speak for herself.

his own nephew. Lucre does nothing to hide the fact that he feels entitled to Witgood's inheritance because of the younger man's reputation for bad behaviour.

Like Witgood himself, Uncle Lucre sees illicit sex as a void into which money is poured, never to be retrieved. The younger man's frequent visits to whores and brothels is Lucre's justification for robbing him of the wealth that remains: "...was it not then better bestowed upon his uncle, than upon one of his aunts? – I need not say bawd, for everyone knows what 'aunt' stands for in the last translation" (2.1.9-12). This bit of winking philology from Lucre is parallel to the complaints with which Witgood opens the play. All of his means, he says, have been "sunk into that little pit, lechery" (1.1.4). *A Trick* is thus a prodigal *nephew* play; while Middleton takes advantage of the narrative possibilities afforded by the relationships among aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews, his characters make jokes about the malleability of these kinship terms. In other instances, *aunt* has little to do with the monetary aspect of prostitution, but in *A Trick*, where the nephew's prodigality includes his "lechery" and everything has to do with money, kinship terms are also financial terms.

Witgood himself plays with the word *aunt* more than once. When he introduces his whore, in her disguise, to his uncle, he calls her "Good aunt" (2.1.278). Here it seems that he is using the word just as his uncle expects him to; it's an ironic epithet for a woman whose role is unclear and unverifiable. The very vagueness of *aunt* had made it, by the time of Middleton's writing, a synonym for *whore*.³⁸ It's not altogether clear whether the word is part of a quiet aside, or whether Lucre is meant to hear it and remain oblivious to its connotation. Either way, it doesn't interfere with the advance of Witgood's

³⁸ In fact the *OED* cites Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* as the first instance of this usage ("aunt 3").

plot. If Lucre was, earlier in this scene, concerned with preventing his nephew's *aunts* from impinging upon the family fortune, he is now unable to recognize the kind of person who could represent such a challenge. Despite his nephew's reputation, he accepts the rather unconvincing evidence that the boy is ready to settle down with a nice rich widow from Staffordshire.

At the end of the play, Witgood voices his relief at seeing his courtesan "well bestowed" upon Hoard. This can be no more than a slant-truth, given that Hoard's proposal to the Courtesan, along with several other men's, is a totally unplanned side-effect of Witgood's plot. He says nothing to the Courtesan in the play's first scene about the possibility of finding her a way out of her own bad situation; the scheme is intended strictly to serve Witgood's ends. He and the Courtesan are both, ultimately, the beneficiaries of coincidence. Nevertheless, the young man is ready to take credit for helping her to a husband, and he links their respective marriages rhetorically as twin factors in their sexual separation. At the same time, he also emphasizes her former faithfulness to him, along with his difficulty in distancing himself from her, and he gets the opportunity to make one last *aunt* joke: "Excepting but myself, I dare swear she's a virgin; and now, by marrying your niece, I have banished myself for ever from her. She's mine aunt now, by my faith, and there's no meddling with mine aunt, you know – a sin against my nuncle" (5.2.148-52). This flourish includes the subtle indication that *niece*, like *aunt*, might mean more than one thing.

Similarly, both the name and the marital status of the character played by the Courtesan become deeply and variously significant for the men who interact with her. It isn't clear whether the role of Widow Medler is based on a real person (in the world of the play) or not. Middleton depicts a social network in which the names and numbers attached to widows and their

fortunes circulate rapidly and without any apparent need for verification. Such rumours enjoy a momentum that supersedes doubt and engenders false memories in the minds of eager men. The First Creditor makes a joke about the conjecture surrounding the idea of Widow Medler by punning on her name: “she lies open,” he says, “to much rumour” (2.2.58-9). That is, the fruit known as the medlar, which is also called the “openarse,” is a perfect metaphor for someone whose private wealth has been so totally exposed. The joke is even more striking for us, since we know what the creditor does not: that the widow is not Mistress Medler at all, but a woman who “lies open” to Witgood’s sexual and strategic whims. Medler suggests both the famously suggestive fruit—a little brown applelike form that was thought to resemble female genitalia—and a cunning insinuator who has something to gain by getting involved in the affairs of others.³⁹

To add to all this, a woman named Jane is always common in at least one sense of the word, because she comes from humble origins, often lives in the country, and sometimes attracts the attention of her social betters. The playwright Thomas Heywood, for example, felt Jane to be a more appropriate first name for Edward IV’s famous mistress Elizabeth Shore, and she’s been known as Jane Shore ever since.⁴⁰ In *As You Like It*, Touchstone tells the

³⁹ In *Measure for Measure*, Lucio uses the word “medlar” to refer to a woman whom he impregnated out of wedlock (4.4.169), and later employs the adjective “meddling” in an equally negative way, to describe the Duke’s alter-ego (5.1.128). Sir Thomas Overbury, in one of his collections of “characters,” employs the medlar to explain the elderliness of the typical procuress: “Her yeeres are sixty and odde: that she accounts her best time of trading; for a Bawde is like a Medlar, she’s not ripe, till [s]he be rotten” (G6v).

⁴⁰ This is what she’s called in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, where the obvious rhyme with “Shore” can almost be heard. Gloucester exploits the notion of a woman’s being shared by the King and Hastings: “Naught to do with Mistress Shore? I tell thee, fellow, / He that doth naught with her, excepting one, / Were best he do it secretly alone” (1.1.99-101). Eventually, he refers to her simply as “that harlot strumpet Shore” (3.4.76). His insinuations pay off when the Mayor, justifying the execution of Hastings, uses similar rhetoric: “I never

bawdy tale of his former passion for a milkmaid called Jane Smile (2.4.43-52). The narrative complex that connects lower social ranking to sexual promiscuity and subsequently generates a nexus of winking libidinous interest around ordinary women is fully present in the very name Jane, which takes its place among the cheery, wholesome-sounding monosyllabic names so often attached to country wenches and whores: Moll, Doll, Kate, Frank, and so on.⁴¹ It could be that Jane is the Courtesan's real first name, or that it is chosen specifically to suit the sexual suggestiveness of the disguise. Hoard's fondness for the name is evident when he addresses his bride as "Wife, Mistress Jane Hoard" (4.4.78-79) or "Mistress Jane Hoard, wife!" (5.2.28).

At the core of Walkadine Hoard's mistake is his own vocation as a usurer and that vocation's requisite greed. Rather than dwelling on the commonness of *Jane* or the suspiciously punny quality of *Medler*, Hoard keeps his mind fixed on the idea of a *widow*. This is easily done, since the word is constantly applied to the Courtesan throughout the period of her disguise. What Walkadine thinks he's going to get by marrying "Jane Medler" is really the opposite of what he ultimately secures: not a hoard of riches but a poor whore. In fact, the Courtesan comes clean about her lack of means, even as she disguises her identity. She says she has nothing, but Hoard is convinced by the rumours of her wealth, and seems not to hear her: "Well said, widow, / Well said; thy love is all I seek, before these gentlemen" (3.1.210-12). *Widow* means only one thing to Hoard; it is the promised antithesis of poverty.

looked for better at his hands / After once he fell in with Mistress Shore" (3.5.49-50).

⁴¹ *Mary* is suggestively abbreviated as *Moll* in both *The Roaring Girl* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Stage Dolls include Doll Common (*The Alchemist*), Doll Tearsheet (*Henry IV*), Doll Target (*The Second Part of The Honest Whore*), and the whore in *Northward Ho*. Franks are found in *A Mad World, My Masters*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, and *Ram Alley*. Kate Keepdown is mentioned but never seen in *Measure for Measure*, and Kate Bountinall numbers among the incarcerated whores in *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*.

However, Walkadine Hoard is not the only one who is prone to get things backwards; Witgood, too, reads the name of his bride through a particular filter, and fails to see the potential parallel between Joyce and “Jane.” If *Joyce* does not sufficiently echo *Jane*, or immediately resonate with prostitution, *Hoard* certainly makes the point, signalling both the vocation of the play’s usurers and the women’s trade that is seen to mirror it. The inverse of the usurer’s occupation—of turning money into a reproductive entity—is the whore’s profession, which similarly relies on the customer’s willingness to pay for the opportunity to *spend*. Not only does prostitution ostensibly lower collective levels of reproduction; it simultaneously turns a profit on the very custom of such waste. Hoarding and whoring go hand-in-hand.

Another linguistic marker of Joyce Hoard’s hidden sexual status is her role as Walkadine’s “niece,” a kinship term used elsewhere by Middleton’s characters to disguise the relationship between a whore and her keeper. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Sir Walter Whorehound shows up to claim the hand of Moll Yellowhammer with his curiously Welsh “niece” in tow. Although Joyce Hoard, unlike the “Welsh Gentlewoman” of *Chaste Maid*, does have a name, that name itself points to the same thing that namelessness comes to signify in both plays: an identity bound up in sexual service. Witgood may hear *Joyce Hoard*, but we also hear *Joyce Whored*. His *choice*, the woman he takes up as a replacement for his “strumpet,” may be another man’s discarded goods. At the very least, both the courtesan and the niece are instruments of manipulation and exchange. In this reading, it looks like an even trade. While it is clear that the play asks us to laugh at Hoard’s mistake in marrying a well-known prostitute, there is also the subtle suggestion that Witgood, in spite of his good wit, has made a similar match. Here and elsewhere, Middleton is keen to portray women’s sexual histories as fundamentally

opaque, and he finds comic potential in men's tendency to see what they want to see in their Janes and Joyces.

A Chaste Maid and Others Kept in Cheapside

In structural terms, Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is a braid of families. The Allwits, the Touchwoods, the Kixes, and the Yellowhammers constitute the majority of the cast of characters, and the interactions within and between these families give the play its plot. More specifically, *A Chaste Maid* presents a range of marriages—each of the four wedded couples operates on a different understanding of the conjugal bond. In every case, sexuality and married life fit together awkwardly or not at all. And each couple, in one way or another, is involved in an arrangement that resembles prostitution. The action reveals a tangle of extramarital affairs, some of which would be considered examples of *whoredom* in Renaissance England, and others which jibe more with modern conceptions of prostitution in that the party sought out to perform sexual services actually receives remuneration for his or her efforts. Marriage and child-rearing are implicated, for better or worse, in the systems of sexual patronage that shape social relations in this playworld.⁴²

The only people in the play who seem to enjoy a comfortable family life are the Allwits, who share their marriage with a third party. Sir Walter Whorehound, a wealthy country knight, “keeps” the Allwits; he makes sexual

⁴² In her introduction to the play, Linda Woodbridge writes, “The absence from the play of those city-comedy favourites, prostitutes, bawds, and usurers, alerts us to the fact that it locates its marketed sex not in the streets but within marriage” (908). My reading suggests that prostitutes are not wholly absent from Middleton's Cheapside, but I agree, nevertheless, that the bulk of the play's sexual commerce takes place within the accepted bounds of family life.

use of Mistress Allwit, provides for their illegitimate children, and has his servants take care of things so that Allwit can glide blissfully through life. Allwit's very name is a joke on his failure to recognize the emasculation and idiocy inherent in his situation: to others, he's a wittol, one who willingly abets the adulterous affairs of his wife; to himself, he's pure ingenuity. Allwit's got it backwards. He never refers to himself as a wittol or to his wife as a whore, but the culture of Cheapside doesn't fully agree with his complacency.

The Allwits are not the only people in Sir Walter's care. He also keeps a whore who is simply labelled "the Welsh Gentlewoman."⁴³ Because this woman has apparently never had a child by him, it is easy for Sir Walter to introduce her to the Yellowhammers as his "niece." The two of them travel to Cheapside together, intending to marry the two children of the Yellowhammers—the "chaste maid" Moll and her brother Tim. Fortunately, the goldsmith and his wife are also ready to arrange nuptials, especially for their daughter. The words they use to address and describe Moll bespeak an eagerness to trade her for some financial gain. While Maudlin curses the girl's greensickness, she also uses the epithet "baggage" (1.1.42), which is a slant synonym for whore. Moll's father adopts the term and utters it more than once when the girl runs off with her beloved (3.1.28, 3.1.51). At that point, he adds "minx" to the list as well (3.1.59). Later still, the rebellious maid is dragged out of the Thames and brought before her family, who subject her to a torrent of namecalling and mocking abuse in which "mermaid," "baggage," and "strumpet" (4.4.37-40) each play a part. But nothing so totally

⁴³ Quoted material is from Kathleen McLuskie and David Bevington's edition of the play in the anthology *Plays on Women*. Their edition is a revision of R. B. Parker's.

confirms the Yellowhammers' sense of their daughter's whorishness as does the simple fact of their calling her *Moll*.

One of the most common contemporary abbreviations of *Mary*, *Moll* continued to be used as a proper name while simultaneously gaining currency as a noun: a *moll* was a whore or a woman noticed for her whorishness.⁴⁴ Of course, the category of whorelike behaviour could include a lot of things that were neither illicit nor sexual. In *The Roaring Girl*, for example, Middleton and Dekker conjure from the real-life Londoner Mary Frith a character called Moll Cutpurse, who is thought to be sexually available until she delivers a strongly-worded tirade to the contrary.⁴⁵ Partly because there is another character in the play called Mary, and partly because the eponymous figure is known for her unruly responses to gender norms, the "roaring girl" is always called by the nickname *Moll*. At one point, she signals her rather superficial affinity with the other, presumably better-behaved Mary by mentioning their shared name: "I pitied her for her name's sake, that a Moll / Should be so crossed in love, when there's so many / That owes nine lays apiece, and not so little" (4.1.70-72). Middleton and Dekker, like their roaring girl, would have us compare the fates of various Molls to see what effect this suggestive name has on the women who go by it. In *A Chaste Maid*, the young protagonist's name is used against her. Moll Yellowhammer's parents do not think she is a

⁴⁴ The *OED*'s earliest instance of this usage comes from Middleton's own *Father Hubburds tales* (1604)—the citation includes the phrase "these common Molls," and the definition provided by the dictionary is: "A girl, a woman; *esp.* a prostitute. Now *rare*" (*OED* "moll, *n*²"). Coppélia Kahn observes that the name *Moll* "evok[es] in a word both virginal and whorish representations of women" (253).

⁴⁵ Moll surprises Laxton, the man who has planned an assignation with her, by arriving at their meeting place in drag and suddenly removing her disguise. She begins, "Thou'rt one of those / That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore," and concludes, "I scorn to prostitute myself to a man, / I that can prostitute a man to me!" (3.1.69-109).

prostitute, but there are times at which it seems she may as well be one, given the extent of their frustration with her rebelliousness.

The women in this play who provide sexual service to men go relatively nameless. Mistress Allwit carries only her husband's name, which is actually nothing more than a joke on his willing cuckoldry. The Welsh Gentlewoman who is kept by Sir Walter seems to require no name at all. Touchwood Senior's acquaintance the Country Wench is similarly anonymous. Thus *Moll* stands out as a mark of individuality and familiarity, while simultaneously linking the young woman semantically to the kind of sexual exchange in which she, unlike several other characters, plays no part. The very idea that the play's "chaste maid" should be called *Moll* is part of Middleton's extended joke about the drastically varying names assigned to sexual behaviour in his fictional Cheapside and in the real world he satirizes. Sexual unwillingness, or a failure to cooperate with the marriage plans laid out by one's parents, is framed by the Yellowhammers as a form of wilful sexual transgression. The young woman who rebels against her parents' control of her romantic and erotic fate is similar, in their view, to a whore who turns her own sexuality into a commodity and profits by it.⁴⁶

While her parents' interpellation of Moll as a "strumpet" or "baggage" is surely unfair, there are other aspects of her story which give the impression

⁴⁶ Incidentally, it comes out in the course of the action that Moll's father has disported with a whore in the past. When Allwit comes to him, disguised as a distant country cousin to the Yellowhammers, and attempts to dissuade him from marrying Moll off to Sir Walter by explaining that the knight keeps another man's wife for his sexual satisfaction, Yellowhammer's outrage is short-lived. What troubles him most is the idea that the husband should be a willing party to the arrangement; the notion of extramarital sex *per se* is completely compatible with his conception of everyday life. He admits, "I've kept a whore myself, and had a bastard / By Mistress Anne, in *anno* – / I care not who knows it" (4.1.259-61). And he extends his explanation with a cursory glance at Sir Walter's wealth and his whore's (imagined) health: "The knight is rich; he shall be my son-in-law. / No matter, so the whore he keeps be wholesome; / My daughter takes no hurt then. So, let them wed" (4.1.264-66).

that she is far from the archetypal “chaste maid.” Her relationship with Touchwood Junior and the secret assignations that the two of them arrange in order to be wed often overlap with representations of prostitution, even though their mutual affection is altogether lawful. After their first attempt to get married in secret is foiled, Moll and Touchwood have to get more creative. Moll is locked up by her father, but escapes through a hole in the floor (suggestive in its own right) that leads out to the gutter. She gets as far as the river, but is caught by her family and pelted with insults that connect her escape to whorishness. This attempt to get away involves the ingenuity of a servant in the Yellowhammer household, who is sympathetic towards Moll because she is in a similar situation herself. Touchwood Junior explains to his brother the means of Moll’s escape and the servant woman’s motivation for helping her:

By the firm secrecy and kind assistance
Of a good wench i’ the house, who, made of pity,
Weighing the case her own, she’s led through gutters,
Strange hidden ways, which none but love could find
Or ha’ the heart to venture. (3.3.29-33)

The servant has either a good imagination or some comparable experience in her past that allows her to sympathize so completely with Moll. If the “strange hidden ways” which lead his beloved out of incarceration can be found only by “love,” it must be that the servant has known a love just as powerful as Moll’s. But it’s equally possible that Touchwood, smitten as he is, misreads the situation. Hatred, too, could drive Moll out of her annoying parents’ house. So could lust. Moll may be “chaste,” but she might also have her mind in the gutter. For that matter, Touchwood’s mind might be there, too; “case,” after all, is a slang term for female private parts. If his pun is

intentional, Moll's lover is boldly describing the sexual yearning she feels for him—a yearning that is identifiable and familiar to the servant whose *case* similarly dictates her actions.

While Touchwood Junior demonstrates a keen erotic interest in one woman, his older brother can't help himself, as the saying goes, from acting on desires that reach in multiple directions. We are given to understand that Touchwood Senior has frequent sex with his wife and any number of other women, but receives only the burden of additional children as payment for his philandering. He is comical simply because he does what so many other men do, but is cursed to suffer the maximum consequence. On the other hand, Touchwood is immune to feelings of obligation when it comes to his extramarital affairs. There is a difference, in his mind, between the sex he has with his wife and the sex he has with other people. The children that are born to Mistress Touchwood are *his* in a way that the others are not. For example, he is able, without remorse, to counsel the Country Wench on how to dispose of the baby who has resulted from their liaison. What goes on between Touchwood Senior and the Country Wench is altogether different from both his relationship with his wife and his later arrangement with the Kixes. Furthermore, the sexual relationship between Touchwood and the Country Wench has entirely different repercussions for him than it does for her. The depiction of this discrepancy is an important aspect of the play's analysis of illicit sexual engagements.

While it is obvious that the Country Wench is not regarded as a whore (neither Touchwood nor the Lenten Promoters call her one), it is equally clear that she seeks to protect herself from the kind of reputation that could immediately descend upon a woman with a fatherless child. (This is, she admits, her fifth.) Bastard children could present Touchwood Senior with

a financial burden and perhaps a certain amount of shame, but the difficulty of raising a child out of wedlock would fall largely on the shoulders of the Country Wench. Challenges would emerge both from her relative poverty and her unmarried status, two factors which, in the narratives conjured by early modern drama, often work together to mark a woman as a whore. The relationship between Touchwood Senior and his acquaintance cannot be understood fully without reference to their very different levels of risk. What is at stake for him in the fate of the illegitimate child is by no means equal to what is at stake for her.

In fact, to compare “stakes” at this juncture is to verge on producing a crass pun, since the solution to the Country Wench’s problem is bound up in the Lenten prohibitions against the consumption of meat. She relieves herself of her obligation to the child by thinking of it in the same terms as Touchwood does; it becomes nothing more than “a piece of flesh” (2.1.107). Because Londoners must abide by strict regulations controlling the buying and eating of meat during Lent, Touchwood feels that this will be an especially difficult time for the Country Wench to dispose of her burden. Fortunately, the Promoters—the officials in charge of surveying the traffic of foodstuffs to ensure that people are not breaking the rules—are corrupt enough to confiscate meat and keep it for themselves or for wealthy citizens who have purchased their loyalty. Thus the Country Wench feels confident that if she tries to pass by them with a basket of “flesh” they will seize it. She makes them swear to “keep it” (2.2.166), and they agree with delight, only to find, after she’s gone, that they’re stuck with a little baby and a promise to care for it. But the frustrated Promoters demonstrate with their subsequent plans how common it is, in their world, for illegitimate children to be cast

aside. They decide to deposit the baby in the suburbs and roast a newly-confiscated loin of mutton.

Eventually, Touchwood Senior is able to turn a profit by making himself sexually available to Lady Kix. He sends word to the desperately childless Kixes that he is possessed of a “water” that promotes conception. In the statement of his fee, presented to Sir Oliver and Lady Kix by their maid, Touchwood’s whole self comes to stand metonymically for the service he offers: “I must tell you first, he’s very dear” (2.2.199). This utterance bears a rhetorical similarity to commonplace representations of prostitution—as a selling of oneself—and generates dramatic irony, since Touchwood really does intend to have sex with Lady Kix. The all-too-productive properties of his “water” can, in this one instance, bring about positive results. The Kixes want the offspring that Touchwood himself can neither afford nor cease to sire. For once, his expenditure of semen will grant him a return, and what was once a curse is now a blessing.

While the Touchwoods are forever producing more children, and cannot come up with the money to support this profusion, the Kixes have plenty of money to spend on apothecary’s bills and secret remedies, but no baby to show for all their efforts. Lady Kix hints that the problem is actually her husband’s failure to pay *her* the requisite sexual attention—when he says, “I mean to make my good deeds my children,” her response is, “Give me but those good deeds, and I’ll find children” (2.1.147-48). Because the cause of their barrenness is really no mystery, it’s fitting that the solution which Touchwood Senior proposes is nothing more than a thinly veiled offer of sexual service. Thus, the happy coincidence that brings Touchwood and the Kixes together constitutes one of the play’s parallels to prostitution.

The arrangement which the Touchwoods make with the Kixes is understood differently by each of the four participants. Sir Oliver Kix will fund the Touchwoods, so that they need not fear future pregnancies—their children will be provided-for. This is done in payment for Touchwood's remarkable gift of fertility, but such generosity can be shown only because Sir Oliver is ignorant of Touchwood's actual remedy. Touchwood, for his part, will go on having sex with his own wife and Sir Oliver's, and, presumably, several other women around town. But fortuitous arrangements such as this are not enjoyed by all the play's characters in the end. The Kixes and Touchwoods belong in the comic conclusion of the play, whereas Sir Walter's rejection of his former ways necessarily excludes him from a community in which sexuality and prosperity are so densely and variously intertwined.

Relationships of patronage based on sexual service are easily formed in Middleton's *Cheapside*, but they can also dissolve. Near the end of the action, a penitent Sir Walter Whorehound begins to insult the Allwits, whom he has kept so lovingly for many years. He calls Mistress Allwit a "foul whore" (5.1.106), cursing her for the very behaviour that he has enjoyed. The Allwits, for their part, are not discouraged by the dissolution of their relationship with the wealthy knight. In addition to the series of insults Sir Walter hurls at them, two reports arrive in the space of a single scene, both of which are at least partially wrong, but function nevertheless to strongly discourage the couple from remaining friends with Sir Walter.

Rather than maintaining their affiliation with a man who is at once an apparent murderer and an imminently dissolute, raving penitent, the Allwits turn their entrepreneurial attentions toward the up-and-coming district in the western part of the city. Their relationship with Sir Walter has left them "richly furnished...with household stuff" (5.1.162) which can be put on display,

so Mistress Allwit proposes that they “let out lodgings... / And take a house in the Strand” (5.1.163-64). The way the Allwits talk about their fresh new plans for a boarding-house in the Strand makes it seem likely that they are in fact hoping to establish a very particular kind of lodging—one in which their “cloth-of-tissue cushions” (5.1.166) and “close-stool of tawny velvet” (5.1.170) can be shown to their best advantage.⁴⁷ Among the legion meanings of *stuff* is a prostituted or lower-class woman,⁴⁸ and both chamber-pots and fancy fabrics—especially velvet—are stock metaphors for whores.

Just as the Allwits easily turn away from Sir Walter Whorehound and his fortunes, the Yellowhammers have little difficulty with the idea that their only son is married to a whore. They encourage Tim to “have patience” (5.4.105), to assimilate this inevitable reality into his self-conception. The stubborn university boy can only bring himself to compare his bride to a purchased horse whom he intends to profit by: “I bought a jade at Cambridge; / I’ll let her out to execution, tutor, / For eighteen pence a day, or Brentford horse-races; / She’ll serve to carry seven miles out of town well” (5.4.97-100). Tim’s clumsy conceit suggests that his intention is to pimp the Welshwoman out, but her response indicates that he’ll meet resistance—she insists that “There’s a thing called marriage, and that makes me honest” (5.4.118).

This magic recipe for a woman’s transformation from whore to wife is rejected by the action of the play up to this point. If we take the Allwits, Touchwoods, Yellowhammers, and Kixes as the available models of marriage,

⁴⁷ Jean Howard provides a compelling account of the play’s final motions, finding in the Allwits’ westward-turning gaze an example of the contemporary trend that was driving the development of a fashionable shopping and entertainment district in the west of London (135-41). Kathleen McLuskie introduces the play with an emphasis on the innovative energies of characters like the Allwits, who “adapt to social change by learning to exploit it” (15). In her reading too, the Allwits are about to open “an upmarket brothel” (15), a venture sure to succeed in the fancy new community to the west.

⁴⁸ *OED* “stuff, *n.*” (3.c.).

there is no evidence that a couple will remain sexually exclusive—“honest”—simply because they are married. None of the wedded pairs in the play achieve mutual sexual fidelity. Ironically, those closest to it are the Allwits, who share the same information about their situation and have no reason to mislead one another. Although Middleton’s *Cheapside* doesn’t portray the sex trade as such, its denizens combine marriage with meretriciousness in the marrying-off of children and in the formal, subsidized structures of adultery that shape their relations. If Tim Yellowhammer’s bride were to become honest, she would be breaking with tradition and departing from custom.



Commercial sexual transactions can take place almost anywhere in early modern drama: the street, the fair, the linen-draper’s shop, or the family home. Characters are not always successful in their attempts to distinguish licit sexual behaviour from prostitution, because far more is prohibited than permitted in their fictional worlds. The general ban on extramarital sex in the real world may not have *created* the sex trade, but it certainly contributed to the popular notion that what is not allowed can nevertheless be purchased. Through the metaphor that makes sex a commodity, the people who are employed in sexual service themselves become metaphors for their work—whores are bought and kept. These customs of thought were long ago applied to the complex phenomenon of selling sex, and have stayed with us ever since. By comparing the sex trade with other forms of commerce, characters in early modern drama draw attention to the labours that are common to all trades. But they also emphasize the exceptionality of prostitution—its ability to generate and transform relationships—in their very confusion over what can and cannot be sold.

II. Drives and Dwellings

Transport and delay—the movement of mind and eyes through a text and the inevitable pause for thought—are metaphors that no close reading can do without. By coincidence, method and content converge in the studies that follow, where the plays invite us simultaneously into both staged spaces and fields of discourse. We visit the lavishly furnished estate of Sir Bounteous Progress in *A Mad World, My Masters*, the humble but bustling home of Bellafront in *The Honest Whore*, and the multipurpose residence of Doll Common in *The Alchemist*. In each of these venues, characters describe their surroundings as places of prostitution, sexualized spaces. This rhetoric of dwellings bears dwelling on, because it reveals a unique relationship between the trade in sex and the maintenance of established interiors.⁴⁹

The essays below investigate not only the wide range of living arrangements represented in the drama, but also the means of transportation that the characters associate with the sex trade. For example, much is made of the idea that coaches are essentially mobile rooms that can accommodate sexual encounters even while in motion. This use of coaches is a potential source of income for people who are already engaged in the business of

⁴⁹ The consideration of staged spaces, as Fiona McNeill argues, is a necessary aspect of the study of early modern gender:

Far from conforming to the ideal of the marital household governed by a properly sexed husband and wife, the volatile thresholds, chambers, streets, households, and suburbs inhabited by unmarried women in these plays vividly emblemize governmental anxieties about the failure of mastery in securing erotic and economic order in both the household and the city. I find no neat taxonomic divisions between mastery and masterlessness, between the inside and outside of the household, between private and public space, between the City and suburbs, or between master- and subplot; such critical conventions solidify borders that in the drama remain distinctly blurred. Instead, I find everywhere in these plays a fascination with femininity at the margins. (198-99)

setting up assignations, because illicit sex is always subject to a fee. Systems of conveyance are thus widely understood as part of the infrastructure of prostitution; dispatch and delivery are aspects of sex work, although they are rarely the responsibility of the prostitute. And while vehicles do not appear in any of the plays examined here, the notion of transportation emerges repeatedly and tellingly in descriptions of sexual service.

Of course lanes and lodgings have anatomical referents, too. Whores are themselves figured as well-worn paths and frequented venues, and their homes become metonyms for their work. Further, in representing prostitution, playwrights exploit the more general application of doors and passageways as standard metaphors for female genitalia. If this pattern of representation seems more literal than figurative to the modern reader, it is only because of its remarkable persuasiveness. It can be difficult to recognize the metaphorical in a notion that is bolstered by biological fact. When it comes to the portrayal of sex work, *entry* is a loaded concept with real social significance. But all of these observations are contingent upon our first entering the world of each play.

The Matted Chamber, Common Coach, and Kept Women of *A Mad World, My Masters*

From the beginning of the play, the estate of Sir Bounteous Progress claims a central place in Middleton's *Mad World*. Well before the old knight himself appears onstage, we hear descriptions of his country house and the fortunes it contains. Sir Bounteous' property is what motivates his grandson Dick Follywit to develop elaborate schemes that will bring the two men into closer contact. The knight's ample supply of goods and land, paired with his

persistent desire to share it and show it off, makes him the perfect gull. It also allows for subtle comparisons between hospitality and prostitution that become more explicit as the action unfolds. From Follywit we know that Sir Bounteous “keeps a house like his name, bounteous, open for all comers” (1.1.60-61)⁵⁰ and that he “stands much upon the glory of his complement, variety of entertainment, together with the largeness of his kitchen, longitude of his buttery, and fecundity of his larder” (1.1.61-64).⁵¹

This account is corroborated by the old knight’s own words when he appears. Sir Bounteous fully expects to be known for the luxury of his home and its grounds. He derives great satisfaction and the better part of his identity from the opportunity to host visiting lords and ladies on his estate. Whether he intends it or not, the language of sexual service permeates Sir Bounteous’ description of his own exemplary hospitality: “I have a kind of complimental gift given me above ordinary country knights, and how soon ’tis smelt out! I warrant ye there’s not one knight i’t’h’ shire able to entertain a lord i’t’h’ cue, or a lady i’t’h’ nick, like me” (2.1.51-55). The bawdy in Sir Bounteous’ brag cannot be fully untangled from his general boast, and yet it’s

⁵⁰ I follow Standish Henning’s edition of the play.

⁵¹ While the extreme hospitality that characterizes the Bounteous estate is subtly compared to the sexual generosity (or *frankness*) of a whore, it is the show of wealth paired with the sin of selfishness that makes great houses whorish in the following assessment, taken from a 1615 sermon by Thomas Adams:

The fashion is now, to build great houses to our lands, till wee leaue no lands to our houses: and the credite of a good house, is made, not to consist in inward hospitality, but in outward walls. These punkish out-sides beguile the needy Traueller: hee thinkes, there cannot be so many roomes in a house, and neuer a one to harbour a poore stranger: or that from such a multitude of chimneis, no meate should be sent to the gates. Such a house is like a painted whoore: it hath a faire cheek, but rotten lungs; no breath of charity comes out of it. (“Plaine-Dealing, or A Precedent of Honesty,” 20).

The elaborate, unwelcoming mansion is described in contrast to the moveable tents in which the holy patriarchs are said to have dwelt. The text appears in an anthology entitled *The Sacrifice of Thankfulness*, in which each sermon is given its own pagination.

undeniably present in the proximity of “country” to “smelt,” in the differentiation between “lord” and “lady,” and in the winking imprecision of “cue” and “nick,” two synonyms for *exactness* that can double up as slang terms male and female private parts. There are deep ironies in the knight’s self-representation. Firstly, his sexualized language is played against a steady flow of jokes made by other characters about his impotence.⁵² Secondly, there is a real connection between the urban sex trade and the generous furnishings of Sir Bounteous’ estate.

We soon meet the “courtesan” Frank Gullman and her mother—who is also her bawd—and learn that Frank herself numbers among Sir Bounteous’ belongings, although she is ultimately very self-possessed: “He’s my keeper indeed,” she says,

but there’s many a piece of venison stol’n that my keeper wots not on; there’s no park kept so warily but loses flesh one time or other, and no woman kept so privately, but may watch advantage to make the best of her pleasure. And in common reason one keeper cannot be enough for so proud a park as a woman. (1.1.131-37)

Frank clearly and confidently compares a kept woman to a deer park, on the grounds that “flesh” is likely to be stolen from both of them. The whore’s logic is “common,” the kind of reasoning that seems appropriate to her status because it is based on lower moral standards and provides her with better

⁵² Such jokes come from Mother Gullman in the first scene: “There’s maidenhead enough for old Sir Bounteous still. / He’ll be all his lifetime about it yet, / And be as far to seek when he has done” (1.1.151-53); from Frank, when Sir Bounteous thinks he’s impregnated her: “He only fears he has done that deed which I ne’er fear’d to come from him in my life” (3.2.86-88); and from Lieutenant Mawworm, as he describes the manner of the whore’s reception at the knight’s estate: “[S]he [is] closely convey’d into his closet, there remaining till either opportunity smile upon his credit, or he send down some hot caudle to take order in his performance” (3.3.59-62).

chances of making a living. This pattern of thought allows her to be sexually available to multiple customers, too—it's "common reason" in the sense that it makes her simultaneously the exclusive property of her keeper and the flesh that is common to all. Sir Bounteous is foolish to assume that his "park" goes unvisited when he's not around. At the same time, though, no amount of anxiety will prevent the loss of creatures who have a will to roam. If Sir Bounteous' property is damaged, it is through the whore's own choice, since she "watch[es] advantage to make the best of her pleasure." In this way, Frank is unlike the deer on her keeper's grounds: she is not, by her account, subject to poaching. Her flesh may alter if she has sex with other men, but it will not be consumed, and she won't disappear altogether.⁵³ She will remain the venue for Sir Bounteous' sexual recreation, no matter how many people she admits into the role of keeper.

Frank's frankness is contrasted with her keeper's frequent obliviousness to the lewdness of his own language. Very little of what the knight says is without potential *double entendre*. When Follywit shows up at his grandfather's estate in disguise as the French lord Owemuch, Sir Bounteous echoes Frank's venison metaphor. He seems ignorant of alternative meanings when he offers his guest a tour of his interior and exterior properties: "Tomorrow your lordship shall see my cocks, my fish ponds, my park, my champion grounds; I keep chambers in my house can show your lordship some pleasure" (2.2.15-18). Because Sir Bounteous uses a curious combination of self-conscious punnery and unintentional bawdy throughout the play, his meaning can be hard to locate. Here, for example, it is uncertain whether the old man is offering his guest some sexual service

⁵³ The vexed use of "flesh" as a metaphor for women's sexual availability is examined in more detail in the next chapter. Already it is clear that the harvesting of meat from animals is only a partial analogue for prostitution.

provided by people who are not explicitly mentioned, or whether he's using the commonly sexualized term *chambers* inadvertently.⁵⁴ Later, it becomes apparent that there is a room that the knight uses specifically for his private visits with Frank—a chamber kept for the woman he keeps.

The old knight's expectation of his whore's exclusivity is perhaps most evident when Frank's talent for juggling multiple affiliations is at its height. In order to generate a double profit, the whore pretends to be sick. Through this feigned malaise, Frank is able to provide an opportunity for Penitent Brothel and Mistress Harebrain to enjoy the private assignation they've so desperately sought, and at the same time she's able to exploit the foolishness of two wealthy men who've been pursuing her, by getting them to pay for phoney medical care as proof of their earnestness. Her single act of becoming bedridden allows her to gather income from four sources: Master Brothel, Master Harebrain (who thinks he's paying Frank to give his wife spiritual counsel), and the two suitors. Into this convergence of manipulations comes Sir Bounteous, with his tendencies toward self-deception.

When the knight discovers that Frank has fallen ill he immediately assumes that she's pregnant with his child, and he is delighted to find himself in a situation that makes him look (to himself, anyway) both generous and virile. A pun on *purse* predictably finds its way into Bounteous' speech: "[T]is nothing but a surfeit of Venus, i' faith, and though I be old I have gi'n't her. But since I had the power to make thee sick, I'll have the purse to make thee whole, that's certain" (3.2.43-46). We suspect that the knight's bounty is limited to grounds, goods, and dollars; that his other *purse* is now empty; that he has very little sexual power. The fact of his elderliness is certainly a source

⁵⁴ The same difficulty of interpretation arises when Sir Bounteous brags about his "fair pair of organs," his "great gilt candlestick," and his "large meat" (2.1.35-36, 41).

of humour, but it is also a necessary condition of his being a grandfather. Sir Bounteous' grandfatherliness is as evident in his employment of Frank as his virility is absent from it. Both his whore and his grandson are removed from him by two generations, and both—as Follywit is eager to assert—stand to benefit from his generosity.

The keeper's responsibility to his employee extends beyond the limits of his estate. Frank has her own lodging, separate and different from the space she inhabits when she's at the country house, but she lives in the care of the knight. She explains to Penitent Brothel (as he performs the role of her physician) that Sir Bounteous is her "sole revenue, meat, drink, and raiment" (3.2.8). The action of the play makes it obvious that she garners income from other quarters, but her ability to freelance in this way depends entirely on the subsidy from the knight. Her activities are as varied as the illicit conduct of unscrupulous wives in other plays—women who can rely on the powerful social idea of marriage to protect their reputations even when they've been taking their sexuality elsewhere.⁵⁵ Although Frank's relationship with Sir Bounteous is patently different from a marriage, it grants the whore a kind of indemnity. She has a guaranteed income that obviates the need for a husband, at least for the time being. Furthermore, she is not immediately recognized by all others as a prostitute, because most of her work is not sex work and she is not burdened with the task of constant advertisement.

Through Follywit's scheming, we get some information about the use Sir Bounteous makes of Frank. Follywit's Lieutenant Mawworm returns from his brief research assignment with a confirmation of the rumour that Sir Bounteous "keeps an uncertain creature, a quean" (3.3.30-31). To Follywit's ears, the news that such a woman exists is a guarantee that he'll be

⁵⁵ I'm thinking of characters like Mistress Overdo in *Bartholomew Fair*, the "Ladies Collegiates" in *Epicoene*, and the city wives in *Westward Ho*.

dispossessed unless he immediately hatches a plot. This information also provides him with a means to gain access, once again, to his grandfather's private chambers. Rather than facing the enemy, he will simply become her. In addition to the inevitable comedy of Follywit's efforts to impersonate a woman he's never met, a surprising degree of detail about the relationship between Frank and Sir Bounteous emerges from the disguise plot. The intrigue begins to familiarize the audience with the logistics of the whore's work—how she makes the commute from the urban hubbub of her other entanglements to the rural privilege of the Bounteous estate, and how she is received upon her arrival.

Mawworm reports that he's heard of the whore "from discourse" (3.3.42) but hasn't been able to learn her name, only "the manner of her coming": "Marry, sir, she comes most commonly coach'd" (3.3.45, 47). The lieutenant's adverbial phrase is easily twisted by Follywit's rejoinder so that it refers not to the frequency of the whore's coach rides but to their significance as performances of sexual agency on a changing social stage. Follywit replies with a combination of mockery and limp puns: "Most commonly coach'd indeed; for coaches are as common nowadays as some that ride in 'em. She comes most commonly coach'd—" (3.3.48-50). In Follywit's reworking of the phrase, "most commonly" is not incidental or marginal, but centrally descriptive of the moral status attached to the woman's comings and goings. The evaluative aspect of Follywit's response is underscored by the fact that he has just received thirdhand information. The whore's behaviour is recorded and reported, and her movements, whether explicitly sexual or not, are measured in terms of sexual morality.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Reading across genres for a more nuanced account of female vagrancy in the period, Jodi Mikalachki provides a gloss on *wantonness* that pertains to the characteristic mobility of whores:

When Lieutenant Mawworm explains that the whore descends from the vehicle “guarded with some leash of pimps” (3.3.51), Follywit asks for clarification—“Beside the coachman?” (3.3.52)—in a way that implicates the driver in the meretriciousness of the commute. While the association of coachmen with prostitution was a commonplace at the time of Middleton’s writing, it’s important to remember too that *pimp* enjoyed a wider application in the early modern period than it does now. We hear no more about the men who make up this particular “leash,” but it’s unlikely that all of these men who facilitate Frank’s transport and accompany her to the worksite are equally entitled to a share of her earnings. The very fact that there are several of them cancels out a crucial aspect of procurement as it is suggested by *pimp* in its later usage: the pimp’s solitary claim on the person and profit of the whore. Here, pimps are men who are associated with prostitutes but are not their customers. They may play many other social roles, but these unseen characters are defined for the moment by their proximity to a woman who provides sexual service for pay. They wouldn’t be considered pimps at all if it weren’t for Frank’s need to get safely to her destination.

A contemporary synonym for *pimp*, and one that carries an even greater suggestion of transportation, is “pander,” the word Follywit uses to describe the servant Gunwater when he learns that this is who “privately receive[s]” the whore at the Bounteous estate: “That’s my grandsire’s chief gentleman i’t’h’ chain of gold. That he should live to be a pander, and yet look upon his chain and his velvet jacket!” (3.3.55-57). Etymologically, a *pander* is a person who brings one person to another for a sexual assignation—the word is

This feminine wantonness, in all its senses of undisciplined, willful, and licentious, does not simply enhance the celebration of freedom in this literature. It functions as a constitutive trope of vagrancy in general, as though the female, in her natural state of wantonness, were the type of all vagrants, inclined by nature to a life without discipline, and only to be controlled by the imposition of patriarchal authority. (56)

derived from the role played by Pandarus in the story of Troilus and Cressida.⁵⁷ It maintains even still the connotation of providing someone with something that is unnecessary at best and downright deleterious at worst.

Mawworm's report on his bit of reconnaissance work continues with further description of the whore's conveyance and reception, which offer more and more opportunities for double meaning as the prostitute is imagined entering the home of her benefactor. With its bawdy metaphors of key and closet, the lieutenant's narrative reveals that the old man needs plenty of lead time and sometimes the added benefit of a hot drink in order to function sexually:

Then is your grandsire rounded i'th' ear, the key given after the Italian fashion, backward, she closely convey'd into his closet, there remaining till either opportunity smile upon his credit, or he send down some hot caudle to take order in his performance. (3.3.58-62)

When Follywit follows through with his plan, disguising himself as his grandfather's whore in order to rob him again, he obtains confirmation that Frank's work for Sir Bounteous takes place in a particular part of the house, with particular accoutrements. Preparing to greet his visitor, Sir Bounteous says to Gunwater, "Here, take this key, you know what duties belong to't. Go, give order for a cullis; let there be a good fire made i'th' matted chamber" (4.2.25-27). The comparison of the Progress estate to a brothel begins with Sir Bounteous' mention of his pleasure-filled rooms early in the play, and continues here with his request for the preparation of a fire and a hot cullis. Elsewhere, *broth* and *brothel* are not necessarily connected, but this cullis seems to be essential to the knight's sexual success. Cullises and caudles are

⁵⁷ OED "pander, *n.*"

usually brought as remedies to the ailing, much like the “precious cordial” or “composure comfortable and restorative” (3.2.49, 50) that the knight pays for at Frank’s bedside during her false illness.⁵⁸ For the elderly Sir Bounteous, hot, soothing beverages are required furnishings for the place of prostitution.

Further, the topos of a well-appointed home that is “open for all comers” appears as a figure for whoredom elsewhere in the play. Transportation is used to represent sexual conduct throughout the action. Master Harebrain, who lives in terror of his wife’s sexual infidelity and mistakenly hires Frank to help keep her chaste, frames his marriage as a protected indoor space whose surroundings teem with threats. “He-cats and courtesans stroll most i’t’h’ night,” he says; “her friend may be receiv’d and convey’d forth nightly. / I’ll be at charge for watch and ward, for watch and ward, i’ faith” (1.2.1-4).⁵⁹ When he hires watchmen to guard the enclosed space of his wife’s sexuality, Harebrain voices his conviction: “[T]here is a cunning plot laid...to rob my house” (1.2.8-9); “[S]omeone / Shall, in the form of my familiar friend, / Be receiv’d privately into my house” (1.2.12-14). All of this language predicts the terminology that appears in Mawworm’s secondhand account of Frank’s visits to Sir Bounteous. The notion of “private” reception is borrowed straight from the discourse of prostitution. Harebrain makes the connection more obvious, if accidentally, when he refers to Frank’s mother as a “woman of an excellent carriage all her lifetime, in

⁵⁸ During her feigned illness, Frank tells Master Harebrain she has eaten a cullis (3.2.207).

⁵⁹ Peter Stallybrass limns out the property paradox as follows:

In early modern England, “woman” was articulated as property not only in legal discourse...but also in economic and political discourse. Economically, she is the fenced-in enclosure of the landlord, her father, or husband....But unlike most property, this property can bring dishonor to the landlord even as he possesses it. “*Covert*,” the wife becomes her husband’s symbolic capital; “free,” she is the opening through which that capital disappears. (127-28)

court, city, and country" (1.2.31-32). The bawd's daughter can only respond with an extension of Harebrain's accidental pun: "Sh'as always carried it well in those places, sir—[*Aside.*] / Witness three bastards apiece" (1.2.33-34).

In fact, for Harebrain, marriage is a version of prostitution in which the wife earns her keep by performing sexually for her husband and no one else. Bawd-like, he controls the comings and goings around his house: "I admit none / But this pure virgin to her company; / Puh, that's enough. I'll keep her to her stint, / I'll put her to her pension" (1.2.57-60). This vigilance is the comic inverse of Sir Bounteous' overgenerous hospitality, and it is no wiser than the old knight's ceaseless giving. In a final test, Harebrain plans to introduce his wife to the sexually keen elder brothers who have come to visit, in order to observe and evaluate her behaviour towards them. Once again, the language of sexual morality relies on the notion of conveyance or conduct that is housed in the word *carriage*:

I will observe her carriage, and watch
The slippery revolutions of her eye;
I'll lie in wait for every glance she gives,
And poise her words i'th' balance of suspect.
If she but swag, she's gone: either on this hand
Overfamiliar, or this too neglectful;
It does behooe her carry herself even. (3.1.10-16)⁶⁰

Mistress Harebrain, well aware of her status as the carrier but not the proprietor of her own sexuality, sends word to her husband that she won't come down to greet these guests because she is so worried about the newly-

⁶⁰ Master Harebrain's paranoia is similar to that of Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale* (1.2), for its dramatic function on the boundary between comedy and tragedy. In both plays, sexual jealousy makes wives the subjects of paradoxical surveillance—the husbands demand that their spouses show hospitality, but look for transgressive displays of attention that will confirm their suspicions of whorishness.

reported illness of her friend. So unlike the jealous husbands in Shakespeare, with their own “slippery” vision, Harebrain does not find what he’s looking for. Instead, his faith in his wife is restored through her show of modesty. Ironically, Mistress Harebrain’s real intent is to get out of her own house and over to Frank’s, where the pretence of her friend’s fit will afford the good wife an opportunity to consort with a man of her choosing.

It isn’t long, however, before Mistress Harebrain receives moral ministrations from her would-be lover, in terms that echo once again the proprietary concerns of her husband. The newly repentant Master Penitent Brothel exhorts her to give up on their adulterous scheming and preserve her wedded chastity. He speaks in rhyme—a device borrowed, perhaps, from the frolicking succubus who has recently visited him in the form of his lady friend.⁶¹ Mistress Harebrain is subjected to a stream of misogynistic platitudes that coincidentally reflect Sir Bounteous Progress’ situation:

There’s nothing but our virtue knows a mean;
 He that kept open house now keeps a quean.
 He will keep open still that he commends,
 And there he keeps a table for his friends;
 And she consumes more than her sire could hoard,
 Being more common than his house or board. (4.4.64-69)⁶²

⁶¹ In fact Brothel uses rhyme to discipline himself before the succubus enters. The beginning of act four finds him in a state of readerly zeal, opening his book to a passage on adultery and chiding himself for “dot[ing] on weakness, slime, corruption, woman!” (4.1.18). But the contagious quality of the rhyming enters with the succubus. Once she engages Brothel in stichomythia, that dialogic mode seems bound to return. Their rapid rhyming on each other’s words is echoed in the exchange between Brothel and Mistress Harebrain. Both scenes are characterized by epigrammatic language that intensifies the emotional gravity of the situation for the would-be lovers while restoring comic complacency to the narrative through the tidiness of rhymed pairings.

⁶² Editors have sometimes changed “her sire” (4.4.68, from the first and second quartos) to “his sire.” The question of who hoards what is secondary to the assertion that the whorish wife squanders whatever’s been saved.

Brothel is talking about what happens when a man allows other men into the company of his wife, turning the virtue of hospitality into the folly of cuckoldry or even the vice of panderism. But the lines also echo the anxieties Follywit expresses about the potential loss of his inheritance to his grandfather's prostitute.

In both cases, the patrilineal betrothal of wealth from one generation to the next is seen to be jeopardized by the greed and profligacy of women. And in both cases, this pattern of divestment is totally imaginary. The "quean" of Brothel's tirade is guilty not only of taking advantage of her husband's openly flaunted wealth, but also of spreading herself around. She endangers his inherited goods, and makes herself so "common" as to lose all value. None of her husband's possessions, including her, remains his own. Similarly, Follywit fears that his grandfather's kept woman will get between the old man's lucre and the young man's greed. And while the comic outcome of the play witnesses the bestowal of Frank upon Follywit and a restoration of the exclusive marital bond between the Harebrains, nothing can be done to contradict the "common reason" pronounced in the first act: the keeping of a woman, whether wife or whore, is never more than an abstract proposition.

Doors Open and Closed in *The Honest Whore*

The first scene of Middleton and Dekker's *The Honest Whore* introduces neither the prostitute Bellafront nor her parallel, the linen-drafter Candido. Instead, the action is centred initially on the funeral of a girl whose father, the Duke of Milan, would rather "starve her on the Apennine" (3.25) than let her marry a descendant of his sworn enemy. It is revealed only later that Infelice's funeral has been staged, that she is not dead but drugged. In the

meantime, we witness the grief of her lover, Hippolito, which takes the form of sexual and social renunciation. Even here, at the tragic origin of the action, illicit sexuality claims a place in the play's language. The dominant metaphors of entrance and exit, so central to Bellafront's story, are best understood with reference to the rhetoric of this first scene, despite its thoroughly un-bawdy context.

The young nobleman's response to the (false) death of his beloved is to institute an inverted sabbath. Because, as far as he knows, Infelice has died on a Monday, Hippolito designates that day as the one appropriate for all sorts of malefaction, "the best day" for villains "to labour in" (1.118): "If henceforth this adulterous bawdy world / Be got with child with treason, sacrilege, / Atheism, rapes... / Or any other damned impieties / On Monday let 'em be deliverèd" (1.119-24). The world itself is figured here as a whorish woman who is easily impregnated with nastiness and subsequently charged with the delivery of her horrible offspring. The strain of misogyny is extended when the speaker promises to separate himself from society as part of his weekly observance.

Heavy with religious language, Hippolito's rhetoric amounts to a curse that invites all evils to enter the world on the day when he intends to retreat from it. In particular, he voices his determination to withdraw from women and immerse himself instead in the contemplation of mortality:

Hereafter weekly on that day I'll glue
 Mine eyelids down, because they shall not gaze
 On any female cheek. And being lock'd up
 In my close chamber, there I'll meditate
 On nothing but my Infelice's end,
 Or on a dead man's skull draw out mine own. (1.126-31)

The grieving lover's removal from society entails both locking up and gluing down. But in spite of Hippolito's sworn declaration of intent, his friend can't believe that he has lost his will to live in the world, among men *and* women. Matteo, also present at the funeral, mocks his resolution to spend one day a week in solitary confinement: "You'll do all these good works now every Monday because it is so bad; but I hope upon Tuesday morning I shall take you with a wench" (I.132-34).

Matteo's prediction finds Hippolito enjoying the advantages of readily available sexual service as soon as his self-imposed sabbath is over, since nothing in the lover's oath has prohibited such rapid whoreward movement. Hippolito can only amplify his promise by placing a provisional curse on himself: "If ever...I loosely fly / To th' shore of any other wafting eye, / Let me not prosper, heaven!" (I.135-39). The nautical metaphor here—of a female eye that acts like a beacon, guiding the young lover to a destination he has not chosen—allows Hippolito to use "shore," a word whose rhyming potential might be less relevant if he hadn't just spoken of "this adulterous bawdy world." While his language reflects the realm of sexual liberty he seeks to avoid, his friend remains convinced that Hippolito will enter that realm soon enough, and he intends to accompany him. Matteo's prognostication becomes something like a challenge when he issues an inverse echo of Hippolito's hypothetical curse: "[A]n I smell not you and a bawdy house out within these ten days, let my nose be as big as an English bag-pudding. I'll follow your lordship, though it be to the place aforenamed" (I.145-48).

Both of these characters talk about sexual fidelity and sexual transgression in terms of location. Hippolito associates the world beyond his "close chamber" with the ubiquity of "female cheeks" that are sure to distract him from his devoted reflection upon the loss of his beloved. He singles out a

time and place for quiet contemplation of Infelice's death, but says nothing about what will happen on the other six days of the week, when he will not be bound by these self-imposed regulations. Matteo, by contrast, imagines both where Hippolito might find himself and what he might do to pass the time between Mondays. In voicing his expectation, Matteo seems eager to become the beacon that guides his friend in the right direction, out of one chamber and into another. Throughout the exchange, physical places are made to stand for what typically happens within them. The kind of metonymy employed by the two friends is common not only to characters who visit prostitutes in the drama of the period, but also to a range of non-dramatic utterances that aim to represent whoredom as a dangerous path and a perilous place.

For example, included in the list of tenets at the end of Robert Greene's rather autobiographical prose narrative in his "*groats-worth of witte*" (1592) is the following warning: "The doore of a harlot leadeth downe to death, and in her lips there dwels destruction"⁶³ (E4). And the focus is drawn again toward doors and passages when the "*Infernall Promoter*" Pamersiel visits the suburbs of London in Dekker's fanciful *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (1608):

Hée saw the dores of notorious Carted Bawdes, (like Hell gates) stand night and day wide open, with a paire of Harlots in Taffata gownes (like two painted posts) garnishing out those dores, beeing better to the house then a Double signe: when the dore of a poore Artificer...was close ram'd vp and Guarded for [f]eare others should haue beene infected: Yet the plague that a Whore-house layes vpon a Citty is worse, yet is laughed

⁶³ The title page of the volume claims that the text was "Written before his death, and published at his dyeing request."

at: if not laughed at, yet not look'd into, or if look'd into,
Wincked at. (H3v)⁶⁴

The anatomical analogue to these dangerous doors is barely disguised by the narrators of Greene and Dekker's stories, but the connection is made much more obvious in early modern medical discourse. In his *Breviarie of health*, the physician Andrew Boorde explains that the vulva is "the gate or dore of the matrix or belly, & there may breed many diseases, as ulcers, scabbes, appostumes, fistures, fistles festures, the pockes, and burning of an harlot" (120v).⁶⁵ A whore's door is, of course, not only the way into her presence but the way into her vagina. It is indeed "a Double signe," an entrance into an entrance. Amid these embedded and ubiquitous metaphors for sexuality as a form of entry, enclosure, or residence, the doors of Middleton and Dekker's play begin to open and close.

The first private conversation between Bellafront and Hippolito is full of questions and answers about the nature of the whore's lodging. Her dwelling, in this initial exchange, functions as a metaphor for her work and her person. Hippolito returns to Bellafront's chamber to meet up with Matteo, but is too agitated to sit down. "If I may use your room," he says, "I'll rather walk" (6.297). He attempts a combination of small talk and business, using the topos of the room as a way of asking Bellafront about her sexual history and her availability. "Pretty fine lodging. I perceive my friend / Is old in your acquaintance" (6.300-01). Hippolito's phrase gestures rhetorically toward a sexual space within the body of Bellafront—her "acquaintance" is the abstracted area she invites her clients to share with her, and it is also the physical fact of her "quaint," that more intimate venue to

⁶⁴ This passage is quoted from the 1609 edition of the text.

⁶⁵ Although Boorde's book was first published in 1547, this quotation comes from the 1587 edition.

which one can purchase admission.⁶⁶ The imprecision of Hippolito's interrogative statement serves precisely to ask two questions at once: one about the use of Bellafront's room and another about the use of her body.

The whore's answer immediately takes up her visitor's use of the spatial metaphor and adds a temporal one. "Troth, sir, he comes / As other gentlemen, to spend spare hours. / If you yourself like our roof, such as it is, / Your own acquaintance may be as old as his" (6.301-04). In much the same way that the "lodging" and "acquaintance" of Hippolito's lexicon seem to indicate something else, the "spare hours" of Bellafront's response suggest a different kind of expenditure. The conversation thus features the typical elision of the acts upon which prostitution is supposedly based, and the standard shift of focus onto time and place. The whore herself represents a location and a duration. To like someone's roof is, it seems, to find their company and their residence comfortable. But when Bellafront uses this expression it also refers to the part of her anatomy that is, according to a common comparison, like a room that her guests enter, with a ceiling they can reach.

Hippolito continues to figure his interlocutor as a building, a room entered by a succession of men:

Were I but o'er your threshold, a next man,
And after him a next, and then a fourth,
Should have this golden hook and lascivious bait
Thrown out to the full length. (6.346-49)

His words here uncannily echo Bellafront's pronouncement to Roger when, earlier in the scene, they heard a knock at the door: "So, give the fresh salmon line now, let him come ashore" (6.65-66). In both cases, metaphors converge:

⁶⁶ *OED* "quaint, *n*¹."

the trope of catching a fish, of luring and landing it, is used to describe the inward movement of customers—their passage from a social habitat to a private habitation. The whore's sexualized body is a verge, a "threshold" or a "shore" at the edge of something that is contiguous with but different from culturally prescribed conduct. The sex trade is a piece of familiar but never fully charted terrain. In *The Honest Whore*, the most intriguing narrative is generated not by the passage of customers over the prostitute's threshold, but by *her* movement from one realm to another. The conversion at the core of the drama stops the flow of clientele and witnesses Bellafront's entry into a lifestyle that is, for her, alternative.

The entrance of the bawd Mistress Fingerlock into the play's action coincides with the exit of Bellafront from the trade that binds them together. Fingerlock is by no means essential to the unfolding of the plot, but she represents an aspect of what the whore is leaving behind. Although her place at the bawdy outer limit of the narrative makes her a figure of excess and exposure, the procuress and her suggestive name draw our attention to the practice of enclosure that is central to the sex trade. Mistress Fingerlock herself is a mechanism that ensures and exploits the precious commodity of privacy. Her first appearance is occasioned by a business opportunity that involves a kind of ordering-in—she intends to deliver Bellafront to a customer.

When Mistress Fingerlock rushes in looking for Bellafront because she has a client to match her up with, Roger reports that the woman she seeks has left her former occupation. "My mistress is abroad," he says, "but not amongst 'em. My mistress is not the whore now that you take her for" (8.5-6). In the past, Bellafront's being *abroad*, or out in society, would mean that she was busy plying her trade or engaging in activities on the periphery of

prostitution.⁶⁷ Now her range of activities is, ironically, broader. Her shift from one social role to another—in which her sexuality is subject to much greater limitations—is a paradoxical liberation. Thus, the account Roger provides is a comic inversion of popular narratives in which women fall *into* prostitution.⁶⁸ In making this change, Bellafront has not betrayed her parents or her husband or her own feminine virtue, like characters who move in the opposite direction. Instead, she has been disloyal to her profession, and by extension, to her bawd.⁶⁹

Upon Bellafront's departure from prostitution, Roger predictably turns his thoughts and his rhetoric toward the prosperous past he shares with Bellafront, her abandonment of their enterprise, and his subsequent hunger. He presents his former relationship with the whore as one comparable to marriage, and mourns its loss:

I tell you, Madonna Fingerlock, I am not sad for nothing; I ha'
not eaten one good meal this three-and-thirty days: I had wont
to get sixteen pence by fetching a pottle of Hippocras, but now
those days are past. We had as good doings, Madonna
Fingerlock—she within doors and I without—as any poor
young couple in Milan. (8.10-16)

⁶⁷ For instance, the gallants who visit Bellafront in Scene 6 expect her to come out eating and drinking with them (6.264-78).

⁶⁸ Robert Greene's "The conversion of an English Courtizan" in *A disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher* (1592, D), is primarily the story of a young woman's passage into prostitution. The "conversion" of the title might refer to her redemption, but the balance of the narration suggests that this usage is ironic.

⁶⁹ Incidentally, the comic potential of Bellafront's backwards movement is sounded later by Matteo, who marvels,

Is't possible, to be impossible: an honest whore? I have heard many honest wenches turn strumpets with a wet finger, but for a harlot to turn honest is one of Hercules' labours. It was more easy for him in one night to make fifty queans than to make one of them honest again in fifty years. Come, I hope thou dost but jest. (9.104-109)

Once again, the description of the trade in sex features doors, and the effect is to conjure a particular image of where the “good doings” of prostitution are carried out. Roger and Bellafront did their work in separate but contiguous locations: his was presumably the advertisement of sexual service and the conveyance of customers into the prostitute’s dwelling; hers, the service itself and whatever other entertainments seemed fit. Their interdependence is evident not only in Roger’s account, but also in the first scene that takes place in Bellafront’s lodging, where they work together to greet, entertain, and gull their guests. Furthermore, Roger’s complaint reminds us that however distinct his arrangement with Bellafront may have been from the ideal marriage, he must now seek a new relationship that will sustain him, or he will be “without” in several senses of the word.

Entering the scene and the conversation, Bellafront has vitriol for both her servant and her bawd. When Mistress Fingerlock tells her about “the sweetest, prop’rest, gallantest gentleman” (8.31-32) who awaits her arrival, the whore’s reaction is a tirade against the sex trade. Prostitution’s dependence upon the maintenance of interior spaces is Bellafront’s particular theme. The bawd, she says, is responsible for establishing a certain kind of household and lying to people about what goes on within it: “[T]hou livest / Upon the dregs of harlots, guard’st the door, / Whilst couples go to dancing” (8.43-45). Turning her attention to Roger, the now-honest whore complains about his habit of swearing, and her emphasis continues to fall on the topos of private places. She imitates the kind of expression that would come out of the “knave pander” she once employed: “‘God damn me, gentleman, if she be within!’ / When in the next room she’s found dallying” (8.51, 61-62). Bellafront now regards the activities that take place behind closed doors in brothels and whores’ chambers as pernicious, and she registers her contempt through

slanted taxonomy—it’s “dancing” and “dallying” that she’s opposed to, not some other deed here left unnamed. On these grounds, Bellafront dismisses Roger from her service, and he quickly enters the employ of Mistress Fingerlock. Bawd and pander are then immediately engaged in business negotiations.

Neither Roger nor Fingerlock is a prostitute, but each of them stands to profit from illicit sex. In contemporary usage, it makes sense to refer to Roger as a *pander* and Fingerlock as a *bawd*, as Bellafront does. This difference in terminology is based loosely on gender, but the rule is somewhat flexible.⁷⁰ Panders are go-betweens and agents of transportation, not proprietors of bawdyhouses. At least, this is the distinction that abides between Mistress Fingerlock and her new employee. The bawd’s experience in running a brothel makes her Roger’s superior, so she has the upper hand in their negotiations. He seems to recognize this even before they begin to discuss the matter—his request is relatively humble: “[H]ow must our agreement be now, for you know I am to have all the comings-in at the hall-door, and you at the chamber-door” (8.75-78). To this division of profits Mistress Fingerlock readily agrees, with one additional provision: she is to have her “vails” (8.79), or tips, when visitors to her house are dropped off by a coachman. “[I]f a couple come in a coach, and light to lie down a little, then, Roger, that’s my fee; and you may walk abroad, for the coachman himself is their pander” (8.81-84). Because he will have done nothing to induce such clients to enter the brothel and avail themselves of its comforts, Roger will see none of their money.

However, there are other, more complicated arrangements that Roger foresees, and from which he hopes to profit: “But how if I fetch this citizen’s

⁷⁰ More flexible, that is, than the rule governing the gendered usage of “madam” and “pimp” in modern English.

wife to that gull, and that madonna to that gallant, how then?" (8.86-87). The bawd assures him that he will be compensated for transporting clients from one place (or person) to another. "Why then, Roger," Fingerlock explains, "you are to have sixpence a lane: so many lanes, so many sixpences" (8.88-89). The result of this brief question-and-answer period is a business agreement that parodies the establishment of a new family. Within the topsy-turvy framework of the fictionalized sex trade, the pander and bawd have entered into a kind of marriage, one that will replace Roger's former alliance with Bellafront. He declares, "I see we two shall agree and live together," and Fingerlock accepts his proposal: "Ay, Roger, so long as there be any taverns and bawdy houses in Milan" (8.90-93). The other family dramas of the play, with their respective interior spaces, are at this moment secondary to the happy union of bawd and pander, whose trade will flourish in the lanes and lodgings of a make-believe Milan.

While Roger and Fingerlock forge a bond based on the promotion of illicit sexuality, their former associate breaks the news to her customers that she has abandoned her occupation and chosen a different path. The gallants have appeared in her home, complaining that she didn't show up at supper the night before. Bellafront's response to their admonishments, and to their presence more generally, includes the binaries of inside and outside, entry and exit. The whore has gone out of Bellafront, and she wants these men to get out of her house: "I pray, depart the house. Beshrew the door / For being so easily entreated" (9.36-37). Her lodging has ceased to be a place of business; the door to her chamber and the anatomical passage leading into her body are both closed to the gallants. As Bellafront's representative—as the representative of her genitalia, in particular—the door to her lodging should no longer be "easily entreated," because she is not sexually available anymore.

In fact, she is in no way available. It's not only Bellafront's vagina that is now exclusive, but other parts of her person as well. Her "mind" is "busied otherwise;" she can give "but little ear" to the raucous talk of her visitors (9.38-39). Instead of engaging in the usual banter, she tells them to "forsake" her, to abandon their former habits: "I do desire you leave me, gentlemen, / And leave yourselves" (9.47-49). Her show of concern for the spiritual fate of her erstwhile customers continues when Matteo and Fluello draw their swords and begin to quarrel over her. The place of prostitution, she says, can easily become a site of violence: "O how many thus / Moved with a little folly have let out / Their souls in brothel-houses, fell down, and died / Just at their harlot's foot, as 'twere in pride!" (9.81-84). Either she ejects these visitors from her house, or they will inadvertently eject their own souls from their bodies.

Expressions of leave-taking continue after all the gallants but Matteo have gone away. Bellafront quickly disabuses him of the assumption that her anti-whoring rhetoric has been part of a trick intended to scare the others off and leave the two of them in privacy. She has to entreat Matteo further: "I pray, depart my house. You may believe me, / In troth, I have no part of harlot in me" (9.94-95). Bellafront has excised something from her social identity—the harlot within has *d*eparted, broken off. In response to Matteo's hope that she is only kidding, Bellafront can only use the same metaphor of withdrawal that now dominates her thinking: "Tis time to leave off jesting; I had almost / Jested away salvation. I shall love you / If you will soon forsake me" (9.110-12). By making a joke of her sexuality, the whore had put her soul in the same kind of peril that results from bawdyhouse brawls. Now she uses a grave religious paradox: her salvation depends upon her friends' willingness to *forsake* her.

The dense rhetoric of departure that attends Bellafront's conversion is the inverse of the trope of corruption so often seen in stories of women who become whores. Both kinds of narrative feed on the reader or audience's fascination with the permeability of the boundary that separates socially sanctioned sexuality from whoredom. What emerges from this phase of Bellafront's story is a picture of the paradox at the core of early modern prostitution. For the whore is not a whore without the custom of her clients, and yet her identity can never fully be relieved of this burden even if she drives them away. When Bellafront and Matteo are married and impoverished in the play's sequel, the husband threatens to make his wife "keepe a doore" (3.2.147). Whatever measures she may have taken to become *honest*, the door that once defined Bellafront as a whore can easily return to its former signification.

A Doll's House in *The Alchemist*

The Prologue of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* places the action of the play firmly in the city where it's being performed:

Our *Scene* is *London*, 'cause we would make known
 No country's mirth is better than our own.
 No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
 Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
 Whose manners, now call'd humours, feed the stage. (5-9)⁷¹

That the "whore" should come first in this list of types is due largely, it seems, to the word's rhyming potential. The sex trade is not a central concern in the

⁷¹ Quotations are from F. H. Mares' edition of the play.

play proper, and prostitution does not take a familiar form in this comedy.⁷² Nor does the action more generally find its characters circulating and conversing in London shops and streets, as the Prologue might suggest. Instead, the play shows how a single house interacts with the city outside. Characters are lured into the establishment with a variety of promises and subjected to a series of elaborate tricks that divest them of their wealth and pride. The various “humours” of London flow into the home of Doll Common and her fellows. Here we meet a whore figure whose work cannot be understood without reference to her dwelling.

The first four acts of *The Alchemist* take place almost entirely within the walls of a house belonging to a character named (but never called) Lovewit, who has left the city due to plague and put his housekeeper Jeremy in charge.⁷³ This Jeremy is known, until his master’s sudden return in Act Five, alternately as Ulenspiegel (an assistant to the supposed alchemist Subtle), and as the industrious Captain Face, who is understood to be either a reliable source of information or a notorious bawd. Face’s schemes seem transparent to the audience, but in fact his intentions and his identity remain obscure from start to finish. At the final hour he shaves off his beard so that he can assume once again the persona of Jeremy Butler. But it isn’t clear that *this* “face” is the real Face, any more than the alchemist’s assistant or the

⁷² Jonson’s emphasis on the whore might come more from his familiarity with the stock prostitutes of Roman New Comedy than from an interest in the characters who represent illicit sexuality in the English tradition.

⁷³ The enclosed nature of the play’s action is something all readers notice. Citing Sir Epicure Mammon’s description of Lovewit’s house as a “*novo orbe*” (I.I.2), C. G. Thayer argues, “This new world is metaphorically the rich Peru; it is also a new world for Mammon and Surly, and a new comic world, complete, self-contained, and perfect” (94). Moreover, he reminds us that both the alchemist’s laboratory and the theatre in which it is conjured are “located in the Blackfriars district” (108). Thayer considers Lovewit’s house an alternative world whose alchemical potential parallels the “wholesome remedies and fair correctives” offered in the theatre (109).

“suburb-captain” is. The only sure thing, at the play’s conclusion, is that the character who has provided the conditions for the action to unfold is a consummate liar. Ultimately, Face achieves a pardon for himself from his master, and leaves his friends to escape, with nothing but a sheet, over the back wall. In dismissing the other two cozeners from his company, he employs all three of his personae: the housekeeper who has been restored to his master’s favour, the bawd who spouts nicknames of brothelkeepers, and the tricky assistant whose own interests are at the heart of his every action.

It is only because of Face’s industry and his knowledge of the city beyond the walls of Lovewit’s house that the play can take place within those walls. He brings the drama into the house by luring already-gulled customers into transactions with Subtle, Doll, or both. Thus, the picture we get of women’s sex work in this play involves no streets, no marked doors, no coaches. Instead, the whore’s tasks are spatially limited to her dwelling and her clientele is chosen by the “Captain.” She stays put in the single house that constitutes the setting of *The Alchemist* until she’s driven out at the end of the play. When Face suddenly ejects Subtle and Doll from their most recent home and workplace, he taunts the prostitute with the idea that she might have to seek work in a regular brothel: “Doll, I am sorry for thee, i’faith. But hear’st thou? / It shall go hard, but I will place thee somewhere: / Thou shalt ha’ my letter to Mistress Amo” (5.4.139-41). The servant’s mock-sympathy indicates the relative comfort of Doll’s position in the house, which has been not a placement but a collaborative and somewhat equal cohabitation.

As opposed to the imagined establishment run by Mistress Amo, the appropriated house of Lovewit falls into no standard category. It is not the house it once was, nor is it a typical bawdyhouse. Its multiple functions are suggested by the catalogue of visitors that Lovewit’s neighbours recite when

he returns from his plague-inspired vacation: “some as brave as lords,” “Ladies, and gentlewomen,” “Citizens’ wives,” “And knights,” “In coaches,” “Yes, and oyster-women,” “Beside other gallants,” “Sailors’ wives,” “Tobacco-men,” “Another Pimlico!” (5.1.1-6). The diversity represented by this roster indicates that a range of services has been offered within the house, but it is also the kind of heterogeneity that was often associated with illicit sexuality. The appeal of this destination for both ladies and oyster-women, knights and tobacco-men, might mean that the better part of the business transacted here has been based on desires that are not class-bound. In the fictions of early modern plays and pamphlets, the sex trade bridges social gaps, bringing people of vastly different circumstances into direct contact or competition. Lovewit’s house, in his absence, has been opened up to receive the broadest possible clientele.

The house is a figure for opportunity in the dialogue of the play’s first scene. During their opening quarrel, Subtle and Face describe each other’s former destitution, and each claims to have rescued the other. The house, transformed into a place of business, has brought both of them new prosperity. Doll is omitted from the accounts of poverty, although the Argument printed at the front of the play refers to her as belonging to the alchemist, and indicates that she has suffered through the same unfortunate circumstances by his side. The pair of them are “A cheater and his punk, who, now brought low, / Leaving their narrow practice, were become / Coz’ners at large” (5-7). It is not clear whether this “narrow practice” has included prostitution. Maybe Doll has been providing sexual services to other men for a fee, in which case she would live up to her surname *Common*, or maybe she’s been the exclusive sexual property of Subtle. Either way, by the system of classification abiding in the culture of the early modern audience,

Doll is a whore. Her sexuality, having been made available to one man without the bonds of marriage, is now a commodity potentially and perennially accessible to all. That means Doll is a certain kind of “cozener at large;” she too is a figure for expansion and opportunity.

Doll’s last name is apt also in its reference to the sharing of space and resources. Not only is she herself held in common; she is the character who is most committed to the idea of cooperation and fair distribution. She intervenes in the initial quarrel to defend the communal lifestyle which the three main characters have chosen for themselves, the “venture tripartite” (1.1.135) that ties them together. Doll’s argument is all the more persuasive because she herself is a venture *bipartite*, a “republic” (1.1.110) shared by the two men.⁷⁴ After her successful resolution of the conflict between Face and Subtle, the woman of the house is held up as a prize: “[A]t supper, thou shalt sit in triumph, / And not be styl’d Doll Common, but Doll Proper, / Doll Singular: the longest cut, at night, / Shall draw thee for his Doll Particular” (1.1.176-79).

Doll is a figure for easy divisibility. Because of her willingness to share and be shared, the household can cohere. And just as the nature of this living arrangement defines the woman who here defends it, both her attitude and her last name define the house. But *Common*’s application to this *particular* prostitute might also be ironic. Doll does not walk the streets or haunt the playhouses like the Punk Alices of other plays; in one sense, she is much more

⁷⁴ The *OED* cites Shakespeare’s use of *venture* in *Cymbeline* as evidence that the word could mean “prostitute” (“venture, *n.*”). The villain Jachimo tells Imogen that her money is being spent by her betrothed on whores, and pretends to pity her for being “partner’d”

With tomboys hir’d with that self exhibition
Which your own coffers yield; with diseas’d ventures
That play with all infirmities for gold
Which rottenness can lend nature; such boil’d stuff
As well might poison poison. (1.6.121-26)

private than public.⁷⁵ She lives and works in a single location, and her clients come to her. She does not share her practice with any other women. In fact, when she plays the role of a mad lady scholar for the benefit of Sir Epicure Mammon, she takes on something of the mystique of the continental courtesan figure—a woman of exceptional beauty and wit who is visited only by those who can afford her company.⁷⁶

Sir Epicure's custom, it so happens, brings a solitary voice of cynicism into the house. This is because the knight is accompanied by his astute friend Pertinax Surly, who is not only dubious of the legitimacy of the alchemist's claims, but also suspects that the place is a brothel as soon as he spots Doll. The responses Surly issues and the action he takes to protect others from the deceptions of the three cozeners reveal a good deal about the growing reputation of Lovewit's house. The primary aim of Surly's investigation is to define the shared residence with reference to the business transacted therein. To that end, his first glimpse of Doll is more than suggestive of the non-alchemical services offered at the house. A single stage direction, "DOLL *is seen*" (2.3.210), ensures that the gullible Sir Epicure will be tempted to leave even more of his money behind. Surly's assumptions are based on two

⁷⁵ Doll's enclosed mobility can be contrasted with the wider-reaching momentum of Moll in *The Roaring Girl*, but her circumscribed movements nevertheless demonstrate a similar set of skills. Although she is seen only indoors, we find in Doll an "urban competency" related to that which Kelly J. Stage locates in Moll:

The Roaring Girl exposes the way social practices work with and against regulated space. Moll achieves success by maneuvering through London's spaces and by taking advantage of normative social practices. She flouts the idea of domestic enclosure, loiters in the streets, frequents badly reputed neighborhoods, and thwarts police actions. Her ability to navigate the city, suburbs, and in-between spaces of London demonstrates her urban competency, which no other character in the play matches. (417)

At the same time, Doll's actions are, like Moll's, "ultimately opportunistic, not subversive" (426).

⁷⁶ She also proves herself adept at acting, embodying different characteristics depending on what's in demand, and in this way she resembles the prostitute characters of the New Comedy tradition.

combined factors: both the sudden appearance of Doll and the irrevocably piqued curiosity of his companion. After the wide-eyed knight refers to Doll as “a brave piece” (2.3.225), Surly delivers a plain assessment: “Heart, this is a bawdy-house! I’ll be burnt else” (2.3.226). At this moment especially, the house is defined by Doll.

Surly is soon to receive further proof that the sex trade has a place at the alchemist’s. Face, still playing the role of Ulenspiegel and eager to get rid of the sensible angel on Sir Epicure’s shoulder, asks Surly if he’s willing to meet up with “Captain Face” in half an hour. Recognizing the captain’s name, the cynic becomes even more sure of himself. If the brief appearance of Doll serves as evidence that the house is a brothel, the mention of Captain Face confirms it:

Now, I am sure, it is a bawdy-house;
 I’ll swear it, were the marshal here, to thank me:
 The naming this commander doth confirm it.
 Don Face! Why, he’s the most authentic dealer
 I’ these commodities! The superintendent
 To all the quainter traffickers in town.
 He is their Visitor, and does appoint
 Who lies with whom; and at what hour; what price;
 Which gown; and in what smock; what fall; what tire.

(2.3.298-306)

Thus Surly attests to the remarkable dynamism of Face, without yet knowing that it is Face himself who has duplicitously invited him to discuss “earnest business” (2.3.290). The audience alone can see how swiftly this humble housekeeper can shift, in every sense of the word. Doll may be the person responsible for the work that ultimately makes the house a brothel, but Face

is the face of the house—the representative who goes out in public and brings customers back. Doll’s contribution to the “venture tripartite” depends upon the reputation that Face builds for the house when he’s away from it.

According to Surly’s assessment, Face is a seasoned pander, while Doll is simply an apparently unmarried woman whose presence in a shared domicile suggests prostitution.

Surly does meet up with Captain Face, but not as himself. His intention is to expose “[t]he subtleties of this dark labyrinth” (2.3.308) by adopting a disguise that will allow him to play the part of a customer. This character, one Don Diego, is welcomed into the house with mockery that begins even before he appears. Face has been tricked into greeting this caricature as if he were a real live Spanish aristocrat, so there are two levels of ironic humour in his self-satisfied announcement:

A noble Count, a Don of Spain (my dear
Delicious compeer, and my party-bawd)
Who is come hither, private, for his conscience,
And brought munition with him, six great slops,
Bigger than three Dutch hoys, beside round trunks,
Furnish’d with pistols, and pieces of eight,
Will straight be here, my rogue, to have thy bath
(That is the colour) and to make his batt’ry
Upon our Doll, our castle, our Cinque Port,
Our Dover pier, our what thou wilt. (3.3.10-19)

Face prepares himself and his partner for the great deal of booty that he believes will be at their disposal when Don Diego arrives—a haul he can’t possibly have seen when he encountered this remarkable personage in the Temple Church. The master cozenor has been fooled himself, and he has

extended the narrative provided by Surly so that it now constitutes a parody of the great naval battle.⁷⁷ Like the rest of their clientele, the Don will come to Subtle and Doll. He is unique, however, in his explicit request for sexual services.⁷⁸ The first thing the character of Don Diego asks for upon his arrival is not a bath—that is only “the colour” given to his visit—but a look at “*esta señora*” (4.3.47). It is this central sexual aspect of the transaction that Face represents as an alternative Armada. In Face’s fanciful proclamation, the prostitute is an English fortification that is offered up to the erstwhile enemy, in exchange for money and the opportunity to rob him of his goods. Don Diego is said to have several pairs of giant pants (“slops” and “trunks”) filled with riches, and Face, Subtle, and Doll have a means to get into those pants.

In addition to the bawdy resonance of the “pistolets” and “pieces” which Doll is charged with grabbing, Face’s report exploits the punning potential of foreign invasion. The *bath* that serves as a pretence for the Don’s visit quickly becomes the *sink* of Dover’s “Cinque Port”—yet another whorish shore.⁷⁹ Face’s invocation of the public sewer, or *sink*, goes with the flow of contemporary representations of illicit sexuality, including Hippolito’s claim in *The Honest Whore* that the prostitute’s body is “like the common shore, that still receives / All the town’s filth” (6.377-78). In Dekker’s 1602 play *Blurt Master-Constable*, a bawdyhouse is a “sincke of wickednes” (B2). Philoponus,

⁷⁷ Dame Pliant, who is eventually chosen to fill in for the already-occupied Doll, says she hasn’t gone near a Spaniard since the Armada, which predates her birth: “Truly, I shall never brook a Spaniard....Never, sin’ eighty-eight could I abide ’em, / And that was some three year afore I was born, in truth” (4.4.28-30).

⁷⁸ Surly’s words in the character of Don Diego are more explicit, that is, than those of Sir Epicure Mammon, who desires to be in the company of “the gentlewoman” played by Doll. Sir Epicure wants “a taste of her—wit—” (2.3.259). A bawdy pun is at work here—it’s clear that the knight wants more than conversation—but the humour comes from ambiguity rather than shocking plainness.

⁷⁹ The *OED* shows identical pronunciations for “sink” and “cinque.”

one of the voices in Philip Stubbes' *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), says that the love generated by dancing is "a concupiscencious, baudie & beastiall looue, such as proceedeth from the stinking pump and lothsome sink of carnall affection" (N). And in the first book of Homilies, issued by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1547, the following admonition falls under the heading "An Homelie of whoredome and uncleynnesse": "[S]urely, if we would weyghe the greatnes of this synne, and consydre it in the right kynde, we shoulde fynde the synne of whoredom, to be that most fylthy lake, foule puddle, and stynkyng synke, wherinto all kyndes of synnes, and euils flow, wher also, they haue their restyng place, and abydinge" (U.i).⁸⁰ The impending arrival of "Don Diego" requires something more like a toilet than a fort—a vessel to receive whatever happens to flow from his boat-like pants.

Because the supposed Spaniard poses no threat, as far as the three cozeners know, he is entitled to their hospitality. Everything, including Doll, must be in readiness for his arrival, so that they can take full advantage of the visit. Doll's first preparations are to be aesthetic and domestic: "She must prepare perfumes, delicate linen, / The bath in chief, a banquet, and her wit, / For she must milk his epididimis" (3.3.20-22). The whore's work is thus elevated only to be rapidly and drastically reduced to its central activity. While many of the measures that Face calls for are exceptional—bringing out the best linens and scenting the room—the sex act itself is compared to farmyard work, the milking of a cow. Doll must be ready to entertain this client with her "wit," the same attribute that supposedly captures Sir Epicure's interest, but her task at its most basic level is coital. Face's utterance is both ironic and straightforward, because *wit* means both

⁸⁰ This text was published repeatedly under the title *Certayne Sermons*. The 1595 edition (STC 13658), printed by Edward Allde, retains the passage quoted above with slightly different spelling.

intellectual aptness and genitalia. Presumably Doll is expected to prepare her mind *and* her private parts for her guest, to ensure the maximum possible milking.

The whore is one of the finer furnishings of the house; her body is comparable to the bath and banquet of which a paying customer can partake. In this way, she is unlike the men she lives with. While the arts and efforts of Subtle and Face also contribute to the nature of the dwelling and the business it contains, only Doll is regarded as a physical feature of the house, part of its topography. She is fortified, like a “castle,” but flexible, like a “what thou wilt.” To the extent that the whore is a prized resource and a contributor to the machinations of the household, she is protected. She can give the house its reputation for illicit sexual activity without having to engage sexually with customers herself. All this changes, however, towards the end of the play, when Face cheats his fellow cozeners out of their share and purges them from his master’s house. Suddenly, Doll is just another mobile whore in search of somewhere to stay, with nothing but a single sheet to her common name.



A play is itself both open and closed, a narrative space that occupies an actual space—*takes place*—when it is performed. Plays that present interiors to our view have a curious way of inviting the audience in while pointedly excluding it from the action. No audience member actually gets to go to Bellafront’s house, but we all get to see inside it, and we get a kind of satisfaction from the experience of watching fictional customers come and go. Plays allow only partial entry. Similarly, the metaphorical mapping of places onto the actual social phenomenon of the sex trade is never exact or complete, because illicit sexuality is boundless by definition. In his often-quoted *Playes Confuted* (1582),

Stephen Gosson describes theatres as “the very markets of bawdry” (G5v), using a metaphor that would soon become literally true—by the time Samuel Pepys started keeping a diary, prostitution was practised much more openly in playhouses.⁸¹ Through narratives that seem to place the sex trade in specific locations, the plays of Gosson’s day ultimately suggest that prostitution is beyond geographical reckoning. The experiences of Middleton, Dekker, and Jonson’s characters show that illicit sexuality transcends whatever metaphorical bounds are imposed upon it, and that the whole world may well be a market of bawdry.

⁸¹ Pepys mentions a conversation with a theatre manager: “Tom Killigrew...told me and others, talking about the playhouse, that he is fain to keep a woman on purpose at 20s. a week to satisfy 8 or 10 of the young men of his house, whom till he did so he could never keep to their business, and now he do” (January 24, 1669).

III. Meat and Drink

The pervasive association of prostitution with cookery in early modern England seems have come from several sources. The use of mineral baths as treatments for symptoms of venereal disease and the historical profusion of such “stews” on the notorious Bankside, the heat that humoural theory assigned to illicit sexuality, the virtual simultaneity of food service and sexual service in establishments such as taverns and boarding-houses, and the lower social status of women selling foodstuffs in markets all contribute to the metaphorical mapping of comestibles onto the terrain of the sex trade. This mapping allows characters in plays to regard the hiring of a prostitute as a form of consumption comparable to the purchase of a leg of mutton or a dish of prunes, even when the connection between the trades is relatively tenuous.

When sex is sold, it cannot be considered a commodity in the same sense that books or beef can be, because it isn’t an item, a tangible good. Despite that fact (or because of it), audiences of early modern plays were invited to imagine purchased sex as a product rather than a service. The popular literature of the period regularly uses the metonym “flesh” to name what is sold in commercial sexual exchange. The complexity of this particular linguistic operation is hard for us to see, because we still live by the metaphors “Selling sex is selling one’s body” and “A sexualized body is a piece of meat.”⁸² What follows is in part an attempt to reveal the properties of an

⁸² Contemporary conceptual metaphor theory is explained in Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By*, where “ARGUMENT IS WAR” is offered as an example:

Our conventional ways of talking about arguments presuppose a metaphor we are hardly ever conscious of. The metaphor is not merely in the words we use—it is in our very concept of an argument. The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of

inherited and deeply embedded concept by paying careful attention to its manifestations in early modern drama. Sometimes the meat metaphor receives a sustained, subtle treatment at the hands of a playwright who explores its full potential—this is true, for example, of the pig-roasting that takes place in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*. Other times, a play is peppered with cursory references to various animals that are typically killed to be eaten. In *Northward Ho*, every animal and animal part mentioned seems to take on a bawdy second significance. The readings below show that the lives and deaths of non-human animals—birds, sheep, fish, deer—are crucial points of reference in representations of the sex trade.

Beyond the broadly exploited notion of meat, the discourse of illicit sex presents a banquet of other metaphors. All kinds of food and all stages of its production and consumption—cultivation, harvest, transport, sale, preparation, hunger, ingestion, digestion, and excretion—are available analogues for aspects of the sex trade. The processes that come before and after eating are important sources of meaning for playwrights as they represent the social phenomenon of prostitution. Thus the essays that make up this chapter dwell sometimes on botanical metaphors, sometimes on scatological ones. Moreover, the body’s ability to assimilate or reject substances and its susceptibility to intoxication are frequently invoked in figurations of whores as both delicious and toxic. In *The Second Part of the Honest Whore*, for example, liquid metaphors show how prostitution poisons buyers and vendors alike. The troubling notion that “you are what you eat” lends a certain urgency to representations of illicit sex as a form of consumption. In *Measure for Measure*, characters are implicated in illicit exchange by means of a seemingly innocent dish of stewed prunes. And while

them that way—and we act according to the way we conceive of things. (5)

the appetites of male customers are central to several of these plots, whores are the most greedy and incontinent consumers in early modern drama.

The Roasted Bawdy of *Bartholomew Fair*

There is perhaps no place in early modern drama where the sale of food and the sale of sex are more intertwined than in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. The combination is introduced when the pimp Jordan Knockem invites his fellow fairgoers Quarlous and Winwife to join the fun in Ursula's booth: "Here you may ha' your punk and your pig in state, sir, both piping hot" (2.5.37-38). But the two things that can be purchased at this "bower"—food and drink on the one hand, and access to illicit sex on the other—are parallel only to a point. Even Quarlous quibbles on the comparison between prostitutes and roasted meat: "I had rather ha' my punk cold, sir" (2.5.39). The pork will be hot as a result of its roasting, while a whore's high temperature is invariably a symptom of venereal disease. For example, a chapter is devoted to "The burning of an harlot" or "*Ambustio meretricis*" in Andrew Boorde's medical manual; here, the heat of the whore is easy to catch and difficult to dispatch:

If a man be burnt with a harlot & do medel with an other woman with in a day, he shall burn the woman that he doth meddle withall. If one be burnt let them wash their secretes two or three times with white wine, or els with sacke and water. And if the matter have continued long go to some expert Chierurgion to have help, or els the gottes will burn and fall out of the belly. (13v)

Thus there is an important difference between the erotic heat that a prostitute's customer wants and the burning sensation that he might get. The

antidotes to such pain are taken from the household supply of beverages, here curiously applied to the private parts for relief. Consumables become topical solutions—part of the body’s dressing—and the gap between human and non-human flesh narrows as the former is subjected to certain preparations. Much of the comic energy of *Bartholomew Fair* comes from the habit of comparing human bodies to other bodies.

In Ursula’s complaints about her culinary work, her heated language strikes a chord with popular representations of the prostituted female body. She herself is a combustion, a mass of hot animal flesh being roasted in the process of preparing the pigs: “I am all fire and fat, Nightingale; I shall e’en melt away to the first woman, a rib again, I am afraid. I do water the ground in knots as I go, like a great garden-pot; you may follow me by the S’s I make” (2.2.49-52). The dwindling of Ursula’s ample body through the rendering of fat is parallel to the slow degradation of the flesh that was said to follow from venereal disease, and for which prostitution was often blamed. If both Ursula and contemporary medical discourse are to be believed, pig-roasting and prostitution have similar repercussions for their practitioners: both contribute to the disintegration of bodies.

Ursula’s physical predicament additionally resembles both pregnancy and menopause. She is “in a heat” (2.2.46), as Nightingale suggests, she’s thirsty, and she’s incontinent. The idea that Ursula’s body is teeming places her in partial parallel with Win Littlewit, who has insinuated that she is pregnant in order to create an excuse for her friends and family to go to the otherwise wicked fair—her craving for pork is, according to the reasoning extracted from Rabbi Busy by Win’s supposedly pious mother, both physically and spiritually dangerous to ignore. Justice Overdo, working undercover at Ursula’s booth, describes the pig-woman as “the very womb and

bed of enormity” (2.2.101). The pregnancy metaphor is applied to Ursula later, too, when Dan Knockem greets her as the mother of the pigs she roasts, and, by extension, the mother of the fair: “What! My little lean Ursula! My she-bear! Art thou alive yet, with thy litter of pigs, to grunt out another Bartholomew Fair? Ha!” (2.3.1-3). The “grunt[ing] out” of Knockem’s description suggests a grotesque coincidence of childbirth, sexual expenditure, intense physical labour, and defecation.

When Quarlous first sees Ursula, he expresses his astonishment at her remarkable size in mock-religious terms: “Body o’ the Fair! What’s this? Mother o’ the bawds?” (2.5.67). Knockem quickly replies, “No, she’s mother o’ the pigs, sir, mother o’ the pigs!” (2.5.68). The taunting continues until Ursula feels compelled to talk back, defending her formidable flesh:

Aye, aye, gamesters, mock a plain plump soft wench o’ the
suburbs, do, because she’s juicy and wholesome. You must ha’
your thin pinched ware, pent up i’ the compass of a dog-collar—
or ’twill not do—that looks like a long laced conger, set upright;
and a green feather, like fennel, i’ the jowl on’t. (2.5.75-79)

The pig-woman doesn’t object to the comparisons these men have made, in principle. She’s happy to describe herself as “plump” and “juicy.” But she insists that leaner women be subjected to the same scrutiny and similar similes. The skinny alternatives to Ursula’s company are like up-ended eels, garnished with fennel. What should lie flat on the plate (or on its back) is made vertical through fussy presentation. The result is not “plain” and “wholesome” fare, but something “pinched” and “pent up.”

Ursula goes on to compare the prostitutes who seek customers at the theatres with slender, diseased fowl, and curses the gamesters in the third person with a “plague” of such women:

I hope to see 'em plagued one day (poxed they are already, I am sure) with lean playhouse poultry, that has the bony rump sticking out like the ace of spades or the point of a partisan, that every rib of 'em is like the tooth of a saw and will so grate 'em with their hips and shoulders, as (take 'em altogether) they were as good lie with a hurdle. (2.5.93-98)

The fish and birds employed in Ursula's description of her competition are not as easily associated with reproduction as the mammals that appear consistently in other characters' representations of *her*. While the familiarity of mammalian pregnancy contributes to figurations of Ursula as both a non-human creature and a mother, the use of eels and poultry in her unfavourable conjurings of other prostitutes places these rivals at an even greater remove from human sexuality. Their bodies don't look or feel like bodies; they don't even resemble good eats. Assignations with playhouse whores are more likely to result in physical pain or social castigation than erotic satisfaction—the “hurdle” of Ursula's final simile is a sled used to transport traitors to their execution.⁸³

Whereas fertility is notably absent from Ursula's tirade against her slender competitors, fantastical narratives of reproduction are central to her dressing-down of irritating fairgoers. She accuses both Quarlous and Winwife of having been conceived in farmyard settings: “you were begotten atop of a cart in harvest-time” (2.5.112); “you were engendered on a she-beggar in a barn” (2.5.120-21), and she fetches her “pigpan” so she can threaten them with scalding. Her rhetoric, with its emphasis on rustic settings, backfires—the “cart” and “barn” of her insults are too like the “booth” at which she sells both food and sex. Despite all her efforts to make other people seem like non-

⁸³ *OED* “hurdle, *n.*”

human animals, it is Ursula herself who ends up most resembling a meal of cooked flesh. The quarrel that ensues in her absence between Knockem and Quarlous results in her tripping with the pan of dripping and burning her own leg in the fall. Her demand for “cream and salad oil” to soothe the injury only contributes to the overwhelming impression that Ursula is now a roasted dinner of pig, bear, whale (2.5.116), horse (2.5.156), or bawd.

Later in the play, Ursula finds that she is not adequately stocked with the second of her two commodities—there’s a shortage of women willing to participate in casual prostitution at the fair. She enlists the help of her fellow bawds Dan Knockem and Captain Whit so that she can take full advantage of certain desirous customers. Addressing her cohort, she uses birds to represent both the recruiters and the gamesome women they are to seek: “An you be right Bartholomew-birds, now show yourselves so: we are undone for want of fowl i’ the Fair, here. Here will be Zekiel Edgworth, and three or four gallants with him at night, and I ha’ neither plover nor quail for ’em” (4.5.12-15). Knockem and Whit’s first task is to persuade the rather suggestible Win Littlewit “to become a bird o’ the game” (4.5.16) while Ursula “work[s] the velvet woman within” (4.5.16-17)—Mistress Overdo—to the same end.

The avian metaphors that circulate at the fair respond to a broad cultural interest in the fate of birds who are procured for human consumption.⁸⁴ In the opening scene of Dekker and Webster’s *Westward Ho*, the bawd Mistress Birdlime defies a tailor to name “any one thing that your cittyzens wife coms short of to your Lady,” insisting that “They have as pure Linnen, as choyce painting, love greene Geese in spring, Mallard and Teale in

⁸⁴ Joan Thirsk writes of the early moderns, “They ate every bird in the sky,” and she goes on to explain that “[a]ll birds were considered more flavorful if they were caught in flight” (13-14).

the fall, and Woodcocke in winter" (1.1.26-29).⁸⁵ The city wives' shift in preference from one seasonally available fowl to another is thus compared to the discrimination and fickleness of their sexual appetites. Birdlime, whose name suggests the easy procurement of male company for such women, means to indicate that city wives get what they want. By her reckoning, a strong and imposing sexual will is one of the things that makes them ladylike.

In *The Honest Whore*, the trapping and eating of birds is related to prostitution through notions of gullibility. Bellafront sends Roger out to purchase some larks and woodcocks and he decides to buy "but one" of the latter, as "there's one already here" (6.291)—Hippolito has just returned.⁸⁶ Without knowing it has been used to describe him, Hippolito extends the metaphor of a captured bird when he announces his resistance to Bellafront's rhetoric: "This were well now, to one but newly fledged, / And scarce a day old in this subtle world; / 'Twere pretty art, good birdlime, cunning net" (6.329-31). The unmistakably gendered *cunning* of the net Hippolito conjures is necessarily different from the tricks that will be deployed by Whit and Knockem in their pursuit of "fowl i' the Fair," but the bird-catching metaphor is linked in both cases to the processes by which characters are implicated in prostitution. In Jonson's play, poultry can represent the women who are temporarily employed in the sex trade or the so-called captains who recruit

⁸⁵ Cyrus Hoy contextualizes Birdlime's catalogue with a series of similar ones from other sources and asserts, "The *double entendre* in such lists of game is obvious" (166). It may be obvious that a second set of meanings is set in motion in these cases, but it is not clear precisely what these meanings are or how they emerge.

⁸⁶ Woodcocks are especially associated with foolhardy participation in illicit sex, presumably because of the ease with which they are caught and the gendering implicit in their name. Robert Greene uses the bird this way in both *A disputation* (B2) and his *groats-worth of witte* (C3v, D3v). In Nicholas Breton's 1597 dialogue *Wits Trenchmour*, the scholar tells the angler that "a bird is commonlie known by his feather, for everie long bill is not a Woodcock" (C4). Also, woodcocks number among the aphrodisiac foods recommended for consumption by gallants in Dekker's *The Guls Horne-Booke* (1609, 34).

them. The repeated appearances of avian life in such figurations reveal that illicit sex is integral to the fair, where all customers are “Bartholomew-birds” of one kind or another.⁸⁷

While the metaphor of captured and cooked flesh is perhaps the most obvious way of talking about the sex Ursula intends to sell, the availability of drinks is also linked logically—and physiologically—to the topos of prostitution. Against all the heat and meat of Ursula’s booth is the refreshment of ale and beer. She gives her tapster Mooncalf specific instructions for the serving of beverages so that she can make the kind of profit she’s counting on:

[S]ix and twenty shillings a barrel I will advance o’ my beer, and fifty shillings a hundred o’ my bottle-ale; I ha’ told you the ways how to raise it. Froth your cans well I’ the filling, at length, rogue, and jog your bottles o’ the buttock, sirrah, then skink out the first glass, ever, and drink with all companies, though you be sure to be drunk; you’ll misreckon the better, and be less ashamed on’t. (2.2.89-95)

Thus the tapster’s own inebriation, and the lack of judgement that comes with it, are fundamental to his occupation. The “true trick,” the bawd goes on to say, will be for Mooncalf to remove bottles and cans before they’ve been emptied, and bring “fresh” servings before anyone can stop him. Her advice explains the system by which liquids will circulate in and around Ursula’s booth: helpings of beer and ale are brought to customers, partly consumed,

⁸⁷ The Stage-Keeper of the play’s Induction complains that the poet has failed to capture the language and ambience of Smithfield, and suspects that this shortcoming is the result of inadequate research: “He has not hit the humours—he does not know ’em; he has not conversed with the Bartholomew-birds, as they say” (10-12). In Leatherhead’s hollered roster of goods, “excellent fine Bartholomew bird[s]” (2.5.4-5) number among the novelty renderings of animals for sale at the hobby-horse booth.

then returned to the barrel or bottles whence they came, only to be served a second time (for a second fee).

The pig-stand also tends to the other end of consumption, where liquids flow not from bottles or kegs but from bodies.⁸⁸ When Mistress Overdo and Win Littlewit find themselves suddenly in need of a potty, they show up almost simultaneously at Ursula's booth. Their incontinence identifies them with Ursula herself, who "water[s] the ground...like a great garden-pot" as she walks (2.2.50-51); it also makes them vulnerable to the manipulations of the pig-woman and her colleagues. Ursula, Knockem, and Whit eagerly take advantage of the opportunity that presents itself when both Mistress Overdo and Mistress Littlewit appear at the booth. In a cultural imaginary that regularly compares prostitutes and their workplaces to sewers, it makes sense that a woman who uses a strange toilet is increasingly likely to be considered a toilet herself.

The very opportunity to speak of a woman's physiological need brings her closer to the realm of whoredom. When Whit requests that Ursula admit Mistress Overdo into the booth for the purpose of relieving herself, she tells him the facilities are occupied: "Heart, must I find a common pot for every punk i' your purlieu?...My vessel is employed, sir. I have but one, and 'tis the bottom of an old bottle. An honest proctor and his wife are at it within, if she'll stay her time, so" (4.5.184-90). By including Master Littlewit in his wife's use of the booth, and employing the suggestively vague expression "at it," Ursula makes her temporary workplace and her body seem more multifunctional than ever, and she points up the connection between two relatively private activities. The "punk" in this rhetoric represents the lowest

⁸⁸ The prominence of the potty in *Bartholomew Fair* is given a thorough and nuanced reading in Gail Kern Paster's *The Body Embarrassed* (23-63). The relevant chapter, "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy," presents material published earlier in *Renaissance Drama* under the same title.

level of potential toilet-seekers, the kind of woman who might elsewhere be compared to a “common pot” herself. At the same time, Ursula’s accidental pun makes the potty a part of her own sexualized body—the “vessel” that can be “employed” in many ways by many people.

Ursula herself is described as having exhibited the kind of intemperance that her business relies upon. In her first exchange with Dan Knockem, Ursula asks him to account for a rumour that has circulated about her immoderate consumption of food and drink: “You are one of those horse-leeches that gave out I was dead in Turnbull Street of a surfeit of bottle ale and tripes?” (2.3.13-14). Knockem doesn’t deny having spread the gossip, but mocks her with an image that is perhaps even more grotesque: “No, ’twas better meat, Urs: cows’ udders, cows’ udders!” (2.3.15). While these “udders” participate in the strong thematic current of reproductive metaphors in the play, the dismissed “tripes” are equally relevant to the construction of Ursula’s bawdy character. This particular foodstuff is mentioned several times in the course of the action, always with some reference to illicit sexuality.⁸⁹ Like the treatment of flesh and beverages in the play, the appearance of tripe in the discourse of the fair jibes with standard representations in the literary culture beyond the frame of Jonson’s work. Tripe is an obvious choice for Ursula’s imaginary indulgence.

Because it is associated with female vendors, tripe usually enters early modern literature in the company of tripe-*wives*, women who sell entrails.

The topoi of prostitution and tripe-selling overlap in a pamphlet by one

⁸⁹ The first mention of tripe in the play is made by Quarlous, in a series of jocular insults aimed at his friend Winwife. The topic is Winwife’s incessant “widow-hunting” (1.3.56), exemplified by his pursuit of Win Littlewit’s strange but financially comfortable mother. “There cannot be an ancient tripe or trillibub i’ the town, but thou art straight nosing it,” Quarlous says (1.3.57-59). Mocking his friend’s efforts, Quarlous points out the similarity between such “old reverend smock[s]” (1.3.57) and the hard, tanned hide of a carcass (“a piece of buff” [1.3.60]).

“Oliver Oat-meale” which tells the story of an inquest into the matter of a tripe-wife’s sexual conduct.⁹⁰ The pamphlet opens with a verse dialogue between a tripe-wife and her husband Trickes, who calls her “Tripe” outright at one point and insinuates throughout that she is like the guts she once sold. The two are caught up in a quarrel because she has had to abandon her trade in order to join him in the sale of imported sweets and tobacco. Trickes gloats, “The Butchers offals were thy sweetest ware, / Mine, of farre kingdomes are the wealthy store” (A4). The tripe-wives of both the dialogue and the inquest are sources of derision partly because of their fondness for their disgusting work. In the “Eglogue,” the wife admits that her trade was unpleasant, but she laments her estrangement from her own source of income: “Accurst was I to leave the Butchers fees, / How base so ere, they brought in golden gaine” (A4v). And the tripe-wife of the inquest is said to be disappointed with married life: “she finds not what she expected, and wisheth her selfe over head and cares in the sowce tub[,]...behinde the Shambles againe as well as ever she was” (20).

What begins as wistfulness turns into wilfulness—the inquest resolves the question of whether the tripe-wife has been tricked into working as a prostitute, but it leaves the bulk of the story open to treat the sexual indiscretions for which she is solely to blame. The Oat-meale persona expresses mocking consolation for the hapless new husband of the tripe-wife: “what a beast [and] filthy slut she hath beene, and still is” (1). The tripe-wife’s transgression inheres in her full command of her own private parts, a situation that is troublingly similar, for the narrator, to her control of the dressing and

⁹⁰ *A Quest of Enquirie, by women to know, Whether the Tripe-wife were trimmed by Doll yea or no* (1595). Coincidentally, another pamphlet from the same year also features a fooled tripe-wife. In *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire*, the cunning-woman Judeth Philips takes advantage of the “covetousness” of an already rich tripe-wife (12-16). The not-quite-blameless victims in both narratives are wealthy widows.

distribution of animal parts at her shop. Following common logic, anxieties about women's cleverness become complaints about their stupidity: "O world of iniquitie, where are women's wits, that make no difference betweene their owne secrets, and a Cowe heele or a Tripe[?]" (1). In pamphlet literature and dramatic writing alike, the repeated comparison of a female vendor's sexualized body to the bodies she sells is one inevitable result of a culturally embedded metonymy by which certain parts stand for the whole.

Ursula is, of course, no exception to this rule. The independent whore Punk Alice calls her the "sow of Smithfield" (4.5.69), echoing the apparently irresistible metaphor used earlier by Knockem: "mother o' the pigs" (2.5.68). The epithet is certainly insulting, but it's also plainly appropriate to a character listed in the *Dramatis Personae* as the "pig-woman" of Bartholomew Fair. Typically Smithfield is associated with cattle and horses—a *sow* would be out of place on any day except St. Bartholomew's Day, when people flock to the market for the fair's traditional roasted meat. A desire to go to Smithfield on the twenty-fourth of August is tantamount to a craving for pig. So while Alice's name-calling might be offensive, it also emphasizes Ursula's important place in the social world before us. Furthermore, the sow fetches the highest price among the roasted offerings at Ursula's booth: five shillings and sixpence (2.2.103-5), a value Ursula herself has set. The pig-woman is compared to a commodity which she controls—exclusively, it seems—and which permeates both the scentscape and the festive atmosphere of the fair.

Alice's invective is perhaps more potent when she calls Ursula a "bawd in grease," employing an epithet that is simultaneously figurative and literal. With this name, she draws attention to the pig-woman's actual appearance,

the oily sweat that drips from her body.⁹¹ As a metaphorical expression, “bawd in grease” suggests further that Ursula is an animal who has been fattened for the slaughter. The effect of the phrase is to make the procuress seem subhuman by drawing a parallel between the plump bawd and a goose, cow, or any other animal bred to be killed and eaten. Although Ursula has been associated with livestock earlier in the play, she is generally regarded as a keeper of animals rather than one who is kept. She makes her money on pigs and people, while we see no evidence that anyone makes money on *her*. But Alice’s insult, in keeping with her presence in the fourth act generally, introduces a potentially grim element to the representation of procurement and prostitution in *Bartholomew Fair*, by describing a fate which Ursula seems not to have considered. Although the bawd is now part of a social structure which keeps her alive and fattens her up, she may eventually be destroyed by the hands that feed her.

If Ursula has any fear of a social death, it lurks behind her questioning of Knockem about the rumour of her fatal overconsumption in Turnbull Street. It is only fitting, then, that this particular location should form the basis of her next insult for Alice: “Thou tripe of Turnbull!” (4.5.70). In one go, Ursula indicates that her interlocutor neither belongs at Smithfield nor poses any real threat to thriving trade at the pig-booth. Alice is compared not to roasted flesh, dripping with fat, but to another creature’s guts. Unlike Alice’s metaphors, which make of Ursula a whole, living being (one that may soon go its death, but is safe in all its fatness for the moment), the tripe which

⁹¹ Ursula herself has already complained of her profuse perspiration—“I shall e’en melt away to the first woman, a rib again” (2.2.49-50)—and she has expressed the preposterous idea that she’ll soon fit into the narrow chair her assistant has provided for her because she is so rapidly losing body mass: “I shall e’en dwindle away to’t, ere the Fair be done, you think, now you ha’ heated me!...I feel myself dropping already, as fast as I can; two stone o’ suet a day is my proportion” (2.2.75-78).

Ursula uses to represent Alice is what's left over from the trade in animal flesh: the slaughtered creature's entrails, taken out of the digestive system in which they once functioned, and now serving rather ironically as fodder for humans. The insult is made all the more potent by the lingering image of Ursula's own indulgence in tripe—it's as if the sowlike bawd could swallow the competition whole.

Conversely, the whore says she suffers from hunger. Assuming that Mistress Overdo is working as a specially commissioned prostitute at Ursula's booth, Alice speaks out against her: "They are such as you are that undo us, and take our trade from us....The poor common whores can ha' no traffic for the privy rich ones; your caps and hoods of velvet call away our customers, and lick the fat from us" (4.5.60-65). To "undo" a woman is, in standard early modern usage, to interfere with her chaste or virginal status and render her valueless on the marriage market—in other words, to make a whore of her. Here the *whore* fears being undone through the privilege and the accessories of her competitors. The fancy dress of women like Mistress Overdo pulls customers away from prostitutes in greater need of an income. Because steady work and pay are so vital to Punk Alice, this interruption in the flow of clients amounts to a period of relative starvation. As obstacles to the sustenance of their less wealthy competitors, Ursula and her temporary employees may as well be "lick[ing] the fat" from people like Alice. In the ravings of the solitary prostitute, then, is a perspective that recalls and critiques Ursula's assessment of the scrawny whores who work at the playhouses. By Alice's reckoning, such women are not eely representatives of fashion, but hungry, isolated workers who have lost the loyalty of their clientele and the food and drink that such loyalty would afford.

Stewed Prunes and Stewed People in *Measure for Measure*

Through the resourceful and optimistic character of Pompey, who procures both sex and beverages, the consumption of food and drink becomes a central aspect of prostitution in *Measure for Measure*. In the second act of the play, the ridiculous constable Elbow arrests Pompey and one of his customers, a gentleman by the name of Froth, for committing an unnamed crime against his wife. The characters are caught up in a whirlwind of punning, and the events that have so totally outraged the constable are never fully narrated. The scene is bookended with graver considerations: the transgression and impending execution of Claudio is discussed both before Elbow enters with his prisoners, and after Escalus has dismissed his complaint. The shape of the scene allows us to view the matters raised by Elbow as trivial. Whether women and men knowingly frequent brothels, what they do there, and who sees them—these things are related to the broader question of how the new sexual regime in Vienna will affect people's lives, but they are not as urgent as Escalus' concern that the punishment planned for Claudio may be unjust and hypocritical.⁹² The testimonies of Elbow and his detainees are so circular and nonsensical that Angelo eventually departs, leaving the case in Escalus' hands. But if we listen to what the deputy dismisses, the punchy, punny dialogue of the scene will respond in its own way to standard metaphors for illicit sex. The malformed anecdote places Shakespeare's Vienna firmly in the linguistic

⁹² He pleads with Angelo at the beginning of the scene, "Let but your honour know— / ... Whether you had not sometime in your life / Erred in this point, which now you censure him, / And pulled the law upon you" (2.1.8-16).

terrain of early modern London, where certain fruits could only mean certain things.⁹³

The story about Mistress Elbow and what did or didn't happen to her at Mistress Overdone's house is not conveyed by Elbow, because he can speak only in ambiguities and malapropisms. We can gather, with Escalus, that the constable's complaint has something to do with a certain establishment, the "naughty house" where Pompey works as a "tapster" and "parcel bawd" (2.1.74, 61). It seems that what Elbow attempts to tell is a tale of temptation and defiance, in which his wife averts disaster by spitting in the face of one of the brothel's clients. If Mistress Elbow had been "a woman cardinally given," her husband says, she "might have been accused in fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness there" (2.1.76-78). From the outset, Elbow's is a story about something that *hasn't* taken place—as far as he knows—despite the very particular setting laid out by its narrator.

This location, Elbow reports, is Mistress Overdone's new house. The proclamation that Pompey reported in the second scene of the play has been carried out. In fact, the tapster's language is echoed by the constable: Pompey's "All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down" (1.2.94-95) becomes part of Elbow's description of "a bad woman, whose house, sir, was, as they say, plucked down in the suburbs" (2.1.62-63). The narrative we are about to hear provides us with information about the effect of the proclamation on the bawd and her tapster. They have moved their operation into the city and given it the partial disguise of a bath-house. Elbow explains, "now she professes a hot-house, which I think is a very ill house too" (2.1.63-64). This statement of suspicion from the slow-witted

⁹³ Speaking more broadly, Richard P. Wheeler observes how the play's imagery "repeatedly connects debased sexual desire with eating" ("Sexuality, Life, and Death in *Measure for Measure*" 19).

constable indicates that the primary commercial function of Mistress Overdone's house is still clearly recognizable—her business has sprung right back up again with a front that is so typical as to be transparent.

The word *stew* is not used in *Measure for Measure* as a synonym for hot-house or brothel, but its bawdy significance emerges anyway. When Pompey is invited to speak, he tells a story whose central event is the eating of fruit. The stewed prunes that are craved and consumed in the tapster's tale replace the sex that the audience expects to hear about, and that Elbow can't quite bring himself to speak of. In one reading of Pompey's report, Mistress Elbow is just another pregnant woman with an urgent need for a particular food. The fruit she seeks is available, as luck and tradition would have it, at Mistress Overdone's establishment. So the story goes:

Sir, she came in great with child, and longing, saving your honour's reverence, for stewed prunes. Sir, we had but two in the house, which at that very distant time stood, as it were, in a fruit dish, a dish of some three pence; your honours have seen such dishes, they are not china dishes, but very good dishes—

(2.1.86-91)

Setting aside for the moment the tapster's apparent preoccupation with the quality of the brothel's tableware, we might first notice the way in which Pompey draws attention to some of the bawdy elements in his language by marking them with little phrases that point toward the multiplicity of possible meanings and constitute a cursory request for pardon. He nods at the various implications of both "longing" and "stewed prunes" by inserting the deferential formula "saving your honour's reverence," and allows the verb "stood" to emerge into its own bawdy potential through the addition of a smirking "as it were." Even the "dishes" of Pompey's ramble are suggestive, if

we consider that Shakespeare uses *dish* elsewhere to refer to a person who has been delectably displayed.⁹⁴

The most telling aspect of the scene the tapster sets is, of course, the pair of prunes that seem so idle in their not-quite-china dish. Whether a longing for stewed prunes necessarily functions as a metaphor for illicit sexual desire or not, Pompey's speech conflates these two kinds of hunger even as it seems to separate them. In its adjectival life, *stewed* belongs to the family of metaphors that compare the effects of brothel patronage on human bodies to the effects of culinary procedures on animal and vegetable matter. The association is present not only in contemporary usage, by which *stew* could represent a fish pond, a soup, a bathhouse, a brothel, or anything in between, but also in the very etymology of the word—it shares a root with *stove*.⁹⁵ Because sexual transgression is linked humourally with an excess of heat, the prostitute and her clientele are routinely described as hot to the point of roasting.⁹⁶ We have seen, for example, how Ursula stews in her own juices.

⁹⁴ The *OED* cites examples of such figurative usage from *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.1.283) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (2.6.134, 5.2.275) in the entry for the noun “dish” (2.a.).

⁹⁵ *OED* “stew, *n.*¹,” “stew, *n.*²” (3 and 4). In an extraordinarily careful reading of a property grant from 1350, Henry Ansgar Kelly finds “one of the earliest known references to ‘the Stews’ or ‘the Stoves’ of Southwark” and explains the difficulty of pinning down the origins of this usage. “[I]t is not clear,” he writes, “whether the primary reference was to the ponds maintained by fishmongers—which certainly existed there at that time, as is evident from the Stratford grant—or to buildings of some sort, specifically those used as bordellos.” Kelly’s research shows that aspects of *stew*’s etymology were carried over into popular representations of the sex trade: “There seem to be two basic words behind this usage, one primarily denoting ‘wetness’ and the other ‘heat,’ which gave rise to our words ‘stew’ and ‘stove,’ respectively, but the meanings were often combined or even interchanged” (351).

⁹⁶ Furthermore, the alliterative phrase “hot whore” is irresistible to early modern writers across genres. When Marlowe’s Faustus asks for a wife and gets a devil with fireworks instead, he curses it: “A plague on her for a hote whore” (C2). Similar curses are uttered against Helen in Thomas Heywood’s *The Iron Age* (1632): “A hot Pest take the strumpet;” “Twas this hot whore that set all Troy a fire” (F3). The figure of Virgo the Maide in *The Owles Almanacke* (1618) is introduced as “a hot whore” before she complains to Prometheus that tobacco smoke has interfered with her beauty and her business (18-19). In the

Thus the more illicit meaning of *stew* emerges ironically in Pompey's attempt to rid the residence of suspicion. Although *stewed* grammatically modifies *prunes*, it does more to describe the nature of Mistress Overdone's house. With Escalus, we realize that anything found therein is potentially stewed, and that the place itself is a stew—a warm, enclosed environment where bodies can be fed or consumed, and disease can be spread or treated.

One threat before Mistress Elbow, then, is that she might become a stewed prune herself. The house may claim her as a constituent of its menu. In fact, Elbow's complaint, however vague, is clearly based on an anxiety about the preservation of his wife's reputation. He worries that she has come dangerously close to the threshold at which a respected wife becomes a suspected whore ("respect" and "suspect" trade places in Elbow's grossest malapropism, 2.1.154-69). He cannot say "what was done to her," in Escalus' words (2.1.113), either because he's ashamed to name the crime or because there was no crime at all. But the very presence of stewed prunes in the house marks it as a brothel and marks its visitors as participants of one kind or other in illicit sexual exchange. This strong cultural reference is what the play's first audiences would have heard in the mention of a fruit that is now regarded very differently.

The talking horse in the wonderful 1595 pamphlet *Maroccus Extaticus* tells his master of "Pierce Pandor, and baudie Bettrice his wife," who "set up" with not only a "stocke of wenches" but also "their pamphlet pots, and stewed prunes, nine for a tester, in a sinfull saucer" (3). Dekker's *Seven deadly Sinnes of London* (1606) briefly portrays the typical Puritan as one "that dares not...come neere the Suburb-shadow of a house, where they set stewed Prunes

play *The Valiant Welshman* (1615), the phrase is used to describe a witch just as she is thrown into a fire (Gv). The eponymous "Witch of Edmonton" is also a "hot Whore," according to the men who try to prove her guilt by burning a handful of thatch taken from her house (39).

befor you" (21). In one of his collections of "characters," Sir Thomas Overbury presents the "Maquerela," or bawd,⁹⁷ who rewards spendthrift brothellers for their gullibility with portions of stewed prunes: "[S]he hath only this one shew of Temperance, that let a Gentleman send for tenne pottles of wine in her house, hee shall haue but tenne quarts; and if he want it that way, let him pay for't, and take it out in stewde prunes" (G7-7v). Perhaps the implication is that it would be unpleasant or impossible to eat enough of this particular food to make up the cost of the withheld wine. But other texts hint at aphrodisiac properties in prunes. In Samuel Rowlands' poem *The Knaue of Clubbes*, a "Puncke prepar'd for passengers" beckons a traveller into her lodging and orders her maid to bring "cakes, / Stewd prunes, and pippins;" soon after these treats arrive, the prostitute and her customer "imbrace" (A4-4v).

The dramatic writing of the period is even more likely to exploit the comic potential of this standard association, as in Dekker and Webster's *Northward Ho*, where a bawd declares that she's going to start keeping "but six stewd prunes in a dish and some of mother Walls cakes" for her best customers, now that times are tough (4.3.83-84). When the hostess of the Boar's-Head Tavern makes an oath in *Henry IV, Part One*, Falstaff mocks her false piety by reminding her of her trade: "There's no more faith in thee than in a stewed / prune" (3.3.107-08). The fruit is taken as a kind of evidence again in *Part Two*, when the plucky prostitute Doll Tearsheet insults her customer Poins. She objects to Mistress Quickly's calling him a "captain": "He a captain! Hang him, rogue! He lives upon mouldy stewed prunes and dried

⁹⁷ Behind the name of Overbury's bawd is a longstanding association between sexual procurement and the mackerel (*OED* "mackerel, *n.*¹" and "mackerel, *n.*²"), based on the idea that "the mackerel assisted in the sexual activity of the herring." The "old panderess" in Marston's play *The Malcontent* is called Maquerelle.

cakes” (2.4.149-51). In the first scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the foolish Slender relates an anecdote that would make no sense if it didn’t include certain significant foods: “I bruised my shin th’ other day with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence—three veneyes for a dish of stewed prunes—and, by my troth, I cannot abide the smell of hot meat since” (1.1.261-65). Here, both prunes and meat stand in for an unnamed female prize who wasn’t worth the effort. In *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, the characters Mistress Horseleech and her assistant Bots are introduced as “two dishes of stew’d prunes, a Bawde and a Pander” (4.3.36), although they don’t hear the insult.

The prunes for which Mistress Elbow yearns could easily signify that she wants more than a certain snack. It is also possible that she feels an innocent desire that is rendered illicit by a common practice over which she has no control. The constable’s wife may be merely a victim of coincidence who has ended up on the wrong side of a pun. But she is not the only character in this brief narrative who likes stewed prunes, nor is she the only one whose taste is tied up with bawdy metaphors. Elbow arrests both Pompey and his customer Froth for endangering the reputation of his wife. Because he is a regular visitor of Mistress Overdone’s house, Master Froth functions in the dialogue as an excuse for the description of a scene we never see. Along with the stewed prunes, he is part of a recipe that produces an imagined brothel-space just outside the action. If Mistress Elbow’s motivation is somewhat murky, Froth’s appetite is plain to see.

Escalus interrupts Pompey mid-sentence—during his discourse on dishes—to urge him toward the crux of the narrative. The tapster repeats what he’s already related with a little more coherence, and finally comes around to the role played by Master Froth in this drama of fruit-eating:

As I say, this Mistress Elbow, being, as I say, with child, and great-bellied, and longing, as I said, for prunes; and having but two in the dish, as I said, Master Froth here, this very man, having eaten the rest, as I said, and, as I say, paying for them very honestly—for, as you know, Master Froth, I could not give you three pence again— (2.1.94-100)

The preponderance of unnecessary modifiers in Pompey's speech ("as I say," "as I said," "as you know") adds to the impression that very little is actually being told here, and makes the focus on fruit seem all the more ridiculous.⁹⁸ The disclosure reveals only that Froth had put away the majority of the available prunes before Mistress Elbow's arrival. In fact, Froth's place in the narrative has everything to do with food and drink, and yet his presence makes it obvious that Mistress Overdone's house offers more than that. His fondness for fruit is both lustful and lethargic; the very idea of his eating stewed prunes accrues bawdy significance without requiring explanation, and Pompey's rhetoric is fittingly idle in its random dappling of puns onto the blank canvas that is Master Froth.

In a passing reference to testicles, Froth is found "cracking the stones of the foresaid prunes" (2.1.103). He enjoys this snack in a room called "the Bunch of Grapes," because that is where he has "a delight to sit" (2.1.123). Froth explains that the latter is "an open room, and good for winter" (2.1.125-26), but the image of the gentleman sitting in a bunch of grapes is unavoidable, especially since the prunes he's eating have been personified as "standing," at once static and comically erotic, in their dish. Froth and his

⁹⁸ In his essay "Being Precise in *Measure for Measure*," Maurice Hunt pays close attention to the combination of extreme detail and confusing imprecision in this scene (247-50). He notes in particular that "Pompey and Froth never are able to recover the loose thread of their discourse after Angelo's hasty exit" (249).

fruit are, it seems, interchangeable. The cursory humour of Pompey's reminiscence relies upon the basic belief that we are what we eat; not far off is the common early modern assertion that foods can advance or curb an illness. The tapster recalls discussing with Froth the fate of some people who are presumably his fellow customers: "I telling you then, if you be remembered, that such a one and such a one were past cure of the thing you wot of, unless they kept very good diet, as I told you—" (2.1.105-108). The kind of diet Pompey recommends may include stewed prunes, which are listed in a 1596 medical manual among dietary treatments for venereal disease.⁹⁹

Further, the gentleman customer's name conjures up images of both foaming drool and the typical brothel beverages of ale and beer. "Froth" functions in *Bartholomew Fair* as a metonym for these drinks (2.5.31, 35); in *Measure for Measure*, it registers the character's gullibility, since "frothing the can," for the early moderns, is a trick commonly employed to make more money on less drink.¹⁰⁰ Independent of Froth's witless contribution to the narrative, Pompey's words sufficiently demonstrate the customer's willingness to spend more money than he ought. The tapster can't provide him with proper change, so Froth pays "very honestly" despite being charged deceitfully. This unfair tapping of wealth is what concerns Escalus as he takes Froth aside and warns him against any further dealings with Pompey: "Master Froth, I would not have you acquainted with tapsters; they will draw you, Master Froth, and you will hang them" (2.1.195-97). Here the foolish customer is an easily drained cask whose complaints, if he were to make any,

⁹⁹ N. W. Bawcutt, following earlier editors, cites this particular text in a note on *Measure for Measure*'s "stewed prunes" (114n): William Clowes, *A Profitable and Necessary Booke of Observations* (161).

¹⁰⁰ OED "froth, v." (5)

would result in the public punishment of those who have profited by his carelessness.¹⁰¹

Escalus dismisses Froth and begins to interrogate Pompey, fully aware already of how he makes his living. He asks, “Pompey, you are partly a bawd, Pompey, howsoever you colour it in being a tapster, are you not?” (2.1.209-10). Pompey’s response does not offer any insight into the particular relationship between brothels and beverages, but it does reveal how intimately connected are questions of sex and hunger for one employed in procurement: “Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live” (2.1.212). The threat of poverty follows the depiction of the sex trade throughout the play, from Mistress Overdone’s complaints of being “custom-shrunk” onward to Pompey’s second arrest. Food and drink are of central importance in the comical non-story of Mistress Elbow and Master Froth, but they receive darker attention when the tapster is finally taken to prison.

As he carries Pompey off to jail, Elbow makes his claim against prostitution. In his view, the trade deprives its workers of humanity and results in the undesirable miscegenation of the population: “[I]f there be no remedy for it, but that you will buy and sell men and women like beasts, we shall have all the world drink brown and white bastard” (3.1.270-72). His simile places the trading of livestock in parallel with the sale of sex, but the ambiguous syntax suggests that procurement is also beastly. This notion recurs a few lines later in the vituperative speech of the disguised Duke, whose friarly counsel uses both the feeding and the consumption of animals as vivid metaphors:

¹⁰¹ The “draw” in Escalus’ warning also invokes the transporting of offenders through the city for the purpose of public humiliation (i.e. “carting”), the disembowelling of criminals at execution, and, less grimly, the luring of customers into a business. Dr. Johnson and subsequent editors have noted the multiplicity of meanings here set in motion (Bawcutt 118n).

Fie, sirrah, a bawd, a wicked bawd!
 The evil that thou causest to be done,
 That is thy means to live. Do thou but think
 What 'tis to cram a maw, or clothe a back
 From such a filthy vice; say to thyself,
 From their abominable and beastly touches
 I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.
 Canst thou believe thy living is a life,
 So stinkingly depending? Go mend, go mend. (3.1.286-94)

Illicit sex is “filthy,” “abominable,” and “beastly,” a degradation of humanity. But so is the practice that profits by it—to “cram” is to fatten a creature for slaughter by feeding it an excess of food; a “maw” is an animal mouth. According to the Duke, Pompey’s occupation might allow him to live, but his life is not properly human because it is parasitic and amoral. It stinks.

The stench of rotting flesh suggested by the Duke’s elegant rant also emanates from the description of Mistress Overdone that is uttered shortly thereafter. When her former client Lucio asks Pompey how the bawd is faring, both question and answer feature metaphors of meat. Lucio, more curious than concerned, facetiously frames Mistress Overdone as not only a seller of flesh, but a tasty and expensive piece of meat in her own right: “How doth my dear morsel, thy mistress? Procures she still, ha?” (3.1.320-21). Pompey responds in kind, locating his employer first at the table and then in the bath. Overdone’s female employees, once her sustenance, are now consumed by the same illnesses that have landed the bawd in a new stew: “Troth, sir, she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub” (3.1.322-23). Prostitution, in this world, makes human flesh susceptible to consumption of one kind or another, even as it turns a profit on natural

human appetites for food and sex. If Shakespeare's cannibalistic metaphor seems especially grim, it is only an obvious extension of a discourse in which a person could be a prune, stew a prune, and eat a prune, all at once.

The Whore's Appetite in *Northward Ho*

Dekker and Webster's *Northward Ho* is a play full of food. It opens at an inn in the notorious town of Ware (famous for its giant bed), where two guests discuss their plans for supper. The first few lines of dialogue introduce at once the theme of eating and the scheme by which Luke Greenshield intends to fool a man he's never met. Greenshield tells his companion Featherstone that he has invited one Mayberry, a fellow Londoner, to eat with them. The go-between is the inn's chamberlain, named Innocence, who has arranged meetings for Greenshield in the past and has recently informed him of Mayberry's presence. This particular convergence of characters is fortuitous, at least for Greenshield. He explains, "the honest knave Chamberleine...hath bin my Informer, my baud, ever since I knew *Ware*" (1.1.2-3); "he dwelt at *Dunstable* not long since, and hath brought me and the two Butchers Daughters there to interview twenty times" (1.1.16-18).¹⁰²

These willing "Butchers Daughters" introduce the repeated metaphor of meat into the play's discourse of illicit sex. They are also the opposite of Mayberry's wife, whose "puritanicall coynesse" Greenshield and Featherstone have witnessed back in London (1.1.9). Greenshield seeks to "take a full revenge" (1.1.8) of Mabel Mayberry's resistance by telling her husband that she was sexually involved with both him and Featherstone. In his sneakiness, Greenshield pretends reluctance before offering up the identity of the woman

¹⁰² I follow Fredson Bowers' edition of the play.

in question. The men, however, do not exchange names. Mayberry doesn't recognize the other two Londoners until their conversation has ended and his cynical companion, the poet Bellamont, asks him if he knows them (1.1.184). "Faith now I remember," he says, "I have seene them walke muffled by my shop" (1.1.185-86).

Because Greenshield has carefully dropped the name *Mayberry*, the gull is forced to speak about himself in the third person, carrying on a ruse of his own that fools no one. In this mode, Mayberry speculates about himself in the role of a cuckold, using a hypothetical third party to reimagine the sexual economy of his marriage: "I warrant her husband was forth a Towne all this while, and he poore man travaild with hard Egges in's pocket, to save the charge of a baite, whilst she was at home with her Plovers, Turkey, Chickens..." (1.1.115-18). Mayberry's hypothesis, based perhaps on experience, is that the frugal and faithful husband ate only hard-boiled eggs while his wife enjoyed daintier fare at home. His language also invites a reading that is more relevant to the matter of sexual fidelity. As we've seen, men and women who are available for illicit sex are often represented as fowl. Having been told that his wife welcomed both Greenshield and Featherstone into her bed, Mayberry imagines her enjoying a variety of captured or domesticated "birds," while he suffers with hardened testicles. Added to her supposed transgression is the subtler charge that Mistress Mayberry disturbs the economic balance of the household by overspending on lavish foodstuffs (or sexual escapades) and neglecting her husband's "purse."¹⁰³

Food figures in the representation of Bellamont's finances, too. The poet, having repeatedly rescued his son from debt, forbids the boy to

¹⁰³ Featherstone uses *purse* for scrotum near the end of the play, when he's taking Kate Greenshield away from her husband: "[W]ilt thou hang at my purse Kate, like a paire of barbary buttons, to open when tis full, and close when tis empty?" (5.1.337-39).

continue spending time and money on “a woman of an ill name” (1.3.162-63). Philip’s sarcastic response dismisses the accusation (“Her name is *Dorothy* sir, I hope thats no il name” [1.3.164]) but hints at its accuracy (*Dorothy* abbreviated to *Doll* is a whorish name). The prodigal son then issues a catalogue of various British ethnicities and their preferred foods.

[L]ooke you sir, the Northerne man loves white-meates, the
 Southerly man Sallades, the Essex man a Calfe, the Kentishman
 a Wag-taile, the Lancashire man an Egg-pie, the Welshman
 Leekes and Cheese, and your Londoners rawe Mutton, so
 Father god-boy, I was borne in *London*. (1.3.174-79)¹⁰⁴

Philip argues that he simply has a predisposition toward illicit sex, as a result of having been born and bred in London. The effect of the common metaphor “mutton” at the end of the catalogue is to bring out double meanings in the foregoing items—humour emerges if we read (or listen) backwards.¹⁰⁵ In one case, the pun is straightforward: a *wagtail* is a bird, but the word also serves as an epithet for a misbehaving man or a sexually promiscuous woman.¹⁰⁶ The other foods in the list, if they can be made to represent sexual preferences at all, can do so only in a comically convoluted way. It could be that an extreme, if seemingly arbitrary, liking for whitemeats, salads, and egg pies simply strikes Philip as a good point of comparison for an overweening desire for illicit sex. In any case, the bawdy

¹⁰⁴ In this catalogue of foods, Cyrus Hoy finds strong echoes of Henry Buttes’ 1599 guide *Dyets Dry Dinner* (263).

¹⁰⁵ About mutton: later on, when Featherstone has cooked up a plan of his own, he’s compared to “a crafty mutton-monger” (4.1.222); the term is used elsewhere in Dekker to stand in for *whoremonger* (*The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, 2.1.255-56 and 4.1.102). In the pageant of sins in *Doctor Faustus*, Lechery says, “I am one that loves an inch of raw mutton better than an ell of fride stock fish” (C4v). When the much-pursued country maid Margaret of Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* is preparing to become a nun, she is referred to as “holy mutton” (H5).

¹⁰⁶ OED “wagtail, *n.*” (3)

tenor of his speech makes all matters of diet appear to be intimately and comically tied up with the subject of sex.¹⁰⁷ Thus the Welsh fondness for leeks and cheese, which will come up again, is all the more laughable for being framed as an erotic predilection.

Bellamont responds to his son's meaty metaphor with a brief lesson on what we might call balanced nutrition:

Stay, looke you Sir, as hee that lives upon Sallades without
Mutton, feedes like an Oxe, (for hee eates grasse you knowe)
yet rizes as hungry as an Asse, and as hee that makes a dinner of
leekes will have leane cheekes, so, thou foolish Londoner, if
nothing but raw mutton can diet thee, looke to live like a foole
and a slave, and to die like a begger and a knave...farewell boy.
(1.3.180-86)

The father seems to miss his son's point. As a reply to Philip's figurative language of foods, this defence of a varied diet amounts to a recommendation that the young man partake of a wider range of sexual indiscretions. The complaint Bellamont means to make is that his son's attention and allowance are being wasted exclusively on Doll: "I am told sir, that you spend your credit and your coine upon a light woman" (1.3.153-54). Philip's squandering threatens to make him as "light" as the woman he pays; his "coine" goes directly to the *coin* ("corner" or cunt) of his acquaintance.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In a chapter on "the erotics of milk and live food," Wendy Wall contends that the comestibles described and ingested in early modern drama are part of "a spectacular national mythology" (128)—a shared imaginary made up of "fantasies of work" (127) and, in particular, "an eroticized national housewifery" (144). Read this way, the various British tastes in Philip's catalogue can be regarded as regional preferences for specific foods *and* for certain ways of conceptualizing sexual labour.

¹⁰⁸ The *corner* metaphor is a favourite of Shakespeare's: Lucio calls the Duke of Vienna "the old fantastical duke of dark corners" (4.3.154-55), and Othello would "rather be a toad" than "keep a corner in the thing [he loves] / For others' uses" (3.3.274-77). The other kind of coin is associated with women's

Philip's final, defiant boast in this exchange is to suggest that if he marries Doll he'll be rich enough to afford vast quantities of condiments: "Sir if I have her, Ile spend more in mustard and vineger in a yere, then both you in beefe" (1.3.187-88). Because the prostitute makes so much in "rents" or "commings in" (1.3.168-69), her husband will be doubly blessed. He won't have to go out and purchase sex, having his own "beefe" at home; nor will he find himself short of money for the luxuries that make life more palatable. If the speech headings in the first printed edition of *Northward Ho* are as the playwrights intended, then both Philip and his father are meant to utter the next and last line of their conversation: "More saucy knave thou" (1.3.189). Surely Philip is the saucier of the two, with his prodigal habits and his condimental plans for the future. But Bellamont, despite his having little interest in the sexual pursuits that compel other characters to act as they do, demonstrates a perspicacity that is saucy in its own way. He warns his friend Mayberry about the shiftiness of their dinner companions because he thinks the story of Mabel's transgression is too conveniently coincidental. With his son, he openly states his objections to a protracted and expensive relationship with a woman whose bad reputation precedes her.

The poet is right to doubt the moral uprightness of his son's whore. Throughout the action, Doll cozens her customers. In keeping with the foody preoccupation of the play, Doll uses the figure of fishing to represent her ventures. She tells her confederates, "If we have but good draughts in my peeter-boate, fresh Salmon you sweete villaines shall be no meate with us" (2.1.43-44). Doll's "peeter-boate" inverts the old metaphor in which fish

sexual will at the arraignment of Vittoria Corombona in Webster's *The White Devil*: "Whats a whore? / Shees like the guilty conterfettred coine / Which who so eare first stampes it bring in trouble / All that receaue it" (E3v). Behind both metaphors is a Middle English word of French derivation with several spellings (coin, coign, cuine, cune, conye, cuny, quine, etc.) and even more meanings (*MED* "coin [n.]").

stands for women's sexualized bodies. Like the whore Bellafront in *The Honest Whore*, this enterprising character regards her customers as an easy catch—she's not the fish but the angler. Already Doll's trickery is framed as a kind of capture and consumption. The "meate" of her boast is given a spelling that suggests food, even though the syntax and context dictate another meaning: the visitors who will be taken in by Doll and her confederates are no match for them.¹⁰⁹ Coincidentally, one of these gulls is, in Doll's words, "a Grocer that would faine Pepper me" (2.1.55-56). The grocer, who goes by the salty name of Allom,¹¹⁰ is soon tricked into promising Doll both money and a large quantity of sugar, which has recently gone up in price.

Food is also of central thematic importance when Bellamont's path finally converges with Doll's. The whore disguises herself as a lady and arranges to meet Philip's father on the pretence of having some poetry commissioned, because she wants to borrow some of his silver for another enterprise, and because she is intrigued by the very idea of "a Poet."¹¹¹ When she is introduced to Bellamont, Doll hasn't had enough time to come up with something for the commissioned piece of writing to commemorate. At the last minute, she declares that the verses—"twelve poesies"—will appear on "a dozen of cheese trenchers" (3.1.57-58). The lines are to be prepared in Welsh, for, in keeping with Philip's ethnic catalogue, the recipient of platters and poems is to be the Welshman Captain Jenkins, one of Doll's regular customers:

I will bestow them indeede upon a welch Captaine: one that
loves cheese better than venson, for if you should but get three

¹⁰⁹ For "meet with": *OED* "meet, *adj.*" (3.b.).

¹¹⁰ *Allom* is an alternative spelling of *alum*, "A whitish transparent mineral salt, crystallizing in octahedrons, very astringent, used in dyeing, tawing skins, and medicine" (*OED* "alum, *n.*").

¹¹¹ She asks Philip, "What manner of man is thy father? Sfoot ide faine see the witty Monky because thou sayst he's a Poet" (2.1.267-68).

or four Cheshire cheeses and set them a running down Hiegate-hill, he would make more hast after them than after the best kennell of hounds in *England*; what think you of my device?

(3.1.63-67)

The pursuit in Doll's imaginary scene is an echo of the comic catalogue of favourite foods offered up earlier by Philip—we know from his list that “the Welshman [loves] Leekes and Cheese.” Against the classically erotic topos of venerary is the decidedly clumsy chasing of cheese, an activity that seems more like an alternative to sexual endeavour than an analogue for it.

Venison, as hunted game that often already belongs to the hunter and lives on his property, sometimes stands in for the sexually pursued (but ultimately inferior and subjugated) female body. The metaphor is introduced here as a point of contrast. In an implied syllogism, the Welshman's lust is compared not to the hunt, but to an excessive love of cheese. In one careening go, Doll seems to compare the tumbling rounds to elusive deer and also to a group of trained hunting dogs who have somehow got loose and may escape completely. She conjures up two settings at once: a pastoral landscape populated with men, hounds, and deer, all engaged in a chase that can easily be understood in terms of an erotic adventure; and Highgate, where a fat Welshman tries to catch several inanimate cheeses as they roll downhill. What Doll describes is just one example of the kind of misplaced lust that appears repeatedly in *Northward Ho*. Behind Doll's “device” is her desire to impress the poet with whom she is speaking for the first time. She will make every effort to endear herself to him, despite their obvious incompatibility. Her advances are not so different, ultimately, from the attempt to capture a renegade cheese.

Bellamont is horrified at the revelation that the lady with whom he has been conversing is no lady at all, but the very whore he's forbidden his son to see. Philip, for his part, happily accuses his father of hypocrisy: "[W]hite haire may fall into the company of drabs," he says (3.1.92-93). Bellamont's outrage, Philip's triumph, and Doll's sudden affection for the poet now dominate the dialogue, but the topos of food and drink is not left behind. Doll invites Bellamont to "sup" with her, promising, "Ile cashiere all my yong barnicles, and weelee talke over a piece of mutton and a partridge, wisely" (3.1.101-02). Again a woman is seen to choose her male companions much as she would choose what kinds of creatures to dine upon. Mayberry pictures his wife preferring plovers, turkeys, and chickens to him; Doll says she'll dismiss her usual supper guests in favour of Bellamont's company. In both cases, man and meat are conflated, and with them, eating and sex.¹¹²

The mutton on Doll's menu reminds us that Philip has compared her to that very kind of meat. It could be that Bellamont hears the echo too, for his response takes Doll's mention of meat-eating as an opportunity to heap scorn on those who engage in illicit sex: "I wud some honest Butcher would begge all the queanes and knaves ith Citty and cary them into some other Country, they'd sell better than Beefes and Calves: what a vertuous Citty would this bee then!" (3.1.110-13). Bellamont's grotesque fantasy of

¹¹² The "barnicles" Doll mentions also warrant further consideration. A *barnacle* is a bit for a horse—a device contrived to restrain and control an owned creature (*OED* "barnacle, *n.*¹"). Doll's barnacles are related to this implement only insofar as she is constrained by external factors to serve the men who visit her. Because it is her job to sell sex, Doll cannot dismiss her male clients without some effort. It's possible, therefore, that the common *whore/horse* metaphor might be operative here, if only in a secondary way. By another derivation altogether, barnacles are a particular species of arctic goose and the "shell-fish" from which they were thought to emerge ("*n.*²"). *Barnacle* served to describe anything that clung to a surface and could not be easily detached. But Doll intends to "cashiere" these clingy creatures, and turn toward her own pleasure. For modern readers, the barnacles in Doll's rhetoric might simply signify a parasitic presence that the whore wishes to slough off so that she can feed herself in the company of her choosing.

banishment recalls Pompey's taunt to Escalus: "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?" (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.219-20). Both men recognize that illicit sex, taken as a social problem, is something that cannot be eliminated unless masses of people are herded together like livestock and either mutilated or sold for consumption. The poet knows that what he proposes is preposterous, but the humour in his metaphor of meat-selling is not altogether lighthearted. It's bad enough that he imagines "all the queanes and knaves" being sold into slavery in a foreign land—this builds on the popular rhetoric that calls for purgation of illicit behaviour in the interest of cleansing the urban landscape of London. But the notion that a *butcher* should be responsible for this displacement makes Bellamont's proposal all the more grim. While the poet's situation may inspire sympathy, his radical refusal to accept the sexual culture in which he lives sets him apart from the other characters in the play.

Even when the pervasive meat metaphors of *Northward Ho* seem farcical, they tend to celebrate human appetites, not to condemn them. The adultery plot of Kate Greenshield, for example, fails to come to fruition and is therefore no real threat to her marriage, but it nevertheless has real comic appeal for the audience. Again women's desire for extramarital sex is represented as a hunger for fowl. Greenshield finds his wife in Featherstone's arms and believes, because of the precedent that she has set, that she's merely been sleepwalking and has no idea where she is. Kate takes advantage of his continued gullibility by speaking as if she were on the threshold between sleeping and waking. The dream she conjures in this pretended partial daze is one of craving: "I longd for the merry thought of a phesant," she says, "And the foule-gutted Tripe-wife had got it, and eate halfe of it" (3.2.68-71). In the brief narrative she relates, Mistress Greenshield's hunger is attenuated by the

assistance of a midwife, who helps her get a taste of the bird. “[B]ut Lord how I pickt it, ’twas the sweetest meate me thought” (3.2.73-74). The story bears a funny resemblance to what has actually taken place—Kate has made her way towards what she wants, in spite of the obvious obstacles. She’s been interrupted, however, before getting her chance to enjoy “the sweetest meate” Featherstone can offer. The relation of the fabricated dream is perhaps her way of letting him know how much she regrets the loss of this opportunity.

Kate’s dream-story is a scene of competing female desires in which women are characterized precisely by their longing. She uses the word “thought” twice, emphasizing the distance between the activities of her imagination and the actualities of the waking world. These *thoughts* also contribute to the contrast that emerges between the Kate in the dream and her competitor. Kate’s want is vaguely cerebral, while the hunger of the “foule-gutted” seller of stomachs is linked syntactically to her very visceral trade. In the context of a play so focused on the depiction of women’s sexual will, this comparison of desires is worth noting. The idea of appetite is central to Doll’s story, and not only because she is a piece of “raw mutton” much desired by men. The hunger of women, however sought-after their own flesh may be, is a focus of both humour and anxiety throughout the play. And the hunger of a prostitute is regarded as an especially troubling phenomenon by several characters, including Doll herself.

The butcher who figures in Bellamont’s invective against illicit sex reappears in Doll’s language later in the play. The whore is furious with herself for having fallen in love with the aging poet. She sees her besottedness as irrational and resents its symptoms: “I can neither eat for thee, nor sleepe for thee, nor lie quietly in my bed for thee” (4.1.149-50). In a frantic effort to shake off this infatuation, Doll examines Bellamont’s body and comments on

its decay: “A legge and a Calfe! I haue had better of a butcher fortie times for carrying! a body not worth begging by a Barber-surgeon” (4.1.139-40). His appearance, she thinks, ought to ruin her appetite. “[W]hich most turnes up a womans stomach,” she says, “thou art an old hoary man” (4.1.143-44). Doll recognizes that the poet is dead meat, “the carcas of a man” (4.1.157), and yet her appetite suffers, ironically, only because of her desire for him. This is a body that could not be sold by a butcher, either at home or abroad; it’s not even up to the standard of the cadavers used by the barber-surgeons in their studies of anatomy.

The whore yearns for this meat in spite of herself, much as other characters chide themselves for seeking the potentially harmful company of prostitutes. In dramatic writing and pamphlet literature alike, whether authors report on their own desires or those of their characters, the compulsion to pursue whores is regarded as a delusion and a risk to one’s health. One of the mechanisms of dissuasion is the metaphor of unwholesome meat. For example, in his *groats-worth of witte*, Robert Greene uses the authority of his own experience to caution his readers: “If thou be married, forsake not the wife of thy youth to follow straunge flesh,” he advises, because a whore “bringeth a man to a morsell of bread and nakednes: of which my selfe am instance” (E4). Greene’s warning pivots on the central irony that an appetite for extramarital sex can lead only to actual hunger. In *Northward Ho*, the hunger that is most carefully narrated is not that of the prostitute’s customers, but of the whore herself. The representation of Doll’s desire for Bellamont reverses the usual pattern of lust and shame, for never once does she consider herself to be a piece of meat, spoiled or otherwise; instead, she uses the metaphor of consumable flesh to talk about her own erotic will.

While early modern writers were certainly preoccupied with the overwhelming nature of men's erotic desire, especially when that desire led to illicit assignations, they often represented the dangers of prostitution as stemming from the formidable appetites of whores. In another of Greene's texts, the converted "English Courtizen" says that whores "cleave like Caterpillars to the tree, and consume the fruit where they fall, they be Vultures that praie on men alive, and like the Serpent sting the bosome wherein they are nourished" (Fv). She reports that her own greed was indiscriminate: "the oldest leccher was as welcom as the yangest lover, so he broght meate in his mouth" (F2).¹¹³ Anti-whoring literature commonly posits a connection between the needy, parasitic nature of the prostitute and the eventual demise of her lustful customers. The whoremonger in Thomas Salter's *A contention, betweene three Bretheren* (1580) is accused by his brothers (a drunkard and a dicer) of being the worst of the three,

[f]or the Whoremonger broyling in the disordinate and insatiable desire of reaping his delyght, after that hee hath during this hunting, loste and consumed long space of his time, in maddnesse, mourning, teares, sorrowing and lamenting, hee at the laste, wasteth in suche manner, as miserablye (sayeth Alciat) beeing so wrapped and snarreled, that hee whollye perisheth, where-by hee not onelye becommeth hatefull to all other, but also to him-selfe, for then hee hateth to lyve. (Iiv)¹¹⁴

The cause of the whoremonger's downfall is not his own inordinate desire, but the prior, powerful hunger of the whore, which is described earlier in the text: "[A]s touching the insatiable bely of an harlot, neither the aire, the

¹¹³ The story is appended to Greene's *A disputation* (1592).

¹¹⁴ Salter's *Contention* is a translation of (a translation of) Philippus Beroaldus' *Declamatio de tribus fratribus* (1499).

earth, the sea, nor the rivers suffice, but it swalloweth and devoureth fields, castles, & houses, & never rendreth or returneth anye thing back agayne” (8). In both Greene and Salter, the man who pursues prostitutes may be ravenously and dangerously hungry, but the whore’s appetite is of mythical proportions.

When Doll’s pattern of cozenage is revealed, Captain Jenkins uses alimentary metaphors to describe (however vaguely) the wrongs levelled on one of his fellow dupes: “there is a putter-box, whome shee spred thick upon her white bread, and eate him up” (4.2.12-13). He mentions her voracity again in the final scene of the play: “[S]hee is a punke, she shifts her lovers (as Captaines and Welsh Gentlemen and such) as she does her Trenchers when she has well fed upon’t, and that there is left nothing but pare bones, shee calls for a cleane one, and scrapes away the first” (5.1.473-77). The Captain’s comic account of Doll’s fickleness and insatiability makes her a ravenous carnivore, if not a cannibal. She exhausts and discards one man after another just as she consumes all of the food that’s put before her.

Doll’s longings remain central straight through to the last bit of intrigue in *Northward Ho*. Bellamont concocts a plan to get rid of the whore by pairing her up with Featherstone. He will feed her aphrodisiac sweetmeats and begin to woo her on Featherstone’s behalf, claiming that Featherstone has been admiring her from a distance. The poet gloats, “Ile so whet the wenches stomack, and make her so hungry, that she shall have an appetite to him, feare it not” (5.1.403-04). The plan is promising because of Doll’s proven susceptibility to new infatuations. The persuasion takes place quickly, offstage, and the whore soon reappears as Featherstone’s wife. Just after the nuptials, Mayberry asks Featherstone if “Now a man may have a course in your Parke?” (5.1.501), coincidentally echoing the device Doll used to talk

about Captain Jenkins' lust for cheese. While the bridegroom voices a willingness to share, Doll seems resolute: "Never I protest" (5.1.503). Here, in a final irony, the whore's capriciousness suddenly makes way for wifely steadfastness. It isn't clear what desires might be satisfied by this new role, or if the transgressive woman's motivation is any different now from what it may have been all along—a total, supernatural greed, fully in keeping with popular representations of the all-consuming whore. In any case, it would be strange for Doll to maintain herself as a private park if she still stands to gain from the purses and pursuits of many men.

Intoxication and Purgation in *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*

Representations of prostitution as poison abound in early modern literature of all kinds. Engagement in illicit sex is regularly described with reference to the consumption of toxic substances that resemble food or drink. These substances are never what they seem to be—by a backwards process of reckoning, the apparent innocuity of both poisons and prostitutes is taken as evidence of their toxicity. In one of his *Foure Treatises*, the clergyman John Downname contends that "harlots...may not unfitly bee compared to sweete, but poysonous potions, which delight in the taste, but kill in the digestion" (166). Having heard a list of diseases that come from illicit sex, the speaker Spudeus in Philip Stubbes' *The Anatomie of Abuses* ponders the cost: "Seeing that whordome bringeth such soure sauce with it, namely, death euerlasting after this life, and so many discommodities besides in this life, I wunder that men dare commit the same so securely as they doo now a dayes?" (H4). Poison is also used in stories of women's induction into prostitution. The bawd Margaret Ferneseede, apparently arraigned and executed in 1608 for the

murder of her husband, is said not only to have attempted to poison *him* with broth (A2, Bv), but also to have “kept a moste abhominable and vilde *brothell* house, poysoning many young women with that sinne wherewith her owne body long before was filthilie bebotched” (A3v, my emphasis).¹¹⁵

Like its cognate *potion*, *poison* comes from the Latin *potare*, “to drink,”¹¹⁶ and although toxic substances are sometimes inhaled or absorbed in early modern narratives, more often they take the form of imbibed liquids. In Dekker’s sequel to *The Honest Whore*, poison enters discussions of prostitution through the associated metaphor of wine. The play’s dialogue deploys a wide range of watery images in the depiction of transgressive sexuality, all of which pertain directly or tangentially to the topos of poison. It also features bad fruit and cheap meat, both figures for the dangers and disappointments of prostitution. In *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, as elsewhere, illicit sex is a kind of false food—disease masquerading as wholesomeness, bitterness lurking within the sweet. Moreover, this phase of Bellafront’s story is a drama of elimination in which whoredom is purged from the system of marriage. Thus the very structure of *The Second Part* is toxic.

Poison gradually becomes a major ingredient of the play’s metaphorical mixture through the horticultural and culinary conceits of Bellafront’s estranged father. The elderly Orlando is known to Bellafront’s pursuer, Hippolito—in the second scene, they greet one another and begin to banter. Orlando’s conversation almost immediately turns to the subject of moral

¹¹⁵ The story is related in a news pamphlet entitled *The Araignment and burning of Margaret Ferne-seede* (1608). The “bebotched” in this quotation may well be a botched version of “debauched,” which is how Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara McManus spell the word in their edition of the pamphlet (*Half Humankind* 353). It’s possible that a compositor’s error resulted in the replacement of an initial *d* with a *b*. The *OED* does not give *bebotch* its own entry, but lists it in a catalogue of words that have the prefix *be-*, with a citation from 1605. As a blemish or boil, a *botch* accords with the narrator’s poisoning metaphor (“botch, *n.*”¹ and “*n.*”²).

¹¹⁶ *OED* “poison, *n.*” and “potion, *n.*”

conduct, with a focus on sexual behaviour. He accounts for his mirth by reciting a pat description of “a happy man,” who “makes gold his wife, but not his whore” (1.2.50, 54).¹¹⁷ The statement “Wenching and I have done” (1.2.69) is nothing more than the typical old man’s jocular dismissal of the pursuits of the young, but what follows neither standard nor comic: although the two men know one another, Orlando claims that he has no children. Hippolito corrects him—“You had a Daughter too sir, had you not?” (1.2.88)—and Orlando responds with a botanical image that makes way for a current of metaphors involving food and drink. “Oh my Lord! this old Tree had one Branch, (and but one Branch growing out of it),” he admits; “It was young, it was faire, it was straight; I pruinde it daily, drest it carefully, kept it from the winde, help’d it to the Sunne, yet for all my skill in planting, it grew crooked, it bore Crabs; I hewed it downe” (1.2.89-93).¹¹⁸ The child’s failure to meet her father’s expectations is represented as the production of insufficient fruit: sour “crabs” instead of big, juicy apples. Thus Bellafront is associated with relative infertility and inedibility. When Hippolito tries to cultivate sympathy in the old man by telling him his daughter is dead, Orlando responds not with grief but with another image of food: “I see deaths a good trencherman, he can eat course homely meat, as well as the daintiest” (1.2.102-04). He then turns from the appetite of death to the appetite of the men

¹¹⁷ Quotations are from Fredson Bowers’ edition of the play.

¹¹⁸ A whore’s upbringing receives similar metaphorical treatment in Robert Greene’s “The conversion of an English Courtizan,” where the reformed woman complains of her parents’ laxity:

So my father and mother, but she most of all, although he to much, so cockered me vp in my wantonnes, that my wit grew to the worst, and I waxed vpward with the ill weeddes...But now I find, in sparing the rod, they hated the chylde, that ouer kind fathers, make vnruely daughters. Had they bent the wand while it had beene greene, it woulde haue beene plyant, but I, ill growne in my yeeres, am almost remediles. (Dv)

In Dekker’s play, the offspring warps not through neglect, but in spite of the parent’s vigilance. Orlando was never “over kind,” it seems, and yet his daughter proved “unruly.”

who would seek out Bellafront's company; in order to describe that desire, he circles back to the idea of fruit.

With polemical flourish, Orlando compares his daughter to a grapevine, then to a single fruit from that vine, then to the intoxicating wine that comes from the grape:

[A] Strumpet is one of the Devils Vines; al the sinnes like so many Poles are stucke upright out of hell, to be her props, that she may spread upon them. And when she's ripe, every Slave has a pull at her, then must she be prest. The yong beautifull Grape sets the teeth of Lust on edge, yet to taste that lickrish Wine, is to drinke a mans owne damnation. (1.2.106-11)¹¹⁹

Unchecked botanical profusion is here intertwined with intemperate drinking; both are figures for the loss of control that is said to follow from illicit sex. The growth of grapevines and the imbibing of wine are different stages in a single narrative of production and consumption, but they are also parallel metaphors for the peril of prostitution. The strangulation implicit in the image of "the Devils Vines" is an externalized version of the process of intoxication. The "Wine" of Orlando's diatribe is toxic in the sense that it has the worst kind of side effect on the soul. Instead of surrounding and stifling a person from the outside, poison enters the body and ensnares the subject from within, taking possession of the senses. What looks and tastes good—"beautifull" and "lickrish"—is in fact deeply dangerous. The consumer is compelled to have more: "to taste...is to drinke," and to drink is to be damned. This, at least, is how Orlando regards the social identity of his supposedly dead daughter.

¹¹⁹ Incidentally, Greene uses the metaphor of grapevines to describe a legacy of good behaviour in *The Myrrour of Modestie* (1584): "the best vine beareth the best grapes, and the honestest parents the most vertuous children" (Av).

In spite of the cruelty in Orlando's words, Hippolito is encouraged by the counter-evidence of the old man's tears. "[T]here are now good hopes," he says, "That all those heapes of ice about your heart, / By which a fathers love was frozen up, / Are thawed in these sweet showres fetcht from your eyes" (1.2.118-21). He also expresses relief at finding that his interlocutor is made of "wax, not marble" (1.2.117). Both metaphors for the old man's emotionality figure sympathy as a liquefying force—it warms and melts what is cold and hard in Orlando. In the excitement of his optimism, Hippolito announces that Bellafront is alive. Orlando is not transformed by this news into a caring father, but rather regrets the weeping he's already done. His callous dismissal of this second revelation ironically draws further attention to his unavoidably watery eyes: "I am sorry I wasted tears upon a Harlot," he says, and he quickly sops them up with a handkerchief (1.2.130). What flows from him next is more invective.

When Hippolito explains that Bellafront is not dead but poor and married to a man who is condemned for murder, Orlando expresses the view that her poverty is appropriate to her vocation: "Then she's a right Strumpet" (1.2.134). The estranged father then offers up a series of kitcheny figures for what he regards as the standard relationship between whores and money:

I ne'r knew any of their trade rich two yeeres together; Sives
can hold no water, nor Harlots hoord up money; they have
many vents, too many sluces to let it out; Taverns, Taylors,
Bawds, Panders, Fidlers, Swaggerers, Fooles and Knaves, doe all
waite upon a common Harlots trencher: she is the Gally-pot to
which these Drones flye: not for love to the pot, but for the
sweet sucket within it, her money, her money. (1.2.134-40)

The pervasive early modern metaphor of sexual incontinence is Orlando's first source of meaning here, with an emphasis on perforation: the "Harlots" of his description have multiple openings through which money can escape. The free-flowing sieve and well-stocked trencher are symbols for a liberality that is at once sexual and monetary. Orlando's rhetoric suggests that the men who use a whore for the one thing are likely to use her for the other, as well. Ironically, it is her very whoredome that renders her unable to *board*. And if Orlando employs a plainly erotic image in referring to his daughter as a "Gally-pot" that holds a "sweet sucket" of honey, he smirks at his own bawdy metaphor through the deferred replacement of *honey* with *money*. For him, sexual and pecuniary availability are both ways of spreading one's liquid around.

Orlando's bitterness extends to Bellafront's husband—whom he knows—with the same poetic momentum: "I hate him for her; he taught her first to taste poyson; I hate her for her selfe, because she refused my Physicke" (1.2.159-60). The toxicity implied in Orlando's earlier metaphors is suddenly brought into sharp focus: illicit sex is poison. Bellafront has erred not only in her consumption of the toxin, but further, in her refusal to accept an antidote. That second mistake is clearly the most hurtful to the old man, whose "Physicke," we assume, could only work if it were administered quickly. Of course the poison of Matteo's sexual will has already been countered by the antidote of lawful marriage, so Bellafront is not beyond remedy, despite the long time that has passed since her father last offered his help.¹²⁰ When Orlando decides in private to disguise himself and save his daughter, it is not her sexual reputation he hopes to recuperate. He intends only to let his money flow in her direction: "[S]he shall drinke of my wealth,

¹²⁰ In a marginal note to the dialogue that constitutes *The Anatomie of Abuses*, marriage is "an antidotarie against Whordome" (H4v).

as beggers doe of running water, freely, yet never know from what Fountaines head it flowes" (1.2.171-73). In Orlando's changing rhetoric, abject poverty displaces prostitution as a source of toxicity, and revulsion gradually yields ground to fatherly sympathy.

The old man's plan to help his daughter requires that he inform Infelice, Hippolito's wife, that her husband has been pursuing another woman. Infelice receives this news as toxic; reading the poetry Hippolito has sent to Bellafront, she says, "Here's honied poyson, to me he ne'r thus writ, / But Lust can set a double edge on wit" (3.1.60-61). Because her husband's lust is directed elsewhere, the sweetness of his missive is poisonous to her. The bitterness of this discovery does not, however, compromise Infelice's judgement. She quickly hatches a plot to force from Hippolito an acknowledgement of his wrongdoing by putting him on the neglected side of the adulterous equation. Her orchestration brings the language of poison back into circulation, because the husband equally hates the idea of sharing his spouse with someone else.

On her knees, Infelice testifies that she has given her "chaste honour" (3.1.142) to Brian, the ridiculous Irish footman. Hippolito responds to her false confession with a stream of invective that relies, predictably, on the topos of prostitution. "Bold Strumpet," he says, "Why hangest thou on me? thinkst Ile be a Bawde / To a Whore, because she's Noble?" (3.1.152-54). Further, he exiles her from the conjugal bed with language that combines whoredom and toxicity: "You ha beene too much downe already, rise, / Get from my sight, and henceforth shun my bed, / Ile with no Strumpets breath be poysoned" (3.1.166-68). Since Infelice hasn't actually been unfaithful, and Hippolito apparently has, she eagerly turns his entire speech back upon him after presenting the evidence of his transgression: "Nay, you may laugh, but

henceforth shun my bed, / With no whores leavings Ile be poysoned" (3.1.192-93). Both spouses think of a sexually transgressive woman in terms of her bodily emissions. The "Strumpets breath" in Hippolito's verse might denote erotic panting, false speech, pathogenic miasma, or all three—the phrase suggests that his wife's breath has become unwholesome to him because of its unlawful emission elsewhere. In Infelice's mouth, the phrase becomes "whores leavings," an expression that points to the other end of the digestive system and plays on the standard association between defecation and illicit sex.

The play's most potent figurations of a toxic sex trade come from Bellafront herself, particularly when Hippolito (in spite of his wife's intervention) tries to convince her that a reversion to her former sexual liberty would be the best thing for everyone involved. Bellafront uses watery and toxic metaphors to describe the life she has left behind. Her language is saturated with the notion of pollution as she explains the way prostitutes are used and abandoned by men: "[S]o men love water, / It serves to wash their hands, but (being once foule) / The water downe is powred, cast out of doores, / And even of such base use doe men make whores" (4.1.318-21). Hippolito suggests that she could limit her transgression to the satisfaction of *his* desires alone, but Bellafront rejects the idea that a single act can be separated from the bigger picture of a woman's sexual virtue. Because she refuses to be made "foule" (again), she spurns propositions that now seem "ranke": "If I drink poison by stealth, is't not all one? / Is't not ranke poison still?" (4.1.332-33). Thus a whore is at once a liquid substance and thirsty consumer in her own right, subject to the same intoxication that awaits her acquaintances.

In her argument against Hippolito's suggestion, Bellafront explains that the reward for a woman's sexual acquiescence is the hatred of the men

who have sought her company. The language she chooses subtly indicates an equivalence between the spoils of erotic indulgence and the filthy, used water she's already mentioned—"sweets" become "stale": "Even then when you are drunke with all her sweets, / There's no true pleasure in a Strumpets sheets. / Women, whom Lust so prostitutes to sale, / Like dancers upon ropes; once seene, are stale" (4.1.341-44). A whore is a delicious intoxicant, but she doesn't stay fresh. *Stale* can signify, as it does for us, the state of food or drink that's been standing out for too long. Like the etymology of *prostitute*, this *stale* suggests exposure. The idea of display is central to another meaning of *stale*: a decoy; in particular, a prostitute employed by a thief to create diversions. And, of course, the early modern audience would have heard in *stale* a synonym for urine, a substance strongly associated with the sex trade.¹²¹ A man engaged in illicit sex might as well drink piss.

Bellafront regards the *whore's* behaviour as a form of consumption, too. She remembers the wine she used to drink, and compares its effects to the general "confusion" of her occupation:

My bed seem'd like a Cabin hung in Hell,
The Bawde Hells Porter, and the lickorish wine
The Pander fetch'd, was like an easie Fine,
For which, me thought I leas'd away my soule,
And oftentimes (even in my quaffing bowle)
Thus said I to my selfe, 'I am a whore,
And have drunke downe thus much confusion more.'

(4.1.356-62)

While the contents of Bellafront's quaffing bowl are not precisely poisonous, they contribute to her imagined demise. She thinks of herself as having

¹²¹ *OED* "stale, *a.*" (senses 2, 3, and 4); "stale, *n.*" and "*n.*," "prostitute, *v.*"

imbibed her own perdition by selling sex. With *confusion*, which suggests both commingling and dissolution, Bellafront's description recalls the image of the "common woman" in Thomas Salter's *Contention*—another version of the insatiable-bellied harlot, who "openeth hir mouth to drinke of all waters" (14-15). Furthermore, a direct echo of Orlando's language can be heard in the "lickorish Wine" of Bellafront's rhetoric, and the old gentleman's figuration of his daughter as a receptacle of both sin and mercy is also operative in this moment of recollection.

Similarly, Hippolito sees his attraction to Bellafront as a danger to his senses and his spiritual well-being: "Ile pursue thee, / (Tho loaden with sins) even to Hells brazen doores. / Thus wisest men turn fooles, doting on whores" (4.1.399-401). Hippolito's logic makes his own compulsion the direct result of Bellafront's sexuality, even though the former whore has left illicit sex in her past and is resolved never to make herself available to him again. For Hippolito, Bellafront is both a permanently polluted body and a constant force of intoxication. This view is shared by Hippolito's father-in-law, the Duke of Milan, who soon finds out about the "madnesse" (4.2.55) of his daughter's husband. "[T]he Harlot does undoe him," he declares; "She has bewitched him, robd him of his shape, / Turnd him into a beast, his reason's lost" (4.2.75-77).

Through the special concerns of Infelice, with her distaste for "whores leavings," the narrative is extended to include a conflict with the urban sex trade at large. The last two acts of the play show the Duke taking radical action to cure Hippolito of his obsession with Bellafront. He plans to save his daughter from the shame of sharing her conjugal bed with a whore by ridding the city of prostitution. He uses the metaphor of purgation to announce his intention:

Ile try all Phisicke, and this Med'cine first:
 I have directed Warrants strong and peremptory
 (To purge our Citty *Millan*, and to cure
 The outward parts, the Suburbes) for the attaching
 Of all those women, who (like gold) want waight[.] (4.2.89-93)

The Duke's idea is that the infectious properties of prostitution can be countered with strict legislation—a substance used as a purgative must be at least toxic enough to provoke evacuation. The private problem of Hippolito's potential adultery is addressed on a grand scale in accordance with Infelice's interpretation of her husband's compulsion. She hypothesizes that Hippolito's motivation is the inverse of his earlier triumph over Bellafront's will, that he would now "marre all agen, to try his wit" (4.2.44). The Duke agrees: "It may be so too, for to turne a Harlot / Honest, it must be by strong Andtidots...Yet 'tis the pride and glory of some men / To change her to a blazing Starre agen" (4.2.45-52). His interest is not, of course, the preservation of Bellafront's virtue; rather, he will administer further antidotes in the form of punishment: "[O]n Harlots heads / New Lawes shall fall" (4.2.100-01).

The poisoning of Hippolito's mind is based on a metaphor with a salient cultural presence, as is the purgation that the Duke intends to carry out in order to cure his son-in-law. Prostitutes are frequently represented as venomous creatures, dangerous to men's mental faculties. In the narrative that makes up the bulk of Robert Greene's *groats-worth of witte*, the character Roberto uses the properties of poisonous animals to complain about whores: "The Vipers tooth is not so venemous, / The Adders tung not halfe so dangerous, / As they that beare the shadow of delight" (D4). The whoremonger in Salter's *Contention* is subjected to a tirade that draws on similar metaphors of intoxication. His brother the drunkard asks,

What is there more vycious and infamous, more infectious and hurtefull, then whordome: the whiche as by Witchcrafte or Inchauntemente so farre transporteth the minde of man, that it throweth him from reason to beastialitye, making him not only foolish, sottish and filthy mopish, but also so madde and witlesse, that hee willingely nourishethe the Aspe in his boosome that bytethe him euen to the hearte, not feeling the poyson so neere. (12)

And Dekker himself uses the idea of purgation in one of his non-dramatic texts, *Lanthorne and Candle-light*, to describe a whore's passage from the suburbs of London into the city proper: "When her villanies (like the mote about a castle) are rancke, thicke, and muddy, with standing long together, then (to purge herself) is she dreind out of the Suburbes (as though her corruption were there left behind her (and) as a cleere streame) is let into the City" (H4). Once in the city, the prostitute finds ways to do her business and go scot-free: "[B]y stopping the Constables m[ou]th with sugar-plummes (thats to say,) whilst she poisons him with sweete wordes, the punk vanisheth" (I). In all of these texts, including *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, individuals and cities alike are susceptible to infection and intoxication by means of illicit sex.

The play also includes metaphors that do not pertain directly to the story of Hippolito and Bellafront but serve instead to show that poison and prostitution are inextricably linked in Dekker's Milan. The topoi of intoxication and infection overlap when Candido, the patient linen-draper, demonstrates his reluctance to drink a health to Mistress Horseleeche. The old bawd and her pander Bots are associated by means of their names alone

with notions of disease and parasitism.¹²² As soon as he hears how Horseleech makes her living, Candido tries to leave the company of the gallants who have introduced them. The linen-draper has an obvious aversion to heavy drinking itself, and the feeling becomes much stronger when Bots lifts a cup “to my Mistris, a whore!” (4.3.93-94). Candido mutters, “Here’s Ratsbane upon Ratsbane” (4.3.95). It is spiritually risky, in his view of things, to celebrate the continued well-being of a bawd—“To drinke healths, is to drinke sicknesse” (4.3.99). The linen-draper shakes visibly as he finishes his drink, and then he announces, “With much adoe the poison is got downe, / Tho I can scarce get up; never before / Dranke I a whores health, nor will never more” (4.3.113-15). Implicit in this episode is the familiar idea that the relative hardness of whores promotes the spread of moral and physical disease.

This paradox is brought to the fore in the final scene, when the Duke sentences Bots to whipping and banishment with the justification that “Panders and Whores / Are Citty-plagues, which being kept alive, / Nothing that lookes like goodnes ere can thrive” (5.2.455-57). Goodness does prevail, however, despite the force of illicit lust that powers the plot. In the end, Bellafront and her unscrupulous husband escape the worst—they are “kept alive” by means of Orlando’s disguised intervention. Appropriately, the old gentleman’s last few speeches in the play return to food metaphors as he offers sanctuary and sustenance to his daughter and Matteo. But first Orlando expresses his view that his son-in-law, rather than his daughter, is a source of corruption. The gambler, not the former whore, is a piece of rotten meat whose stench must be covered up so that it won’t be so offensive to the

¹²² At the time of Dekker’s writing, *horse-leech* could have a very literal meaning: a big bloodsucker that attached itself to horses. It could also mean a veterinary doctor tending to horses, or a greedy person (*OED* “horse-leech, *n.*”). *Bots* are the larvae of flies belonging to the species *Cæstrus equi*. They live in the digestive organs of horses (*OED* “bot, bott, *n.*”).

people nearby: “[H]e is my Sonne-in-law, and in law will I be his Father: for if law can pepper him, he shall be so parboild, that he shall stinke no more i’t h nose of the Common-wealth” (5.2.459-61). To this, Bellafront instructs her father to “[b]e yet more kinde and mercifull” (5.2.462), and Orlando in turn calls her “precious mans meat” (5.2.463). Ultimately, though, he bestows his blessing upon the young couple, using the same domestic figures that have characterized his rhetoric all along: “My house shall be thine, My meate shall be thine, / And so shall my wine” (5.2.479-81). The Duke then applies his favourite medicinal metaphor to the matter of Matteo’s redemption: “[A]ll your woes are stayed / By your good Father-in-law: all your Ills / Are cleare purged from you by his working pills” (5.2.487-89).

One of these “Ills” is the shame of being married to a whore—an inconvenience eliminated by Hippolito’s confession that he couldn’t get what he wanted from Bellafront. But the structure of the play reminds us that what is purged from one place will find its dwelling somewhere else, especially if it can be put to use. Although Bellafront is released from charges of whoredom and the two central marriages are shown to be free of adultery, the finale would lack something if it didn’t take place at Dekker’s fanciful Milanese Bridewell, where convicted whores provide entertainment by railing against their fate. The Duke himself sets the stage for this revelry, telling his companions to disguise themselves when the whores are “marshall’d in,” in order to “make the Sceane more Comicall” (5.2.262-63). The Duke may well have purged the city of prostitution, but his own appetite for the degradation of others ensures that whores remain available for what Bellafront might call “the base use” of comic consumption.



Meat and drink metaphors are among the main ingredients of early modern representations of prostitution, onstage and elsewhere. The mutton, prunes, and ale that are offered up as figures for whores' work in the plays of the period reflect a collective desire to view sexual service as a consumable good. Such metaphors make the social fact of prostitution easier to digest by placing its participants in comparison with substances that enter and leave the body. Simultaneously, wishes and anxieties about the enormity of women's erotic appetites are embodied in the figures of the fat bawd and the intemperate whore. At the toxic limit of the consumption metaphor is the notion that the sex trade corrupts the body politic, poisoning the populace with something that is wholesome in appearance and lethal in effect.

IV. Cunning

In early modern England, “cunning-women” and “cunning-men” were thought to have access to knowledge that was unavailable to others. They could tell the future, discourse with spirits, and see hidden things. Cunning-folk made a living by selling occult information. But *cunning* also refers to the deliberate and selfish manipulation of the thoughts of others—a practice much aided by popular belief in the possibility of seeing the unseen.¹²³ Thus cunning-folk are exposed in news stories as liars and cheats, and the moniker becomes ambiguous. It names what these people say they are and what they often are indeed: both canny counsellors and petty criminals. Either way, *cunning* is an intellectual quality with social and economic ramifications.¹²⁴

The word also has linguistic associations that make it particularly relevant for the exploration of early modern prostitution. It’s a near-homonym of “cunny” and “coney,” both nicknames for female private parts. A *coney* is the dupe in a confidence scheme, the party “caught” in the profitable deceptions of a “coney-catcher.” The hunted rabbit on whom this metaphor depends is a figure for vulnerability and lack of intellect. And while the female genitalia might also serve such a purpose, representing the easily exploited victim of greedy advances, it is much more common for the *cunny* to be seen as a trap, and for women’s cunning—whether they be professional tricksters or not—to be associated with their sexuality. Because prostitutes

¹²³ The eponymous character of John Lyly’s play *Mother Bombie* (1594) has her own confidence and that of her community. “I wil professe cunning for all commers,” she says (D2v). A potential customer explains what that cunning includes: she can “tell of fortunes, expound dreams, tell of things that be lost, and devine accidents to come, she is called the good woman, who yet never did hurt” (E).

¹²⁴ In his book on the subject, Owen Davies defines *Cunning-folk* as “individuals who stood out in society for possessing more knowledge than those around them;” he explains that the adjective *cunning* comes from the Anglo-Saxon verb “cunnan,” “to know” (viii).

have already broken with social norms by stealing their own virginity from their future husbands, their conduct is inherently cunning in at least two senses of the word. They are defined by their sexual availability, but they belong to no man; sex is not theirs to give, and yet they turn a profit on it. Whores embody cunning in all its complexity.

Moreover, plays of the period tend to associate prostitution with linguistic skill. As it is represented on the early modern stage, a prostitute's work includes informal conversation with her customers. In general, whore characters are figures of verbal sophistication who describe their trade, defend themselves, and mock their clientele with a store of puns and metaphors. It is strikingly common for whores to rise to verbal challenges and to fare well against their opponents. In play after play, talk is a crucial part of sex work. Furthermore, because prostitution entails plenty of work that isn't strictly sexual, and because whores in the drama are often employed in several different ways at once, the range of discursive situations is very wide. The stage prostitute's job comes to resemble that of the actor who plays her—she uses multiple roles to engage customers in a fantasy of mutual interest or affection. In both *A Mad World, My Masters* and *The Alchemist*, the prostitute's manipulation of language is necessary in all of her dealings. Despite the variety of work undertaken by the whores in these plays (and despite the fact that they don't have sex with anyone, for money or otherwise, in the space of their respective narratives), their vocational identity is limited to prostitution.¹²⁵ The versatility of Frank Gullman and Doll Common—

¹²⁵ In *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*, Patricia Fumerton shows how complex and mutable the vocational identities of workers could be. The whores who appear as characters in early modern drama are often “unsettled,” in the sense that they can and must adapt to changing circumstances. At the same time they are strangely fixed in their lower social status.

realized onstage as verbal adaptability—is seen as a consequence of their place in the sexual economy, not as an alternative to it.

John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* presents a very different kind of character in its eponymous whore: one whose cunning is decidedly negative, and whose interests are at odds with those of the other characters. Franceschina is an import from revenge tragedy, made ridiculous by jealous rage and poor pronunciation. In some ways, she's the exception that proves the rule—a prostitute who overestimates her own intellectual strength and ends up alone.¹²⁶ Although plays and pamphlets often refer to whores as lethal, it is not common for audiences to witness the machinations of a prostitute character whose cunning is explicitly murderous. By providing a contrast to the other whores on the early modern stage, Marston's play shows that the cunning prostitute is a comic convention, sympathetic not because she's especially unique or realistic but because she's so very useful.

The Close Courtesan and her Functions in *A Mad World, My Masters*

The word *cunning* is put into circulation in the first scene of *A Mad World, My Masters* by a bawd whose very name—Mistress *Gullman*—hints broadly at her ability to secure knowledge over her clientele. The bawd lectures her daughter Frank, who is also her employee and her pupil, about the increasing necessity for vigilant duplicity on the part of procurers and prostitutes. Frank has just uttered a philosophy that, in keeping with her own name, champions the whore's right to distribute her services as she chooses and to maximize her profit by pretending to serve each client exclusively. To Frank's "common reason" (I.I.136) her mother issues a warning: "Every part of the

¹²⁶ Another exception is Marlowe's Bellamira, the conniving prostitute in *The Jew of Malta* (written about 1590), who ends up dead.

world shoots up daily into more subtlety. The very spider weaves her cauls with more art and cunning to entrap the fly” (1.1.140-42). The gender of Mother Gullman’s spider is sufficient to suggest an equivalence between the industrious arachnid and the wily prostitute; beyond that, the creature’s “cauls” pertain in various ways to the whore’s work. At the moment of Middleton’s writing, a *caul* could be a spiderweb, a dainty hat, a piece of network, or an anatomical membrane—especially the one that surrounds a fetus within the womb.¹²⁷ The elements of exhibition and anatomy that complicate the concept of *cunning* are present even before the word is uttered, in the intricacy of the spider’s (or the playwright’s) *cauls*.

In the following lines Mother Gullman’s rhetoric shifts slightly, from the organic image of the hungry spider to an agricultural figure that wouldn’t normally be associated with intellectual acuity. This way, she can describe a general increase in *subtlety*: even “[t]he shallow ploughman can distinguish now / ’Twixt simple truth and a dissembling brow” (1.1.143-44). Those “that live by sleight” (1.1.147), including prostitutes, have to become more convincing because their potential victims are becoming more perspicuous. This upward growth of cleverness among erstwhile dupes is compared (subtly, we might say) to the insinuation of the serpent into the sexual economy and ecology of paradise, for that character, the story says, “was more subtil than anie beast of the field, which the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3.1)¹²⁸ The change that Mother Gullman perceives in the distribution of knowledge is ironically parallel to the fall that put the very first “shallow ploughman” to work.

¹²⁷ OED “caul, *n.*”

¹²⁸ The Geneva Bible (a.iii). The very same wording appears in the King James Version (A2).

Despite her obvious concern for the future of her occupation, Gullman doesn't dwell on the problem of an increasingly discerning client base. Warning turns into braggery as the bawd reminisces about the successful gullings of her "golden days" (1.1.155). The history of cunning that she now delivers is necessarily a history of her daughter's cunny—a physiological place that can be profitably misrepresented because its properties are hidden. The entire venture relies upon an imbalance of knowledge; the bawd and the whore have to stand between their customers and the truth. At the very least, they must be consistent in telling their clients what they want to hear, whether those lies are fully believed or not. Thus Mother Gullman knows the value of her daughter's maidenhead, and is delighted at having sold it "[f]ifteen times... / [t]o make up a dowry for [her] marriage" (1.1.149-50). Like the spider, the bawd makes her profit in a very particular location—not her "cauls" but her daughter's "pillow" (1.1.154). If Gullman has a web, it's the net of make-believe modesty with which she and her daughter capture their customers: "Tis nothing but a politic conveyance, / A sincere carriage, a religious eyebrow / That throws their charms over the worldlings' senses" (1.1.160-62). The "conveyance" and "carriage" of Mother Gullman's advice refer simultaneously to seemingly moral conduct, successful cozenage, and sexual congress—all forms of bearing in which the whore is already expert.

Frank, too, is able to make statements that are both clear and quibbling. She responds to the lecture with a reminder of her education: "Mother, I am too deep a scholar grown / To learn my first rules now" (1.1.170-71). "Deep" was a common adjective for "scholar" in the period,

appearing regularly without bawdy implication.¹²⁹ But where the subject is sexual training, the scholar described as “too deep” is one who has received an education that is both excessive and illicit; she is too far gone to be taught anew. *Deep* has a bodily referent, too: this is a student who has gained her knowledge through the repeated sounding of her anatomical depths. These connotations, deep in their own way, do not impede the transmission of Frank’s basic meaning, because her subject is sexual practice. Whereas other characters sometimes make puns accidentally, the bawd and whore are constantly aware of their trade, and ready to represent it—directly or otherwise—in language. They don’t exactly revel in such wordplay; rather, they take it for granted as part of a day’s work, an aspect of their vocational cunning.

The most salient point of contrast to the effortless wit of Frank and her mother is provided by the paranoid proto-cuckold Master Harebrain, whose own use of “cunning” shortly after Mother Gullman’s speech shows no awareness of the *double entendre* that is culturally embedded in the word. He tells the watchmen he has hired, “[T]here is a cunning plot laid, but happily discovered, to rob my house...[S]omeone / Shall, in the form of my familiar friend, / Be receiv’d privately into my house” (1.2.8-14). The cuckoldry that Harebrain fears is narrated, intentionally or otherwise, in his instructions to the night watch. A cunny plot—*that* kind of private reception—is what he’s afraid of, so he has used what little cunning he has to come between his wife and her potential lover. But it’s what Harebrain tries not to say, with his plodding repetition of “my house,” that sounds so clearly through his orders.

¹²⁹ Middleton, however, seems to have liked the bawdy potential of the expression. In *A Chaste Maid*, Maudlin Yellowhammer gets her son to say the Latin word “ars” because she has fond memories of hearing it spoken by “an honest gentleman that knew [her] when [she] was a maid” (4.1.61-62). When Tim finally utters the word, she calls him “a deep scholar” (4.1.75-6).

According to his grammar, a certain amount of *laying* has already taken place. In seeking to prevent his wife's adultery, Harebrain invites us to imagine it. His effort at obfuscation backfires, and his words end up both reflecting and mocking his anxiety. Here and elsewhere, Harebrain's words talk back.

Later in the same set of instructions, the jealous husband says, "Let me not be purloin'd," and immediately becomes enchanted with his own verbal discovery. He quotes himself in an aside: "'pur-loin'd' indeed; the merry Greeks conceive me" (1.2.19-20). Invoking the writers of classical antiquity for their ability to catch a pun, Harebrain elevates his lame joke to the level of etymology. His tendency is to add emphasis to what's already obvious (the *loin* in *purloin*), and to remain oblivious to the secondary meanings that make his speech ridiculous. Harebrain's language knows more than he does—when, a few lines later, he speaks to Frank of her mother's "carriage" (1.2.31), his meaning of proper social and moral conduct can only resound with irony in relation to the other senses of the word. Thus the exchange between him and Frank is further evidence of his relative intellectual weakness. They share a language, but the whore is much more at home with the polysemy of words than her harebrained interlocutor is.

From Mother Gullman's lecture onward, Frank is associated with learning and books. Upon the arrival of the two foolish elder brothers Inesse and Possibility, who are promising new clients of the Gullmans, the bawd sends her daughter out of view, and tells the visitors that she is "Even at her book" (1.1.178). The "deep scholar" is now supposedly engaged in serious religious contemplation, so the visitors are cautioned to obey several rules of conduct whose breach, according to Mistress Gullman, would upset her daughter greatly. Possibility promises not to utter "a bawdy syllable," and Inesse can't resist a joke: "Syllable was well-plac'd there, for indeed your one

syllables are your bawdiest words: prick that down.” (1.1.187-89). This isn’t necessarily the worst joke in the play, but it’s well below the level of verbal wit exhibited already in the chosen syllables of the Gullman family. While Inesse does his best to read the situation and the rhetoric of his interlocutors, and fails, Frank advances the plot by merely pretending to read.

It isn’t only in the work she does under her mother’s supervision that Frank puts on a pretence of pious erudition. One of the marvels of the whore’s cunning is her ability to orchestrate multiple employments.

Harebrain wants “Lady Gullman” to give his wife “good counsel,” “a little of thy instructions” (1.2.28, 38-40). In particular, he wants Frank to read to Mistress Harebrain—her job is to replace the wife’s lascivious reading materials with good pious text. Harebrain explains, “I have convey’d away all her wanton pamphlets, as *Hero and Leander*, *Venus and Adonis*; oh, two luscious mary-bone pies for a young married wife. Here, here, prithee take the *Resolution*, and read to her a little” (1.2.43-46). In place of the titillating materials the jealous husband has confiscated, Frank is meant to read Mistress Harebrain “a chapter of hell,” in which are listed “the pains allotted for adultery” (1.2.48-51). But if she is to teach Mistress Harebrain anything, it will be a lesson that brings the sexually curious wife closer to the realm of whoredom.

Instead of foisting the pious tract on Mistress Harebrain, Frank counsels her to keep similar books open and on display in her chamber while secretly stowing her choice of reading materials in her clothing.

If he chance to steal upon you, let him find
Some book lie open ’gainst an unchaste mind,
And coted scriptures, though for your own pleasure
You read some stirring pamphlet, and convey it

Under your skirt, the fittest place to lay it. (1.2.86-90)

The bawdy resonance of the verb *to convey* is at its strongest here. While Harebrain imagines his wife consuming the lewd pamphlets as if they were a couple of marrowbone pies, Frank suggests that she ought to engage in a kind of book sex with them by hiding them in the very place where they're most relevant.¹³⁰ Both metaphors figure reading as an aphrodisiac, although they aim at different bodily openings. In both formulations, Mistress Harebrain is hungry not only for sex but for textual representations of it. It is Frank's view that the young wife is fully entitled to these reading materials, and that this is a private matter in more ways than one. What she chooses to read is between her and her genitalia.¹³¹

Further, Harebrain's instructions require the whore to excoriate her own vocation: "[T]ell her her thoughts, her very dreams are answerable; say so, rip up the life of a courtesan, and show how loathsome 'tis" (1.2.51-53). In contrast to Harebrain's hyperbolic commands, Frank's actual work involves much more bringing together than "rip[ping] up," and the play as a whole shows that her life is far from "loathsome." She reflects in an aside, "This

¹³⁰ The social phenomenon of "book sex" is examined in Michael McKeon's *The Secret History of Domesticity*. McKeon argues that the emergence in print of "what came to be called 'pornography'" (301) was one mechanism of "the early modern separation out of the public from the private" (318):

The evidence of book sex argues that so far from being primordially the most "intimate" of concerns, sex was aided in its modern privatization by, among other things, the technology of print and its solitary consumption. Before the modern period, we might say, sex was either "public" in the sense of serving the great collective ends of perpetuating the family and the species or (more precisely) "nonprivate" in the sense of being coextensive with—not separated out from—these great ends. Under such conditions, the discourse of sex as it appeared in jest books, chap books, broadsides, and the like had the status of a shared joke rather than a private gratification. It was more obscene than pornographic, more concerned with social commentary and punishment than with sensual arousal. (300)

¹³¹ Another convergence of the sexual and the textual can be found, as Michelle M. Dowd observes, in Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho*, where the city wives' interest in writing is sexualized through "the pen/penis pun" (229).

gentleman would persuade me in time to disgrace myself, and speak ill of mine own function" (1.2.54-55). The single "function" of which she speaks—her special place in the sexual economy—has already allowed Frank to enter several contracts. She is employed as a whore by both her mother and Sir Bounteous Progress, as a bawd by Mistress Harebrain and her would-be lover Penitent Brothel, and as a spiritual counsellor by Master Harebrain.

Although each of these employers describes Frank's function differently from the others, her work is always somehow sexualized, and sheer utility is central to her role. Brothel explains that he's "constrain'd to use the means / Of one that knows no mean, a courtesan" (1.1.100-01), and marvels at the fact that "[h]onesty is removed to the common place" (1.1.126). To Brothel, Frank is the paradoxically "close courtesan" (1.1.111)—a figure who "[c]orrupts and loosens" (1.1.105) but also keeps secrets. After Frank's first session with Mistress Harebrain, Master Harebrain speaks (with inadvertent irony) like a bawd: "What, done so soon? Away, to't again, to't again, good wench to't again; leave her not so" (1.2.115-16).

It is, of course, not Harebrain but Frank who now plays the bawd. In her consultation with the young wife, Frank includes Mistress Harebrain in the class of women who must outwit men for the sake of their own sexual satisfaction. She represents vigilant jealousy as an obstacle that can be overcome with the appropriate sort of performance: "When husbands in their rank'st suspicions dwell, / Then 'tis our best art to dissemble well" (1.2.74-75). The injunction to put on false modesty echoes Mother Gullman's instructions to Frank in the previous scene—a parallel in rhetoric that points up Frank's promotion to the status of bawd. While Harebrain has hired her to protect the chastity of his wife, Penitent Brothel has enlisted her in an effort to do the very opposite. And if Mistress Harebrain's show of innocence must be

performed before her husband in private, its success nevertheless relies upon an intellectual collaboration between the two women that is based on an inherited tradition of cunning.

It falls to Frank to come up with a plan that will allow Brothel and Mistress Harebrain to meet under seemingly innocent circumstances. Upon inventing a scheme, she's so filled with eagerness that she has her man wake Brothel up: "Tell him I've happily bethought a mean / To make his purpose prosper in each limb" (2.3.4-5). When he appears, Frank explains that the plot came to her in her sleep, and that it's the only sure way to overcome the exigencies of his situation. Frank is certain that her plan will allow for the fulfilment of Brothel's desire; in her formulation, his "purpose" is a living body (perhaps a human body, perhaps a tree) whose every "limb" will flourish once the plot is set in motion. The vagueness of *purpose* is bawdy in its own way, and the reference to appendages is wonderfully plain. Not only every aspect of his desire towards Mistress Harebrain but also "each limb" of his own body will reap the benefits of Frank Gullman's plan. Similarly, and also conversely, Master Harebrain tells his wife that the good counsel and "advices" of that "sweet virgin" Frank will bring her "comfort...in the end;" "Thou'lt feel," he says, "an alteration" (1.2.145-51). What Mistress Harebrain seeks and Frank will help her achieve is a very different kind of "comfort in the end," an "alteration" caused by the sexual intervention of another man.

Up to this point, Frank has done little to bring the amorous acquaintances together, in spite of the fact that she has exclusive access to Mistress Harebrain. Her visiting rights alone aren't sufficient to the task of assignation which she must carry out; her presence in Mistress Harebrain's quarters must evolve to include an opportunity for Master Brothel to join her there. "Wherefore thus I've convey'd it," she declares, "I'll counterfeit a fit of

violent sickness” (2.5.21-22). Because Frank’s plan entails transport of various kinds, her use of *convey* to represent her thought process is partially punning. Next to that subtle wordplay is the perfect rhyming of *fit* and *counterfeit*, and it doesn’t stop there. Brothel asks her how plausible such a sudden illness would be, and she reassures him by satirizing the supposed maladies of women generally:

Puh, all the world knows women are soon down; we can be sick
when we have a mind to’t, catch an ague with the wind of our
fans, surfeit upon the rump of a lark, and bestow ten pounds in
physic upon’t; we’re likest ourselves when we’re down. ’Tis the
easiest art and cunning for our sect to counterfeit sick, that are
always full of fits when we are well; for since we were made for a
weak imperfect creature, we can fit that best that we are made
for. (2.5.28-35)

In Frank’s rhetoric, the female sex becomes a “sect” skilled in feigning illness, a demographic best suited to a horizontal position. Women’s *fitness* for the company of men includes their fits, surfeits, and counterfeits. The pretence of falling ill is appropriate to women because their *sect* is defined by sex, another physical circumstance that brings them down. The counterfeit fit not only resembles sexual ecstasy, but emanates from the natural “cunning” common to all women.

Frank’s scheme promises profits of two kinds. It will provide the necessary conditions for an encounter between Brothel and Mistress Harebrain, and it will help Frank herself drain money from the elder brothers who have been seeking her company. She intends to be “translated” into a seeming invalid, and to see Master Brothel “slipp’d into the form of a physician” (2.5.35-36). In the character of a quack, Brothel will lie to Inesse

and Possibility about what the sick woman needs, and they will feel obliged to expedite her convalescence. Frank's advice to her collaborator emphasizes both the idiocy of their victims and the continued credibility of their own performances:

Lay on load enough upon 'em, and spare 'em not, for they're good plump fleshly asses, and may well enough bear it. Let gold, amber, and dissolved pearl be common ingredients, and that you cannot compose a cullis without 'em. Put but this cunningly in practice, it shall be both a sufficient recompense for all my pains in your love, and the ready means to make Mistress Harebrain way, by the visiting of me, to your mutual desired company. (2.5.43-50)

As a member of the female sect, Frank can advise Brothel on how to put the plan "cunningly into practice"—he may not have a woman's natural inclination, but he can get *down* with Mistress Harebrain if he shows himself capable of cunning. The "means" and "way" of Frank's counsel are good synonyms for the conveyance of the plot, but they also represent the anatomical access which becomes possible through such scheming. Moreover, the plan carries its own erotic charge: it has already woken Frank up and filled her with eagerness; now Brothel says he will "constantly embrace it" (2.5.51).

Frank wants the money that the two elder brothers are willing to spend to bring her back to health, but she doesn't want the tedious visits that they pay. Inesse and Possibility are very hard to shake. After they've insisted on keeping watch over Frank as she sleeps, the whore feigns a bodily emergency that forces her to cry out urgently to the make-believe physician, "Master doctor! Master doctor!...Your physic works; lend me your hand"

(3.2.152-54).¹³² The spectacle of the prostitute defecating into her chamber pot is a breach of social decorum drastic enough to drive the fools away. Frank's only remaining option is to shit them out, for excretion, too, is one of her many functions. Brothel is delighted at the whore's rapid purgation of the elder brothers through the pretended evacuation of her bowels: "Let me admire thee! / The wit of man wanes and decreases soon, / But women's wit is ever at full moon" (3.2.158-59).

It's obvious that the men's "wit" of which Brothel speaks is the penis that can change so quickly from erection to flaccidity, just as the "moon" he mentions is clearly Frank's bare ass. But there's more than straightforward bawdy to Brothel's praise. Although there is a kind of *wit* that Frank will never have, she is fully endowed with the imaginative and intuitive faculties that generate the play's intrigue. Brothel's statement is accurate insofar as Frank consistently exhibits qualities that the male characters in *A Mad World* mostly lack: a comfort with the complexity of language, a sense of what people want most deeply, a willingness to work for her money, and a vibrant self-confidence. And if she spins her plots spiderlike, with ever "more art and cunning," she does so on behalf of the playwright, who relies as much as anyone on the versatility of the "close courtesan" he has conjured.

Wit, Fit, and Common Knowledge in *The Alchemist*

When, as if by accident, "DOLL *is seen*" by the lusty Sir Epicure Mammon in Jonson's *The Alchemist* (2.3.210), her fellow cozener Face immediately assigns

¹³² Editors insert various stage directions after these lines. David L. Frost has "*A bed pan is produced, and she is lifted upon it*," Nick de Somogyi, "*PENITENT supplies a chamber-pot. She feigns defecation*," Peter Saccio, "*Penitent supplies a chamber-pot. She feigns farting and excreting*." Standish Henning leaves the blocking up to the reader's imagination.

her a role that will both titillate and astound the knight. Suddenly Doll is a gentlewoman with an academic obsession, a fixation on biblical exegesis that emerges in the form of a recurring “fit.” The performance of this character requires from Doll a seemingly interminable flow of words that are at least somewhat convincing as echoes of scholarly texts:

Sir, she is a most rare scholar:

And is gone mad, with studying Broughton’s works.

If you but name a word, touching the Hebrew,

She falls into her fit, and will discourse

So learnedly of genealogies,

As you would run mad, too, to hear her, sir. (2.3.237-42)

Face promises a spectacle that is erotic in its irony. The lady scholar’s gender is enough to make her a comic figure—her social rank has afforded her the opportunity to acquire vast amounts of useless, unfeminine knowledge. More importantly, her insatiability is amusing because it resembles sexual compulsion: the fit is set off by a verbal “touch,” the lady “falls,” the one-man audience is driven crazy by her performance. In Face’s description of the event, the sound of the gentlewoman’s ecstatic rambling takes the place of a visual display of sexual readiness and seems to contradict the cynic Surly’s hypothesis that “this is a bawdy-house!” (2.3.226). But the rhetoric Face deploys is decidedly erotic in its careful narration of the point at which a woman’s vulnerability converges with her privately acquired knowledge.

Immediately intrigued by the gentlewoman’s mad skills, Sir Epicure maintains the thread of *double entendre* by asking if he may “have conference with her” (2.3.243). The lady scholar, Face explains, is at the house “to be cur’d” (2.3.224), not to be seen—the alchemist is apparently enraged at her accidental exposure to the other clients. Thus Face conjures a pretence of

transgression by which he, in the person of Subtle's assistant, can sell the knight further information about the gentlewoman. Sir Epicure pays to ask, "What is she, when she's out of her fit?" (2.3.252). The ungendered "what" serves simultaneously to demote the unnamed lady from full humanity and to elevate her to the realm of pure potentiality that is the imaginary province of prostitution. And the knight gets what he pays for, in the fantastical response of "Lungs":

O, the most affablest creature, sir! So merry!
 So pleasant! She'll mount you up, like quicksilver,
 Over the helm; and circulate like oil,
 A very vegetal: discourse of state,
 Of mathematics, bawdry, anything— (2.3.253-57)

Face-as-Lungs describes the gentlewoman's conduct in an increasingly bawdy way, to the extent that conversational dexterity—itsself represented as a series of alchemical operations—becomes a metaphor for sexual talent. Where talk and sex are so rhetorically intertwined, it's difficult to say which is the source of the metaphor and which is the target. The very confusion of Face's report mimics the alchemical mixing it narrates. But "discourse," in its promising ambiguity, remains central to the advertisement of the lady scholar. She's a highly verbal creature.¹³³

The emphasis on the gentlewoman's discourse inevitably draws the customer's (and the audience's) focus to her mouth, and thence to other

¹³³ Alvin B. Kernan regards verbal skill as more generally distributed among the play's characters: "It is almost impossible not to notice that the characters of this play are blessed with the 'gift of tongues,' using language, in most cases, with great facility, if not great precision" (14). In his reading, Doll's performance of the lady scholar consists of a "learned philosophical mixture of history and apocalyptic prophecy...spout[ed] in inspired frenzy to drive Mammon out of the house" (15). Douglas Brown notes "[t]he powerful extravagance of Doll's raving," but calls it "total gibberish" (xx). The tension between Doll's resourcefulness and the learned lady's madness makes more sense if we regard the fit as a deliberate performance.

openings.¹³⁴ Her fit of talking is replaced by the coital fit that could join her body to Sir Epicure's, just as the alembic is secured "[o]ver the helm" of the cucurbit in the process of distillation. Her fluent "circulat[ion]" is projected to take place on top of the knight, a position to which she can easily "mount" because of her familiarity with a range of topics that includes "bawdry." The lady's physical and intellectual loftiness makes her a version of the *cortigiana* figure that was frequently and awkwardly borrowed from the Italian tradition.¹³⁵ Here, the continental courtesan can be invoked only for comic effect, since the play's Argument has already established Doll's circumstances as those of a "punk" (4) rather than an economically independent entrepreneur. She is not a famous beauty but a humble "colleague" of Subtle and Face; her origins are not the Italian court but the streets of London.¹³⁶

After Face's account of what the lady can do, Sir Epicure finds a way to ask for what he wants: "Is she no way accessible? No means, / No trick, to give a man a taste of her—wit— / Or so?" (2.3.258-60). The idea that the supposed gentlewoman is not available to him makes her lubricated readiness all the more appealing. There's a titillating contrast between the liberality of Doll's character and the make-believe rule that bars access to her "wit." That little word signifies the lady's intellect, her genitalia, and both of these at once, employed in combination to please the learned gentlewoman's fortunate interlocutor. Believing in the total power of wealth, Sir Epicure hopes to

¹³⁴ With reference to contemporary conduct books, Peter Stallybrass explains, "Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity" (127). Verbosity is the proper province of the sexually unrestrained woman. In her study of feminized loquacity, Patricia Parker contends that "[t]he spectre of effeminacy is one that haunts, with a remarkable commonality of instances, the whole province of the lingual" ("On the Tongue" 459).

¹³⁵ A nuanced account of the influence on the *cortigiana* type on English stage representations of whores is given in Jean Howard's *Theater of a City*, under the heading "The Prostitute and the Cosmopolitan Perverse" (141-57).

¹³⁶ In the *dramatis personae*, after Subtle ("The Alchemist") and Face ("The Housekeeper"), Doll is listed as "Their Colleague."

purchase some time with the lady scholar—a special privilege Face fully expects him to request. But no amount of money can guarantee that the knight will witness the wit without the fit. The challenge Face sets for Doll also provides her with an out: the comically boring, repetitive, and irrelevant content of her genealogical recitations keeps her from having to have sex with the client, even though it constitutes—ironically—part of a sexualized performance.

Like the others, Doll has to draw on various reserves of knowledge and cleverness in order to make the most of each economic opportunity. While her alacrity and adaptability are qualities she shares with Face and Subtle, there is something about Doll's cunning that sets it apart from the ingenuity of her colleagues. Her ability to perform a range of roles convincingly is associated explicitly with her experience in sex work. According to Doll, prostitution entails a kind of professional development that makes the whore proficient in the art of impersonation. When Subtle counsels her that she must be convincing in the role of the lady—"Doll, my lord What's'hum's sister, you must now / Bear yourself *statelich*" (2.4.6-7)—she replies, unimpressed with his elementary Dutch,

O, let me alone,
I'll not forget my race, I warrant you.
I'll keep my distance, laugh, and talk aloud;
Have all the tricks of a proud scurvy lady,
And be as rude as her woman. (2.4.7-11)

In the conversation that begins this scene, Face and Subtle engage in a conceit that makes Doll a piece of bait and Sir Epicure a biting fish that they are about to reel in. Face declares, "A wench is a rare bait, with which a man / No sooner 's taken, but he straight firks mad" (2.4.4-5). Clearly, though, it

isn't enough for Doll to be seen—her work with Sir Epicure is to be gestural and verbal. In her own formulation, Doll is not a passive lure, but an active or even overactive manipulator. The role she assigns herself is more complex than Subtle's request for stateliness might suggest. She plans to be simultaneously as coy as a proud gentlewoman and as frank as a servant, and she is prepared for this task by dint of her membership in the "race" of women whose work depends on performativity.

Doll plays both bawd and whore in the scenes with Sir Epicure, since the woman with the talking problem is a character she procures for her client. Within the framework established by Face, she can set the limits of the exchange by seeming to be provoked into her fit by something Sir Epicure says. She is not obligated to "milk his epididimis," as she is, at least at first, in the case of the supposed Spanish count who comes calling later in the play. But in order to portray the lady scholar, Doll must have either a working knowledge of Broughton's works or a knack for guessing at their content. When she launches into her false fit, she delivers extracts verbatim from Broughton's *A Concoct of Scripture*.¹³⁷ The genealogical reckoning of this text is no more nor less than an absurd and protracted attempt to untangle a mess of proper nouns, many of which apply to multiple persons or places. In Doll's mouth, the exegetical jumble becomes even more bizarre than it is in the original.

The amount of repetition in Doll's ravings makes the content of her speech ridiculous, and the names are funny in the simplest possible way. The lines she delivers in the person of the lady scholar belong to a genre of speech that is totally distinct from the rest of her conversation, and utterly in keeping with Face's account of the sensational "fit of talking":

¹³⁷ This observation comes from F. H. Mares' edition of the play, in a note to the ravings at 4.5.1-32.

For after Alexander's death—
 That Perdicas, and Antigonus, were slain,
 The two that stood, Seleuc' and Ptolemy—
 Make up the two legs, and the fourth Beast.
 That was Gog-north, and Egypt-south, and South Iron-leg—
 And then Gog-horned. So was Egypt, too.
 Then Egypt clay-leg, and Gog clay-leg—
 And last Gog-dust, and Egypt-dust, which fall
 In the last link of the fourth chain. And these
 Be stars in story, which none see, or look at— (4.5.1-11)

The combination of the lady's conviction with the repeated syllable "Gog" is a joke in its own right. But in addition to the formal features that bring humour to Doll's make-believe, a certain irony makes the use of Broughton distinctly comic. It's a prostitute who offers up this biblical database, after all. Although Doll expects to be able to get away without having sex with Sir Epicure, and despite his attempt to describe his desire without naming it, erotic potential remains an important element of the transaction. Even if her services are limited to conversation, the "lord's sister" is being prostituted to the old knight. Whatever else it may be, Doll's work is sex work.

Doll's knowledge, unlike Subtle and Face's, is both gendered and eroticized. She asserts this difference by reminding her cohort that she has a particular kind of experience which they lack—she belongs to a *race* that doesn't include them. The three swindlers share a common motivation and they all participate in each of the schemes to rip off their customers, but Doll's contributions to "the venture tripartite" are always associated with her past work as a prostitute, while the adaptability and ingenuity of the other two is evidence of their freedom from a fixed vocational identity. Face is able

to switch occupations (captain, alchemist's assistant, head servant, spirit) without so much as a costume change, and he does so with such frequency and conviction that we wonder at the end of the play if we know who or what he really is. Doll's occupation signifies more strongly. In the context of the shared domicile, her gender alone is enough to suggest prostitution. For a keen observer like Surly, her very presence in the house is evidence that it is a brothel. Similarly, the whore's versatility does nothing to complicate her identity as a prostitute. On the contrary; her flexibility is a feature of her vocation, rather than a departure from it.

Ironically, Doll's sexual vocation is so clearly assigned that she needn't carry out the tasks that seem most proper to it. In her most straightforwardly sexual work, she is replaceable. The introduction of Dame Pliant sets the complexity of Doll's work in relief—with so many demands on her time and skill, the whore has to delegate her defining employment to the nearest available woman. Of the several men who visit the house over the course of the play, the Spanish count (who is actually Surly in disguise) is the only one with whom Doll actually expects to have sex, and at the last minute she finds herself otherwise engaged. While Doll is busy performing the roles of the lady scholar and the Queen of Fairy for other customers, Dame Pliant is forced to fit into a situation she doesn't fully understand. As a "doxy," Doll has been ordered to "prepare...her wit" (3.3.20-23) for Don Diego's entry into the house and her body. Face's instructions exploit the bawdy resonance of both milk and honey: Doll is told to "milk [the Don's] epididimis" and to "hive him / I' the swan-skin coverlid" (3.3.22, 47-48). The pastoral metaphors are mingled with musical ones: "[T]hou shalt keep him waking, with thy drum" (3.3.44); "You must go tune your virginal" (3.3.67). From the housekeeper's ornately figurative directions it is clear that the success of the

plot to extract resources from Don Diego depends upon vaginal entrapment—the kind of cunning only a woman can carry out. When Doll is unexpectedly occupied, Face and Subtle have to persuade someone else to be “ruffled” (4.4.41) in her stead. Dame Pliant, whose only distinguishing features are her good looks and her malleability, seems like a suitable replacement.

Of Doll’s three personae, the character of the Queen of Fairy accords most with contemporary conceptions of cunning. The role is occasioned by a client who requires services of prognostication. A lawyer’s clerk called Dapper visits the alchemist because he wants a spirit to give him gambling advice, and Face and Subtle tell him that he’ll receive his familiar from the Queen of Fairy directly. By reading Dapper’s “complexion” (1.2.105), Subtle claims to discover that the clerk is not only a favourite but a relative of the Queen of Fairy. Dapper is then promised an audience with his “aunt,” provided that he pay Subtle and Face a fee and a portion of his future winnings, and that he prepare himself in a number of absurd ways for the moment when the Queen (who sleeps in) is ready to see him. The vision of an “aunt of Fairy” (1.2.149)—a spirit and a prostitute rolled into one—is developed in the ambiguous language of the transaction: “Her Grace is a lone woman,” Face says, “And very rich, and if she take a fancy, / She will do strange things...[Y]ou do not know / What grace her Grace may do you in clean linen” (1.2.155-57).

In accordance with the pun that sounds in the very title of the “Queen of Fairy,” there is plenty of sexual promise in her portrayal. Subtle, disguised as one of her priests, enters with scraps of fabric said to have been torn from her underwear, and proceeds to blindfold Dapper with them (3.5.5-15). Later, when Doll is called away to perform other duties, Subtle makes the excuse

that the Queen is “[a]t dinner, in her bed” (3.5.64), and pretends to have brought Dapper some food “[f]rom her own private trencher” (3.5.65). However, the Queen’s reported advice is for the clerk to exercise willpower: “Yet, if you could hold out, till she saw you (she says), / It would be better for you” (3.5.68-69). When her majesty finally appears, Dapper is instructed to get “[d]own on [his] knees, and wriggle” before being given permission to “[a]rise, and touch [her] velvet gown” (5.4.21, 28). At last Doll draws the clerk towards her—“Let me now stroke that head” (5.4.29)—in a gesture that is at once maternal, magisterial, and erotic.

The duping of Dapper echoes the events narrated in a 1595 pamphlet under the title *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire, by the subtill practise of one Judeth Philips, a professed cunning woman, or Fortune teller*. In this text, the “cosening queane” Judeth Philips pretends to read the brows of a wealthy couple, and promises them an even greater lot if they make lavish preparations for the Queen of Fairy. The rigmarole includes the laying out of linen, candlesticks, and coins in the finest room of the house, as well as the titular “Brideling, Sadling and Ryding” of the husband. While Judeth is inside supposedly meeting with the Queen of Fairy, the couple are told they must “lye three houres one by an other groveling on [their] bellies” under a holly tree outside (8). Having bundled up all their goods, the thief “put[s] her selfe into a faire white smocke, somewhat disguised, with a thing on her head all white, and a stick in her hand” (8) and presents herself before her victims as the Queen of Fairy. She takes her pack and leaves the “churle” and his wife writhing on the cold ground, wondering when the cunning woman will return from the house with the good news. Like Dapper, their payment and prostration is to no avail. And like Doll, Judeth is a woman whose aptitude for trickery is linked to her chosen place in the sexual

economy. The cunning woman is said to have left her first husband because she was “not contented with his poore estate” and “purposed to seeke some other course for maintena[n]ce of her living” (5). In the narrative that accompanies “The Brideling,” Judeth works with two male “confederates,”—“P. and V.”—to gull a wealthy widow (11). She too is a Quean of Fairy.

Despite the lofty status to which she accedes in the roles of the lady scholar and the fairy queen, Doll does not come out on top. Face demonstrates that he ultimately holds the monopoly on both wit and cruelty when he discharges his two companions without a second thought near the end of the play. The move is utterly unexpected, even though Doll and Subtle have been plotting to take Face’s share and leave *him* in the lurch. The housekeeper’s deception is sublimated into the new comic community that blossoms with the return of Lovewit. Doll and Subtle, for all their ingenuity, are forgotten. Face leaves them to their own devices:

All I can do
Is to help you over the wall, o’ the back-side;
Or lend you a sheet, to save your velvet gown, Doll.
Here will be officers, presently; bethink you
Of some course suddenly to ’scape the dock:
For thither you’ll come else. (5.4.132-37)

With this cold statement of farewell, Face mocks the ingenuity that has made both his lifestyle and Jonson’s play possible. The quick wit that allows the three tricksters to scam many customers at once is now dismissed, as Face suggests that there’s no way out of the grips of the law for his former companions. His “bethink you” would have been urgently hopeful earlier in the action; now it’s just mean. Doll will get to keep her velvet gown, but the rest of her earnings, illegitimate as they may be, are lost to Face. The parting

of ways would lack all semblance of comedy if it weren't for Face's mention of "the back-side" of the house—a winking reminder of a route that is always available to Doll. However her knowledge may be exploited, there is a kind of cunning that remains in her private possession.

The Whore's Will in *The Dutch Courtesan*

The title of John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* indicates a central figure who embodies sexuality and foreignness. It says nothing of the play's generic weirdness, of the awkward affiliation between the eponymous "courtesan" and the comic momentum of the plot. Nor does it hint at the final and total failure of the whore character to maintain a position in the action or on the stage. If we follow the title's inclination toward the Dutch courtesan Franceschina, we read a story of botched revenge and eventual dissolution—a narrative based on the limits of the whore's wit. But the dramatic thrust of the play moves away from Franceschina and towards a conventional nuptial conclusion, much as her lover Freevill does. The Dutch courtesan is, after all, a villain. In other plays, the cunning of a whore might pose a threat to marital fidelity; here, it's an engine of murder.

The shift in focus from the figure of the courtesan to that of her potential client begins with the Prologue, when the audience is invited to "survey / Nothing but passionate man in his slight play, / Who hath this only ill—to some deem'd worst— / A modest diffidence and self-mistrust" (15–18).¹³⁸ The "slight play" which will enclose the character Malheureux is both the drama itself and the fluctuation of passions that determine his behaviour toward Franceschina. The phrase is an abridgement of the first line of the

¹³⁸ I follow M. L. Wine's edition of the play.

Prologue—"Slight hasty labours in this easy play..."—and it forges a link between the playwright's self-representation and the figure of the reluctant client. Such a comparison runs contrary to the strong rhetorical tendency, here and elsewhere, to propose an equivalence between the author and his whore character. Announcing an intention "not to instruct, but to delight" (8), the Prologue winks at the "hasty labours" and "easy play" of both the courtesan and the company. But what seems like a subtle comparison between the play and its eponymous character, or between the *labours* of the playwright and those of the whore, is undercut by the Prologue's dismissal of prostitution from the centre of the play. Instead, what matters most is the "passionate man" who fails at first to recognize the triviality of both his desire and its object. Franceschina's role, already made peripheral, will become increasingly *slight* as the play progresses, until her fate is immaterial to the comic conclusion of the action. If she stands at the beginning of the drama as the play's sole representative of revenge tragedy, her total banishment from the action provides the space for a happy ending.

The *Fabulae Argumentum*, printed between the Prologue and the *Dramatis Personae* in the 1605 quarto, proposes a straightforward mathematical operation that belies both the complexity and the emphasis of the action that follows. According to the argument, the basic mechanism of the drama is one of contrast: "*The difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife is the full scope of the play, which, intermixed with the deceits of a witty city jester, fills up the comedy.*" The rhetoric of fullness and filling is deployed to distill the play's action into a single idea, much as the reductive "[n]othing but" of the Prologue does. But the argument's simple promise cannot be kept, because the contrast between Franceschina and Beatrice is limited, in practical terms, by the fact that Freevill has already made his decision in favour of "a lawful

love" (1.2.91) when the play opens. He brings the two women into parallel by having a past with one and a future with the other, but there's no contest between the whore and the bride. However, the sexual economy portrayed in the play is shown to rely heavily upon the distinction between the intellectual faculties of the prostitute and the artlessness of the chaste maid. In such a context, a difference in sexual availability may be tantamount to a difference in mental sophistication, and "*the love of a courtesan*" may include murderous rage.

In consecutive scenes, Beatrice and Franceschina represent themselves as lacking the ability to dissemble. The claim is true in the case of Freevill's betrothed, and wonderfully false in the case of his whore. Using the familiar rhetoric of modesty, Beatrice tells Freevill that she is empty of artifice: "I cannot with a mistress' compliment, / Forced discourses, or nice art of wit / Give entertain to your dear wished presence" (2.1.12-14). She elaborates in well-turned phrases on the subject of her own "secure simplicity" and "sober ignorance," positioning herself "as one quite void of skill" (2.1.20-24).¹³⁹ Despite the obvious care Beatrice takes with language, there is no indication that her thoughts run counter to her words. Because her aim is to become the conjugal property of Freevill, she is bound by a discourse that requires linguistic vigilance in the presentation of meek thoughtlessness. The very irony of the situation seems to be beyond her, however—she participates willingly in a verbal ritual that undermines her intellect.

Franceschina also uses the rhetoric of modesty and ignorance to advance her own ends, but her purpose is to deceive. When she finds out about Freevill's determination to marry Beatrice, the whore enlists his friend Malheureux in her effort to punish the happy couple. The alliance with

¹³⁹ The phrase "sober ignorance" is used by Freevill later in the play, as he discourses on "[w]hat difference is in women and their life" (5.1.72, 66).

Malheureux depends upon a promise of sexual service—a subject Franceschina raises in alternation with her hatred for Freevill and her desire to have him killed. Her approach to Malheureux is equal and opposite to her repulsion from his friend; “By this kiss,” she exclaims, “I hate him!” (2.2.146). Malheureux’s loathing for prostitution, combined with his “impatient heat” (2.2.159), means that the whore can manipulate him only by pretending to have fallen in love with him “at the first sight” (2.2.148). Further, Franceschina makes her sexual availability contingent upon the death of Freevill by claiming to have made a vow: “So long as Freevill lives, I must not love” (2.2.164).

In the midst of these machinations, Franceschina introduces the possibility that she could be duped by her interlocutor, rather than the other way around: “Sall I, or can I, trust again? O fool, / How natural it is for us to be abus’d!” (2.2.134-35). With that “us,” the whore joins the ranks of necessarily modest women, all those who must present themselves as intellectually vulnerable in order to build relationships with men. When Malheureux asks if she will belong to him exclusively, Franceschina takes another opportunity to feign feminine transparency: “Vill I? How hard ’tis for true love to dissemble! I am only yours” (2.2.175-76). An echo of Beatrice’s love speech is clearly audible in Franceschina’s promise, and a kind of humour emerges from the similarity in their self-representation. Behind the whore’s promise, however, lurks a tragic apparatus that cannot function within the comic framework of the play. The character of Franceschina, too different in both her national and generic origins, can only contribute alterity. While Beatrice’s show of modesty confirms her place in a conventional plot, Franceschina’s schemes are too threatening to be assimilated. The whore’s cunning almost immediately falls short of what her revenge plot demands.

Franceschina commands Malheureux to secure for her possession the ring given to Freevill by his fiancée. Using the ring as evidence of Freevill's faithlessness, she will be able to destroy not only the brace of friends but also her former lover's innocent intended. She bids Malheureux farewell, then tells the audience what she foresees:

Now does my heart swell high, for my revenge
 Has birth and form. First, friend sall kill his friend;
 He dat survives, I'll hang; besides, de chaste
 Beatrice I'll vex. Only de ring—
 Dat got, the world sall know the worst of evils:
 Woman corrupted is the worst of devils. (2.2.192-97)

Later, believing she has laid a perfect plan, Franceschina prepares for the satisfaction of revenge with another invocation of devils: "Now sall me be revange. Ten tousant devla! Dere sall be no Got in me but passion, no tought but rage, no mercy but blood, no spirit but divla in me. Dere sall noting tought good for me, but dat is mischievous for others" (4.3.40-43).

Franceschina isn't the only one who is excited by her scheme, or the only one to associate her cunning with a supernatural force of evil. When Freevill finds out about her plans, he is filled with anticipation: "Well, I am great / With expectation to what devilish end / This woman of foul soul will drive her plots" (4.4.92-94). He is well acquainted with Franceschina's *end*, in a different sense of the word. As the play progresses, erotic momentum develops around his continued curiosity about the whore's manoeuvres and his increasing desire to expose her to public view.

Proudly expressing the full extent of her devilishness, Franceschina declares, "If dat me knew a dog dat Freevill love, / Me would puisson him; for know de deepest hell / As a revenging woman's naught so fell" (5.1.13-15). The

idea of a gaping hole that represents the depravity of “the woman corrupted” appears again in Franceschina’s advice to an eager Malheureux about the benefit of curbing one’s sexual appetite:

You sall not gulp down all delights at once.
 Be min trat, dis all-fles-lovers, dis ravenous wenches
 Dat swallow all down whole, vill have all at one bit!...
 No, no, I’ll make you chew your pleasure vit love;
 De more degrees and steps, de more delight,
 De more endeared is de pleasure height. (5.1.25-31)¹⁴⁰

Although these lines describe the lustful impatience of men, the open mouth of Franceschina’s rhetoric repeats the image of female depths, while the gradual mounting of pleasure evokes the responsiveness of the male anatomy. With this lesson, the prostitute exhibits two kinds of cunning at once: the tutelage of a whore who has more experience than her clientele and the trickery of one who protracts desire in order to advance her own evil plot. The body of knowledge that makes up a prostitute’s repertoire overlaps with the devilish scheming of the play’s antagonist. In response to Franceschina’s condescension, Malheureux offers a mock-compliment: “What, you’re a learned wanton, and proceed / By art!” (5.1.32-33). Despite the humour implicit in the phrase “learned wanton” and in the paradoxical figure of the *courtesan*, the balance of intellect tips slightly—for the moment—in the whore’s favour.

Another character who associates Franceschina’s cunning with her sexual conduct is Crispinella, Beatrice’s sister and the play’s other alternative to her naïveté. Believing her plot to be progressing as planned, Franceschina visits the sisters with news of Freevill’s supposed murder, and presents his

¹⁴⁰ M. L. Wine glosses the “wenches” in this speech as “wenchers,” and other editors follow (Peter Davison, Macdonald P. Jackson, and Michael Neill).

ring as evidence of his infidelity: “De yong man dat be slain did not love you, for he still lovit me ten tousant tousant times more dearly” (4.4.50-51). In an attempt to calm her suicidal sister down, Crispinella proposes that the dishonest party is not Freevill but rather the scheming foreigner Franceschina. She links the audacity of sexual availability to the manipulation of other people’s knowledge: “Sure Freevill was not false: / I’ll gage my life that strumpet, out of craft / And some close second end, hath malic’d him” (5.2.12-15). The use of “strumpet” in an effort to dismiss the possibility of sexual transgression seems ironic, but it accords with the moral framework of the play: the other woman is a strumpet not because of her history with Beatrice’s betrothed or any other man, but because of her unflinching use of sexuality in spinning a tale that will serve her own “second end.”

Freevill’s counter-plot involves a feigned death and a disguise, all in the interest of allowing Franceschina to believe that she has been successful. Because he has withheld information that would have saved Malheureux from facing execution, Freevill has to prove, in the final scene of the play, that his greater purpose is worth the trouble. Again the devilishness of his adversary is crucial to his justification. He tells his friend,

[T]o force you from the truer danger,
 I wrought the feigned, suffering this fair devil
 In shape of woman to make good her plot;
 And, knowing that the hook was deeply fast,
 I gave her line at will till, with her own vain strivings,
 See here she’s tired. (5.3.43-48)

The angling metaphor often applied to whores’ deceptions is reversed here, to narrate Freevill’s victory over the wit of his former lover. Franceschina is the exhausted fish, brought ashore by means of the angler’s greater mental

strength. The adjective “fair” that accompanies “devil” in this instance serves as a reminder of Franceschina’s vocation; in particular, it draws attention to the potentially dangerous combination of beauty and intellect that is thought to inhere in all whores. The phrase “vain strivings” gestures toward the relatively unproductive work of the prostitute, in both her usual set of tasks and her pursuit of vengeance. It echoes too the “slight play” and “hasty labours” of the Prologue, where sex work and dramaturgy are brought into parallel. And although the comedy itself ultimately tires of its titular character, it depends absolutely on the topos of prostitution for its intrigue.

As she is carried offstage, Franceschina uses language only to renounce it: “Ick vill not speak. Torture, torture your fill, / For me am worse than hang’d; me ha’ lost my will” (5.3.57-58). These last words include a poignant pun on the whore’s total loss. A figure of independence until the last act, Franceschina now faces severance from both her *Freevill* and her *free will*, words she would pronounce identically. She conceives at the outset a solution to her own jealousy—the murder of her lover—but comes to find at the end of the narrative that she has managed neither to secure this man’s affection nor to have him killed. For a character so totally defined by her ability to manoeuvre through adverse social conditions, the defeat of her plot is the defeat of her personhood. Worse than the jealous disposition and bad accent with which she is cursed at the play’s opening is the sentence of irrelevance levelled on the Dutch courtesan at the end of a story that was never really hers.



In his pamphlet *A Common Whore*, the poet John Taylor writes, “Experience shewes that *Bookes* much knowledge brings, / And by experience *Whores* know

many Things" (B7v). Both the verb "to know" and the noun "things" are metaphorical here; the poet means to say that whores become intimately familiar with other people's private parts through their work. Taylor mocks his subject with a barely veiled reference to the kind of knowledge that is particular to prostitutes. In the drama of the period, however, the *savoir faire* exhibited by whore characters isn't limited to the discipline of sexual service. Rather, the whore is a figure for knowledge itself, and the intellectual dynamism of characters engaged in sex work is a mechanism of dramatic invention. These other literary uses of prostitutes are just as reductive as Taylor's bawdy puns, but they reflect the simultaneous anxiety and excitement that the very idea of *whore* could inspire in a playwright. The poets of the early modern stage were keen indeed to demonstrate their own cunning through the words and actions of published persons.

Conclusion

Suggesting a new approach to the matter of sexual prohibition in *Measure for Measure*, Jonathan Dollimore expresses frustration with readings of the play which take it for granted “that sexual transgression in *Measure for Measure*—and in the world—represents a real force of social disorder intrinsic to human nature and that that play at least is about how this force is—must be—restrained” (41). Dollimore regards the play’s “demonising of sexuality” as “a relegitimation of authority” (43), a politically urgent confirmation of control in a fictional world where corruption at the social apex can be displaced to the base:

Of course there were real social problems and “naturally” the deprived were at the centre of them. Moreover, if we recall that there *were* riots, that fornication *did* produce charity dependent bastards, that drunkenness *did* lead to fecklessness, it becomes apparent that, in their own terms there were also real grounds for anxiety on the part of those who administered deprivation. At the same time we can read in that anxiety—in its very surplus, its imaginative intensity, its punitive ingenuity—an ideological displacement (and hence misrecognition) of much deeper fears of the uncontrollable, of being out of control, themselves corresponding to more fundamental social problems. (48-49)

A straightforward correspondence between metaphors for prostitution and particular anxieties about social control would be impossible to trace without ignoring the heteroglot potential of the utterances that constitute early modern drama. Dollimore is right to have us look for “ideological

displacement” where we might otherwise have seen patriarchal complacency, but anxiety, in all its imaginative productivity, is only one of the many forces that could inspire representations of illicit sexuality.

The utterances of dramatized whores are too complex to be dismissed as stock responses to assigned social roles. When the resourceful Frank Gullman declares that any woman “may watch advantage to make the best of her pleasure” (1.1.134-35), she issues not only a warning but a promise. As they observed such characters taking liberties onstage, early modern women may well have “watched advantage” for sexual, social, and economic opportunities of their own. Depending on their disposition and the shape of their daily lives, they may also have seen in the whores of popular comedy a positive reflection of themselves. As Jean Howard suggests, “Citizens’ wives who went to [the] theatre might, at one extreme, be invited by its fictions to take up positions of chastity, silence, and obedience, but at another extreme by its commercial practices they were positioned as consumers, critics, spectators, and spectacles” (“Crossdressing” 440).

In her study of bawdy wordplay, Mary Bly identifies a gap in accounts of audience response that exclude “erotic minorities”: “[G]iven the large amount of evidence we have pointing to the presence of prostitutes in theatrical audiences, virtually no discussion of audience reaction considers their possible response to the ever-present jests about punks, drabs, and whores” (19).¹⁴¹ Bly is concerned to show that “disrespectful jests” (19) would

¹⁴¹ Using the kind of language that Bly identifies as belittling, Andrew Gurr considers both the fact of women’s presence in the early modern theatrical audience and the fictions that accrued to such spectators:

References to the adulterous intentions of playgoing housewives faded with the quietening of the puritan protests by 1600, but the assumption that female playgoers were motivated by sex, whether for pleasure or money, remained a male prejudice throughout the period. There may well have been fewer professional whores looking for custom than there were ‘trulls’ or ‘doxies’ accompanying their menfolk

have been heard by the members of the audience to whom they referred, even if they're too obscure to be heard by us. The readings above aim to reveal further potential in the language of derision—not just the violent muscle of figurative speech, or its “punitive ingenuity,” but its dynamic embodiment of possibility. Readers too must “watch advantage” for the emergence of alternatives.

In one sense mine is precisely a study of genre, of the range of responses that playwrights invite from audiences by employing traditionally comic material. Although there are very few tragic whores in early modern drama, generalizations about the whore as a comic type must be qualified with readings that transcend generic bounds. Prostitution is often identifiably or even paradigmatically comic, but in a peculiar way. The Bakhtinian concept of “reduced laughter,” introduced so eloquently to Shakespeare studies by James Siemon, might offer an adequately subtle frame of reference for the reading of plays that seem to derive moral prescriptions from the fictionalized lives of whores:

Reduced laughter is a more mediated, hesitant, or even silenced form that Bakhtin found permeating a literary line that runs from Menippean satire, through Rabelais, to Dostoevsky, and expressing ambivalence and resistance rather than an outright rejection of social and cultural restraints. (211)

for the pleasure of seeing a play. They clearly did not make so much of their presence that they deterred more respectable playgoers. (76)

Gurr's research is illuminating, but his picture of the Shakespearean theatre does not allow for the plural motivations of audience members, who may well have found sex, pleasure, money, and much more at the playhouse. His findings presuppose not only that “trulls” and “doxies” constituted identifiable social groups, but also that such groups would have repelled other playgoers. In this, Gurr seems to rely too heavily on modern conceptions of sexual transgression and so-called respectability.

Siemon's purpose is, put simply, to complicate our reading of Shakespeare by complicating our reading of other things. For example, he finds in contemporary ballads plenty of ingredients for "the mixings of tone and genre" that characterize Shakespeare's *Richard II*, a play in which "serious implications follow from the intertwining and mutual qualification of pathetic and comic effects" (223).

By bringing literary sensitivity to his analysis of "The Beggar and the King" (the ballad of King Cophetua), Siemon argues for the value of close reading across genres:

If this interpretation threatens to overread the contrary pulls within the ballad, treating the popular text as more complex and self-contradictory than its form and its conjectured audience would seem to warrant, then we might consider the class-hegemonic assumptions that underlie the assessment of ballads and their consumers as inherently simple. (230-31)

He goes on to introduce the possibility that the moral prescriptions attached to ballads, rather than their transgressive subject matter, may have been the primary source of delight for members of an early audience: "What if status or gender domination were the real appeal to portions of the audience, providing imaginary gratifications (or degradations) for members of a social order exhibiting polarization in both these fields of power?" (231). A popular appetite for the reiteration of moral codes might seem more likely to us if we were to read our own cultural products with the same scrutiny Siemon applies to the story of King Cophetua.

The discourses on drama that constitute this study are as dependent on a broader program of reading as Siemon's book about *Richard II* is, and for much the same reason. Even where metaphors verge on transparency, their

deployment in popular texts (plays included) is not straightforward. In every case, recitation of standard associations can signal a confirmation of existing power structures, an appropriation of oppressive language, or both.

Attendance to a wide range of utterances reveals deeply entrenched patterns, but it also grants us access to further semantic possibilities in the analysis of conventional figures. Moreover, a broadly applied practice of close reading exposes fissures in the very notion of convention.

In the context of a critical narrative about the representation of the sex trade in early modern England, ballads can provide a particularly good source of evidence for the rhyming potential of *whore*. The function of rhyme in the production of metaphorical meaning is underexamined—a feature of utterance found in such a wide range of genres claims a space in the study of early modern metaphor. If I have sometimes argued that metaphors work in the service of existing hierarchies by processes that are either intentional or ideologically automatic, it is necessary also to recognize that rhyme tells its own story. It is at once semantically arbitrary and conspicuously deliberate. In generating tight associations between terms, rhyme seems conclusive, and yet its semantic operations are not fully open to view. The figure of a door, widely deployed for its rhyme with *whore*, might be the best available metaphor for the nature of rhyme itself.

Rhyme creates a juncture at which generic commitments are simultaneously epitomized and unsettled. Read alongside *The Second Part of The Honest Whore*, the ludic rhymes of the ballad *A Caveat or Warning For all sortes of Men both young and olde, to avoid the Company of lewd and wicked Woemen* (c. 1620) might sound like more than mere phonic coincidences:

You young men that in London live,
Take heed by this my fall:

For if you still will follow whores,
 they will devour you all:
 Your quoine, your states, your health and friends,
 Then turn you out of door:
 O Young men all by this my fall,
 take heed trust not a whore.

The door of *A Caveat*, controlled by the false and ruinous whore, is like and unlike that of the honest but ruined Bellafront of Dekker's play. The balladeer sings of having been shut out, while Bellafront's dissolute husband threatens to undo her reformation with the announcement that he'll "make [her] keepe a doore" (3.2.147). These opposite movements of the door—from open to closed and from closed to open—serve equally to define the woman on the threshold. Both speakers are eager to position the woman in a stance that will render her easily recognizable to an audience. Matteo echoes the injunction of the ballad in reverse, reducing the laughter of the cautionary tale so as to accommodate his cruel spousal prerogative.

Conversely, Siemon would have us notice that the ballad's own use of conventional figures is similarly complex: the singer is on *this side* of the whore's door, thrown into a field of discourse where rhyme is a generic and economic necessity. The repetition of his caveat—"take heed trust not a whore"—is self-mocking in its tacit resignation to the reputed inevitability of men's acquiescence. The more accurate summation of the ballad's advice is "trust not thyself," but that phrase is aesthetically inappropriate, with its short final vowel, hard terminal fricative, and relative dearth of rhymes. In any case, such hindrances to pleasant versification are beside the point—the poet's choice of caveat makes sense not only because of rhyme, but because of another kind of accord: the repeatedly voiced association between whoredom

and suffering which is embedded in the “*Woemen*” of the ballad’s extended title. The many ever-available rhymes for *whore* are both poetically convenient and ideologically conventional in a culture where women’s sexual transgression is so often sounded as the cause of men’s dissipation. A warning in verse to those who “still will follow whores” is surely a mechanism of displacement, a convention of metaphorical thought. But like all texts, it’s also an open door.

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