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# WOMEN WHO DON'T FIT IN: THE UNMARRIED WOMAN IN SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

by  
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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

"Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife"  
-- The Duke in *Measure for Measure* (V. i. 178-179). (1)

The world of Shakespearean comedy revolves around, or is closely tied to, marriage. Often enough, various obstacles and turns of plot may impede but ultimately only delay the marriages, promises of marriage, dances, or reunions which conclude the typical comedy or romantic comedy. These festivities harmonize the tensions between men and women, and symbolize birth--or rebirth--and continuity. Toward this end, the desires of fathers are circumvented frequently, and "disruptive" or "unruly" daughters are brought under the control of husbands. In the process, women become defined according to their position in the maid/widow/wife paradigm of marriage evident in the lines quoted above (2). This definition comes from the official voice of authority, the Duke, which denies any other category of women or basis of definition.

In the margins of many of these plays, however, exist various "outlaw" female figures--witches, nuns, and prostitutes--who flout this definition and forge new and different categories. But even widows, with their greater measure of freedom and liberty, are

viewed in these plays as being somehow at odds with the desired end, and demands, of marriage for women. The Duke's pronouncement above is made upon being confronted by Mariana, a woman who apparently defies these categories. Lucio, a libertine of great disrepute, responds to the Duke's statement by showing that indeed, other categories do exist: "My lord, she may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife" (V.i.180-181).

Throughout the comedies in which a tension between this official definition of woman and the reality of "outlaw" female figures prevails, efforts are constantly made either to tame or to control these rebels. Young, nubile women who in some form resist marriage are threatened with the alternative of life in the convent, an alternative that denies them sexual expression or identity. This threat, however, is averted ultimately by marriage. The convent is portrayed as acceptable space only when it functions as a temporary refuge for wives torn from their families and from their place in society. Other categories of women are shown to be, or are brought, under the control of the state or society. In a fundamentally Shakespearean manner, the quest to define and control women and to dictate the forms of organizing sexual activity forces attention to the related issues of language and sexual identity. Female subjectivity, affirmed by the power to use language effectively (3), is appropriated by husbands or the state in its exercise of control over women.

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## **SECTION I**

### **WOMEN OF THE SPIRIT: THE NUNS AND WITCHES OF SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY**

#### **1**

Careful examination of *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest* makes apparent the subtle connections which link the two categories of nun and witch: Shakespearean witches and nuns raise the intimately related issues of sexual identity and the ability to use and manipulate language. The cloistering of the nun, within the convent and her habit, constitutes a denial or suppression of her sexual being and finds further expression in constraints placed on the freedom to use language.

Yet comedy brings the nun out of the convent, or keeps prospective novices from entering it, and elicits from them public speech. This public speech affirms the subjectivity which the convent is supposed to cloister, a subjectivity which is then appropriated by either a husband or the state. On the other hand, comedy permits to witches expression of the physical and even the physically gross, (often incorporating elements of androgyny), which is connected to the power to use and manipulate

language. The witches of comedy, unlike the witches of tragedy, are mute figures already or about to fall under societal control.

Emilia in *The Comedy of Errors*, an early comedy, enters the convent under a peculiar set of circumstances. She was separated from her family--a husband and twin sons--during a storm at sea and taken to a foreign country. For a woman torn from her husband but not widowed and with no real place in a new society, the convent appropriately offers refuge, and providing her with a secure and esteemed place in society. This is evident when Syracusan Antipholus runs into the convent seeking shelter from the authorities. Now the abbess, Emilia refuses to turn him over until he is restored to his proper health:

Be patient, for I will not let him stir  
Till I have us'd the approved means I have  
To make of him a formal man again.  
It is a branch and parcel of mine oath,  
A charitable duty of my order...(V.i.102-107).

Emilia plays the traditional role of nun through her prayers, healing, and charitable work. She stands in sharp contrast to Pinch, the man brought to exorcise Antipholus of Ephesus, but who, as his name implies, simply exacerbates the situation (VI.vi). Instead of confining, the priory shelters Emilia, and other characters too, as Syracusan Dromio acknowledges: "Run master, run, for God's sake take a house;/This is some priory; in or we are spoil'd" (V.i.35-36). This indicates a degree of permeability between the world of the convent and the outer world. The move to the convent clears the confusion, the violence, and the air of witchcraft which suffuse the play until Emilia's entrance, making it a source of healing not only on the individual, but on the collective level as well.

The Duke affirms Emilia's place and function in answering Adriana's complaint against her for not giving up Antipholus: "She is a virtuous and reverend lady,/It cannot be that she hath done thee wrong" (V.i.134-135). It also invests in her a certain measure of authority. Her exchange with Adriana in Act V Scene i demonstrates this well: "No, not a creature enters my house," (92) and later, "Be quiet and depart, thou shalt not have him," (112). The image of the convent here differs significantly from that found in other plays. Emilia's decision to become a nun implies a life of celibacy--a suppression or containment of her sexual self. Yet the fact of a missing family affirms her sexual identity. By the time she appears in the play, suppression or containment are unnecessary because of her age--she is no longer a young, marriageable woman.

*The Comedy of Errors* culminates in Emilia's leaving the convent, making her speak out publicly. First, she comes out because of the chaos and clamour out in the street, and the intrusion of her "house," and later at the command of the Duke. From the moment of her late entry to the conclusion of the play, her voice is a commanding one. Her exchange with Adriana makes evident her ability to manipulate language and so presents Adriana's chiding of, and complaint against her husband as unbearable nagging:

The venom clamours of a jealous woman  
Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.  
It seems his sleeps were hinder'd by thy railing,  
And thereof comes it that his head is light.  
Thou say'st his meat was sauc'd with thy upbraidings;  
Unquiet meals make ill digestions;  
Thereof the raging fire of fever bred,  
And what's a fever but a fit of madness? (V.i.69-75)

The contrast between Emilia's speech and her vision of a married woman's use of language is clear. Adriana's speech ought not be confrontational or accusatory, but submissive and passive, even deferential. Emilia, by contrast, has the power to upbraid, and defy, as demonstrated in her refusal to release Antipholus.

Emilia plays with the subtleties and nuances of language to forge a coherent, though not necessarily logically sound, set of causal relationships and associations. Her reasoning here resembles the specious reasoning of the clown or fool, and is clearly for comic effect. It is not, however, the deliberate, self-serving lie of the prostitute, who fabricates a story of forced entry and theft for her own personal economic gain. It can be compared to Syracusan Dromio's conflation of the figures of the witch and the prostitute when the courtesan confronts Syracusan Antipholus, demanding her jewel of him:

Nay, she is worse, she is the devil's dam; and here she comes in the habit of a light wench, and thereof comes that the wenches say "God damn me", that's as much as to say, "God make me a light wench". It is written, they appear to men like angels of light; light is an effect of fire, and fire will burn; ergo, light wenches will burn; come not near her. (IV. iii.49-55)

But the world of the convent does become problematic for the world of marriage. While it provides a place of refuge for Emilia until the time that she could be reunited with her husband, it apparently keeps Antipholus away from Adriana and denies her her right as a wife to tend to her husband. Adriana's remark demonstrates this: "I will not hence and leave my husband here:/And ill it doth beseem your holiness/To separate the husband and the wife" (V.i. 109-111). By insisting that Syracusan Antipholus remain with her, her actions seem to produce the same effect as those of the courtesan--keeping a husband away from his wife. This is undercut by the simple fact that Syracusan Antipholus is **not** Adriana's husband. With true dramatic irony, however, the characters are unaware of this, which simply heightens the confusion. Only upon the intervention of the state, in the person of the Duke who orders that Antipholus be brought forth, can the situation be remedied.

In *The Comedy of Errors* the convent acts as a refuge but does not confine or place constraints upon the woman's ability to use language. Emilia is brought out of the convent and made to speak publicly. This is necessary, because where before at the start of the play she existed only in the language of Egeon's tale, her speaking out brings her to life, making her a real presence in the world, and leads to her reunion with her husband.

A different vision of the convent and the life of a nun emerges in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of confinement, suppression of female sexuality, and barrenness. Egeus complains to the Duke Theseus of his daughter's unwillingness to obey him in his choice of husband for her, and demands the appropriate execution of Athenian law--her death. That Athenian law incorporates the personal-familial relations and marriage--indicates a blurring of the public and private realms which is an exclusively male prerogative. Hermia's challenge to her father, that she loves and desires to marry another, makes clear that the point of contention is not marriage per se, but the locus of authority and the power to choose. Egeus' argument, that "As she is mine, I may dispose of her," (I.i.42), and echoed in Theseus' "To you your father should be as a god" (I.i.47) is pitted against Hermia's "My soul consents not to give sovereignty" (I.i.82).

Theseus, instead of enforcing "the ancient privilege of Athens," forced marriage or death, provides another option, life as a nun:

Either to die the death, or to abjure  
For ever the society of men.  
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,  
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,  
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,  
You can endure the livery of a nun,  
For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,  
To live a barren sister all your life,  
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon. (I.i.65-73)

This critical, self-contained passage reveals clearly the play's attitude toward the convent and life as a nun. "Society" stands in direct opposition to the "cloister," depicted as a mew, which according to the O.E.D. is "a cage for hawks, esp. while moulting." "Fair" becomes translated into "shady," the darkness of the cloister, and echoes in the image of night, and the moon's coldness. Moulting, evoked by "mew'd," the loss of freedom, but also of time and youth, finds further expression in the word "barren," which connects to the "cold fruitless moon," and contrasting sharply with "desires," "youth," and "blood." Furthermore, the "livery of a nun" is something to be "endured," and becomes a cloister on the individual level, acting to confine and mew.

Crucial to the whole question of authority and choice is Hermia's insistence on speaking her mind. It is the reason why she faces possible life in a convent. In response to Hermia's desire to marry Lysander, Theseus puts it bluntly: "In himself he is;/But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,/The other must be held the worthier" (I.i.52-55). Lysander does not have the support, the voice, the vote of Egeus, because the father/daughter relationship present is one of ownership and disposability, Egeus' voice must necessarily be Hermia's as well, and with no contradiction. But Hermia seeks to escape her object status, and in challenging her father, she attempts to claim subjectivity for herself; hence, her response to Theseus:

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,  
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up  
Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke  
My soul consents not to give sovereignty. (I.i.79-82).

Hermia carves out a space for herself in the public realm by couching her words in the imagery of the political, of sovereignty usurped by a tyrannous lord. This blurs the distinction between the personal and public realms and gives her a stake in both. But she goes beyond the temporal world of politics to the spiritual, insisting that she cannot consent because her *soul* does not. This counters Theseus' statement that her father should be as a god to her and effectively checks Theseus, a temporal ruler, and her father, depicted as a lord. The word "patent" flouts Egeus' claim of possession of her and establishes her own subjectivity. Should she choose to live as a nun, the ability to speak and use language which she so brilliantly displays in this scene would be reduced to "chanting faint hymns."

This convent does not shelter as it did in *The Comedy of Errors*, but resembles a prison or a cage. It immures female sexuality, and in so doing, ironically affirms the existence of female sexuality. The punishment rests in denying female sexual expression in marriage and motherhood, allowing it to waste away over time, leading to barrenness. This wasting, or loss finds further expression in the references to Pyramus and Thisbe, which throughout the play serves to represent the fruitless end possible for the lovers, but especially for Hermia.

A preference for marriage and continuity resounds in Theseus lines to Hermia, "But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd/Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,/Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness" (I.i.76-78). "Blessedness" evokes the spiritual, but the weight of the passage portrays celibacy as atrophy, as "withering," as wasted potential; indeed, virginity is the thorn itself! This barrenness--operating against the theme of continuity central to Shakespearean comedy--echoes in the presumed childlessness of the fairy queen Titania, contrasting sharply with her desperate and confused maternal desires. Denying a woman marriage and motherhood becomes a punishment fitter than death for an unruly daughter who defies patriarchal authority.

Embedded in the language of the text, though not an actual character in the work, is the figure of the imperial votress, a nun. Oberon relates her stow:

Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took  
At a fair vestal, throned by the west,  
And Ios'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow  
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.  
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;  
And the imperial votress passed on  
In maiden meditation, fancy-free,  
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:

It fell upon a little western flower,  
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound (11.i.157-167)

The imagery here is very bold and suggestive: Cupid's "love-shaft," obviously phallic, and clearly meant to be associated with lust as evoked by the word "fiery" and the image of youthful abandon, has as its target the imperial votress, sworn to chastity and virginity. Yet the "chaste beams of the watery moon" quench the fiery lust of Cupid's arrow and protect the votress from being pierced. The conjunction "and" (63) makes clear that the moon's beams were meant to intercept the arrow. Consequently, the arrow missed and struck instead a flower. This amounts to the deflowering of a virginal, vaginal flower--as suggested by the purple of the "love wound" which replaces the flower's original virginal white colour (4) --in a situation free of lust, and may symbolize the chastity of intercourse within marriage.

Both the moon--the chaste Diana--and the imperial votress share complicity in this deflowering. Moreover, the juice of this flower acts as an agent to promote love and marriage as Oberon, the fairy king, relates to Puck: "The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid, / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees" (11.i.170-172). This is the juice used on the lovers and enables the pairing of Hermia with Lysander, and Helena with Demetrius. It is also the juice used on "proud Titania" to render her eventually docile and obedient to her husband. However, only Oberon and Puck know the secret of this flower's juice and its effects. And they are the ones who exercise control over its use. This is another appropriation by the male power structure of a female figure or symbol, making it an instrument for furthering male control through marriage.

Thus, the very moon, which would be the object of devotion should Hermia become a nun, also helps to facilitate love and marriage. The inference seems to be that chastity is best served not through celibacy and life as a nun, but through marriage and that Theseus' pronouncement of life as a nun, which requires celibacy, runs counter to the workings of the natural world. To remedy the situation, the natural world intervenes, through the fairies, to prevent this wasting from occurring. Chastity in marriage stands in contrast to the lust of Cupid's arrow, and the lust of rape which causes Diana and the flowers to cry: "The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye, / And when she weeps, weeps every little flower, / Lamenting some enforced chastity" (III.i. 191-194).

The votress remains a virgin in the text, however, and this may be because the whole episode is an allusion to Queen Elizabeth I, the virgin queen, a non-married woman. Yet the work portrays one married queen, the fairy queen Titania, and another who is married by the play's close, the Amazon queen Hippolyta. Both are unruly female figures of power who are effectively brought under male control (5). And both figures, the fairy queen and the Amazon queen--are elements in the symbolic world surrounding Elizabeth. Bringing them under male control in marriage may thus constitute a subtle criticism of Elizabeth's status as a unmarried woman which may undermine the "compliment" paid to her in the allusion to the chastity of the imperial votress.



Thus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* prevents Hermia, a young marriageable woman who clearly wants marriage, from becoming a nun. Within the text, the moon and another votress help to keep Hermia from the convent. The image of the convent is one of confinement, silence, withering, and waste, a vision very different from that of *The Comedy of Errors*. Keeping Hermia from a life of "single blessedness" resembles Emilia's being brought out of the convent to rejoin family and married life. *Measure for Measure* uses the image of the convent as a place of both confinement and restraint--explicitly of speech, but also as a refuge. It develops further the theme present in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of the nun, or one who seeks out a life of austerity and constraint, aiding or facilitating the marriage of other women.

The opening act of *Measure for Measure* ushers us into a world of extreme sexual behaviour: the unbridled liberty of the prostitute, her clients, bawd, and brothel, and extreme restraint in the persons of Angelo and Isabella. In trying to combat the license of illicit sexuality, Angelo employs harsh rigidity. Yet this world of extremes imperils the world of marriage--Mrs. Elbow is mistaken for a prostitute by Froth and is publicly humiliated, the marriage of Claudio and Juliet is deemed void because they failed to publish the banns, and Claudio faces death for what becomes seen as fornication. From this world of sexual license, Isabella seeks out the convent.

From her first words, Isabella makes clear that she craves restraint:

Isab. And have you nuns no farther privileges?

Nun. Are not these large enough?

Isab. Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more, But rather wishing a more strict restraint...(I.iv.1-4)

This contrasts sharply with Mistress Overdone--who was married nine times and "Overdone by the last" (11.i.199). While she has just obtained for herself another bawd or procurer, Pompey, to hawk her wares in the world of the flesh, Isabella, as a nun, escapes the world of the flesh through the vow of celibacy required, and is protected from it by the cloister. Even the fantastic Lucio is aware of this, as his lines reveal: "I hold you as a think enskied and sainted/By your renouncement, an immortal spirit" (I.iv.34-35).

Another form of restraint imposed by the order of nuns concerns speech as Francisca, a nun at the convent indicates:

When you have vow'd, you must not speak with men

But in the presence of the prioress;

Then, if you speak, you must not show your face;

Or if you show your face, you must not speak. (I.iv.10-13)

The reasoning behind this command is an apparent unwillingness to connect speech and women, even though these are women vowed to celibacy and a life of chastity and renunciation. It denies a woman both subjectivity and objectivity: She is deprived of her voice and the power to speak which takes away her subjectivity, but the fact of her habit

shields her from the male view. The command parallels the muting of women in the convent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but here, the constraints placed on speech are explicit. These lines also show that though she is on the verge of doing so, she has not as yet taken her vows--she is still a young marriageable woman. At this point, the affairs of the outer world intrude upon the life of the convent, pulling Isabella out for the purpose of, all things, pleading for the life of her brother.

Isabella's exchanges with Angelo provide further possible insights into why she seeks the restraint of the convent. She is very hesitant to speak at first, and must be strongly and consistently encouraged to do so by Lucio. When she does start to speak, however, her speech is very revealing: "There is a vice that I do abhor,/And most desire should meet the blow of justice" (11.ii.29-30), and further, "I am/At war 'twixt will and will not" (11.ii.32-33). "Whore" echoes in the word "abhor." and the imagery of "blow of justice" is clearly sexual; furthermore, "will" is also synonymous with sexual desire. Another instance in the same scene occurs in her description of Angelo's misuse of his power: "Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt/Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,/Than the soft myrtle" (116-118).

She inadvertently uses language charged with sexual imagery. While she has the power to speak eloquently and movingly, as evident in her beautiful speeches on the nature of authority and justice as opposed to mercy, she lacks complete control over her language. It is possible that the world of vice and sexual liberty so dominates that it infects even her speech. But possibly, her lack of control indicates a desire to repress herself sexually, a desire achieved through life as a nun. In Isabella's view of the convent, the two images of the convent as a place of refuge and a place of extreme confinement and restraint are merged--for her, the convent provides refuge through restraint.

In her second interview with Angelo, he hurls the question of sexuality at her directly by saying that she must submit to him sexually in order to save her brother's life. Her response is telling:

That is, were I under the terms of death,  
Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,  
And strip myself to death as to a bed  
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield  
My body up to shame. (11.iv. 100-104)

On one level, she says that she would rather suffer torture and death than shame herself. Yet in her mind, sex and punishment are inextricably bound, and death takes the form of consummation--sexual and literal. The intensity of these lines suggests that she participates inadvertently, through language, in sexual experience. So wary is she of sex and the physical that when she informs Claudio of Angelo's conditions, and he presses her to comply, she calls it incest: "Is't not a kind of incest, to take life/From thine own sister's shame?" (111.i.138-139).

In a true point of irony, Claudio acknowledges her power of speech:

For in her youth  
There is a prone and speechless dialect  
Such as move men; beside, she hath a prosperous art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade. (I.ii.172-176)

The words "prone," "move," and "play" are sexual *double entendres*. Possibly, Claudio subconsciously knows that his sister will be able to stir Angelo's physical desires. Thus, in his entreating her to plead, he prostitutes her on some level. And she no doubt succeeds in moving Angelo, though not in the way she desires, but physically. He complains that where before he could never be stirred by "the strumpet," Isabella "subdues" him. Angelo's use of the verb "subdue" makes Isabella appear the aggressor who renders him passive and powerless to resist-male language shifts the burden of responsibility onto an innocent and unsuspecting woman (6). The nature of his desire is quite peculiar. He asks himself why he is attracted to her: "Dost thou desire her foully for those things/That make her good?" (11.ii.174-175), and further, "What, do I love her, /That I desire to hear her speak again?/And feast upon her eyes?" (11.ii.177-179). His "love" for her is anti-Platonic, the reverse of that described by Pietro Bembo in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (7): Her goodness, chastity, and intellect lead him to hunger after her body.

Angelo's reasoning of his desire for her draws attention to the role of the nun's habit. Instead of protecting Isabella by concealing her sexuality, it simply fires his lust and functions like the masks worn by fashionable ladies of the time: "...as these black masks/Proclaim an enciel'd beauty ten times louder/Than beauty could, display'd" (11.iv.79-81). The habit increases his desire and makes him all the more conscious of her sexual self. Instead of suppressing, or confining female sexual identity, it exposes Isabella. The height of irony is then that in commanding her to "Be that you are.../By putting on the destin'd livery" (11.iv. 133-137), Angelo uses the term "destin'd livery" to mean sexual experience. This livery would cover the beauty which the habit now exposes.

To escape the fate she so dreads, Isabella agrees to the plan hatched by the Duke, who, disguised as a friar, overhears her conversation with Claudio at the prison. According to this plan, known as the "bed-trick," Isabella agrees to submit sexually to Angelo at a prescribed location and hour, and for a specific period of time. However, another woman, Mariana, will substitute for Isabella in the actual act. Mariana was betrothed to Angelo, but her portion was lost, the marriage never consummated and she was abandoned. Through Mariana's playing the part of the substitute, her marriage to Angelo would be consummated and enforceable. By accepting the plan, Isabella helps to promote a marriage. Her role is similar to, but far more involved than, the actions of the imperial votress of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Within the play, however, her actions resemble those of Pompey, Mistress Overdone's bawd. Measure for Measure prevents her from joining an order, forces her out of the convent, compels her to speak, and here involves her, at least indirectly, in sexual activity.

A further requirement of the plan involves Isabella's speaking out publicly and complaining to the Duke upon his return to Vienna of Angelo's tyranny and vice. Whereas she last petitioned power behind closed doors, now she must speak out before a large, public audience, again contradicting the convent's provision against speaking out and revealing oneself simultaneously. For speaking out, however, the Duke orders her taken to prison. The significance of this act cannot be underestimated. Mistress Overdone was taken away to prison where Pompey the bawd now serves by aiding the hangman Abhorson. Furthermore, Pompey describes the prison as resembling the brothel:

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. (VI.iii.1-4)

The Duke orders her imprisonment in a de facto brothel--a far cry from Isabella's seeking out the convent at the start of the play. Though her assisting in the marriage of Mariana and Angelo was wholesome, some parallel could be drawn between her actions and the bawd's; here the play places her directly in the realm of illicit sexuality. It also demonstrates the extent to which Isabella's power of speech is seriously undermined by the Duke: he orchestrates the entire scenario, and his speech and actions significantly dictate Isabella's fate. Her power to use language affirms itself, however, in her plea to have Angelo spared death.

She does eventually leave the prison, and goes on to plead for Angelo's life, which she secures. By the close of the play, she manages to save two marriages and raises the possibility of a third: The Duke proposes to her, "...and for your lovely sake/Give me your hand and say you will be mine"(V.i.489-490). This is an echo of Angelo's injunction to her to show herself a woman "By putting on the destin'd livery," (11.iv.137), i.e., proving herself a sexual being. Isabella makes no verbal response to his proposal and this raises some important questions for the text: Is Isabella at this point dressed as a nun? Does she accept the Duke's proposal in some non-verbal way? And more importantly, if she does not, how possible is it for her to reenter the convent after being so involved in the world of sex and sexuality?

The convent in one of Shakespeare's last plays, *Pericles*, functions as a temporary refuge almost as it does in *The Comedy of Errors*, but in *Pericles* betrays the influence of the intervening plays. Thaisa is separated from her husband Pericles during a storm at sea. Believing her to be dead after childbirth, Pericles throws her overboard in a sealed coffin, which washes ashore in Ephesus. She is found and taken to Cermion, a physician, who in effect brings her back to life. Upon discovering her separation from her husband, she declares her intention to live out her remaining days in the convent:

But since King Pericles,  
My wedded lord, I ne'er shall see again,  
A vestal livery will I take me to,  
And never more have joy (III.iv.7-10).

Cermion directs her to Diana's temple where she stays until her reunion with her husband. The description of the convent as a place without joy is directly stated in these lines, and recalls the life of the convent spelt out for Hermia examined above. The convent becomes a tomb-like space for women who are, in effect, dead to family, society, and the rest of the world. Moreover, this "death" is self-imposed, effected by Thaisa's own speech.

After Pericles is reunited with his daughter Marina, Diana herself instructs him to go to her temple at Ephesus to pay her homage:

My temple stands in Ephesus; hie thee thither,  
And do upon mine altar sacrifice,  
There, when my maiden priests are met together,  
[            ] (8) before the people all,  
Reveal how thou at sea didst lose thy wife (V.i.238-242).

Whereas Diana's role in facilitating marriage was indirect in *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, she becomes an actual character in the later work, and orchestrates the reunion of the separated husband and wife. This reunion recalls the reunion of Emilia and Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors* but differs from it significantly: Pericles is directed to the temple at which Thaisa lives; unlike Emilia, she does not leave the world of the convent and speak out in the public realm-the reunion takes place within the temple.

Moreover, it is Pericles' voice, his story, which causes her to speak out, and she does not identify herself, but calls out to Pericles: "Voice and favour! /You are, you are--O royal Pericles!" (V. iii.13-14). And upon identifying him, she faints-another "death"--without regaining her subjectivity and identity as Pericles' response makes clear: "What means the nun? she dies, help, gentlemen? (15). Cermion, instead, establishes who she really is by name: "Look, Thaisa is/Recovered" (27). Upon recovering, she persists in establishing Pericles' identity: "O, my lord./Are you not Pericles? Like him you spake,/Like him you are" (31-33). Only upon Pericles' calling her by name, is she willing to name herself:

Per. The voice of dead Thaisa!  
Thai. That Thaisa am I, supposed dead And drowned (34-36).

Unlike Emilia, Thaisa's identity can be established and conferred only through her husband, and she has no subjectivity independent of him. Comparing this reunion to that of Emilia and Egeon underscores the extent to which this is true. Upon Antipholus' calling out his father's name, and Dromio's comments upon the fact of his bondage, Emilia responds:

Whoever bound him, I will loose his bonds,  
And gain a husband by his liberty.  
Speak old Egeon, if thou be'st the man  
That hadst a wife once cail'd Emilia,  
That bore thee at a burden two fair sons?

O, if thou be'st the same Egeon, speak--  
And speak unto the same Emilia (V.i.339-345).

Emilia gives herself identity, names herself, and allows Egeon to gain his liberty through the fact of her own. She commands him to speak, and his speech simply confirms hers. This is the exact reverse of the reunion in *Pericles*.

In spite of the different images of the convent--a place of refuge, a place of extreme restraint, a place of refuge through restraint, each play examined here prevents women from becoming nuns and involves them in sex and marriage (9). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Measure for Measure* were so explicit in doing this because these women were young and marriageable, and the life of the convent contradicts the theme of continuity. These two plays also attach the issues of female speech and female sexual identity--where the life of the convent demands restraint of both, the action of the play affirms both. But even in the plays in which the convent functions as a refuge, the depiction evolves over time to show an even greater control of female speech. The convent of *Pericles* nullifies Thaisa's ability to speak and her identity, and restores these to her through her husband, whereas Emilia maintains the power to use language and the fact of her subjectivity.

## 2

Shakespeare's depiction of the witch inextricably binds the issues of sexual identity and speech, but in very different ways. Indeed, it would seem as though the rules governing the depiction of the nuns are inverted in the characterization of the witch in that it emphasizes the physical and the physically gross, even including elements of androgyny (10), and portrays her as having powerful control over language. A proper appreciation of the figure of the witch in Shakespearean comedy demands a careful consideration of the witches of *Macbeth*, the work in which the character is most fully developed. The contrast reveals that while the witches of tragedy possess the ability to use and manipulate language to tragic consequences, comic witches are silent figures who are already, or eventually fall, under societal control.

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Banquo's response upon first sight of the Weird Sisters crucially helps to connect the issues of sexual identity and language in the characterization of the witch:

How far is't call'd to Forres?--What are these,  
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,  
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me,  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lips; you should be women,

And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so. (I.iii.39-47)

"Wither'd" indicates not only extreme age, which finds further expression in "choppy finger" and "skinny lips," but deformity to the point of almost ceasing to appear human, as indicated by "th'inhabitants o'th'earth." They are so old and deformed that he cannot ascertain whether they have the power to reason, and in what will later become a point of extreme irony, demands whether they may be questioned, which implies the power to speak. Furthermore, they are bearded, and though this is on one level just another element of witch lore (11), it bestows upon the witches a definite measure of androgyny, as indicated by Banquo's unwillingness to call them women. "Wild" connects them to the natural world, beyond the reaches of society and also to the beginning of the scene, where the first witch relates the incident regarding the chestnuts. The woman's scornful reply to the witch's requesting some chestnuts shows that they are marginalized by the larger society, and they themselves are the members of their own subsociety.

This characterization of the witch echoes of the barrenness and the withering that results from the life of "single blessedness" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Furthermore, the "antic rounds," the fact that their order of speaking is circular, the dances, and the cauldron may be perverse corruptions of the symbolism surrounding female sexuality, procreation, continuity, and domesticity found in comedy, and may represent the barrenness of the witches. However, this play's characterization of the witch differs greatly from the depiction of the nun. Whereas the cloister and the habit conceal female sexual identity and confine its expression without nullifying the fact of its existence, the very sexual identity of the witch is dubious. Witches are not simply withered or barren women, but bearded and androgynous creatures. And this dubious status is not concealed by the habit or cloister, but freely exposed to be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, witches form a female subsociety resembling that of the convent, another subsociety of women intimately involved with language-prayer and the chanting of "faint hymns." The figure of Hecate also links the witches to the nuns. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Diana as the moon is an object of devotion by the nuns and their protectress. But Diana and Hecate are both aspects of the same goddess (12). It is hardly surprising that Hecate connects the nuns and the witches in these two plays which are set in a pre-Christian world. This link suggests that where female speech is not controlled as in the convent, it has the potential to manifest itself disruptively and dangerously in the witch. Hecate's complaint that she was excluded when the witches appeared to Macbeth resembles in parodic fashion the injunction in *Measure for Measure* that the prioress be present when a nun speaks to a man.

The notion of the "masculine woman" having the power of speech echoes within the play in the person of Lady Macbeth. She recognizes that Macbeth lacks the resolve to murder Duncan, and in describing how she will encourage him, she uses very masculine imagery: "Hie thee hither,/That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,/And chastise with the valour of my tongue" (I.v.25-27). "Valour" clearly evokes images of the battlefield, a distinctly male domain. Later, she becomes more explicit, bidding Duncan to her "battlements"

(I.v.40). Language gives her access to the male world, an access that she does not otherwise have. Her desire to be "unsexed" merits careful consideration. It does not mean that she is rendered a man, but simply an "unnatural" woman, lacking the weakness and tenderness associated with women, but having the resolve and cruelty of a man. "Come to my woman's breasts,/And take my milk for gall" (I.v.47-48) shows that gall replaces milk, but her basic function to nurture, albeit with gall, remains intact. This separates her from becoming the androgynous witch figure.

The echo of the witch in Lady Macbeth described above is actually part of the larger way in which the witches are connected through language to the Macbeths and the course of the play. In Macbeth's first encounter with the witches, he is taken aback when addressed as Glamis, Cawdor, and King, successively, as Banquo makes clear: "Good Sir, why do you start, and seem to fear/Things that do seem so fair?" This may suggest that they verbalize the thoughts already existing in Macbeth's mind, but in doing so, make them of a far more active nature, and create the chain of events which leads to their fulfillment. But even before this, Macbeth's "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I.iii.38) recalls the witches' "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.11).

Similarly, the second Witch's "Killing swine" (I.iii.2) echoes later in Lady Macbeth's description of Duncan's guards as caught up in "swinish sleep" (I.vii.68), guards who, like the swine before, are soon to be killed. Significantly, when Hecate chides the witches for not having her present when they first appeared to Macbeth, she employs distinctly commercial imagery: "How did you dare /To **trade** and **traffic** with Macbeth" (111.v.3-4) [emphasis mine]. This commercial imagery echoes constantly in the speech of the victors at the close of the play, Act V, Scene ix: "So great a day as this is **cheaply bought**," (3); "Your son, my Lord, has**paid** a soldier's **death**," (5); "He's **worth** more **sorrow**, /And that I'll **spend** for him," (10-11); "He's **worth** no more;/They say he parted well and **paid** his score" (17-18); and "We shall not **spend** a large **expense** of time," (26) [emphasis mine]. The language of the witches anticipates and actuates new set of commercial relations which replace the old feudal ones by the close of the play. Furthermore, the imprecision implicit in the witches' use of language reverberates in the attempt of the new order to ascertain the value of its dead soldiers.

More than these examples, however, the witches are connected to the action of the play through their power to equivocate (13). "When the battle's lost and won" (I.i.4) and "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," (I.i.11) first indicate their ability to do so. The three apparitions which they conjure for Macbeth upon his seeking them out are the examples more central to the play. Through the power to manipulate language, they avoid lying, which the Macbeths and even Malcolm (IV. iii) are unable to do, and allow Macbeth to develop a false sense of security. This is important in understanding their role in the tragedy: Through language, they merely provoke the base side of man, which is never silent as indicated by Macbeth's initial response of shock to the witches' declarations of his future. They verbalize for him what he was afraid of admitting to himself, his ambition and will to power. And as one critic astutely indicates, the witches are non-directive: "The Weird Sisters present nouns rather than verbs. They put titles on Macbeth without telling what actions he must carry out to attain those titles. It is Lady Macbeth who supplies the verbs"



(14). Macbeth, as he acknowledges (II.ii), makes the conscious decision to yield "to that suggestion" and this renders the play a truly human tragedy.

*Macbeth* portrays the witch as a physically gross, androgynous creature who has a remarkable power to use and manipulate language. The consequences of this are clearly detrimental. Only here is the witch a true character with a speaking role. In the two comedies in which witches figure, they are not real characters, but are found in the language of other characters. Verbal characterizations nevertheless pick up on the themes of androgyny, the physically gross, and the power of language. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was written earlier than *Macbeth*, capitalizes on the theme of androgyny for full comic effect, but still connects the witch to the issue of speech. The later play *The Tempest* keeps the witch embedded within the language of other characters, but maintains the theme of the physically gross.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page disguise Falstaff as the witch of Brainford, Mother Prat, a fat, old woman. Ford's response to learning that the "witch" is present in his house reminds us how standard are the attributes of witches described in *Macbeth*. He describes her as a hag, one forbidden to enter his house, a fortune-teller, one having access to knowledge that is beyond the realm of the ordinary: "She works by charms, by spells, by/th' figure, and such daubery as this is, beyond our/element; we know nothing" (IV. ii.162-164). She clearly resembles the Weird Sisters. Having Falstaff, a man, play the witch compounds the androgynous element. Evans spots his beard, comments upon it: "I like not when a 'oman has a great peard [beard]./I spy a great peard under his muffler" (IV. ii.80-81).

Ford's injunction that Prat is forbidden to enter his house is aimed at keeping her away from his wife. It recalls Ford's critical attitude towards the friendship of the wives:

Ford. Ay, and as idle as she may hang together, for want of company. I think, if your husbands were dead, you two would marry.  
Mrs. Page. Be sure of that--two other husbands. (111.i.11-14)

This distrust of female society recurs throughout the play, manifest in the appearing of a solitary witch. It occasions the beating which Falstaff receives before he exits the house, and echoes in Ford's searching through the clothes in the buck-basket, clearly identified as belonging to the female sphere of the house. The beating, however, reveals the extent to which the society exerts control over the witch--while the men label Prat a witch and the wives insist that she is not, male monopoly of the means and instruments violence, expressed here as brute force, enforces the male power to define women. It also serves to punish Falstaff. Where before he was dumped into the ditch--a mock baptism meant to purify the soul, he here is beaten--punishment of the flesh. This punishment is on the individual level, within the privacy of closed doors, and extends the metaphor of the body and soul misbehaving, personified in Dr. Caius, and Evans the parson. The play later brings in all of society in shaming him publicly. Having him as a witch is shaming in that it is effeminizing and underscores his status as an old man, a failed lover, and the pun on impotence implicit in his name.

The witch's connection to language in this play is subtle and exists even though "Prat" never says a word. Ford, disguised as Master Brook, hires Falstaff to assail his wife's virtue as a test of her chastity. Falstaff is not simply a paramour, however, but reports to Ford of his progress. As one who has special access to hidden information and acts as an intelligencer, he mimics exactly the role of the Weird Sisters. Possibly, Shakespeare carried over the notion from this play to *Macbeth* where he explored its tragic and dark implications. The great comic irony of having Falstaff as a witch, a "fortune-teller," is his inability to predict his own fortune and so escape a beating.

The image of the witch in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* preserves many of the elements in the characterization of the witches in *Macbeth*. However, the differences are significant--silence, isolation, and control by society. She is a marginal figure, though not a particularly reviled one. The witch Sycorax of *The Tempest* differs from the witches of both these plays in even more fundamental ways. She is neither an actual character nor impersonated on stage. Rather, she remains embedded in the language of other characters. According to the descriptions of other characters, she possessed the destructive powers of Classical witches; having died long before the play opens, Sycorax no longer poses a threat.

Prospero describes the witch Sycorax as an old deformed hag: "The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy/Was grown into a hoop" (I.ii.268-269). The elements of age, deformity, and the physically gross resurface. For her "mischiefs manifold," she was banished from Argier (Algiers), but spared death because she was pregnant. This raises two issues--first, society's ability to exert control over the witch; second, maternity and the witch. The fact of her pregnancy--and that she answered to a male god, Setebos--causes her to differ radically from the other witches examined so far. I tend to see this, without diminishing the fact of maternity, as being a statement of the physically gross. It conjures up the image of an aged, deformed hag fornicating with a devil--as the play makes clear, to produce a deformed and ugly offspring. Furthermore, she dies and does not play the mother role to Caliban.

Sycorax was, according to Prospero, an extremely potent witch (15):

This mis-shapen knave,  
His mother was a witch; and one so strong  
That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,  
And deal in her command, without her power. (V.i.268-271)

She exerted control over the natural world through her art, and "command" establishes this control to language. Although Sycorax is dead when *The Tempest* begins, her son, Caliban, represents the flesh, the physical, and the physically gross, the elements constantly at odds with the spirit, personified in Ariel. Epitomizing the misuse of art, Sycorax stands in direct contrast to Prospero, whose story of banishment echoes hers in numerous ways. Yet Sycorax is bound to language: just as she imprisons Ariel within the

trunk of a tree, Shakespeare, the artist like Prospero, chooses to bind her within language, permitting the tool of his art report but not exercise of her power. This is the very reverse of Emilia's situation who first exists only within the language of other characters, language which functions as another cloister, but who establishes her being through speaking out.

*The Tempest*, as does *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, establishes the connection between female sexual identity and the power to speak, yet portrays silenced and muted witch figures. This suggests that even though a witch may be tailored as far as possible to suit the needs of comedy, her ability to use language is still too disruptive a force and better fits the world of tragedy. Not ironically, Shakespearean comedy also forges the speech/identity connection in the figure of the nun, working to elicit speech from the nun, and so enabling her to claim a certain measure of subjectivity for herself. At the close of these comedies, Emilia, Hermia, and Isabella are muted, and the last voices are male. In fact, for all of Act V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the only female to speak is the Amazon queen Hippolyta. However, she falls into that category of "masculine woman," reinforcing the link between masculinity or androgyny in women and the power to speak. This silencing apparently contradicts the notion of comedy working to elicit female speech and its link to subjectivity. It does not however: by speaking out, these women do gain the subjectivity which would be lost to the cloister, and which affirms the fact of their sexuality. The husband or the Duke appropriates this subjectivity through marriage or the mere fact of authority at the close of the play which renders the rebel daughter a passive and silent wife.

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## **SECTION II** **WOMEN OF THE FLESH:** **THE PROSTITUTES AND WIDOWS OF** **SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY**

### 1

Prostitutes and widows do not figure prominently in Shakespearean comedies, generally. Where they do appear, however, they help profoundly to inform and shape the world of the play and reinforce its significant themes. As with nuns and witches, the treatment of the prostitute and widow in Shakespeare is intimately connected to the issues of language and physicality. The prostitute, different from the figure of the courtesan, tends to come from the lower social orders. She is objectified and commodified by her submission to a bawd or procurer, and this object status is reinforced by the inability or unwillingness to use language. Moreover, while the world of the prostitute is associated with the grosser aspects of humanity--exploitative sexuality, ageing, decay, and disease--it critiques and undermines the higher moral plane on which the play's larger world seeks to base itself. Ultimately, the brothel counter-culture is shown to be, or is brought, under the control of the state.

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The courtesan differs from the prostitute in that the entertainment she provides is not primarily sexual. And whereas the prostitute tends to come from the lowest classes in society, the courtesan more resembles the hetaera of Greek tradition in terms of economic means and social status. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the courtesan's fame throughout Ephesus stems from her effective use of language and wit in entertaining men. Ephesian Antipholus describes her: "I know a wench of excellent discourse,/Pretty and witty; wild and yet, too, gentle; /There will we dine" (111.i.110-112). This description shows the contradicting attitudes which inform the characterization: she is at once "wild," meaning that she possesses a measure of freedom not given to other unmarried women, but that she is "gentle" on one level removes the imputation of sexual license. Her reputation comes from her wit and "excellent" discourse, which shows her to have a masterful control over language in the company of men. This power to use language as an equal in the presence of men, and the fact that she is in a position of control as an independent agent over her house, the Porpentine, gives her a certain measure of subjectivity and autonomy.

Yet the description is ambiguous and allows room for double meanings. "Know" could mean to be acquainted with, but it may also mean to possess carnal knowledge. "Wild" and "gentle" could also have explicitly sexual connotations. Furthermore, the courtesan's house, the Porpentine, stands in contrast to the domesticity of married life. Unlike the home, which is closed to strangers, and unwittingly locked against Ephesian Antipholus, making it a truly private sphere, the Porpentine breaks down the barrier between the public and private realms. Indeed, Ephesian Antipholus goes to her because he is locked out of his own home: "Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me,/I'll knock elsewhere, to see if they'll disdain me" (111.i.120-121). The open doors of the Porpentine in a metaphoric sense may allude to the possible sexual availability of the courtesan because of her blurring of the public and private realms. In this context, she is rendered an object.

Labelling the courtesan a prostitute, allowed for by the ambiguity of male language, is made explicit in her encounter with Syracusan Antipholus and Syracusan Dromio. Dromio's description of her conflates the figure of the prostitute and the witch or female devil: "Nay, she is worse, she is the devil's dam;./and here she comes in the habit of a light wench.../ergo, light wenches will burn; come not near her" (IV. iii.50-55). "Burn" refers to the venereal diseases and also the burning in hell which comes as punishment for dealing with prostitutes. The perception of her is informed by her distinctive clothing, so that the male gaze and the assumption that she is a prostitute, seek to reduce her to object status.

Syracusan Antipholus also refers to her as a witch: "Avaunt, thou witch" (IV. iii.76). The circumstances under which these descriptions are made are critical-both Antipholus and Dromio are in a state of confusion, having lost control over their surroundings and their perceptions. From the start of the play, they view the world of Ephesus as magical and enchanted, but at this point, magic and enchantment turn to dark sorcery. Syracusan Antipholus tries to gain control over his circumstances through language: "Thou art, as

you are all, a sorceress;/I conjure thee to leave me and be gone" (IV. iii.64-65). He tries to alter and dictate reality by using language and entering a different linguistic "economy" or world, the language of magic and witchcraft-in using the term "conjure," he seeks to enter the reality of that magical world he perceives in which the spoken word has the ability to effect change or action. But the attempt fails. Thus, where male control is undermined or threatened, women of dubious categories, such as the courtesan, are rendered objects in the attempt to create and establish order. The courtesan, however, rejects this attempted objectification by speaking and insisting upon compensation for the ring which was taken/borrowed from her. Demanding restitution affirms her subjectivity which entitles her to own property. Moreover, she has the right to seek redress as demonstrated by the fact that she was present in the group which brings the complaint before the Duke.

*The Comedy of Errors* presents the world of the courtesan as problematic for the world of marriage. Ephesian Antipholus frequents the Porpentine, the courtesan's house, much to the consternation of his wife Adriana. Her dialogue with her sister Luciana (11.i.1-43) shows her inability to change or rectify the situation because of her lack of power in her relationship with her husband. She places his liberty as a cause of their problems, and when she asks the reason for the fact of greater male license, Luciana's response is telling: "Because their business still lies out o'door" (11). Her lack of liberty contrasts sharply with the freedom of the courtesan, freedom which exists because the Porpentine breaks down the line separating the public and private realms, making her at once a private and public figure. But this very blurring contributes to the confusion in both.

The courtesan becomes a figure similar to the nun in the world of the play in that she disrupts the world of marriage. The apparently innocuous *The Comedy of Errors* looks forward to *Measure for Measure* by structuring female sexuality around these two extremes, liberty and restraint, and shows that where either or both are too strong a force, domesticity and the private realm are thrown into chaos. Thus, while they appear to be polar opposites, and are so in many respects, they function to the same effect. It is not, therefore, too ironic, that at the end of the play, Emilia invites all to come into the convent to tell their stories, courtesan included.

Mariana, the ingenue of *Pericles*, is almost forced into the world of prostitution because she lacks the protection afforded by family. She is the daughter of a king, but lost to him until the conclusion. Her guardians plot to have her killed, but this attempt fails, and she is instead captured by Pirates and sold into a brothel. For the entire period of time spent in the brothel, she wages a constant battle to preserve her chastity. The Bawd seeks to objectify her and render her a commodity, fit to be bought and sold, and her fight against this is constantly through language. A monetary value is placed on her being in the brothel, a place of exchange intimately connected to the economy of the wider world of Mytilene, and specifically the market: The Pandar orders Boulton to go search the market for a fresh supply of slaves to serve as prostitutes. The implied lack of women has caused a downturn in the profits of the brothel.

As is typical of Shakespearean comedy where commodification of women takes place, the language and imagery dwells on the physical, specifically the processes of ageing, decay, and death. The prostitutes who staff the brothel before Marina's arrival are described as rotten: "We were never so much out of creatures. We have/but poor three, and they can do no more than they/can do; and they with continual action are even as/good as rotten" (IV. ii.6-9). Similarly, "What else, man? The stuff we have, a strong wind/will blow it to pieces, they are so pitifully sodden" (IV. ii. 17-18). The women are themselves worn out, decrepit, and rotten, but their sexuality is also destructive to men: "Ay, she quickly poop'd him; she made him roast-/meat for worms" (IV. ii.22-23).

Marina is objectified and commodified not only by the economy and market, but also by male speech. Boult refers to her as a "piece" (IV. ii.41). But more than this, he is commanded to advertise her in the market in order to attract customers:

Boult, take you the marks of her, the colour of her hair, complexion, height, her age, with warrant of her virginity, and cry "He that will give most shall have her first." Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing, if men were as they have been" (IV. ii.53-57).

Using language to pull her part from part in order to create a visual picture for his audience, Boult negates her subjectivity and selfhood. The description of his publicizing her underscores this intent: "I have cried her almost to the number of her hairs;/I have drawn her a picture with my voice" (IV. ii.91-92). Male language makes her into an object of art, displays her in the public area of the market, and subjects her to the lascivious male gaze. Boult then takes on the stature of an artist who does a blazon of women, similar to the conventional poetic practice of the day. An implicit critique of this tendency rings loudly in Shakespeare's sonnet 130 ([16](#)), which shows the extent to which women are objectified in literature and poetry by male language.

Marina preserves her chastity through her insistence on speech. In entreating her to be accommodating and receptive to men's sexual advances, specifically those of Lysimachus, the Bawd addresses Marina as follows: "Pray you, without any more virginal fencing, will/you use him kindly? he will line your apron with/gold" (IV. vi.56-58). Language becomes a tool, the weapon with which she defends herself. Her first encounter with Lysimachus exemplifies this wonderfully. He tries to engage her in conversation with the purpose of establishing the power imbalance in their relationship, that he is a governor and she a common whore:

O, you have heard  
something of my power, and so stand aloof for more  
serious wooing. But I protest to thee, pretty one, my  
authority shall not see thee, or else look friendly upon  
thee. Come, bring me to some private place; come,  
come (IV. vi.85-90).

She responds, "If you were born to honour, show it now;/If put upon you, make the judgement good/That thought you worthy of it" (IV.vi.91-93). She shows that though "honour" is a ceremonious title, it is not divorced from its primary meaning, and she invokes this primary meaning to keep Lysimachus at bay. Her use of language here involves essentially the type of polysemy and punning in one's favour found throughout Shakespeare's plays. For Marina, however, verbal fencing averts the threat of rape. Upon being cornered by her, he reveals that he came with no evil intent towards her, but this is highly suspect and seems actually to be an attempt at saving face in an utterly humiliating situation.

This encounter also shows the state in a highly compromised position. Lysimachus, as the governor of Mytilene, is the state personified. That he goes to the brothel shows the state to be a patron of prostitutes as opposed to an enforcer of morality and discipline. Though the state is a patron, it seeks to avoid responsibility and opprobrium by officially denying the existence or reality of the brothel. The state thus shows a greater concern for policing language than for controlling sexual behaviour. Marina points this out tellingly:

Lys. Now, pretty one, how long have you been at this trade?

Mar. What trade, sir?

Lys. Why, I cannot name't but I shall offend (IV. vi.65-68).

The state seeks to avoid responsibility for its patronizing the brothel and for existence of the brothel through denial, through refusing to label prostitution as such. But Marina forces the state to see its own hypocrisy: "Do you know this house to be a place of such resort,/and will come into't?" (IV. vi.78-79).

When Lysimachus leaves the brothel in his chastened state, he vows that if ever Marina hears from him again, it would be to her benefit: "If thou dost/Hear from me, it shall be for thy good" (IV. iv. 115-116). Here, the state does not challenge the institution of prostitution, but offers the mere possibility of aid to a single individual. This attests to the fact of state control over the world of prostitution. Unlike *Measure for Measure*, in Pericles there are no closing of brothels and no prostitutes are thrown into prison. That the state patronizes the brothel, allows its existence, but officially denies this, suggests that prostitution has a definite, albeit reviled, place in Ephesian society.

Marina's use of language not only chastens the figure of state, it also subverts the order of the brothel. The brothel suspends the morality of the larger society in order to create its own moral world within which prostitution is seen as a source of profit and pleasure. Marina's "virginal fencing" disrupts this suspension and brings the larger society's sense of morality into the brothel:

Bawd. How now! what's the matter?

Boult. Worse and worse, mistress; she has here spoken holy words to the Lord Lysimachus.

Bawd. O abominable!



Boult. She makes our profession as it were to stink afore the face of the gods (IV. vi.131-136).

Not only does her speech disrupt the economy of the brothel, it is viewed as abominable, almost sacrilegious, and in true comic fashion is given the potential to cause social harm: "Fie, fie upon her! she's able to freeze the god Priapus, and undo a whole generation" (IV. vi.3-4). Similarly, "The nobleman would have dealt with her like a/nobleman, and she sent him away as cold as a/snowball; saying his prayers too" (IV. vi.138-140). Their horror, like her encounter with Lysimachus, exposes the moral pretensions and hypocrisy of the larger society. Part of the privilege of nobility is the sexual exploitation of women of the lower social orders, which shows the nobility to be, in fact, quite ignoble.

The Bawd responds to Marina's virginal fencing by ordering Boult to rape her: "Boult, take her away; use her at thy pleasure. /Crack the glass of her virginity, and make the rest/malleable" (IV. vi.141-143). Her virginity before was seen as an asset which increased her worth and would have made her all the more valuable as a prostitute. However, her power to speak, which she uses because of her desire to protect her chastity, makes her virginity a liability to the world of the brothel. This is a clear inversion of the larger world's norms and expectations. The words "glass" and "malleable" seek to objectify her. But glass has other implications as well. Marina's virginity is clearly dependent upon her ability to use language in order to fend off men. Given, then, that they are so closely bound, her speech and virginity function as a glass, as a mirror which shows the lascivious intent of her would-be patrons. This is exactly what takes place in her encounter with Lysimachus.

Marina manages to escape the brothel, without the aid of Lysimachus, by convincing the Bawd to hire her out as a sort of tutor and artist. Arguably, she could never become a prostitute because of her social class. As the daughter of a king, she is of the highest social stratum. It would be extremely scandalous and incongruous to have a Shakespearean prostitute coming from the higher social classes. By placing Marina in the brothel, the lower class of bawds and panders seek to exploit her, but also the elite classes--her would-be patrons are all gentlemen or other members of the higher social classes. This contradicts the established pattern of the sexual exploitation of lower class women by upper class men(17). Moreover, Marina's essential nobility, as well as the advantages afforded because of her status--access to language, learning, the arts--allow her to resist the threats to chastity and suggest that she be hired out as a tutor instead.

Upon escaping the brothel, her fame spreads throughout Mytilene and she gains a reputation as a woman of great accomplishment. This puts her into the public realm of work, as she is paid for her services. It allows for her to be reunited with her father, Pericles. When she is first taken to him, she is presented as an entertainer with the power to lift him out of melancholy. He initially rejects her attempts, so she realizes that she can win him over by relating her life's woes. She even occasionally pretends to withhold speech in order to pique his interest. Her speaking out establishes her identity as his daughter, and restores her to his protection. This, however, leads to an end noted before--as her subjectivity is established, it is appropriated by her father. She is promised in



marriage to Lysimachus, and remains curiously mute for the rest of the play, except to acknowledge her mother.

Mistress Overdone of *Measure For Measure* is a prostitute in the true sense of the word. As with the prostitutes of *Pericles*, the description of Overdone revels in the physical and the physically gross. Lucio's addressing her shows her to be diseased: "How now, which of your hips has the most profound sciatica?" (I.ii.54-55). The men of her world describe her as worn out, and this simply echoes her name. The play clearly associates disease, decrepitude, and decay with the world of the brothel as Lucio declares upon sight of Mistress Overdone: "Behold, behold, where Madam Mitigation comes!/ I have purchased as many diseases under her roof as/come to--" (I.ii.41-43). These lines make clear the commercial nature of sexual activity, and the commodification of women necessary for this to take place. But commodification of women, as in *Pericles*, leads to disease and not just pleasure.

The state actively intervenes in the world of prostitution, but unlike Lysimachus in *Pericles*, as an antagonistic force. In the first instance state influence is indirect--the wars of the state reduce her client pool and shrink her revenues. But state intervention becomes direct from very early on. The opening of the play makes clear that the leniency of the Duke in the past has led to moral laxity in Vienna, a situation which needs to be brought under control. Mistress Overdone and the world of the brothel stand as symbols of this moral laxity. In order to establish control, the state in the person of Angelo orders the demolition of the brothels in the suburbs and the eradication of illicit sexuality. As a consequence of this, Overdone finds herself without a place in society, and without a source of income. She turns to Pompey, who agrees to continue playing the bawd to her:

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. (I.ii.98-103)

These lines indicate that within the world of the brothel, procuring is a good deed by Pompey to Overdone. In fact, the level of commitment and concern makes their relationship a parody of marriage in that it collapses the rhetoric of concern and caring with real economic needs. This relationship gives her employment, a place in society, and takes the form of protection merited by her working tirelessly in the "service." This facet of brothel life suggests that the world of the prostitutes is really a subsociety with its own distinct value systems and support mechanisms for its members. This episode may be seen as a parody of the opening scene of the play in which the Duke appoints Angelo as his substitute because he has been sufficiently tried and proven time and again in the Duke's service. Within this context, Overdone's "service" is akin to and as meritorious as the service rendered by the soldiers engaged in the wars abroad.

In keeping Pompey as her bawd, she persists in her own objectification. She lacks the subjectivity of the courtesan, who remains an independent agent, owning her own "house," and answering to no one, but works for and becomes dependent upon the bawd. But she does this in order to have a place and function in society. However, the state does not see these relationships and values as existing in concordance with its own. When Pompey and Master Froth are brought before Escalus by Elbow, the instrument of state control, the disjuncture between the two value systems becomes evident. The image which emerges from Elbow's description of the brothel world contrasts sharply with Pompey's quoted above:

He, sir? A tapster, sir; a parcel bawd; one that serves a bad woman; whose house, sir, was, as they say, plucked down in the suburbs; and now she professes a hot-house; which I think is a very ill house too. (11.i.62-66)

Pompey argues for the existence of the prostitution by claiming that it fulfills human needs and that it would be a lawful means of income if only the state would permit it. He also argues that human sexuality cannot altogether be successfully restrained by the law:

Pom. Truly sir, in my poor opinion, they will to't then. If your worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not fear the bawds.

Esc. There is pretty orders beginning, I can tell you. It is but heading and hanging.

Pom. 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...(11.i.230-237).

Restraint of the kind that the state seeks to implement would only fail, and Escalus does not deny this. The state is unable to deny the fact of the human sexual drive, but seeks to control the forms of sexual activity by punishing those who participate in what it defines as illicit sex. And the state assigns blame by displacing the responsibility onto the prostitutes and the bawds, the organizers and facilitators of illicit sex.

Pompey and Froth are brought before Escalus because of an incident involving Mrs. Elbow. She wandered unawares into a brothel searching for stewed prunes, and was--mistaken for a prostitute whom they propositioned. Again, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, the world of prostitution bears negatively upon the world of marriage and domesticity. But here, there are clear class implications in that the brothel is at odds with the sensibility and respectability of the barely "middle class" Elbows.

Elbow's complaint makes the point that individual members of society are unable to protect themselves from the institution of prostitution. In fact, Elbow's lack of control over his language creates the possibility of compromising his wife. In bringing the charge against Pompey and Froth before Escalus, his constant malapropisms expose her to charge of being sexually loose:

Elbow. First, and it like you, the house [brothel] is a respected house; next, this [Pompey] is a respected fellow; and his mistress [Overdone] is a

respected woman.

Pom. By this hand, sir, his wife is a more respected person than any of us all.

Elbow. Varlet, thou liest! Thou liest, wicked varlet! The time is yet to come that she was ever respected with any man, woman, or child (11.i.159-166).

This inability to protect on the individual level further necessitates the state's policy of control and suppression of prostitution. Mrs. Elbow's plight is rendered all the more sympathetic because she was, according to Elbow, quite visibly pregnant at the time. This makes the contrast between domesticity and prostitution all the more vivid: whereas the former results in children and continuity, the latter leads to disease and disruption in society and in the domestic realm. And as the exchange between Elbow and Pompey demonstrates, the lower class of panders and bawds is better able than the middle class to manipulate language advantageously; Escalus, the representative of state, is the one who eventually sorts out the linguistic confusion.

Ultimately, the state succeeds in putting Pompey and Overdone in jail, and in exerting control over the world of prostitution. The extent to which Overdone has lost her subjectivity is revealed at the point where Pompey is taken to jail:

Lucio. How doth my dear morsel, thy mistress? Procures she still, ha?

Porn. Troth, sir, she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub.

Lucio describes her as a morsel--the imagery is of food, and the word "morsel" implies consumption, but also digestion and other final bodily processes. Commodification, exchange, and the market are also implicit in this. But the word also has connotations of incompleteness, reinforcing the incompleteness of the prostitute because of the loss of subjectivity. Pompey's description of her as soaking in a tub in order to cure venereal diseases and so resembling a bit of salted beef functions in much the same fashion. This reiterates the world of the prostitute to disease, decay, and the physically gross.

Just before Elbow carts her off to prison, Overdone reveals a secret she has been hiding:

My lord, this is one Lucio's information against me, Mistress Kate Keepdown was with child by him in the Duke's time, he promised her marriage. His child is a year and a quarter old come Philip and Jacob. I have kept it myself; and see how he goes about to abuse me (111.ii.192-197)

Overdone's speaking out constitutes an attempt to restore some measure of subjectivity as a woman who was wronged. She believes that she should be entitled to the same consideration that she paid to Lucio by remaining silent about his fornication and his bastard child. But this does not accurately portray the prior state of their relationship: We learned earlier that Lucio was a frequent customer of Overdone's, so it was in her own interest to withhold her knowledge. The refusal to speak out about it indicates her lack of subjectivity, rendering her complicit in Lucio's victimization of Keepdown. On the point of being taken off to jail, she comes under the direct control of the state, but so does her use of language. Her speaking out does not prevent her from being locked up, but is used

by the state in its exercise of power: The Duke at the end uses this information to force Lucio into marriage with Keepdown. Thus, what ever measure of subjectivity she attempted to reestablish is appropriated by the state, and is used as an instrument to further state control.

Overdone, by speaking out, helps to promote a marriage. This echoes later in Isabella's facilitating the marriages at the end of the play. Isabella's role in the marriages comes about because the Duke, disguised as a friar, prods her to involvement. Thus, Isabella is similarly made into an instrument which furthers the state's social and moral policy. This mirroring which takes place throughout comments upon the actions of the play's larger world of Vienna. At the very core, both the larger world and the world of the prostitutes are concerned with sexual intercourse between men and women. At variance, however, are the forms of organizing sexual activity--marriage in the case of the former, commodification and exchange in the case of the latter. But Mariana's situation complicates this scheme, in that Angelo refused to marry her because she lost her portion at sea--marriage is intimately involved with the issues of wealth and exchange. The state succeeds in establishing its own way of organizing sexual activity at the expense of the prostitutes, and in doing so, merely cloaks and disguises, without eliminating, real economic concerns in the rhetoric of romantic love. This is evident in the Duke's proposing marriage to Isabella, an offer apparently motivated by romantic love.

The prostitute, who exists as a sex object, submits to being objectified out of the need to find a place and function in society. Objectification is demonstrated in, and reinforced by, the inability or refusal to speak and use language. But objectification is vital in that prostitution depends upon the ability to commodify women in order to allow for exchange. Subjectivity, on the other hand, proves inimical to it because it exposes men as the aggressors in a sexually exploitative relationship. Objectivity allows the burden of responsibility to be displaced solely on to the woman, and permits men to create a fiction of non-participation reinforced by male control over language.

## 2

Shakespearean widows, in contrast to prostitutes, tend to come from different social classes, and the characterization of each particular widow reflects class considerations. While widows in general display a greater measure of freedom and independence than other women, in the world of comedy, those from the upper classes are depicted as chaste and virtuous because they have given up on the expression of a sexual self. This denial of sexual expression combined with the fact of age bestows upon older widows a degree of androgyny which is connected to their ability to effectively use language--an indicator of their subjectivity and independence. Widows from other social classes are usually of questionable character, sometimes falling into prostitution. They have limited access to language which is to some extent a measure of their objectivity.

\*

Overdone, discussed above, is also a widow. Serial remarriage was for her a type of prostitution, in that she went from one husband to the next. Prostitution in widowhood then becomes a continuation of her pattern of remarriage. Given that she is from the lower social levels, she falls into prostitution in order to survive, as her lament to Pompey makes clear. Society leaves her with no alternative but prostitution and this is demonstrated clearly by the fact that Pompey, a man, is able to escape the full punishment for pandering by assisting the hangman. This type of opportunity is not available to Overdone, a woman, and a lower class woman.

In contrast to Mistress Overdone stands Paulina of *The Winter's Tale*. She is a member of the nobility and is widowed under a peculiar set of circumstances during the course of the play, two factors which contribute significantly to her portrayal. In the play, it may be remarked that virtue is given a female voice: Paulina is the only character who consistently and most vociferously argues for the integrity of the wronged queen Hermione. In fact, she says that hers is voice most appropriate to defend the queen: "He must be told on't, and he shall; the office/Becomes a woman best. I'll take't upon me" (11.ii.31-32). At this point in the play, she is not yet widowed, but already demonstrates a great measure of subjectivity, independence, and an outstanding capacity to use language. In the world of the court, in which men are afraid of offending the king and hazarding their positions, she makes it her place to speak. For Paulina, language is the weapon available to her in her defence of Hermione, and she states this implicitly to Leontes: "Good queen, my lord, good queen: I say good queen,/And would by combat make her good, so were I / A man, the worst about you" (11.iii.59-61). Thus, language is the weapon available to women in defense of their chastity, as clearly demonstrated by Marina in *Pericles* .

Paulina's encounter with Leontes, (11.iii) reveals the ways in which society regards the married woman who insists on speaking out publicly. Leontes expects her to confront him, so he stations servants outside his door to deny her access to him, to deprive her of speech: "I charg'd thee that she should not come about me. /I knew she would" (43-44). Leontes tries to undermine her subjectivity by demanding of her husband, Antigonus, that he control her, "What! canst not rule her?" (46), but she rejects this attempt outright: "-- trust it,/He shall not rule me" (50). This debunks Antigonus' rationalization of her independence: "When she will take the rein I let her run;/ But she'll not stumble" (51-52). Employing animal imagery seeks to reduce Paulina, but she merely ignores her husband and continues to address the king. Similarly, Leontes' seeks to reduce her by calling her dame Partlet (75), a fowl, a character from the world of beast fables noted for her power to use language. But instead of silencing her, the label simply affirms Paulina's command over language.

Leontes' response to her echoes Antipholus' response to the courtesan when she demands her ring of him, in that Leontes calls her a witch and a bawd: "A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o' door:/A most intelligencing bawd? (67-68). The term "mankind witch" confers androgyny upon her, which as argued above, is clearly related to the power to speak. Leontes, like Antipholus, in his distraction and loss of control, resorts to objectifying threatening women in the attempt to reconfigure and reorganize his world.

The charge that she is a witch is implicitly restated in Leontes' threats to have her burnt and in the talk of tortures, the traditional punishment for those accused of witchcraft.

Paulina, in order to position herself to address him, also reconfigures the private and the public realms and blurs the distinction between the two:

Good my liege, I come,--  
And, I beseech you hear me, who professes  
Myself your loyal servant, your physician,  
Your most obedient counsellor, yet that dares  
Less appear so, in comforting your evils...(52-56).

She thrusts herself into the public realm by recasting herself as his physician and counsellor, and this legitimizes public speech. She is not merely Antigonus' wife, an object to be ruled. "Ruled" itself is a term which itself implies the injection of the political into the personal realm to structure familial relations under the power and command of the father-king of the family. Since Paulina cannot be ruled by her husband, Leontes labels her a traitor. She denies this and instead charges him with treason because of the injustice he does to his wife: "Nor I; nor any/But one that's here, and that's himself; for he,/The sacred honour of himself, his queen's,/His hopeful son's, his babe's, betray's to slander" (82-85). Here, again, Paulina frames the personal in terms of the political and in effect equates them in a manner which recalls Lady Macduff's accusing her husband of treason because he deserts his family in *Macbeth* (IV. ii.44-54).

Leontes orders that Antigonus expose the infant Perdita and leave her to die. In following this command through, he is killed by a bear thus leaving Paulina a widow. She definitely has the sense that Antigonus is dead: "...As my Antigonus to break his grave/And come again to me; who, on my life,/Did perish with the infant" (V.i.42-44). Quite arguably, Leontes is responsible for her state of widowhood. He, in effect, deprives her of a husband, excluding her from the realm of sanctioned sexual expression. Hermione, to the general belief, is also dead, and this renders Leontes a widower. But Paulina keeps the queen alive to the court and to Leontes through language:

I should so:  
Were I the ghost that walk'd, I'd bid you mark  
Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't  
You chose her: then I'd shriek, that even your ears  
Should rift to hear me; and the words that follow'd  
Should be "Remember mine." (V.i.62-67).

Hermione's constant resurrection through language prefigures the true resurrection that closes the play. It keeps Leontes' love for her alive, and at the same time, demonstrates the extent to which he regrets his actions of the past.

It is important to note that unlike Thaisa of *Pericles*, who similarly suffers a type of "death," Hermione does not bide her time in a convent. Instead, she is sheltered in Paulina's chapel, which at once attests to Hermione's chastity and keeps her within the domestic sphere of Paulina's home. One of the most significant consequences of keeping Hermione alive through language is that it prevents Leonres from remarrying. This effort sets Paulina at odds with the court as expressed through Cleomenes:

Cleo.                                Not at all, good lady:  
You might have spoken a thousand things that would  
Have done the time more benefit and grac'd  
Your kindness better.

Paul. You are one of those  
Would have him wed again.

Dion. If you would not so,  
You pity not the state, nor the remembrance  
Of his most sovereign name; consider little,  
What dangers, by his highness' fail of issue,  
May drop upon his kingdom, and devour  
Uncertain lookers on. What were more holy  
Than to rejoice the former queen is well?  
What holier than, for royalty's repair,  
For present comfort, and for future good,  
To bless the bed of majesty again  
With a sweet fellow to't? (V.i.20-34)

Her use of language has clear personal and political implications. Paulina's speech constrains Leontes' sexual expression by denying him another bride--a clear inversion of patriarchal structure. The chance that he may die heirless as a result potentially imperils the future of the state, making it vulnerable to attack or invasion. Widowhood here is clearly seen as a condition of incompleteness through the words "royalty's repair;" personal and emotion incompleteness threatens dynastic succession and the state resulting in political incompleteness. One may also see a sort of justice or equilibrium in that just as Leontes makes a widow of Paulina, she keeps him in a similar condition. More than this, though, she gets him to promise that he will not remarry upon her approval. Thus, she clearly dictates his future sexual expression and holds the present and future of the state in her control.

One of the crucial consequences of Paulina's controlling Leontes' sexual expression is that she averts the threat of incest. In Shakespeare's source for the play, Robert Greene's work of prose fiction *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time*, the king pursues his desire to make his daughter, unbeknownst to him, his wife, and even comes to the point of threatening her with rape for refusing him. In *The Winter's Tale*, similarly, when Florizel presents Perdita as a Libyan princess, Leontes expresses a clear physical interest in her:

"Would he do so, rd beg your precious mistress,/Which he counts but a trifle" (V.i.222-223). But Paulina steps in to remind him of Hermione:

Sir, my liege,  
Your eye hath too much youth in't; not a month  
'Fore your queen died, she was more worth such gazes  
Than what you look on now. (V.i.223-226)

This chastens Leontes, and shows that remarriage for him is potentially disastrous. In the world of the play, avoiding the chaos that incest represents supersedes Cleomenes' fear of disaster for the state should the king not remarry.

Of course, Paulina keeps him from remarrying because she knows that Hermione lives. In fact, she has kept and tended to her all this while. She believes that the words of the oracle will be fulfilled: "For has not the divine Apollo said,/Is't not the tenor of his Oracle,/That King Leontes shall not have an heir,/Till his lost child be found?" (V.i.37-40). On one level, the oracle may dictate Leontes' "childlessness," and Paulina's speech simply reminds us of this. On another level, though, the oracle is not causal at all but descriptive, and Paulina's power to speak makes the oracle true.

Paulina orchestrates the scene in which Hermione comes to life and rejoins her family. This scene clearly demonstrates her remarkable control over language. She presents Hermione as a statue, but then commands her to life:

Music, awake her, strike!  
'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;  
Strike all that look upon with marvel.  
Come! I'll fill your grave up: stir, nay, come away:  
Bequeath to death your numbness; for from him  
Dear life redeems you. You perceives she stirs.  
(V. iii.98-103)

Where before Hermione survived in language, speech brings her back to actual life. This parallels Emilia's coming back to life in *The Comedy of Errors*. It is as though language is used to barter life from death and so resurrects Hermione. But these lines do not only command; they are soft, and encouraging: "stir, nay, come away" suggests Hermione's reluctance and hesitation. In bringing her to life, Paulina appropriates the term "witch" hurled against her earlier (II.iii) and redefines it: "Start not; her actions shall be holy as/You hear my spell is lawful" (V. iii.104-105). Thus, she not only uses language, but she expands and changes its meanings. She insists that she is not the malevolent figure which Leontes labelled her: "...but then you'll think/(Which I protest against) I am assisted/By wicked powers" (V. iii.89-91). This is proof of her independence and subjectivity, the power to define oneself.

After the king's family is reunited, Paulina states her intention to resign her remaining years to mourning Antigonus:



I, an old turtle,  
Will wing me to some wither'd bough, and there  
My mate (that's never to be found again)  
Lament, till I am lost. (V. iii.132-135)

"Wither'd bough" invokes barrenness, and death. Leontes counters this by making her a husband of Camillo. But marriage raises questions concerning Paulina's subjectivity. She, recalling Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, makes no verbal response to this--does or does she not accept him as a husband? It may be argued that she is being silenced, as conveyed by "O, peace, Paulina?" (V. iii.135). The weight of the play, however, makes this appear a feat beyond consideration. Instead, an equilibrium is established in that just as she returns Leontes to the realm of marriage and sexual expression, he does the same for her. His action seeks to eliminate the incompleteness which prevailed before, and which is clearly implicit in Paulina's description of her last days.

Somewhere between the extreme characterizations of the widow depicted in the persons of Mistress Overdone and Paulina is Mistress Quickly, who first appears in the history plays, most strongly *Henry IV*, parts 1 and 2, but is retailed for the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Here, while she clearly is definitely unmarried, the text gives no clear evidence that she is a widow. However, her role and characterization here draws significantly from her part in *2 Henry IV* in which she plays the part of a widow, innkeeper, and bawd.

The world of *2 Henry IV* heavily involves mortality, corruption, and the distrust of language. From the start, Rumour makes it clear that language cannot be trusted, which renders all speech suspect. The most dramatic expression of this comes in the arrest of the rebels: John of Lancaster tricks them into believing that they would be pardoned, but he in fact agreed only to redress of their complaints, not pardon for treason and rebellion. The throne of war-torn England seats an ailing king concerned about his death and the problem of succession: He remains convinced of Hal's waywardness and irresponsibility, which shows itself in his involvement with Falstaff's world of liberty.

The moral decay of the court makes its way to Eastcheap, finding its most base expression in Mistress Quickly's inn. Where before in *1 Henry IV* Falstaff flings the unfounded accusation that Quickly runs a bawdy house, here the inn is frankly staffed by the prostitute Doll Tearsheet, with Quickly acting as bawd. Quickly's "brothel" comments in parodic fashion upon the conditions prevailing in England. Moral disease and decay are manifest in Falstaff's preoccupation with his own mortality and physicality, and in the charge that her customers are infected by Tearsheet; the political rebellion is parodied in Pistol's attempted usurpation of Falstaff in his attempt to inflict violence upon Doll; and the misuse of language is evident in her apparent protestations of love for him. Ultimately, as the political situation becomes resolved and the rebellion is quelled, the state exerts its control over the brothel, arresting both Quickly and Tearsheet.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Quickly works in the household of Dr. Caius: "...there dwells one Mistress/Quickly, which is in the manner of his nurse; or his/dry nurse; or his cook; or his laundry; his washer,/and his wringer" (I.ii.2-5). This takes her out of the public world and situates her in the domestic sphere. An inn does exist at Windsor, but the owner is male, which suggests that the play seeks to define clearly and distinguish the public from the private world, identifying women as belonging solely to the private. In the text, men, not women, blur the distinction between both, which Ford's searching the buck-basket reveals. Ford, believing that Falstaff lies concealed in the laundry, orders that it be searched. The response to his pulling the clothing out shows the male blurring of realms:

Page. This passes!

Mrs. Ford. Are you not ashamed? Let the clothes alone.

Ford. I shall find you anon.

Evans. 'Tis unreasonable; will you take up your wife's clothes? Come away.

This male invasion of the female sphere is shown to be a source of shame, as indicated by the question, "Are you not ashamed?" But it is also emasculating, as implicit in Evans' remark, and explicit in the cross-dressing of Falstaff.

As argued above, women who cross the boundaries between the public and private worlds are often subject to the male charge of being sexually loose or available. Keeping women within the domestic realm here protects them from this accusation by men. However, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, women accuse other women of being morally lax. In sending Quickly over to Falstaff as a messenger, Mrs. Ford describes her in very unflattering terms: "Shall we send that foolish carrion, Mistress Quickly, to him" (111.iii.179-178). "Carrion" is a term of contempt applied to prostitutes. It conjures images of death and decay, which is associated with prostitutes.

While she is not a prostitute, neither is Quickly a paragon of virtue. She, in effect, acts as a go-between, a pander, for Fenton and she is paid for this:

Fent. Well, I shall see her to-day. Hold, there's money for thee: let me have thy voice in my behalf; if thou seest her before me, commend me.

Quick. Will I? I' faith, that we will; and I will tell your worship more of the wart the next time we have confidence; and of other wooers. (I.iv. 149-154).

Not only is she becoming a type of pander, but she agrees to inform him of other suitors-- she becomes an "intelligencing" bawd. But, she agrees to do the same for Caius and Simple in their courtship of Ann. This, I believe, draws heavily on her role as a bawd in *Henry IV*. However, the text modifies the role here in that she is helping to promote a marriage, and not prostitution. But pandering makes Mrs. Ford's use of "carrion" possible.

Mrs. Ford's term of opprobrium becomes somewhat more justified in Act IV, Scene 1. Here, Mrs. Page looks on as Evans teaches her son Latin. Quickly's constant interjections shows her to be brassy and world-wise, and this contrasts with Mrs. Page's restraint and modesty:

Will. Genitive *horum, harum, horum*.

Quick. Vengeance of Ginny's case; fie on her! Never name her, child, if she be a whore.

Evans. For shame, 'oman.

Quick. You do ill to teach the child such words.--He teaches him to hick and to hack, which they'll do fast enough of themselves, and to call "horum"--fie upon you! (52-59)

In arguing that Will not be taught the world of whoring, she betrays her knowledge of the terms used in that sphere. The very fact that she hears double entendre is revealing in and of itself. But this scene is important in that it shows the limited access women have to language. Latin, the scholarly language and the preserve of men, is not available to them. It also connects to Quickly's malapropisms throughout the texts in which she is a character, showing her awareness of vocabularies that are beyond her. They reveal her attempts to gain access to this world of language, as she does with Latin.

At the close of the play, Quickly takes on the role of the Fairy Queen, in the organized shaming of Falstaff. Ann Page was originally supposed to have played the part, but in order to facilitate the scheme to marry Ann to Fenton, the part is filled by Quickly. This shaming takes place in the public realm, because it involves all of society. That the role be filled by Quickly supports the notion of the clear separation of realms, and instead of the virginal Nan speaking out in public, the play puts the most "compromised" or questionable woman in the part instead.

As the fairy queen, Quickly affirms the goodness and value of true knighthood and the order of the Garter: "Each fair instalment, coat, and sev'ral crest,/With loyal blazon, evermore be blest" (V.v.64-65). This makes clear that the institution of knighthood is not under attack, but that the erring knight, Falstaff, must be punished and chastened. As the fairy queen, Quickly also affirms the virtue of female chastity, as evident in Pistol's line, "Our radiant Queen hates sluts and sluttery" (47). Thus, in this role, Quickly is elevated to a higher moral plane. But the irony of the whole episode is inescapable. The fact that the chastising figure is the most questionable female character in the work undercuts the role and the supposedly higher moral plane upon which she stands, and this makes Falstaff's shaming at once more and less humiliating. But "queen" is also a euphemism for prostitute, making the statement that "Our radiant Queen," Quickly, "hates sluts and sluttery" all the more ironic and comical.

Both categories of women are brought ultimately under the control of the state, helping to further its programme of organizing sexual activity. Widows, who are not prostitutes, are active agents in promoting marriages and may themselves be married at the close of a comedy. Prostitutes, by contrast, who are independent of state control are at odds with the thrust to marriage, often disrupting the domestic realm, unless brought under the control of the state which turns them into instruments for furthering state power. Depending upon class, a widow may fall into the ranks of the prostitutes, as does Overdone, or she may exert control over the throne, as does Paulina. Both categories are depicted as being heavily invested in the affairs of the public realm through their use of language, something not characteristic of many women in Shakespeare. But consequentially, any widow is at risk to the slander of being a bawd, a prostitute, or being sexually available. The fact that they are outside of the world of marriage but not under the control of fathers possibly exposes them to this threat.

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## CONCLUSION

In three of the plays discussed, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Pericles*, female sexuality is structured around the extremes of liberty as exemplified in the prostitute and restraint as exemplified in the nun. The consequences of this differ in each play. In *The Comedy of Errors*, it infantilizes men. Upon leaving the house of the courtesan, Ephesian Antipholus is locked out of his own home, albeit unwittingly, by his wife in what becomes an inverted patriarchal structure; the unmarried Syracusan Antipholus' running to the convent for refuge may be read as a type of juvenile regression, a reading all the more possible considering that the Abbess, Emilia, is in fact his mother.

In *Measure for Measure*, because the world of prostitution is beyond control, the Duke is unable to exercise his authority and must delegate the responsibility to Angelo. The fact that he disguises himself as a Friar is telling: The celibacy of the Friar may imply the Duke's political impotence. And in *Pericles*, Pericles remains a wanderer, alienated from society and his own country, until he is reunited with his daughter, who earlier is almost forced into prostitution, and his wife, who commits herself to life in the convent. The inference to be drawn may be that these alternative forms of female sexual identity undermine male power, control, and authority not simply on the individual level, but on the collective and political levels also.

In the figure of the nun, the denial of female sexual expression implies the lack of male sexual expression also--the convent then represents the frustration of male sexual expression on the collective level. With prostitutes, the sexual availability of one woman to numerous men means that no single man is able to have any real economic or dynastic interest in that particular woman--this renders her, in effect, unavailable to men on a more profound level. (Accordingly, in *Pericles*, where the brothel has a definite place in society and is already under the control of the state, the prostitutes are not free women, but slaves from foreign countries--the other prostitute mentioned is Transylvanian--who

are bought through the market.) The witch functions to a similar end--her access to the supernatural has the potential to throw all of society into chaos, as in *Macbeth*, so comic witches are depicted as being already under societal control. Thus, as this survey shows, from start to end, Shakespeare's muse directs nubile heroines to marriage, but castigates, through ignominy in perpetuity, those women who remain aloof.

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## ENDNOTES

- (1) All quotations taken from **The Arden Shakespeare**.
- (2) Carol Thomas Neely articulates this paradigm in the introduction to her work, **Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
- (3) Freud brilliantly establishes and describes the connection between female virtue and silence in his 1913 essay "The Theme of the Three Caskets" available in **The Freud Reader** (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989) which explores the issue in King Lear and The Merchant of Venice.
- (4) In Shakespeare's source for the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, Ovid's **Metamorphoses** (translated by Mary Innes, Penguin edition) upon the Pyramus' suicide, the mulberries on the tree which became soaked in his blood changed in colour from white to purple: "The fruits of the tree were sprinkled with his blood, and changed to a dark purple hue. The roots, soaked in his gore, tinged the hanging berries with the same rich colour" (97). Shakespeare reworks this tragic symbol into an instrument of continuity and marriage in the purple flower.
- (5) Louis Adrian Montrose in his essay, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture" in **Representing the English Renaissance** ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) shows how these figures of power function in the meta-dramatization of power relations between Elizabeth and the artist.
- (6) This recalls the story of Arethusa and Achelous in Book V of Ovid's **Metamorphoses** (translated by Mary Innes, Penguin edition).
- (7) Baldesar Castiglione **The Book of the Courtier** (Translated by George Bull, Penguin edition): "And thus he [the lover] will come to contemplate not the particular beauty of a single woman but the universal beauty which adorns all human bodies; and then, dazzled by this greater light, he will not concern himself with the lesser; burning with a more perfect flame, he will feel little esteem for what he formerly prized so greatly [the woman's body]" (338-339).
- (8) Missing text, according to the editor, F. D. Hoeniger.

(9) This movement may very well reflect the anti-Catholic sentiment of the time. Of course, the convents, monasteries, and chantries had been closed since the reign of Henry III. For contrasting views of the closing of these religious institutions, see J.J. Scarisbrick **The Reformation and the English People** (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984) and Diarmaid MacCulloch *The Later Reformation in England 1547- 1603* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990)

(10) Lisa Jardine, in **Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare** (Totowa; N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983) describes the Renaissance viewing the unrestrained tongue of the vocal woman as the female equivalent of a penis. This view echoes in the androgyny of the witch.

(11) For a detailed description, see Anthony Harris Night's **Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-century English Drama** (Totowa, N.J.: Manchester University Press, 1980).

(12) Harold Brooks' introduction to the **Arden A Midsummer Night's Dream** points out this connection from Seneca's **Hippolytus**, and Spenser's **The Shepheardes Calender**.

(13) "Notes for a Lecture on Macbeth" [c. 1813], in Coleridge's **Writings on Shakespeare**, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Capricorn, 1959).

(14) Susan Snyder "Macbeth: A Modern Perspective" in **The New Folger Library Shakespeare Macbeth** (197).

(15) Stephen Greenblatt, quoting Reginald Scot's work **The Discoverie of Witchcraft** in his essay "Shakespeare Bewitched," appearing in **Cultural Traditions** ed Tetsui Kishi, Roger Pringle and Stanley Wells (Newark: University of Delaware Press 1991), cites these as the powers of Classical witches.

(16) This is the famous anti-Petrarchan sonnet which begins with the lines: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun--/Coral is far more red than her lip's red--/If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun" in **Shakespeare's Sonnets** , ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

(17) For a full discussion, see Guido Ruggiero **The Boundaries of Eros** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

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