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**Negotiating Spaces:  
women and agency  
in English Renaissance society, plays and masques**

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## Abstract

This thesis provides new and alternative readings of women's opportunities for agency in sixteenth and early seventeenth century society, and of the ways in which this was represented in plays and masques of the time. The relationship between history and theatre is a two-way process. In light of this, the depiction of proactive female characters in public plays is examined alongside the appearance of proactive women in society and on stage in Jacobean court masques, through the different but complementary lenses of marriage and female alliances.

After the Introduction (Chapter One), Part One (Chapters Two and Three) looks at female agency in marriage and the ways in which this was depicted in drama, from the perspective of two neglected social practices, spousals and wife sales. The spousal law offered women as well as men an opportunity to regulate their marriage without recourse to the church or parents and is a common, but under-studied, plot in Renaissance drama. Three of the most interesting and complex uses appear in George Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher* (1602-4), John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-14) and Thomas Middleton's *The Widow* (c.1616). The spousal plot provides an alternative angle for the playwrights to explore and endorse female characters' decisions to rebel against male family members and marry men of their choice.

Wife sales, which in society offered some women an opportunity for agency in separation and remarriage, appear in six Renaissance plays: Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599), Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1603-4), Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605), Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611), Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c.1621) and John Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (c.1635-6). The purpose of examining this plot, which has been almost ignored by critics, is that in all of the plays the wife transaction provides the context for an exploration of female agency, marriage and economics; further, in three, the sale or related barter results in the wife taking legitimate control of the action. Part One of this thesis, which reveals images of proactive maids, wives and widows legitimately defying patriarchal definitions of womanliness, extends understanding of the range of possibilities for the portrayal of female roles on the public stage.

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Part Two (Chapters Four, Five and Six) analyses the opportunities for female agency at the Jacobean court from the perspective of female homosocial bonding, looking at Anna of Denmark (Queen consort of James I), her court women, and the masques in which they danced. Anna's women were, like the Queen, trying to control their lives. Chapter Four shows that the Queen's retinue provided a separate space for these women to gather, interact and create alliances and further, that this mutual support facilitated their agency at the Jacobean court, agency which often involved opposing the king.

This evidence of homosocial bonding is used as the basis for an exploration of the court masques commissioned by Anna, which were a means for the Queen to continue her support of her women and to present them as a united group. In Chapter Five *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), written by Ben Jonson, when examined as two parts of a whole, reveal evidence of a coherent strategy of representation: the first masque presents images of female limitation, which are destabilised by the on-stage appearance of non-conformist women, while the second masque argues for the capabilities and worth of these women. Chapter Six reveals the women's continuing presentation as a united community in Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* (1609) and, more obviously, in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* (1610), in which Anna is presented as the genetrix of a sorority. The evidence uncovered in Chapter Four showed that Anna's women were not always unproblematically allied: nevertheless, analysis of the masques commissioned by Anna reveals the Queen's desire for her retinue to be perceived as unified. This retinue may have been satirised by Ben Jonson in *Epicoene* (1609-10), providing a likely reason why Jonson was not asked to write Anna's masque in 1610; however, Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* (c.1620s) is a positive and idealised depiction of female community, which can be connected to Wroth's experiences as part of Anna's retinue. Along with *Tethys' Festival*, it is a closet record of sisterhood.

The interaction of women with other women in Renaissance England - a relatively new area of investigation - is examined alongside women's relations with men: the result is the emergence of a more complex picture of women's opportunities for agency and of the ways in which this was reflected, both on the public stage and in the masques of Anna of Denmark.

## Illustrations

1. Costume for a Daughter of Niger in *The Masque of Blackness*. Drawing by Inigo Jones. The Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by permission of the Duke of Devonshire and the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.
2. Costume for an Oceania in *The Masque of Blackness*. Drawing by Inigo Jones. The Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by permission of the Duke of Devonshire and the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis grew out of my desire to examine the possibilities for female agency in sixteenth and early seventeenth century society, and the ways in which this was represented in the theatre of the time. There are many people who helped my ideas come to fruition, most obviously my supervisor, Dr. Sandra Billington, whom I would like to thank for her excellent supervision, for always being available, for giving me detailed and constructive comments and for encouraging me to think more deeply about my arguments. I would also like to thank my examiners, Peter Thomson (Emeritus Professor, Department of Drama, University of Exeter), whose reference to Elizabeth de Vere started my exploration into neglected Renaissance women, and Dr. Robert Maslen (Department of English Literature, University of Glasgow).

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Any errors and omissions which remain are, of course, my own.

### **Author's Declaration**

I acknowledge that this thesis is my own work and that all sources used have been properly referenced.

## Abbreviations

- L&P*: James Gairdener (ed.), *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic: Henry VIII, Volume Twelve, Parts One and Two*, (London: HMSO, 1890, 1891).
- SP (Dom.)*: Mary Anne Everett Green (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of James I, Three Volumes: 1603-1610, 1611-1618, 1619-1623*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green Longmans & Roberts, 1857).
- SP (Ven.)*: Horatio F. Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and Other Libraries of Northern Italy, Three Volumes: 1603-1607, 1607-1610, 1610-1613*, (London: HMSO, 1900, 1904, 1905).
- HMC Queensberry*: Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Buccleugh and Queensberry Preserved at Montagu House, Whitehall, Three Volumes*, (London: HMSO, 1899-1926).
- HMC Salisbury*: Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of ... The Marquis of Salisbury ... Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, 24 Volumes*, (London: HMSO, 1833-1976).
- Twelve Goddesses*: Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* in Richard Dutton (ed.), *Jacobean and Caroline Masques I*, (Nottingham: Nottingham University Press, 1981).
- Blackness*: Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness* in Dutton, *Masques I*.
- Beauty*: Jonson, *The Masque of Beauty* in Dutton, *Masques I*.
- Queens*: Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in Dutton, *Masques I*.
- TF*: Daniel, *Tethys' Festival* in Dutton, *Masques I*.
- LF*: Jonson, *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* in Spencer, T. J. B. & Wells, Stanley (eds.), *A Book of Masques in Honour of Allardyce Nicol*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
- Diary*: Katherine O. Acheson (ed.), *The Diary of Anne Clifford 1616-1619*, (London: Garland, 1995).
- JC*: Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, Seven Volumes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941-68).

- ES:* E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage, Seven Volumes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).
- BMD:* David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- PG:* Madeleine & Ruth Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace, Two Volumes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915).
- BJ:* C. H. Herford & P. & E. Simpson, *Ben Jonson, Ten Volumes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-54).
- FSM:* Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977).
- EDR:* Ely Diocese Records, Cambridge.
- HRO:* Hertfordshire Record Office.
- LRO:* Lancashire Record Office.
- MNHL:* Manx National Heritage Library, Isle of Man.
- NAS:* National Archive of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- PRO:* Public Record Office, London.
- WSRO:* Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office.

## 1. Introduction

In 1604 Susan de Vere, lady in waiting to Queen Anna, the wife of James I, secretly married Philip Herbert. According to Philip's brother William, the match was made 'after long love' and 'without the knowledge of any of his or her friends'.<sup>1</sup> It was also made without the knowledge of Susan's father, the Earl of Oxford or of her guardian at court, her uncle Robert Cecil. Nor had the King's permission been sought. During this period, aristocratic women, in particular maids like Susan, were in theory strictly controlled, as male honour was vested in the chastity of female family members. Yet Susan succeeded in marrying the man of her choice without recourse to any male relative. While she cannot be viewed as representative of women at this time, Susan was not unique in taking control of her life, and as such her actions provide a useful starting point for this present investigation. Examinations of the lives of sixteenth and early seventeenth century Englishwomen, in conjunction with the fictional representation of women in public plays and private masques of the time, reveal images of women of different classes negotiating a space for themselves within this patriarchal society.

The position of women in Renaissance England has been the topic of wide-ranging critical debate.<sup>2</sup> The argument put forward by Jacob Burckhardt in the mid-nineteenth century that women stood on a footing of 'perfect equality' with men was first rejected in the 1970s by Joan Kelly-Gadol in her seminal essay 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?'<sup>3</sup> The opposite view - that this was a period in which women were wholly constrained to the dominant ideology, with no opportunity for independence or self-expression - has also been rejected by most scholars, including Pamela Benson, Patricia Crawford, Sara Mendelson and Laura Gowing.<sup>4</sup> Renaissance society was undeniably patriarchal, constructed around a hierarchical chain of being which positioned women as subordinate to men, and female inferiority was reinforced by medical texts.<sup>5</sup> However, patriarchy is never monolithic. As recent studies have shown, the ideological construction of 'woman' as inferior, silent, chaste and confined to the domestic did not go unchallenged: within Renaissance England there existed a multiplicity of often competing discourses including male, female, humanist, monarchical, Catholic and Protestant.<sup>6</sup> As feminist scholars have pointed out, 'woman' was (and is) 'an



ideological category, the site of constant struggle' and debate.<sup>7</sup> The experiences of women in the Renaissance not only differed from the experiences of men; they also differed from the experiences of other women, according to factors such as class, age and occupation.

Some women undoubtedly internalised the dominant codes which demanded silence, chastity and subordination, but there were many others who rejected, to a greater or lesser extent, the roles to which they were expected to conform. Women preached, litigated, managed estates, worked, were educated, attended the theatre and wrote religious tracts, pamphlets, diaries, conduct literature, plays and poetry.<sup>8</sup> The evidence suggests that most of these women were not trying to overturn the dominant hegemony – the intention here is not to posit the existence of a conscious and coherent feminism at this time – instead, they were finding ways within the system to gain a degree of control over their lives. This study offers new and alternative accounts of Renaissance Englishwomen's agency and the ways in which this is represented in plays and masques of the time, through the different but complementary lenses of marriage and female alliances. The two sections of this thesis converge in the person of Susan de Vere: Susan decided to choose her own husband and marry secretly, and female agency in marriage is at the centre of the first part of this study; in addition, Susan was a member of Anna of Denmark's retinue and the second part of this study analyses the ways in which the Queen and her women were able to negotiate a space at the English court through the creation of female homosocial bonds, bonds which were made visible by their participation in court masques.

Cultural representations of women are not exact portrayals of women in society. Nor were sixteenth and seventeenth century playwrights writing moral tracts, rather they were producing entertainment: as Kathleen McLuskie points out, 'The direct pressures on Renaissance dramatists were artistic and commercial as well as ideological'.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite this, playwrights had the potential both to reinforce the dominant view of women and to challenge it, and as dramatists took material from the social conditions around them, useful analogies can often be drawn between the actions of real women and the portrayal of women in plays.<sup>10</sup> And, as will be shown, this can be taken a step further when the Jacobean court masque is examined. It is for this reason that this thesis looks initially at the

social and historical background to the period before providing pro-female readings of specific texts.

The first section of this thesis, therefore, examines marriage, the path which it was expected most people would take. Between the twelfth century and 1857, marriage was the province of the church, whose 'jurisdiction ... extended to some of the most intimate aspects of the personal life of the population as a whole'.<sup>11</sup> Under Catholicism, virginity had been viewed as a state preferable to marriage, but after the Reformation, the barrenness of extended virginity was something to condemn, not exalt. Despite this being problematised by the stance of Queen Elizabeth, St. Paul's exhortation that 'it is better to marry than to burn' was replaced by a belief that marriage was vital for the welfare of both the individual and society: as Dympna Callaghan argues, 'marriage is the foundation of the family which is in turn the foundation of the State, society and cosmos in analogical order'.<sup>12</sup> It has been argued that as Protestantism placed more emphasis on the family unit, this improved the position of women: however, the closure of the nunneries removed from women a legitimate alternative to marriage, one which had enabled them to be part of a female community. Christopher Hill has argued that after the Reformation more power was vested in husbands, while Jacqueline Eales demonstrates that 'Current historical thinking ... suggests that attitudes towards female inferiority were not greatly altered by either the Renaissance or the Reformation'.<sup>13</sup>

During both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in theory, and often in practice, marriage was a financial transaction, arranged by the parents, particularly with regard to the upper classes: for some children this meant being engaged at birth.<sup>14</sup> Parental control was considered paramount and the woman was expected to be ruled by her parents and subsequently by her husband. Further, all women were ultimately viewed in relation to their marital status, classed as maid, wife, widow or whore.

The majority of women married, usually in their mid-twenties, although aristocratic girls tended to marry younger.<sup>15</sup> While the stereotype of the young girl married to a much older man is no longer considered to be the norm during this period, there is evidence that this did happen, for example the case of Mary (Sidney) Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Further, some women were forced to marry against their will, such as Penelope Devereux, while others had husbands

who beat them.<sup>16</sup> This did not mean, however, that all women were constrained by marriage, or that they were constrained in the same ways or to the same extent. For example, despite the fact that when a woman married all her goods were supposed to transfer to her husband, in practice some women – usually widows, but also maids, such as Elizabeth de Vere, the older sister of Susan – managed to keep control of their land on marriage. And, although under common law a married woman was unable to go to court, customary and ecclesiastical law allowed wives to litigate as single women and the evidence shows that all kinds of women, including wives, went to court.<sup>17</sup> In addition, although marriage isolated many women from female companionship, David Cressy has argued recently that marriage and subsequently, child-birth, opened up to some women a variety of activities which necessitated interaction with other married women.<sup>18</sup>

Also, some women, like Susan de Vere, were able to marry for love. The attitude towards love during the Renaissance was complex. It was often characterised as a disruptive force: Francis Bacon argued that love 'doth much mischief, sometimes like a Siren, sometimes like a Fury', using examples of dangerous femininity to construct it as unruly.<sup>19</sup> This attitude can also be found in the drama of the time, for example in Romeo's exaggerated love melancholy for Rosaline, or in the love which drove Giovanni to incest and to murder Annabella in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1632). Some, however, believed that, while passionate love was destructive and dangerous, within marriage constant love was desirable. This idea is reflected in one of Bacon's final observations in his essay 'Of Love': 'Nuptial love maketh mankind'.<sup>20</sup> The appearance in England of matches based on this concept of affection and companionship has been attributed by some historians, notably Valerie Wayne and Pamela Benson, to the emergence of Humanism at the beginning of the sixteenth century and by others, such as Christopher Hill and Lawrence Stone, to the growth of Puritanism.<sup>21</sup> Stone has argued that such marriages only began to appear in the late seventeenth century, but there is evidence they existed before this time, for example Amy Erickson's analysis of wills, Alison Wall's study of the letters of the gentlewoman Maria Thynne and of course, Susan de Vere's marriage to Philip Herbert.<sup>22</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, however, urges caution when discussing these matches:

at best the term *companionate marriage* is misleading; at base it refers to a concept of spousal relationships which is far less revolutionary than we have been encouraged to believe.<sup>23</sup>

In light of the fact that sixteenth and seventeenth century marriage was based on an inherent theory of hierarchy and female subordination, this study prefers the term 'affectionate' to 'companionate' as being more appropriate to describe apparently loving matches during this period.

In 1991 Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker wrote that

[b]oth men and women marry, but as part of the 'feminine domain' marriage as a set of institutional practices with its own history and implications has until now been ignored.<sup>24</sup>

In the last decade there has been an increased focus on marriage and its dramatic representation but there are, however, still neglected areas of investigation, and analysis of them can help build a more layered and complex view of women and marriage at this time. Much has now been written on the way marriage is dealt with by Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline playwrights, for example its presentation as a financial transaction in which the woman is treated as property, forced into a partnership against her will, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-4), Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) and *Women Beware Women* (c.1621) and Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1629). The concept of woman as commodity is, of course, central to any discussion of marriage at this time, and as such it will be taken into account: however, this study is interested in plays which show female characters acting independently, whether in the formation of marriage, or as a wife. This will be examined from the perspective of two types of marriage plot which have their origins in society: the spousal and the wife sale. The purpose of looking at marriage from these specific viewpoints is firstly, that both have in general been overlooked (the latter almost completely) and secondly, that these plots provide the context for playwrights to explore issues of women's legitimate agency with regard to marriage.

William Herbert, when describing the secret marriage of Susan de Vere to his brother, wrote that the couple had 'contracted privately'. In so doing, Susan and Philip had taken advantage of the medieval law of spousals, which was also

known as precontracting. This stated that in order to enact binding matrimony, a couple only had to exchange vows of the present tense ('I do'). By the seventeenth century, church officials were strongly opposed to people marrying in this way, preferring them to wed publicly in church in the presence of a minister. But as marriage law remained unchanged until Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, couples who chose to marry by a *de presenti* precontract alone were legally married, and the church had no option but to ratify such matches.

This method for people to regulate their own lives without recourse to the church or to parents was incorporated into Renaissance drama, and the spousal plot is a feature of many plays of this period, both comedies and tragedies, testimony to the variety of dramatic possibilities it offers.<sup>25</sup> Yet despite this, it has in general been neglected, in particular with regard to the study of women and marriage. In light of this omission, this thesis examines three plays in which the spousal plot provides the framework for explorations into single women's opportunities for agency in the formation of marriage: George Chapman's tragicomedy *The Gentleman Usher* (1602-4), John Webster's tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-14) and Middleton's comedy *The Widow* (c.1616). In all three, proactive single women use the spousal law to form love matches with men of their choice against the wishes of male relatives. These female characters reject the traditional feminine role, but in doing so they are not presented as immoral; rather, their actions are endorsed. As will be shown, the spousal plot provides a different perspective on the usual dramatic portrayals of conflicts between families and daughters. In addition, by presenting precontracting alone as a positive and legitimate option for couples, the playwrights (whether intentionally or not) put forward the notion that private conscience was more important than parental/familial or state control. This can be considered subversive, particularly when placed in the context of women marrying of their own accord.

Having examined the positive portrayal of rebellious single women through the lens of the spousal plot in Chapter Two, Chapter Three analyses the representation of wives in plays of this period from the perspective of wife sales. There is a group of six Renaissance plays in which a wife is sold or bartered, and until now, as far as my research can determine, no one has tried to make sense of the inclusion of this plot. The plays are Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599), Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1603-4), Middleton's *A Trick to Catch*

*the Old One* (1605), Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (c.1611), Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c.1621) and Ford's little known play, *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635-6). All involve issues of female autonomy. In general, when wives take control of the action in Renaissance plays they are depicted as immoral: witness, for example, Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan, the Duchess in Middleton's *The Witch* (c.1613) and Isabella in *Women Beware Women*. However, as will be shown, in three of the plays to be discussed in this chapter, the sale or related barter provides the context for the wife to guide the plot in a way which is legitimised within the play.

The dramatic representations of women to be discussed in Chapters Two and Three were mediated, not only by the male voice of the playwright, but also by that of the boy actor who performed the female roles. Controversy surrounded the cross-dressed boy actor, with moralists claiming that he destabilised 'normal' gender roles and incited homosexual lust.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the exclusion of women from the stage may have meant that any potentially subversive messages regarding female characters were contained within the play world. To some extent, however, boys playing women must have been accepted as a convention, otherwise plays - in particular those which depended on the tragic power of female protagonists, such as *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Duchess of Malfi* - would not have had dramatic force. This study would also argue that it has to be considered significant that some plays presented proactive female characters in a positive way, particularly in light of the fact that women would have been in the theatre audience.<sup>27</sup> There was, however, a group of theatrical productions in the first decade of the seventeenth century in which women were able to perform, if not to speak: the masques commissioned by Anna of Denmark, Queen consort of James I, which took place in the private arena of the Jacobean court. These masques and the women who performed in them are the subject of the second half of this exploration into images of women negotiating spaces: in these productions, the actions of historical women and cultural portrayals of women converge. Further, the focus here is not on heterosexual relations (as in the first section), but on female homosocial bonds.

As a result of the pioneering work of Stephen Orgel, the masque is now understood to have been an important tool of Jacobean court politics.<sup>28</sup> On one level it glorified King James and promoted his ideology of an absolute monarchy.

In the last decade, however, critics such as Leeds Barroll, Barbara Lewalski and Clare McManus have read the masques from the perspective of the central female presence at the court, Anna of Denmark.<sup>29</sup> Queen Anna - who has recently been repositioned as an important historical figure in terms of politics and court patronage - introduced the masque to the Jacobean court on a large scale, commissioning and dancing in six masques between 1604 and 1611. Lewalski argues that Anna's appropriation of the masque subverted James' position, while Barroll focuses on what the masque performances reveal of Anna's presentation of herself as an alternative female figure of royalty. McManus adopts a different approach, placing the masques within a historical tradition of female performance and arguing that these women were able to appear on stage because masquing was a form of dancing: 'dance was the courtly woman's primary point of entry into the masque form'.<sup>30</sup> This study, however, centres on the fact that Anna's participation in these theatrical performances was never alone: she always appeared alongside other female masquers, and it is these masquers who are of most interest here. These dancers appeared on stage in roles, portraying nymphs, warrior Queens and rivers; however, the women were also representing themselves, and those watching always knew the identities of the dancers.

On her arrival at the English court in 1603 Queen Anna had gathered around her a group of strong-willed, intelligent, artistic, unconventional and often oppositional women, and it was these women, all of whom were aristocratic, and very few of whom conformed to patriarchal conceptions of femininity, who danced. The lives of some of these women have not yet been discussed (and many not in this context), and Chapter Four therefore examines some of the women closest to Queen Anna, one of whom was Susan de Vere. These women are analysed, not as individuals, but as part of a group of women who helped each other to control their lives. Lewalski (who looks briefly at some of the women who danced in the Queen's masques) has stated that Anna's women formed 'a separate female community'.<sup>31</sup> This study will argue, however, that the situation was complex, and rather than constituting an unproblematic united female community, the evidence shows that the support network formed by these women was one from which court women could be excluded as well as included.

In light of the conclusions drawn in Chapter Four, Chapters Five and Six provide alternative readings of the masques, focusing not only on the written text

and spectacle, but also, crucially, on what they reveal regarding the inclusion and presentation of specific dancers. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, in their 1999 study of early modern female alliances, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens*, argue that

to study women in groups is to gain a sense of women as productive and imaginative, interactive with even the most patriarchal injunctions to silence and domesticity and, at times, resistant and even transformative of dominant discourses.<sup>32</sup>

With this in mind, this study analyses the ways in which Anna and her women negotiated a space at the male-oriented Jacobean court through their alliances with each other and through their participation in the court masques. Aristocratic masquers (male as well as female) were silent, but as will be shown, the appearance of Anna and her women on stage was not merely decorative, as has been argued in the past,<sup>33</sup> nor were they trapped in a controlling male gaze.

Chapter Five examines the first two masques which Ben Jonson wrote for the Queen (the second and third she commissioned), *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), arguing that when analysed in conjunction they reveal evidence of different but related aims regarding Anna and her women. Chapter Six focuses more on the question of Anna's women being portrayed and perceived as a community, examining Jonson's *Masque of Queens* (1609) and Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* (1610). It will be argued that Queen Anna used her masques in various ways: to make visible her relationships with specific women, to endorse their often oppositional positions, to highlight their capabilities, to show images of female empowerment and - significantly - to present her women as a united community, an agenda which culminated in the production of *Tethys' Festival*, in which the women were figured as a sorority headed by the Queen. Two plays which then benefit from analysis resulting from the study of the masques are Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609-10) and Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* (1620s).

To summarise the intention of this study, then, the first section looks at women and their experiences of marriage in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, using this socio-historical context to provide the starting point for pro-female readings of plays by George Chapman, John Webster, Thomas Middleton



and Thomas Dekker. By looking at spousals and wife sales, two under-studied areas, the aim is to add to current knowledge of early modern marriage and of the opportunities which existed for female agency within this patriarchal institution, and also to show some of the ways in which playwrights were able to construct positive proactive female characters, both single women and wives. Further, many of the texts studied in Chapters Two and Three have in general been neglected, and this study hopes to show they are worthy of further investigation.<sup>34</sup>

In the second section (Chapters Four, Five and Six), women and their theatrical representation converge in the masque performances of Queen Anna and her retinue. This part examines the written poetry of the masques, arguing that these male authored texts do not necessarily put forward a patriarchal point of view if they are considered in conjunction with the performance text and the specific women who danced in them. The emphasis in this part of the thesis is not on marriage (women's relations with men), but on female alliances - women's relations with other women. And, it will be shown that female homosocial bonds are central to understanding the potential of the masque form to be read as pro-female, or more accurately, as promoting the position of these specific women. This study acknowledges that the masques which Anna commissioned were not the sum of her activity, but only the Queen's actions relating to her masques or directly to her women have been discussed here.<sup>35</sup> It is hoped that the conclusions in this section will contribute to the relatively recent, but growing, investigation into early modern women's alliances, to the repositioning of Queen Anna as a significant figure in historical and theatrical studies and also to reassessments of the Jacobean court masque.

Recovering the lives of sixteenth and early seventeenth century women and the ways in which they interacted with both men and with other women, and analysing female cultural representations improves our understanding of the position of women at this time and of the way in which 'woman' has been ideologically constructed throughout history. This study adds to this understanding by showing images of women, both real and fictional, negotiating a space for agency within a society which was structured in such a way as to deny them the right and opportunity so to do.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from William Herbert quoted in Josephine Roberts, "'The Knott Never to Bee Untide': The Controversy Regarding Marriage in Mary Wroth's *Urania*" in Naomi Miller & Gary Waller (eds.), *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, (Knoxville: Tennessee University Press, 1991), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Renaissance', with its attendant meaning of 'rebirth', has been rejected by many recent scholars as problematic, either because it seems to refer only to literary and artistic development or because they believe it implies greater change and upheaval than there actually was. Further, the very use of the word suggests that women did in fact undergo a 'rebirth', something which is still being explored. Most scholars now tend to use the term 'early modern' to describe the period c.1500-c.1700. This is also problematic, not least because it implies that history works as a linear progression, moving inevitably towards our own modern time. Both terms are used in this study for convenience, but it is important to be aware that neither is neutral nor wholly satisfactory.

<sup>3</sup> Burckhardt was specifically writing about the Italian Renaissance, but his conclusions influenced many subsequent writers on women in the English Renaissance. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, (London, 1921); Joan Kelly-Gadol, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?' in Lorna Hutson (ed.), *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Radical feminists have argued that women in the Renaissance were wholly oppressed, for example Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: a study of the dynamics of male domination*, (London: Routledge, 1992). However, most scholars reject this. There are now many studies on Renaissance women: see for example Marlene Springer (ed.), *What Manner of Woman*, (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan & Nancy J. Vickers (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: the discourses of sexual difference in early modern Europe*, (London: Chicago University Press, 1986); Pamela Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, (London: Yale University Press, 1995); Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, (London: Fontana Press, 1995); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England 1500-1700*, (London: UCL Press Ltd., 1998); Sara Mendelson & Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Hutson, *Feminism*; Patricia Crawford & Laura Gowing (eds.), *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth Century England*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Book I of Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* (with an English translation by A.L. Peck), (London: Heinemann, 1943), especially pp. 103; 113.

<sup>6</sup> Even within these different areas there was no unified agreement: for example, at this time there existed a variety of different Protestant sects.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> For female preachers, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle & Pamela J. Walker, *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, (London: California University Press, 1998). For women litigating see Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–*

1640, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*; Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For women managing estates see Alison Wall (ed.), *Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne*, (Wiltshire Record Society, Volume 38, 1983) and also Chapter 4 of this thesis. For women working see Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Mendelson & Crawford, *Women*, pp. 256-300. For female education see Benson, *Invention* and Eales, *Women*, pp. 35-46. For women attending the theatre see A. L. Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941) and Richard Levin, 'Women in the Renaissance Theatre Audience', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 40 (1989), pp. 165-74. For women writers, see Betty Travitsky (ed.), *The Paradise of Women: writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1981); Margaret Paterson Hannay (ed.), *Silent But for the Word*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985); Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: women writers of the English Renaissance*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Tina Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices: women as writers and translators of literature in the English Renaissance*, (London: Routledge, 1992); Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1993); Louise Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Woman Writers*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Helen Wilcox (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kim Walker, *Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, (London: Prentice Hall International, 1996); Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: seventeenth century radical sectarian writing and feminist criticism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Randall Martin (ed.), *Women Writers in Early Modern England 1500-1700*, (London: Longman, 1997); Marion Wynne-Davies (ed.), *Women Poets of the Renaissance*, (London: J.M. Dent, 1998); Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing*, (London: Longman, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> McLuskie, *Dramatists*, p. 228. Commercial concerns would have encompassed not only the audience (which of course included women as well as men) but also duty to patrons.

<sup>10</sup> Studies which consider the representation of Renaissance women include Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, (London: Macmillan, 1975); Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), in which Jardine argues against Dusinberre's approach; Mary Beth Rose (ed.), *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: literary and historical perspectives*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985); Stevie Davies, *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986); Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); McLuskie, *Dramatists*; Dorothea Kehler & Susan Baker (eds.), *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1991); Carole Levin & Karen Robertson, *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1994); Kate Aughterson (ed.), *Renaissance Women: a Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England*, (London: Routledge, 1995); Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama*, (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 1. On marriage see also *FSM*; Alan Macfarlane, 'Review of Stone

FSM', *History and Theory*, 18 (1979), pp. 103-26 and *Marriage and Love in England: modes of reproduction 1300-1840*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). See also the texts listed in the notes to Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Callaghan, *Gender*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Eales, *Women*, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Frederick J. Furnivall, *Child Marriages, Divorces and Ratifications etc. in the Diocese of Chester A.D. 1561-6*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1897).

<sup>15</sup> 'More than 90 per cent of those reaching adulthood in the sixteenth century would marry, and more than 80 per cent in the seventeenth century.' *BDM*, p. 285; Crawford & Gowing, *Women's Worlds*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 206-28.

<sup>17</sup> See note 8.

<sup>18</sup> *BMD*, pp. 198-203; 287-8.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Of Love' in Michael J. Hawkins (ed.), *Essays*, (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Valerie Wayne, Introduction to Edmund Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship*, (London: Cornell University, 1992); Benson, *Invention*; Hill, *Puritanism*; *FSM*. The term 'Puritan' is problematic: it encompassed different sects, some more radical than others. Further, '[t]hey often called themselves, not Puritans (which is what their enemies called them) but "the godly"'. Barry Coward, *Social Change and Continuity in Early Modern England 1550-1750*, (Essex: Longman, 1988), p. 92. See also Hill, *Puritanism*; Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Oppositional Drama Under the Stuarts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 19-22.

<sup>22</sup> Amy Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, (London: Routledge, 1993); Wall (ed.), *Two Elizabethan Women*. Other critics have disputed Stone's argument for a lack of affection in sixteenth and seventeenth century marriages, for example Coward, *Social Change*, pp. 22-4 and Kim Walker quoted in Krontiris, *Voices*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 138.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction in Kehler & Baker, *In Another Country*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>26</sup> For discussions of sumptuary legislation, cross-dressing and the cross-dressed boy actor see Wilfrid Hooper, 'The Tudor Sumptuary Laws', *English Historical Review*, 30 (1915); Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1926); Jardine, Chapter 1 in *Daughters*; Jean E. Howard, 'Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988), pp. 418-40; Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Penguin, 1992); Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: anti-theatricality 1579-1642*,

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Orgel, 'Boys will be Girls', *Around the Globe*, Autumn 1997, pp. 27-8.

<sup>27</sup> This raises the question of the efficacy of theatre. Theatre itself may not be able to change society, but it has the potential to change the viewpoint of the audience.

<sup>28</sup> See Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) and *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance*, (London: California University Press, 1974).

<sup>29</sup> Lewalski, Chapter 1 in *Writing Women*: Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and female masquing in the Stuart Court 1590-1619*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> McManus, *Women*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Frye & Karen Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 13. The study of Renaissance women and community is a relatively new area of investigation: for a list of earlier studies into Renaissance women's alliances, see *Maids and Mistresses*, p. 6n. 5. The most recent book on this topic is Rebecca D'Monté & Nicole Pohl, *Female Communities 1600-1800*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> See for example Gary Waller, "'Like One in a Gay Masque': The Sidney cousins in the theatres of court and country" in S. P. Cerasano & Marion Wynne-Davies (eds.), *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History and Performance 1594-1998*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> Shakespearean plays have been included only as a reference point where necessary, in order to focus on and give more value to less commonly studied playwrights and texts.

<sup>35</sup> For discussions on the Queen's other activities see Barroll, *Anna* and McManus, Chapters 2 and 4 in *Women*.

**Part One**  
**Female agency in marriage**

## 2. Women making marriage: the spousal law in Renaissance society and plays

I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber,  
*Per verba de presenti* is absolute marriage  
(*The Duchess of Malfi*, 1.2.391-2).

The formation of marriage in sixteenth and seventeenth century England was a complex ritual process. In most cases a couple would court each other, often with gifts, then, in front of at least two witnesses, promise to marry at a future date. The banns would then be read out on three consecutive Sundays (or holy days), allowing anyone who knew of a legal impediment to the marriage the opportunity to object. Alternatively, a couple could avoid having the banns published by obtaining a marriage licence from a minister. Next, the couple would exchange vows of the present tense in their parish church (standing in the doorway before the Reformation, by the altar after) in front of a minister and other witnesses, before consummating the marriage. This was the process which church officials wanted all couples to follow, and the evidence suggests that most marriages did in fact conform to this: 'From moderate puritans to high ceremonialists, the general view held that marriage belonged to God and should be celebrated with solemnity in his church'.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the continuation of the medieval law of spousals, however, all that was actually required to formulate binding matrimony was for a couple to exchange vows of the present tense. This study therefore provides a background to spousals, which are also known as precontracts and, briefly, to clandestine marriages. It also examines the evidence that spousals provided a means for couples to regulate marriage themselves and that they potentially gave women as well as men an opportunity to negotiate a space for themselves within the formation of marriage. This study will also analyse the frequent occurrence of the spousal as a plot device in early modern plays, focusing specifically on three plays in which the precontract plots involve issues of women's legitimate agency.

### The legal and social background

Marriage law was formulated in the twelfth century by Pope Alexander III (1159-81), and it remained the province of the church in England until 1857: marital disputes, with the exception of those involving property, were dealt with by ecclesiastical courts. Twelfth century canonists had debated what exactly would constitute matrimony, and had decided that consent was central. When Gratian was asked, 'may a daughter be given in marriage against her will?' he replied 'no woman should be coupled to anyone except by her free will'.<sup>2</sup> Equal importance was therefore placed on the consent of the woman. In addition, Gratian considered parental consent and the blessing of a priest as essential, otherwise the marriage was valid but 'infected'.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the theologian Peter Lombard (c.1095-1160) and the Masters of Paris argued that consent alone was necessary to create binding matrimony, and it was this latter formulation which was adopted by Alexander III.<sup>4</sup> Consent was to be signalled by the mutual exchange of vows, known as contracting spousals, a word derived from the Latin *spondere*, which is 'to promise or pledge faithfully', and from *Sponte dare*, 'to give freely or without constraint'.

Twelfth century ecclesiastical law further distinguished between three different kinds of spousals: contracts *per verba de presenti*, contracts *per verba de futuro* and conditional contracts. Spousals *per verba de presenti* involved oaths spoken by the couple using words of the present tense, such as 'I do', and this constituted legal marriage: 'The words of the contract by *verba de presenti* were, in J. L. Austin's terminology, performative words, themselves creating the bond of marriage'.<sup>5</sup> Spousals *per verba de futuro* and conditional spousals were promises to marry, the former at a future time ('I will'), the latter pending the fulfilment of a condition, for example 'I will marry you if my parents consent': these were agreements to marry rather than actual marriage. Both could, however, become irregular but wholly binding marriage if the couple engaged in sexual relations: in this case the contract was considered to have been transformed into *de presenti*.

In order to avoid confusion, there were fundamental differences between the contracts, for example the distinction already mentioned between 'I do' (present tense)



and 'I will' (future tense). As a contract *per verba de presenti* constituted marriage, it was indissoluble. Such a betrothal could only be annulled if there was a pre-existing contract, if either or both of the parties was underage or if the relationship was consanguineous. In all of these cases the contract could not be legal in the first place.<sup>6</sup> If one or both partners married other people after being betrothed with a *de presenti* contract, the second marriage constituted adultery and any children born of the second match were likely to be declared illegitimate. Even if the second match had been solemnised in church, a prior *de presenti* contract superseded a later marriage or contract. In such cases, a second marriage would be pronounced void, as in a 1568 case: Rowland Griffith's marriage to Elizabeth Wyt was annulled when he was found to have been previously precontracted to Joan Saunders.<sup>7</sup> This could happen years after the event: in 1564 Alexander Winstanley and Ellen Sonkie were precontracted in front of witnesses using words of the present tense. Three or four weeks afterwards, possibly due to her father's disapproval of the match with Winstanley, Sonkie married someone else. Twenty years later Winstanley brought a suit against her in order to annul the second marriage.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to a *de presenti* contract, a contract *per verba de futuro* was dissolvable in certain circumstances, some of which were extended absence; impotence; disease or disfiguration; fornication with a third person; if the couple were underage or if the day named for the marriage had passed. Therefore, in the words of Henry Swinburne, in *de futuro* contracts the knot of marriage was 'not so surely tied, but that it may be loosed, whiles the matter is in suspense and unperfect'.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned, however, if the couple engaged in sexual relations then the contract was translated into marriage and treated accordingly.

This distinction between contracts *per verba de presenti* and *per verba de futuro* was the foundation of medieval marriage law and these informal declarations continued to be practised throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For the church, however, although spousals alone constituted binding matrimony, such marriages were considered deficient: ecclesiastical officials wanted people to publicly celebrate their matches in church with a minister. This was for three reasons: firstly, to avoid sinful matches, such as bigamy or marriages between kin; secondly, to

prevent adultery and thirdly, to ensure only legitimate children inherited. Also, if marriage was in the hands of the people, as it was when only spousals were involved, then the church could not have complete authority over it. As early as 1200, therefore, church officials introduced more stipulations and restrictions. In an attempt to encourage couples that precontracting was not sufficient, parishioners were told that they had to publicly solemnise their marriage in church. And, in 1215, the Lateran Council issued a decree stating that all marrying couples must publish banns. But contracting spousals alone continued to create binding matrimony. The situation was therefore complicated, and as Martin Ingram argues

It might seem that the Church would have done better if it had at the outset made the due solemnisation of marriage in church a necessary condition for the recognition of a valid union.

Making church celebration an essential component of matrimony would have solved many of the church's problems regarding its control over the formation of marriage. But as Ingram goes on to explain,

It would seem, indeed, that Pope Alexander III wished to do this, but was deterred by the fact that, given the diversity of marriage practices in twelfth century Europe, the step would have rendered a massive proportion of marriages invalid.<sup>10</sup>

The church's elevation of marriage to the position of sacrament in 1439 by the Council of Florence can be interpreted as part of a continuing attempt to gain control over marriage, as can the introduction of marriage registers in England in 1538.<sup>11</sup>

In 1563, the Council of Trent's *Decree Concerning the Reform of Matrimony* rationalised marriage law for Catholics on the continent, stating that 'Whoever contracts marriage otherwise than in the presence of a pastor and of two or three witnesses does so invalidly'.<sup>12</sup> The decree also banned couples from cohabiting between the time of the contract and the solemnisation. Many Protestant European countries introduced similar marriage laws, but no such law was passed in England until Lord Hardwicke's marriage act of 1753, which made only church weddings

valid, and until this time the strength of informal declarations remained in Protestant England.<sup>13</sup> However, as Cressy observes, 'Unchurched marriages based on simple consent may have met the minimum requirements of the law, but they were severely deficient in social and cultural terms'.<sup>14</sup> And, in 1540, twenty-three years before the Council of Trent's decree, a parliamentary statute was introduced in Protestant England which declared all solemnised marriages indissoluble 'notwithstanding any precontract or precontractis of marriage, not consummate with bodily knowledge'. The reason for this, as R. B. Outhwaite notes, was to enable Henry VIII firstly, to separate from Anne of Cleves, whom he had married, but had not engaged in sexual relations with, and secondly, to marry Catherine Howard, who had a previous, non-consummated contract. However, this statute was repealed in 1548 'because, it was said, "women and men" were "breaking their own promises and faiths made by the one unto the other"'.<sup>15</sup>

In 1550, in the reign of Edward VI, an appointed commission drafted the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*, which would have invalidated irregular marriages, for example those not publicly solemnised in church.<sup>16</sup> The bill was defeated in the Lords in 1553 and although it was reintroduced when Elizabeth was on the throne, it was again rejected.<sup>17</sup> Another parliamentary bill was proposed in 1571, to regulate those who issued marriage licences, while in 1597 the House of Commons attacked the church's handling of its clergymen, complaining that licences were being distributed too freely.

While parliament was unable to rationalise marriage law, the civil courts did support the church's attempts to force couples to marry publicly in a church, by making most property rights dependent on solemnisation. If the husband died before the marriage was publicly celebrated with a minister, then his widow received no dower, nor could she administer his goods, which would otherwise have been her role.<sup>18</sup> Further, any children in an unsolemnised marriage were regarded under common law as illegitimate and therefore unable to inherit automatically. But despite this, unsolemnised marriages also gave women a space to operate within the patriarchal framework of matrimony: an irregularly married woman, dying, could make her will and dispose of her own goods as she wished, something she was not

entitled to do had the marriage been solemnised, as then all her goods would have transferred to her husband.

At the same time as parliament was trying - unsuccessfully - to reform marriage law, the Protestant church too wanted regulation. In 1562, the year before the Council of Trent decree, convocation (a provincial synod of the Anglican clergy) deliberated over the possibility 'that all clandestine contracts be judged in law as no contracts', but these measures did not go beyond the discussion stage.<sup>19</sup> Preachers condemned matches which were not conducted in church and emphasised to their parishioners the importance of remaining chaste before a marriage was solemnised. However, this in itself can be viewed as a paradox since conditional and *de futuro* contracts could gain marriage status through the very thing the church was discouraging – sexual relations. The moralist William Harrington had, in 1528, stated the Roman Catholic line:

the man may not possess the woman as his wife nor the woman the man as her husband ... afore such time as that matrimony be approved and solemnised by our mother holy church; and if they do indeed they sin deadly.<sup>20</sup>

This Catholic view was endorsed by the Protestant reformer Miles Coverdale's translation of Henry Bullinger's *Christian State of Matrimony* (1541):

Therefore after the handfasting and making the contract, the church going and wedding should not be differed too long, lest the wicked sow his ungracious seed in the mean season.<sup>21</sup>

This reference to contracting indicates that spousals were approved of by ministers as a precursor to solemnisation, as illustrated by the minister Richard Greenham who, in 1599, presided over the formal contracting of two of his parishioners, calling the precontract 'so good a custom'.<sup>22</sup> The church wanted to relegate precontracts to the status of engagement before the ceremony proper, and thus encouraged people to contract only *de futuro* spousals. This is mirrored by the actions of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, who exchange faithful vows before solemnising their marriage (albeit clandestinely) in church in the presence of the Friar. The minister Henry

Smith also championed contracting before the ceremony, saying that a couple should pause 'between the contract and the marriage ... for their affection to settle in'.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting that Coverdale's translation of Bullinger warns against leaving too long a pause, in case affection leads to sexual relations.

This emphasis on discouraging sexual relations between the contract and the solemnisation, reflected in Prospero's warning to Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (4.1.15-23),<sup>24</sup> is also echoed by seventeenth century moralists such as John Downname and the Puritan preacher William Gouge who, in his tract *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) wrote: 'Yea, many take liberty after a contract to know their spouse, as if they were married: an unwarrantable and dishonest practice'.<sup>25</sup> Gouge, who here distinguishes between a contract and solemnised marriage, and who considers the contracting of spousals alone deficient, speaks as though sexual relations before solemnisation were commonplace. This is reinforced by Outhwaite's evidence that 'Verbal promises tantamount to marriage were the excuse offered by sixty per cent of the pregnant or bastard-bearing women examined by the justices in mid-seventeenth century Somerset'.<sup>26</sup> The 1622 case of John and Joan Chapman of Stepney, who were called to court for beginning sexual relations after their contract, but before their marriage was solemnised, seems to have been characteristic. Three years earlier, a plea of 'betrothal was successful against an accusation in the courts of pre-nuptial fornication'.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, while the church emphasised chastity before solemnisation, in practice spousals seem to have been regarded by many as the signal to begin sexual relations. The church courts paradoxically encouraged this: firstly, by allowing a precontract as justification for pre-nuptial sex and secondly, by allowing pre-nuptial sex to confirm a contract.

In 1604 canons were formulated to support what was already being preached: they stated that the banns must be read for three weeks running and that marriages were only to take place in a church in the couple's own parish in the presence of an ordained minister, between the hours of 8am and twelve noon and not during prohibited times of the year.<sup>28</sup> The canons also included a provision forbidding marriage without parental consent for children under twenty-one.<sup>29</sup> Ministers could no longer give marriage licences without such consent, and this can be viewed as a

reaction to parliament's criticism that ministers issued these licences too freely. However, parental consent, while viewed by the church as desirable, was not necessary to contract marriage 'lest the principle of the free consent of the couple should be violated'.<sup>30</sup> But the question of what constituted marriage was gradually becoming less about the consent of the couple involved and more to do with outside social concerns. The canons were intended to ensure that people were free to marry, to eradicate the possibility of fornication and illegitimacy and also, as has been argued, to further the authority of the church. Yet spousals alone continued to constitute marriage: paradoxically, such marriages were denounced by the church, but remained wholly legal, which meant that the church often had to validate unsolemnised precontracts.

### Spousal Disputes

Ecclesiastical records list disputed contracts, with the result that the poorly made contract is the one about which historians have most information. But this does not mean that defective contracts were the norm: Ingram and Cressy have provided evidence that by the seventeenth century many marriages were actually performed according to the dictates of the church.<sup>31</sup> It is probable that most people who were precontracted did intend to solemnise their match at a later date – but there was a proportion who did not, and this could lead to problems: a dispute could arise between the contracted parties, or couples could face prosecution by church officials for pre-marital sex. The properly made precontract was designed to avoid confusion, but, due to the 'ambiguities, insufficiencies and irregularities of poorly worded, inadequately witnessed, or contested contracts', betrothal disputes were responsible for most matrimonial legal cases: the fact that an informal contract could still create a binding union entailed uncertainty, moral ambiguities and opportunities for deceit and fraud.<sup>32</sup>

Although the distinctions between *de presenti* and *de futuro* contracts were clear, people did not always choose their words carefully, leaving scope for misinterpretation. As 'no precise formulae for making a valid contract were laid

down', this could lead to problems.<sup>33</sup> The general trend was to mimic the words spoken in church ceremonies, which were taken from the Book of Common Prayer, but Swinburne argues that some of the words used by contracting couples were so flexible 'that they may easily be stretched to make, either th'one [*de presenti*] or th'other [*de futuro*']'.<sup>34</sup>

Cases arose where one partner refused either to cohabit or to solemnise the marriage, which reveals partners in disagreement as to which had priority, a contract or church solemnisation. There is evidence in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of different interpretations of the law, for example the case of Jane Walkden v Richard Lowe (1561). Lowe had 'cast his love to [Walkden] and promised her marriage; and she likewise promised him' and the couple repeated their vows in front of witnesses. Lowe then married another woman. When his new wife found out about the earlier promise, she knew her marriage was void and 'refuseth to take him as her husband'.<sup>35</sup> The partners are following different codes, but it is the precontract which has final authority, as in the previously cited cases of Griffith v Saunders and Winstanley v Sonkie. This is also found in Jacobean and Caroline plays. In Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (c.1613), Sebastian's contracted wife, Isabella, thinking he is dead, has married Antonio: but to Sebastian Isabella remains his 'wife by contract before heaven' (1.1.4). In John Fletcher's *Love's Pilgrimage*, written some time before May 1622,<sup>36</sup> Philipppo tells Leocadia that her contract with Mark-Antonio is null and void because of Mark-Antonio's prior contract with Theodosia: 'his precontract/ Doth annul yours' (5.4.89-93). In Thomas Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier* (1622-31), the whole plot centres around the King of Spain's decision to reject Onaelia, to whom he was precontracted, and instead make another woman his wife and queen. He knows that in doing so he has committed a sin: 'She's my Queen/ And wife, yet but my strumpet, though the Church/ Set on the seal of marriage: good Onaelia/ ... Was precontracted mine' (1.1.16-20). And, in John Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635/6), the merchant Fabritio has his marriage to Flavia annulled by pretending that he had been previously precontracted to another woman. The frequent appearance of the precontract as a dramatic plot suggests that people were aware that precontracts did constitute binding marriage, and the fact that this belief

was more than an outdated myth is shown by the records of those whose self-regulation is upheld by the law.

Legal cases could also arise from precontracts as a result of desertion. In the case of *Anne Yate v George Johnson* (1562), the couple contracted using formal, ritualistic words. Both were asked 'art thou George/Anne contented to take Anne/George to thy wife/husband and so to use her/him?' They both replied 'Yea, by my faith and troth'. Johnson lived with Yate as her husband, then took her money before deserting her.<sup>37</sup> In the case of *Morgan Edmund v Elizabeth Bird*, also in 1562, a different sort of abuse of the betrothal custom can be detected. Edmund and Bird were contracted before witnesses. Each witness remembers the words spoken in a different form, but it seems clear the intention was to make a *de presenti* contract, as one witness recalled that

they were taken and reputed as man and wife before God, by this deponent, and of all other that were present by, and of the neighbours thereabout that know of it.<sup>38</sup>

On the day appointed for the solemnisation, Edmund failed to appear, and Bird was told he was dead. Believing herself free, and having lawsuits to deal with, she married Henry Dilon. Edmund returned and brought a suit against Bird. However, it appears that his intention never was to marry her, but to extract money from Dilon. Edmund is reported to have called Bird 'a priest's whore', and when asked by a witness why he called her this he replied, 'to make Dilon to pay me such money and plate as he had of hers in his hands'. Edmund actually appears to have been afraid that if he won the case he would be forced to marry Bird, but believed he could avoid this by citing her adultery as a reason not to marry her. It is interesting that Bird displayed remorse, viewing Edmund as her real husband, saying 'in conscience she is his lawful wife, afore God, to Morgan, and he her husband'.<sup>39</sup> This reinforces the argument that precontracts were viewed not only by the law, but also by lay people, as binding marriage. This is despite the fact that all precontracts, even those before witnesses, were considered deficient by the church if they were not followed by the



reading of the banns (or alternatively, obtaining a licence) and public solemnisation in the presence of a minister.

Clearly in this situation it was the private or secret contract which was the most problematic and the most likely to lead to a dispute. According to Swinburne, a secret *de presenti* contract was as legitimate and binding as one with witnesses. He speaks of the couple's conscience, stating that if one party lied, they were still married in the eyes of God and any later marriage, even if accepted by society, would still be adultery: 'Their consciences shall be as a thousand witnesses before the Tribunal of the immortal God'.<sup>40</sup> This is reflected in the anonymous play *Fair Em* (1589-91), in which Manvile is contracted to two women:

William: Speak Manvile, to whether didst thou give thy faith?

Manvile: To say the truth: this maid had first my love.

Elner: Yes Manvile, but there was no witness by.

Em: Thy conscience Manvile is a hundred witnesses (ll. 1421-4).<sup>41</sup>

In George Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher* (1602-4), a play discussed later, Margaret and Vincentio contract such a secret betrothal.

In practical terms, however, if there were no witnesses it was difficult to prove that any agreement had ever existed. Equally, a couple could pretend they were precontracted, perhaps to evade an unwanted match or, the greater fear of the church, as a justification for adultery if one or other was already married. For these reasons, the secret contract is condemned in Richard Whitforde's *A Werke for Householdors* (1537): 'It is a great jeopardy to make any such (private and secret) contracts, specially among themselves secretly alone, without records, which must be two at least'.<sup>42</sup> Of all precontracts, therefore, church officials particularly tried to discourage secret betrothals. If a second contract followed, whether a witnessed *de presenti* contract or a church wedding, and a prior secret precontract was alleged, the church tended to find in favour of the second, more public match. This did, however, put the church in the position of possibly sanctioning adulterous marriages, as in ecclesiastical law if there really had been a prior *de presenti* contract, that would be the legitimate one.

The issue of disputed betrothals was further complicated by the different levels of importance placed on other aspects of courtship, such as ritual, and the exchange of gifts and tokens: as Diana O'Hara argues, marriage was not only a legal act, but also a social drama. Cressy observes that 'gifts were not simple items of value but potentially complex signifiers of promise and obligation', and Swinburne also mentions the exchanging of 'love gifts and tokens' in his treatise on spousals.<sup>43</sup> The exchange of gifts could include anything from gloves to knives, although rings were most common (the contract formed between Olivia and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* is 'strengthened by interchange of ... rings' (5.1.157)), and is often cited as evidence of the existence of a precontract, for example in the case of William Hewytson v Dorothy Cawton (1601). Hewytson argued that as Cawton had sent him a 'silk point with a silver tag' as a token, and accepted a gold ring from him, this proved they were betrothed.<sup>44</sup> The exchange of gifts was one way for the courts to determine consent, but despite being a consideration in some historical cases, there appears to have been no unanimous agreement as to the significance or necessity of gifts and tokens in contracting matrimony. The arguments which arose from badly-made, pretended and disputed precontracts, coupled with the lack of consistency as to the importance of other factors over and above consent contributed to the reasons why the church wanted contracted couples to have their marriages publicly conducted and solemnised.

Three of the cases cited in this chapter were brought by a male plaintiff, but the rest were brought by women. It is difficult to know exactly how many women were plaintiffs in such cases, particularly as the evidence varies according to time and place. For example, in Ely in the 1580s, the ratio of male plaintiffs to female was 2:1, in Furnivall's examination of the court records for Chester, ten of seventeen precontract cases were brought by women, while in seventeenth century Wiltshire the ratio of women plaintiffs to men was 3:2.<sup>45</sup> This may indicate that precontracts were being used to trick women, and in some cases this is undoubtedly true. But in terms of the question of women's freedom to control their own lives, the number of female plaintiffs testifies to women's ability to bring these cases to court. Due to the common law legal fiction of coverture, a married woman could not sue or be sued

independently of her husband: however, as mentioned in the introduction, the ecclesiastical court was more accessible, allowing married women to sue as single women.<sup>46</sup> By bringing these cases to court, the women were taking responsibility for their lives and their relationships, as well as revealing their knowledge of marriage law and an understanding of legal proceedings. It is perhaps fitting that the women who chose to precontract - an institution which involves self-regulation - are the same women who were prepared to go to court to fight for their rights.

### Clandestine Marriages

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, therefore, church officials wanted couples intending to marry to follow a certain procedure: to contract by words of the future tense, to have the banns published or to buy a licence, and to exchange vows of the present tense in a church (preferably in their own parish) in front of a minister and witnesses. But there were some people who, while they accepted that marriage required more than the simple exchange of consent, for whatever reason wanted to marry secretly: these marriages, which often fulfilled some or most, but not all, of the church's directives were termed clandestine. Clandestine marriages are distinct from precontracted marriages (although a marriage conducted by spousal alone would be considered clandestine), and this section gives a brief account of them.

Outhwaite observes that 'clandestine ceremonies were certainly irregular, though not all irregular marriages had highly covert or surreptitious qualities', before going on to explain that a marriage could be clandestine in a number of ways.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, there were ministers who were willing to marry couples without the banns being read and outside of the prescribed times, for example at night: 'private fees for clandestine weddings ranged from 5s to 15s, several times the normal ecclesiastical charges'. This kind of clandestine marriage could be enacted anywhere, from a barn to an alehouse.<sup>48</sup> The main form of punishment for clergymen who performed these marriages was suspension from their benefice, as in the case of Robert Ward from Yorkshire who, in 1631, was suspended for three years. However, many of the ministers who performed clandestine marriages were unbeneficed and therefore had nothing to lose and this, coupled with the high prices they could charge for this

service, made it very difficult for the church to either regulate or discourage these ministers.

Secondly, by obtaining a licence from a member of the clergy, a couple getting married in church could avoid having the banns read. While this was strictly legal, there was a proportion of ministers who did not properly establish whether the couple were legitimately able to marry. Thirdly, couples could be married in a 'lawless church', such as St. James', Duke Place: 'Such places were generally "peculiar", places claiming exemption from visitations from the Episcopal authorities in whose jurisdiction they seemed to be located'.<sup>49</sup>

Couples may have chosen to marry clandestinely for a number of reasons. If there were impediments to the marriage; if they were going against the wishes of family or friends; if they were Catholic; if the woman was noticeably pregnant; or if a couple simply wanted to avoid the expense of catering for a large number of guests at the wedding celebrations then privacy might well be necessary. Further, ministers often refused to read the banns for the most poverty-stricken members of their parish as they were concerned that any children from the match would burden the poor rates: these people had no choice but to marry covertly.

Such secret marriages continued to be popular, even when the contracting of spousals alone seems to have been in decline, providing further evidence of self-regulation in the formation of marriage. However, the fact that most marriages which would have been termed clandestine by the authorities fulfilled most of the required steps indicates that people were trying to follow the church's prescription. As Cressy notes: 'despite obvious technical defects [marriages] were, for the most part, conformable to social and legal practice'.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, religious, social, moral and legal pressures, such as the internalisation of the belief that marriage was associated with God and the importance of reputation and property rights, combined to promote the solemnised church wedding. The fact remained, however, that in Protestant England the Medieval law of spousals continued to have legal status until 1753: informal declarations remained valid, and the evidence shows that they were still considered as such by at least some couples, for example John and Joan Chapman in 1622. As already shown, this is also the point of view expressed in plays: to conclude

with a further dramatic example, in Middleton, Ford and William Rowley's tragicomedy *The Spanish Gypsy* (c.1623) Constanza says that Don John, to whom she is precontracted, is her husband: 'faith and troth I hope bind faster/ Than any other ceremonies can' (5.3.13-14).

#### Women making marriage: spousal plots in drama c.1602-1616

There is a large number of sixteenth and seventeenth century plays which include spousal plots. The only one to be examined in depth from this perspective, however, is *Measure for Measure* (1604), in which Claudio is condemned to death for consummating his precontract with Juliet, while Mariana is actively encouraged to consummate an almost identical precontract with Angelo; such discussions have tended to focus on determining which kind of precontract each couple had.<sup>51</sup> Few critics have analysed plays other than *Measure for Measure* from the point of view of the inclusion of spousal plots, but two exceptions are William G. Meader and T. G. A. Nelson. Meader, in a chapter of his 1971 study, *Courtship in Shakespeare*, briefly examines a variety of plays which include precontracts, both Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean, 'in order that the separation of courtship and spousal may be delineated'.<sup>52</sup> And most recently Nelson, in his 1998 article, 'Doing Things With Words', draws on the work of J. L. Austin to analyse the literary and dramatic implications of the *de presenti* contract constituting a performative act. He explains that performatives, which are socially, historically and culturally specific, 'have the grammatical form of statements but "do not 'describe' or 'report' anything" and "are not 'true or false'": instead they effect transactions in the real world'.<sup>53</sup> In Austin's words, the term 'performative' 'indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action', and marriage contracts are the most obvious example of this.<sup>54</sup> Nelson argues that most discussions on spousals 'have so far remained oddly silent on the relevance of speech-act theory'.<sup>55</sup>

Meader and Nelson do not specifically focus on female characters in their analyses of dramatic spousals. However, Nelson's discussion of the *de presenti* contract as speech act is valuable within the context of this exploration into dramatic representations of women's potential for agency when moving from the single to the

married status. In the Renaissance, as is well known, female silence and chastity were presented as inextricably linked, and female speech was considered a threat to male authority. In plays this is manifested when male characters are given a monopoly of language whereby women are silenced and their identities controlled. Further, sixteenth and seventeenth century playwrights often present marriage as an area over which women had little control: for example Middleton's city comedies examine the perception that women are property to be bought and sold in marriage, often against their will. But when playwrights include *de presenti* precontract plots, it can be argued that a space opens up in which female speech is not only necessary - since, as discussed, these contracts required spoken assent from both parties, female as well as male - but is also active, as saying the words enacts binding matrimony. Therefore, as precontracts only required a couple to exchange vows of the present tense in order to effect marriage, spousal plots allow playwrights the opportunity to explore the potential for single women to have some autonomy in the making of marriage.

Of course, not all spousal plots show women in a position of control: there is the possibility that a precontract could be ignored, as in Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1629) and Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, or that women could be forced into contracts against their will, as with Jolenta in John Webster's *The Devil's Law-case* (1617-23).<sup>56</sup> But there are also dramatic examples of women instigating precontracts in order to form affectionate matches against the wishes of male relatives. Three of the most complex and interesting examples can be found in Chapman's tragicomedy *The Gentleman Usher* (1602-4), Webster's tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-14) and Middleton's romantic comedy *The Widow* (1616). In all three the spousal is central to the action, and the intention here is to discover what the inclusion of this plot reveals regarding the dramatic presentation of female agency in the formation of marriage.

*The Gentleman Usher* was written by Chapman between 1602 and 1604, listed in the Stationer's Register on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1605 and published in 1606. It was performed by a boy's company, probably the Children of the Chapel, who played at the Blackfriars theatre.<sup>57</sup> Outwith the various analyses of Chapman's tragedy *Bussy*

*D'Ambois* (c.1604) and his city comedy *Eastward Ho!* (c.1605), which was written in collaboration with Ben Jonson and John Marston, there has been relatively little critical discussion of Chapman's work, and *The Gentleman Usher* is no exception.<sup>58</sup> Millar Maclure has described it as being 'on the face of it an absurd play ... weak in construction and faltering in illusion',<sup>59</sup> and the most recent edition, John Hazel Smith's valuable modern-spelling version, is now over thirty years old. Early critics such as Maclure and Smith focused on the central themes of Platonism and *noblesse*, with Smith arguing that 'the doctrine of "virtuous men" is illuminated by the theme of degree as it recurs cyclically throughout the play'.<sup>60</sup> More recently, Mario DiGangi and Mark Thornton Burnett have examined the homoerotic nature of the relationship between the eponymous servant, Bassiolo and his master, Vincentio.<sup>61</sup>

*The Gentleman Usher*, a tragicomedy, includes elements of romance, masquing, farce and satire. The play centres around a love triangle: Margaret and Vincentio are in love, but Vincentio's father, the 'grave old' Duke Alphonso (5.1.55) has decided to marry Margaret, and woos her with various entertainments. Vincentio and Margaret gull her father's usher, the ridiculous Bassiolo (reminiscent of Shakespeare's Malvolio), into helping them exchange letters. To ensure that Bassiolo keeps their secret, they play on his vanity, convincing him that it was he who made the couple fall in love. When the pair discover that the Duke plans to marry Margaret on his return from hunting, she and Vincentio marry secretly, exchanging vows of the present tense. The Duke discovers the match and declares that his son is to be killed or banished. Vincentio is then wounded by the pretended nobleman and adviser to the Duke, Medice, who is really a gypsy called Mendice. Margaret, thinking Vincentio dead, rubs a harsh ointment onto her face, so that Alphonso will no longer want her. When Vincentio is discovered alive, she tries to release him from his bond to her because of her disfigurement: however, he refuses, after which the doctor Benevenius tells Margaret he can restore her beauty. The play ends with Alphonso admitting his wrongs and asking heaven to bless the couple. In the subplot, Strozza, a nobleman and friend to Vincentio, is wounded at the order of Medice. Strozza is brought back from despair by his wife, who tells him to put his life in the hands of

heaven. He does so and is granted the gift of prophesy. He reveals the real identity of Medice and the gypsy's banishment contributes to the happy ending.

One aspect of *The Gentleman Usher* which has been little discussed is Chapman's exploration, via the character of Margaret, of the issue of female agency in the formation of marriage. Millar Maclure has argued that Chapman is 'Jonsonian in his affiliation: not only in the delineation of humours and his gallery of gulls ... but in his generally unsympathetic portrayal of female characters'.<sup>62</sup> Yet as will be shown, Margaret is witty, independent, strong-willed and passionate, and the most complex character in the play. She is an aristocratic maid who asserts her right to choose her own marriage partner, marries via a secret precontract and does so against the wishes of her father and the Duke. Further, her actions are endorsed within the play.

*The Gentleman Usher* is full of references to and examples of Margaret's free will, and of the constraints which are placed upon it.<sup>63</sup> In his first entertainment, Alphonso appears before Margaret, his wrists tied, the conceit being that he is 'by [her] bounteous hands/ To be releas'd' (1.2.115-16). But despite untying the Duke, as duty dictates she must, Margaret pretends to be unaware of the meaning implicit in her action, that of accepting his suit of marriage; instead she emphasises that it is a game which is 'Too worthy, I confess, my lord, for me/ If it were serious; but it is in sport,/ And women are fit actors for such pageants' (1.2.124-6). In the second entertainment, a masque, Alphonso positions Margaret as his 'fair duchess': his objectification of her and lack of concern as to her wishes is made explicit when he later tells her that this is 'an essential type of that you are' (3.2.284). During the masque, one of the characters says to Margaret: 'Yet take you in your ivory clutches/ This noble duke and be his duchess' (2.1.295-6). As before Margaret feigns a lack of understanding, pointing to both the festive and the temporary nature of her role as duchess: 'My lord, but to obey your earnest will/ And not make serious scruple of a toy,/ I scarce durst have presum'd this minute's height' (2.1.186-8). At the end of the masque she immediately rises from the throne and gives her crown to him, resigning 'this borrowed majesty' (2.1.300).



Margaret therefore resists Alphonso's construction of her as his rightful wife by pretending to misunderstand his intentions, by refusing to admit that she is doing anything other than playing a part in the entertainments, by emphasising that she only plays these parts because it is her duty and finally, by claiming to be unworthy of him. Her ability to dissemble allows her the opportunity to indirectly reject the Duke and thus to have some freedom. This can be seen at other points in the play. For example, when talking with Bassiolo, to gain control of the situation she pretends to be uneducated and malleable, professing that the usher's letter is 'so good 'twill not be thought to come from a woman's brain' (3.2.453-4), and saying that it was Bassiolo who forced her to love Vincentio (4.5.99). Margaret here adopts the role of passive woman in order to disguise and facilitate her activity within the play.

Margaret's father, Lasso, like Alphonso, also tries to constrain her, and to him Margaret speaks plainly, revealing her true feelings and claiming autonomy: 'I have small hopes, my lord, but a desire/ To make my nuptial choice of one I love' (4.5.5-6). However, the stereotype father denies his daughter any say in her future husband, using her gender and youth to control her (4.5.10), and telling her that 'time and judgement will conform [your wilful coyness]/ To such obedience as so great desert' (4.5.27-8). As previously mentioned, aristocratic marriages were often arranged by parents, and daughters like Margaret were expected to acquiesce. But Lasso's words here are impotent: the audience knows that Margaret has just married the man she loves via a precontract.

The precontracted marriage not only subverts the intentions of the Duke and her father, but further, the plan is initiated by Margaret. The moment when she instigates the precontract is the pivotal point in the play, and the ridiculous Bassiolo, usually present when the couple woo each other, is absent from this scene. M. C. Bradbrook has argued that the Bassiolo plot 'push[es] the romantic love stor[y] into the background',<sup>64</sup> and the usher's omission at this point indicates that Chapman wanted to ensure that the exchange of vows was not undermined by farcical humour: the focus is on the marrying couple alone.

At this point in the play, Margaret has realised that the Duke is going to marry her against her will and she asks Vincentio 'is there no mean to dissolve that power/

And to prevent all further wrong to us ...?' (4.2.122-3). Vincentio replies that they could be married, but he thinks this is impossible: 'I fear your father and [my father] resolve/ To bar my interest with his present nuptials' (4.2.129-30). Margaret's reply to this is unequivocal: 'That they shall never do' (4.2.131). Instead she proposes that the couple contract marriage *per verba de presenti*. This is not the first time that Margaret has mentioned a form of secret contract: when Bassiolo had previously tried to get her to write a letter to Vincentio, she answered: 'Nay then, i'faith, 'twere best you brought a priest/ And then your client and then keep the door' (3.2.372-3). Although her words here were part of a role she was playing - that of modest virgin - the fact that Margaret mentions secret marriage in this context indicates that it is she, rather than Vincentio, who is guiding the direction of the relationship. Ultimately, Margaret decides that a priest is not necessary: she says to Vincentio:

... May we not now  
 Our contract make and marry before heaven?  
 Are not the laws of God and Nature more  
 Than formal laws of men? Are outward rites  
 More virtuous than the very substance is  
 Of holy nuptials solemnized within? ...  
 ... 'tis not a priest shall let us  
 But since th'eternal acts of our pure souls  
 Knit us with God, the soul of all the world,  
 He shall be priest to us ... (4.2.131-43).

Margaret considers the private mutual exchange of vows as not only more binding than church celebration, but also as more virtuous: for her, the precontract is 'holy nuptials solemnized within'. Margaret's imagery is Platonic since it places private conscience and the precontract above earthly laws. This view is later endorsed by Strozza, who 'has sometimes been taken to be Chapman's own spokesman':<sup>65</sup>

A virtuous man is subject to no prince  
 But to his soul and honour, which are laws  
 That carry fire and sword within themselves  
 Never corrupted, never out of rule (5.4.59-61).

Chapman also has a woman voice these sentiments, and she does so while contracting marriage in defiance of the society's lawmaker.

Vincentio 'devise[s] a form/ To execute the substance of [the couple's] minds' (4.2.148-9): he covers Margaret's face with a veil and they tie their arms together with a scarf. Afterwards, he says 'It is enough, and binds as much as marriage' (4.2.181). But Margaret makes it clear that it is their exchange of promises which constitutes marriage: the ritual only serves to 'ratify [their] heart's true vows' (4.2.145). The couple's privileging of inner qualities is later shown in Vincentio's promise to continue loving Margaret, even after she has disfigured herself:

'Tis not this outward beauty's ruthless loss  
 Can any thought discourage my desires. -  
 And therefore, dear life, do not wrong me so  
 To think my love the shadow of your beauty.  
 I woo your virtues, which as I am sure  
 No accident can alter or impair  
 So be you certain nought can change my love (5.4.93-9).<sup>66</sup>

Virtue, not beauty, is the essence of the match. His wording here also mirrors Margaret's previous vow, made just after their spousals, to stand by her husband: 'How can your lordship wrong my love so much/ To think the more woe I sustain for you/ Breeds not the more my comfort?' (5.1.94-6).

In both of these quotations, Margaret and Vincentio's words emphasise love, and throughout *The Gentleman Usher* their relationship is presented as unambiguously affectionate. Before Margaret is seen by the audience, Vincentio has declared his love for her, and Strozza's comments indicate that these feelings are reciprocated: 'your deserts/ And youthful graces have engag'd so far/ The beauteous Margaret that she is your own .../ ... she needs no wooing' (1.1.85-92). When Margaret sees Vincentio, she tells him simply 'My lord, I only come to say y'are welcome/ And so must say farewell' (1.2.151-2). Her plain speaking here is necessary because the Duke is nearby; however, the fact that she never dissembles with Vincentio serves to show that her deceitful actions towards Alphonso are necessary, rather than part of her character. At the end of the play, Benevenius

speaks of the couple's 'constant hearts' (5.4.140), calling them a 'princely pair of virtuous turtles' (5.4.127). The precontract therefore facilitates a marriage based on love and Margaret's proactive role in the plot does not taint Vincentio's view of her. The language of the couple's vows, proved by Vincentio's later actions when Margaret is disfigured, ensures that this love match is presented, not as unruly, but as a Platonic joining of souls.

As discussed in the introduction, because of the gender hierarchy inherent in all Renaissance marriages, this study prefers the term 'affectionate' when discussing sixteenth and seventeenth century marriages apparently based on love, rather than 'companionate', which implies an equality which may not have existed. In *The Gentleman Usher* Vincentio is of higher status than Margaret: although both are aristocrats, he is the son of a duke, she the daughter of an earl, and within such a marriage not only gender but also class hierarchy would dictate that Margaret was subordinate to her new husband. This raises the question as to whether Margaret is exchanging the freedom she was able to have as a single woman for the submission of a wife, and as such limiting her potential to exercise her will. The evidence in *The Gentleman Usher*, however, suggests that Chapman is presenting Margaret and Vincentio as aiming for an equality within their marriage. Vincentio promises Margaret he will be 'tender of your welfare and *your will*/ As of mine own, as of my life and soul' (4.2.160-1, italics added). And, after their marriage, he tells her to 'Be well advis'd, for yet your choice shall be/ In all things as before, as large and free' (4.2.190-1). Vincentio (unlike Alphonso and Lasso) views Margaret as autonomous and further, expects her to continue being independent and proactive as a wife, indicating that marriage will not be a constraint for Margaret, and that Vincentio will not assume the role of dominant husband. It can therefore be argued that the precontract has facilitated a match which, as well as being fittingly called 'affectionate', perhaps also approximates to the term 'companionate'.

The precontracting of Margaret and Vincentio is immediately followed by a scene in which Strozza discourses on the virtuous wife. His speech refers specifically to his wife Cynanche, but its juxtaposition with Margaret becoming a wife means it can be usefully applied to her as well. Strozza begins by praising a wife's speech:

'Let no man value at a little price/ A virtuous woman's counsel' (4.3.4-5). Strozza connects the virtuous wife with heaven, mirroring Margaret's words regarding the exchange of vows being performed before heaven. He further says that the female soul is stronger than the male (4.3.8); this resonates both as a rejection of the misogynist school of thought which believed women did not have souls, and as an echo of Margaret's words when precontracting: 'th'eternal acts of our pure souls/ Knit us with God, the soul of all the world'. Finally, Strozza argues that the wife's 'virtues, ruling hearts, all pow'rs command' (4.3.32). Strozza's speech, commending the virtuous wife as active and vocal rather than passive and silent, indirectly endorses Margaret's actions and further legitimises the private precontract which she instigated.

The potentially companionate match of Margaret and Vincentio, contracted in secret without witnesses, without parental consent and against the dominant patriarchy as presented within the play, is set against the proposed arranged marriage of Margaret and Alphonso. Alphonso is another stereotype - the old man who wishes to marry a girl a generation younger - but his desires are portrayed as sinister rather than comic. The disparity between their ages is alluded to seven times and Bassiolo says: 'who saw ever summer mix'd with winter?/ There must be equal years where firm love is' (3.2.150-1).<sup>67</sup> Alphonso's actions are thus framed as being outwith the natural order. He is also head of state and on this level too his actions are unhealthy. He allows the corrupt flatterer and pretended nobleman Medice to be constantly in attendance on him and, more seriously, Alphonso is also an unnatural father. He decides to kill his son and heir, saying 'can I prove [Vincentio] aims/ At any interruption in my love,/ I'll interrupt his life ... the trait'rous boy shall die' (4.4.11-13; 56). In response to this, the nobleman Julio tells him that 'In pity of your son, your subjects breathe/ Gainst your unnatural fury' (5.4.35-6). Margaret and Strozza both independently call Alphonso a 'tyrant' (5.4.12; 40), equating him with Saturn, who ate his children (5.3.80-2; 5.4.54-5),<sup>68</sup> and Margaret makes it clear that her disfigurement is the result of Alphonso's actions: 'Thou hast forc'd from me, all my joy and hope' (5.4.17). She calls him a 'thief to Nature' (5.4.13), while Strozza tells him 'see how thou hast ripp'd/ Thy better bosom, rooted up that flow'r/ From whence

thy now spent life should spring anew' (5.4.42-4). Through the imagery of violent destruction Alphonso's actions are constructed as aberrant.

As Smith notes, 'The play is partly built upon ... contrasts between the married couples and an establishment comprised of people foolish, villainous or misguided'.<sup>69</sup> In addition to these contrasts, the marriage of Margaret and Vincentio becomes the means to regenerate society within the play. At the end Alphonso has admitted his wrongs, Strozza is healed, Margaret and Vincentio have been promised cures and Medice has been banished. Vincentio will eventually inherit from his father, and the last two lines of *The Gentleman Usher*, spoken by the reformed Duke, focus on Margaret and Vincentio's love marriage, previously endorsed by the fact that the couple's trials prove their claim that their love is Platonic: 'Then take thy love, which heaven with all joys bless/ And make ye both mirrors of happiness' (5.4.296-7). Even Medice and Corteza accept that the couple are married, having earlier told Alphonso that he would have to kill Vincentio if he wanted to marry Margaret (5.1.119-22). In *The Gentleman Usher*, therefore, a precontract facilitates a Platonic love marriage which is considered valid without church solemnisation and through which society's ills are cured.

The secret precontract provides a further point regarding Margaret's escape from the dominant hegemony. It did not involve her father giving her to her husband, a gesture understood to signify the transference of ownership. This subversive omission is continued in Vincentio's promises that her independence will continue in marriage. As Margaret's rebellious actions are legitimised, her portrayal shows that female activity does not necessarily preclude female virtue.

Another play which shows a maid using a precontract to choose her own husband is Middleton's romantic comedy *The Widow*, which was written over a decade after *The Gentleman Usher*, around 1616.<sup>70</sup> It was originally performed at Christmas-time by His Majesty's Servants at the Blackfriars theatre, and was later revived at the Jacobean court.<sup>71</sup> The title page claims that *The Widow* was written in collaboration with Ben Jonson and John Fletcher, but it is generally agreed that Middleton was the sole author.<sup>72</sup> The play, which includes one of Middleton's common themes, a widow-hunt, has in general been discussed only briefly by

critics.<sup>73</sup> This study would argue, however, that *The Widow* is a useful play to read, in particular from the point of view of extending critical awareness of Middleton's exploration of marriage. In his city comedies and tragedies, Middleton often presents marriage as a financial transaction in which women are treated as property. In contrast, in *The Widow* he examines the ability of single women to have some control over the formation of their marriage. He does so by including two precontract plots - one facilitates a single woman's choice of husband, the other complicates it.

In the first example, the plot centres on a city wife, Philippa. She is married to Brandino, a comic stereotype of the old, slow-witted husband, and she plans to take a young lover. The first possibility, Francisco, fails to keep his assignation, while the second possibility, Ansaldo, is actually a runaway daughter, Martia, disguised as a boy. But in order to conceal the intended adultery from Brandino, Philippa disguises 'him' as a woman. Francisco falls in love with Martia in her true identity, and Philippa sees in Francisco's infatuation a means to get 'sweet revenge' (5.1.221) on him for having let her down. She tells Ansaldo 'at his next solicitings, let a consent/ Seem to come from you', saying to the audience that two men contracting together will 'make noble sport' (5.1.242-3). The couple contract offstage with witnesses, and as Ansaldo is a really a woman, the marriage is binding. Instead of Philippa deceiving Francisco, Martia has deceived Philippa, and thus the city wife loses both her hoped-for lovers. After the contract, Martia tells Philippa to reform her behaviour: 'Be good .../ Heaven will not let you sin, and you'd be careful' (5.1.423-4). As in *Twelfth Night*, therefore, the cross-dressed girl becomes a means to punish the unruly woman.

On the one hand, the precontract works as a tool to discipline Philippa, however, it also enables a rebellious match. Martia ran away to escape an arranged financial marriage with a man whom her father says is 'a wealthy gentleman/ No older than myself' (2.1.162-3). In her determination not to be forced into this, Martia is similar to Margaret in *The Gentleman Usher* and, like Chapman, Middleton uses the precontract to facilitate a love match. When Francisco is told to be wary because he knows nothing of Martia's background, he says 'Tis only but her love that I desire;/ She comes most rich in that' (5.1.56-7). He later tells her father 'I lov'd her

not, sir,/ As she was yours, for I protest I knew't not,/ But for herself, sir, and her own deservings' (5.1.416-18). In contrast to Margaret, however, Martia does not instigate the precontract: rather, Middleton shows her taking advantage of circumstances to avoid her father's choice of husband. As such, Martia, despite her cross-dressing, is presented as less complex than the proactive Margaret. In addition, Martia's words to her father at the end of the play seem at first reading to be conventional: 'I have been disobedient, I confess,/ Unto your mind, and heaven has punished me/ With much affliction [Martia is robbed twice in the course of the play] since I fled your sight' (5.1.408-10). She appears before her father prepared to repent her disobedience, something Margaret never does. However, Martia's use of the phrase 'unto your mind' indicates that she is only half repentant and her seemingly deferent words do not change the fact that, like Margaret, she has successfully precontracted with a man against her father's wishes.

Martia, like Margaret, is a maid, in theory the kind of woman least able to have control over her marriage partner. In common with Margaret, she uses a spousal to avoid an unwanted marriage and to form a love match, and as all the characters in *The Widow*, even Philippa, accept this precontracted marriage, it is endorsed within the play. Yet it does not carry equal significance with the spousal in *The Gentleman Usher*. Martia's precontract is one of various subplots, while the match of Margaret and Vincentio, central to Chapman's play, is presented as being above earthly laws: its idealistic, Platonic basis is what regenerates a corrupt society. And while Martia's marriage is undoubtedly rebellious, it also has an overtly moral purpose: to tame an unruly wife.

*The Gentleman Usher* and *The Widow* are comedies and, as would be expected, end with marriage and reconciliation; but in both plays it is rebellious precontracted marriages which are shown to be the ordering principle. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-14)<sup>74</sup> a young woman also uses a precontract to marry the man of her choice. Webster's handling of the spousal plot, however, is very different to that of Chapman and Middleton, not least because Webster was writing within the context of tragedy. During the seventeenth century, playwrights started to use tragedy, a genre traditionally concerned with man and his place in the universe, to explore marriage,



placing women in a central role previously denied to them: the tragic hero was replaced by the tragic heroine. One of the most famous of these heroines is Webster's *Duchess*, a young aristocratic widow who is murdered by her brothers for refusing to accept their control of her. The play is based on real events which took place in Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century and Webster's main source was a story in William Painter's *Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (1567).<sup>75</sup> Along with Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), *The Duchess of Malfi* is generally agreed to be 'ranked second to Shakespeare's tragedies on the Jacobean stage'.<sup>76</sup>

The Duchess, a young widow, is forbidden by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to remarry. However, she secretly marries her steward Antonio with a precontract, reinforcing her action with legal knowledge: 'I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber,/ *Per verba de presenti*, is absolute marriage' (1.2.391-2). Like Margaret and Martia, the Duchess uses the precontract to negotiate a space for herself to marry the man of her choice against the wishes of male relatives, but the fact that the Duchess is a widow introduces a different range of associations. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, widowhood meant that for possibly the first time a woman was free from the constraints of father and husband and thus had the potential to live independently. For this reason she was viewed by some moralists as a threat: these moralists condemned those who remarried and set up a good widow/merry widow binary opposition, with the 'good' widow being considered such because she had no thought of remarriage – she was the 'perpetual wife', ever true to her late husband.

This concept of the remarrying widow as lusty dominated early analyses of *The Duchess of Malfi*, with critics arguing that the Duchess' actions would have been censured.<sup>77</sup> However, Frank Wadsworth argued as far back as 1956 that 'condemnations of second marriages were not universal or unqualified', pointing to various texts which endorsed remarrying widows, including Cornelius Agrippa's *The Commendation of Matrimony* (1540).<sup>78</sup> In addition, the historical evidence shows that widows did remarry.<sup>79</sup> Webster's *Duchess* would therefore not have been automatically condemned by a seventeenth century audience. Further, within the play, Webster adapts the source material to portray the Duchess as sympathetic. In Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, the Duchess is presented as a lusty woman. Webster's

Duchess, however, is 'a loving wife' (4.1.74) and a caring mother, whose last thoughts are for her children (4.2.200-2). In contrast, her brothers are unambiguously evil: Ferdinand has 'a most perverse and turbulent nature' (1.2.91), while the Cardinal is irreligious, a man who 'strews in his way flatterers, panders, intelligencers, atheists: and a thousand such political monsters' (1.2.84-5). Ferdinand says to his sister 'You live in a rank pasture here i'th' court' (1.2.227). This acquires an ironic edge through Antonio's opening speech about the effect of Prince's courts, which makes clear that any rank pasture is due to the presence of the brothers: 'ift chance/ Some curs'd example poison [the court] near the head,/ Death and diseases through the whole land spread' (1.1.13-15). The Duchess is thus set up in opposition to her brothers, and the play explores the tragic consequences of their insistence on extreme control over her.

The Duchess' widowhood does not offer her a straightforward opportunity for independence as authority has transferred to her brothers, and Ferdinand emphasises the link between paternal and fraternal authority with his sword: 'You are my sister/ This was my father's poniard' (1.2.249). He has the Duchess spied on, so that her 'darkest actions' and 'privat'st thoughts/ Will come to light' (1.2.235-6) and tells Bosola 'she's a young widow,/ I would not have her marry again' (1.2.173-7), but does not explain why, cautioning Bosola 'Do not you ask the reason' (1.2.178). After the Duchess' death Ferdinand does say: 'I had a hope/ Had she continu'd widow, to have gain'd/ An infinite mass of treasure by her death' (4.2.277-9). But as there is no other mention of her money, it seems that here Ferdinand is rationalising his actions. As Elizabeth Brennan and others have noted, it is Ferdinand's incestuous desire for the Duchess which provides the most convincing reason for his unnatural and extreme demands on her.<sup>80</sup>

The Duchess rejects her brothers' attempts to control her, and in this rejection she inevitably takes control of both action and speech, likening herself to a soldier who, 'through frights and threat'nings ... will assay/ This dangerous venture' (1.2.266-7). She later also dismisses Antonio's fears about her brothers (1.2.382): but as these fears prove to be well-founded, her courage can also be read as foolhardiness, as her maid Cariola observes.

The Duchess' superior rank to her steward, Antonio, is never lost sight of during the play, and is the reason why she has to take charge of the wooing: she speaks of 'The misery of us, that are born great/ We are forc'd to woo, because none dare woo us' (1.2.357-8). Her note of regret is interesting, making the issue of her taking control more complex: her class forces her to be active in relation to Antonio. Antonio's line - 'These words should be mine/ And all the parts you have spoke' (1.2.387-8) - points to the fact that in this scene the traditional roles have been reversed. The Duchess' control of the wooing is made most obvious by the fact that she has hidden Cariola to act as a witness to the contract. As Cariola has been concealed without Antonio's knowledge, he has been deceived by the Duchess. Webster does make it clear that the couple are in love and that Antonio has not been forced into this marriage: although shocked when Cariola appears, he immediately says to the Duchess 'may our sweet affections, like the spheres,/ Be still in motion' (1.2.395-6), indicating his consent to the match. But the hidden presence of Cariola introduces an ambiguity into the contracting, an ambiguity which is absent from the clear cut, equal contracting of Margaret and Vincentio.

The Duchess' higher rank overcomes Antonio's superior gender, but despite this she is presented as aiming for an equality in the match, firstly by physically raising Antonio -

This goodly roof of yours, is too low built  
I cannot stand upright in't, nor discourse,  
Without I raise it higher: raise yourself  
Or if you please, my hand to help you: so (1.2. 333-6)

- and secondly, by presenting herself as a woman rather than a duchess: 'I do here put off all vain ceremony,/ And only do appear to you, a young widow/ That claims you for her husband' (1.2.371-3). Finally, she symbolically releases him from servitude to her: 'And 'cause you shall not come to me in debt,/ Being now my steward, here upon your lips/ I sign your *Quietus est* [release]' (1.2.378-80). Within their private world there is evidence that the marriage of the Duchess and Antonio has the potential to be companionate. Antonio says that his 'rule is only in the night' (3.2.8), indicating a

kind of equality, that the twenty-four hours of the day are divided equally between them. Their roles are not equal, however: it can be read as significant that Antonio's time - the night - was traditionally considered female. Further, night-time points to the secret nature of the relationship: Antonio's status is hidden, that of the Duchess, public. In addition, while the Duchess has no name within the play other than her title, Antonio has a name, but no title other than steward. The Duchess' rank and the secret situation therefore means that Antonio can be read as being presented by Webster as emasculated. The Duchess and Antonio are in love, but unlike the marriage of Margaret and Vincentio in *The Gentleman Usher*, their relationship is ultimately not able to be equal.

When precontracting, as with Margaret, the Duchess is shown to consider the verbal exchange of private vows to be more binding than a church ceremony: 'What can the Church force more? .../ How can the Church build faster?/ We are now man and wife, and 'tis the church/ That must but echo this' (1.2.401-5). Not only is church solemnisation viewed as nothing more than an 'echo' of their binding precontract, the Duchess also shows her awareness that it is the contract which makes the marriage legitimate under ecclesiastical law, and that the church would have no option but to ratify it. And, for three acts of the play, long enough for her to give birth to three children, the Duchess is shown to succeed in her desire for an affectionate second marriage, a match which was achieved via the precontract. But the Duchess' actions are never legitimised by the patriarchy as presented within the play, nor even by Cariola, who says 'Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/ Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows/ A fearful madness: I owe her much of pity' (1.2.417-19).

During the exchange of vows the Duchess had said 'Bless, Heaven, this sacred Gordian, which let violence/ Never untwine' (1.2.393-4). The Gordian knot could not be untied, but Alexander the Great sliced it with his sword, and Ferdinand twice threatens his sister in this way with regard to her marriage. Nelson has argued that the eventual murder of the Duchess (by strangulation) was due to the illegitimacy of the secret precontract:

death overtakes both the Duchess and her husband as a result of their rash private spousal contract, followed by the consummation which they both know their contract does not entitle them to, and by the birth of children who are illegitimate under the law.<sup>81</sup>

The evidence shows, however, that a contract *per verba de presenti* was absolute marriage. Socially the marriage may be considered madness, but the Duchess is right to claim 'we are now one' (1.2.410). The union is further endorsed by Webster's use of fecund imagery to depict their relationship: Antonio says to the Duchess 'we may imitate the loving palms,/ Best emblem of a peaceful marriage/ That never bore fruit divided' (1.2.398-400),<sup>82</sup> and he sets up an opposition between the single women in myth who were changed into the 'fruitless bay-tree' and 'pale empty reed' and those who married, who were transformed into the fruitful 'olive, pomegranate, mulberry' (3.2.26-8; 31). The Duchess' fertility is therefore portrayed as natural and praiseworthy.

The crucial moment in the plot which shows Webster endorsing this union is at the end when the son of the Duchess and Antonio is proposed as the next Duke of Malfi. Nelson is correct that under English common law the children of the Duchess and Antonio would have been viewed as illegitimate, yet Delio and the noblemen consider otherwise: 'Let us make noble use/ Of this great ruin; and join all our force/ To establish this young hopeful gentleman/ In's mother's right' (5.5.109-12). Earlier Ferdinand had spoken of 'my young nephew/ [The Duchess] had by her first husband' (3.3.67-8). In the source of Webster's plot it was this son who ruled after his mother, with the son of Antonio never a contender for the dukedom. However, Webster has adapted his source to make Antonio's son a legitimate claimant to the dukedom, one who is backed by the noblemen. Since Webster did not eliminate the existence of a son by the Duchess' previous marriage he can be viewed as deliberately privileging the son of the Duchess and Antonio over the son of her first husband. What the noblemen propose is that the bloodline of the aristocracy be traced through the mother, made clear by Delio's words - the son is to be set up 'in's mother's right'. In light of the aristocratic and patriarchal principle of primogeniture, this is subversive. Critics who argue against an optimistic reading of this ending point to the fact that the son is not shown by Webster actually becoming duke: for example, Richard Levin

argues that 'we cannot anticipate the kind of regime these men will establish or whether they will establish one at all'.<sup>83</sup> But this study would suggest that the question of whether or not this son becomes duke is less important than the fact that Webster has him proposed as his mother's successor: this in itself can be considered radical. Webster's portrayal of the aristocracy in *The Duchess of Malfi* was of a disordered, chaotic world, which, with the death of the Duchess, lost its moral centre; now, with the closing image of the play showing the son of a love match and unsolemnised, precontracted marriage being put forward as the next duke, there is the potential for a healthy society.<sup>84</sup>

In view of the fact that the Duchess and Antonio come to a tragic end, there is no regeneration of the society depicted within the play. It is all the more striking, therefore, that Antonio's son has the opportunity to inherit: in this way Webster opens up the possibility that he will supplant the man who should inherit both by natural precedence and because he is the offspring of a socially approved aristocratic marriage. The fact that he is able to inherit therefore challenges current social morality. The author finally legitimises the marriage, a love match made by a contract to a lower class man and by the Duchess' choice, rather than legitimising the social situation which condemned her.

In all three plays discussed, a precontract opened up a space in which female speech was necessary and, in different ways, provided the setting for a single woman to legitimately take control of her life and to choose her own marriage partner against the wishes of her family. Further, the Duchess of Malfi is shown enacting a concrete challenge to the aristocracy within the play. Similarly, in *The Gentleman Usher*, Margaret is presented by Chapman as going counter to the patriarchy and succeeding. The actions of these two women, who instigated the precontracted marriages and guided the plots, are endorsed, showing that female activity and female speech need not exclude virtue. But in Webster's tragedy it is the playwright and not the aristocratic patriarchy as depicted within the play who finally legitimises the Duchess' actions.

A further complication in the possibilities for widows and contracts appears in the second spousal plot of Middleton's comedy, *The Widow*, where the eponymous

heroine, Valeria, is tricked into forming a contract against her will. Valeria has decided to remarry. Unlike the aristocratic Duchess, she is a rich city widow who has no male relatives to limit her independence. She has three suitors: two elderly men and a young gentleman, Ricardo. Ricardo explains to his friend Francisco his reason for wooing Valeria, saying 'it was the naturallest courtesy that ever was ordained; a young gentleman being spent, to have a rich widow set him up again' (1.2.1-4). Ricardo's initial appearance as the typical spendthrift gallant who tricks a rich widow is, however, problematised. When Francisco points out that he is so much poorer than Valeria, Ricardo tells him 'Why there's the fortune ... she knows all this, and yet I'm welcome to her' (1.2.34-5): Ricardo has therefore been honest with Valeria. In addition, when asked by Francisco if he loves her, Ricardo replies 'By this hand I do,/ Not for her wealth, but for her person too' (1.2.159-60).

When Valeria first appears to the audience, she says 'I'd have one that loves me for myself .../ Not for my wealth' (2.1.68-9). She is presented as honest, banishing one suitor from her presence for having his face painted.<sup>85</sup> Valeria herself never uses make-up, saying that 'A wise man likes that best that is itself,/ Not that which only seems, though it look fairer' (2.1.19-20), a reference both to herself and to her desired prospective husband. But in order to ensure that the man she chooses as her husband is honest, she has to be, for a short time, 'that which only seems'. She has decided that when someone claims to love her, she will 'make great trial ere I have him', saying, 'Though I speak all men fair, and promise sweetly:/ I learn that of my suitors; 'tis their own,/ Therefore injustice 'twere to keep it from them' (2.1.22-5). Valeria's decision to prove her suitors is thus presented as a necessary deceit - if she could trust them to be honest with her, she would have no need to test them.

Before Valeria is able to carry out her 'great trial', however, Ricardo tries to deny her the opportunity for autonomy by tricking her into forming a contract with him. His deceitful behaviour is not justified by Middleton, in the way that Valeria's trial of her suitors is, even though Ricardo's reason is a pro-male one, to be active and dominant in his relations with Valeria: 'I must have the part that overcomes the lady,/ I never like the play else' (1.2.147-8). He continues, 'She's a most affable one,/ Her words will give advantage, and I'll urge 'em/ To the kind proof, to catch her in a

contract' (1.2.154-6). Ricardo uses the spousal law, previously shown to offer women a potential avenue for freedom in the creation of marriage, as a means to trap Valeria:

Valeria: I'd have one that loves me for myself ...

Not for my wealth, and that I cannot have.

Ricardo: What say you to him that does the thing you wish for?

Valeria: Why, here's my hand, I'll marry none but him then.

Ricardo: Your hand and faith?

Valeria: My hand and faith.

Ricardo: 'Tis I, then.

Valeria: I shall be glad on't, trust me; shrew my heart else!

Ricardo: A match! (2.1.68-76).<sup>86</sup>

Ricardo tricks Valeria into offering him her hand as she says the words; on taking it, he says they are contracted and concealed witnesses can prove it. Valeria's need for control of the situation is in order to escape the usual reason why men woo widows and to achieve an affectionate marriage and, in wresting the initiative from her, Ricardo appears to her as exactly the kind of dishonest and greedy husband she did not want. Although the audience knows that Ricardo's battle is one for control - a contest of wills between the sexes - in Valeria's eyes the trick was engineered to get her money: 'then I see/ 'Tis for my wealth: a woman's wealth's her traitor' (2.1.78-9) and she discounts Ricardo's reply "'Tis for love chiefly, I protest, sweet widow;/ I count wealth but a fiddle to make us merry' (2.1.80-1).

In view of the fact that *The Widow* was written shortly after *The Duchess of Malfi* it is possible that Middleton devised this part of his play as a comic reversal of the precontract situation in Webster's play. There, too, the Duchess was dominant as a wooer, emasculating Antonio in a way which Ricardo openly rejects. And, to deceive Valeria, Ricardo uses the Duchess' means of autonomy, even including the surprise of concealed witnesses. In tricking Valeria, therefore, Ricardo is presented as trying not to be an Antonio; he wants to be active in the wooing process, not passive, and in a superior position after the marriage.

The reversal does not stop Valeria, however: instead, she has her initiative restored in an open court of law. She says 'I hope law will right me' (2.1.94-7), not



only against Ricardo but also against the testimony of the two witnesses, a seemingly hopeless task. During the case she offers Ricardo one thousand pounds to renounce the contract. That fails, so she has her sister's maid, Violetta, pretend to be in love with him, but this also fails. These attempts at an out of court settlement show Valeria's fear that the court will validate the match. Regardless of the trick, Valeria has said the performative words and she admits to the Second Suitor that she 'rashly' gave her hand and faith to Ricardo (2.1.180-1). Ricardo clearly considers the match binding: he calls her 'wife' and says he is her 'husband' (2.1.98-100) and he rejects all Valeria's devices.

It is well known that in this period widows often litigated,<sup>87</sup> and as discussed earlier in this chapter, the historical evidence shows that a large proportion of women were plaintiffs in precontract cases. In light of this, Valeria's decision to go to court would not have been considered unusual. However, while historical women, such as Anne Yate and Jane Walkden turned to the law in order to force men to honour contracts, in Middleton's play Valeria wants to free herself from one.

The court case, which is not staged, turns on the question of consent, as happened in historical cases. Despite the two witnesses, Valeria wins her case. The reason given is that 'tis not allowed/ A contract without gifts to bind it fast' (5.1.287-8). In ecclesiastical law all that was required to form marriage was the mutual exchange of vows of the present tense. Yet, as discussed, in historical cases where one party challenged the existence of a precontract, gifts could become an important determinant of consent, for example in the previously cited case of *William Hewytson v Dorothy Cawton* (1601). Middleton therefore uses the exchange of gifts as a plot device to overcome the testimonies of the witnesses and to rescue Valeria, emphasising this when the old suitors ask her 'You broke no gold between you ... Nor drunk to one another?' (2.1.142-3).

The precontract was instigated in order to prevent Valeria from exercising proactive choice, but plot manipulation results in a legal confirmation of her control of the action. Ricardo's reaction to the loss of male prerogative is to say 'O dearth of truth!/ ... If hand and faith be nothing for a contract/ What shall man hope?' (5.1.282-5), constructing his own deceitful actions as honest. But he has no active way to

respond to the court's judgement and from this point onwards Valeria is in control of the wooing, as she had intended from the beginning. She restates her primary aim: 'I must take one that loves me for myself' (5.1.302), and tells the suitors that she has signed over her goods and lands to Brandino: 'Here stands the honest gentleman, my brother/ To whom I've made a deed of gift of all' (5.1.295-6). The final comic twist is that it is only Ricardo who still wishes to marry her. Valeria therefore contracts with the man who originally tricked her. Yet it can be argued that had she accepted the original precontract, this would have set the tone for the subsequent marriage, as it does with Antonio and the Duchess in Webster's play, as indicated by Ricardo's adoption of the role of dominant husband immediately after it (2.1.98-100). At the end, the match is on Valeria's terms. She has shown Ricardo that she is not a passive woman to be worked upon - rather she is active. He outwitted her, but she took him to court and won, and has proof that he loves her for herself and not her money. Valeria is a widow, like Webster's Duchess, but in Middleton's precontracting scene the women's roles are reversed and Valeria's control comes instead via her successful application to the law.

The female characters discussed in this chapter all marry, and in light of this it could be argued that they are ultimately constrained to the dominant ideology. However, the fact that these single women are shown making marriage on their own terms cannot be underestimated. As precontracts required the consent of the couple alone to form binding matrimony, the women are able to remove the need for the intervention or permission of male relatives, instead giving themselves in marriage. As such, they are empowered. Further, in all three plays female characters use the spousal law to create affectionate matches. These matches are not presented as unruly, rather they are legitimised by the playwrights. In *The Gentleman Usher* and *The Widow* love matches, as would be expected in comedies, triumph over attempted arranged marriages: further, in *The Gentleman Usher*, as the match is not only loving, but companionate, this equality, endorsed as it is in the play, can be read as presenting a challenge to the traditional gender hierarchy which underpinned Renaissance marriage. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the love match results in the death of

the Duchess and Antonio: however, their marriage is endorsed as their son is set up to rule at the end.

It is a fact that young women obtaining the loves of their choice against parental wishes is a feature common to both Renaissance comedy and tragedy. For example, Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew* successfully elopes with Lucentio; Hermia's attempted elopement with Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594/5) receives the Duke's eventual support (although only after Demetrius has renounced his claim on Hermia, the result of Puck's magical intervention) and Desdemona defies her father by marrying Othello. In all three of these examples, however, the rebellion is presented as morally ambiguous: *The Taming of the Shrew* ends with the reformed, obedient Kate centre-stage rebuking Bianca and those like her, Hermia's elopement is framed within the magical dream-time of Midsummer Night and Desdemona's choice of marriage partner results in her death, with no offspring to suggest society will be regenerated.

By contrast, in the three plays studied in this chapter, female rebellion is the central focus. In addition, this agency is both facilitated and legitimised by the female characters' legal knowledge. Middleton has Valeria say to the First Suitor 'I'm but a woman,/ And, alas! ignorant in law business' (2.1.149-50), but she successfully makes her suit and at the end of *The Widow* tricks the men with a feigned deed of gift. By having Valeria go to court and win, Middleton is able to endorse her control of the plot. And Margaret, Martia and the Duchess all marry by spousal: in so doing, they defy their parents or brothers and evade the church's demands for publicity, paradoxically by using ecclesiastical law to negotiate a space to marry the men of their choice.

The inclusion of the spousal plot in these three plays places the concept of private conscience in the foreground. This is most obvious in *The Gentleman Usher* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. In Chapman's play Margaret explicitly states that private vows are not only more important than church marriage, they are also more virtuous and her words and actions are legitimised firstly by Strozza, who echoes her sentiment, and secondly by the fact that the unsolemnised and unwitnessed *de presenti* contract is the means for society to regenerate. The Duchess of Malfi also

positions her precontract as being more binding than a public church wedding, and although she dies as a result of choosing private conscience over public duty, her secret precontracted marriage is finally endorsed by Webster. By making the spousal plot central, and by presenting it as a legitimate choice for these female characters, the playwrights - in particular Chapman and Webster - place private conscience above adherence to the dictates of the church. As this is positioned within the context of women defying patriarchal conceptions of femininity and marrying of their own accord it can be considered even more subversive.

The spousals alternative not only provides another plot through which playwrights can explore the potential of young women to defy male relatives but, in the plays discussed in this chapter, both private conscience and the legitimacy of female speech are placed in the foreground. Further, in these plays, the woman is more proactive in the plotting than in other forms of elopement, without any suggestion that such initiative reveals a degenerate nature. The women use legal knowledge to outwit patriarchal hegemony, and the medieval spousal law therefore offered Chapman, Middleton and Webster an angle from which to explore women's potential for legitimate independence when moving from the single to the married state. These precontract plots reveal a defiance of social convention regarding the definition of womanliness, one which is endorsed by the playwrights.

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- <sup>1</sup> BMD, p. 295.
- <sup>2</sup> R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England, 1500-1850*, (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 19.
- <sup>4</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 20.
- <sup>7</sup> PRO C 270/33/26.
- <sup>8</sup> Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, pp. 198-9.
- <sup>9</sup> Henry Swinburne, *A Treatise of Spousals*, (London, 1696), pp. 236;13.
- <sup>10</sup> Martin Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation in the English Ecclesiastical Courts c.1350-1640' in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, (London: Europa Publishers Ltd., 1981), p. 40.
- <sup>11</sup> FSM, p. 31; pp. 604-5
- <sup>12</sup> H. J. Scroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, (Illinois: Tan Books & Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 183.
- <sup>13</sup> FSM, pp. 35, 67. The many different religious factions in sixteenth and seventeenth century England may explain why no unanimous agreement was reached regarding the reform of marriage law.
- <sup>14</sup> BMD, p. 316.
- <sup>15</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 19.
- <sup>16</sup> For a brief discussion of this document with regard to divorce reform, see Chapter 3.
- <sup>17</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 67.
- <sup>18</sup> Erickson, *Property*, p. 34.
- <sup>19</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 65.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 155.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Davis P. Harding, 'Elizabethan Betrothals in *Measure for Measure*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 49 (1950), p. 145.
- <sup>22</sup> Richard Greenham, 'A Treatise of a Contract of Marriage' in *The Works of Richard Greenham*, (London, 1605), p. 175.
- <sup>23</sup> Quoted in BMD, p. 267.
- <sup>24</sup> All references to plays by Shakespeare are taken from Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor (eds.), *The Oxford Shakespeare: the Complete Works*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
- <sup>25</sup> Quoted in Harding, 'Elizabethan Betrothals', p. 145.
- <sup>26</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. xx.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 280; FSM, p. 661.

- <sup>28</sup> Cressy notes that 144 days of the year were prohibited times, including the whole of Lent. *BMD*, p. 302.
- <sup>29</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 48. Only widows were excluded.
- <sup>30</sup> Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation', p. 48.
- <sup>31</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, pp. 216-18.
- <sup>32</sup> *BMD*, p. 267; Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 133.
- <sup>33</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 34.
- <sup>34</sup> Swinburne, *Spousals*, p. 12.
- <sup>35</sup> Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, p. 56.
- <sup>36</sup> E.C.H. Oliphant (ed.), *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher*, (London: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 434.
- <sup>37</sup> Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, p. 58. Yate won her suit.
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 190-1.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193; 192.
- <sup>40</sup> Swinburne, *Spousals*, p. 87.
- <sup>41</sup> Anonymous, *Fair Em*, ed. W. W. Greg, The Malone Society Reprints, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927).
- <sup>42</sup> Quoted in Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, p. xlv n.1.
- <sup>43</sup> Diana O'Hara, 'The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage', *Rural History* 3 (1992) p. 10; *BMD*, p. 265; Swinburne, *Spousals*, p. 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Crawford & Mendelson, *Women*, p. 114.
- <sup>45</sup> Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation', p. 45; Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*.
- <sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the many different courts which operated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the implications for women legislating, see Erickson, *Property* and Stretton, *Women Waging Law*.
- <sup>47</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, pp. 20-5.
- <sup>48</sup> *BMD*, pp. 325; 322.
- <sup>49</sup> Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 25.
- <sup>50</sup> *BMD*, p. 317.
- <sup>51</sup> See Harding, 'Elizabethan Betrothals', pp. 139-58; Ernest Schanzer, 'The Marriage-Contracts in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 13 (1960), pp. 81-9; S. Nagarajan, 'Measure for Measure and Elizabethan Betrothals', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (1963), pp. 115-19; Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'The Marriage Contracts in *Measure for Measure*: a Reconsideration', *Shakespeare Survey*, 32 (1979), pp. 129-44; Harriet Hawkins, *Measure for Measure*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987).
- <sup>52</sup> William G. Meader, *Courtship in Shakespeare*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 165.
- <sup>53</sup> T. G. A. Nelson, 'Doing Things With Words: Another Look at Marriage Rites and Spousals in Renaissance Drama and Fiction', *Studies in Philology*, 95:4 (1998), p. 351.

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<sup>54</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to do Things With Words*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Nelson, 'Doing Things With Words', p. 352.

<sup>56</sup> Historical cases exist of girls being forced to precontract. In 1549 a girl, Alice, was beaten by her father to force her to contract with William Wittoun of Frodesham. She is recorded as saying: 'she had rather the devil had [Wittoun], than she would contract to marry with him; but she needs must do it, by the compulsion of her father'. Quoted in Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, p. liii.

<sup>57</sup> *ES III*, p. 251; John Hazel Smith, Introduction, *The Gentleman Usher*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>58</sup> See Millar Maclure, *George Chapman: A Critical Study*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1966) and M. C. Bradbrook, *George Chapman*, (Harlow: Longman, 1977). For discussions of Chapman's poetry see Raymond B. Waddington, *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in George Chapman's Narrative Poems*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974) and Gerald Snare, *The Mystification of George Chapman*, (London: Duke University Press, 1989).

<sup>59</sup> Maclure, *Chapman*, p. 95.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, Introduction, *Usher*, p. xxiv; Maclure, *Chapman*, p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture*, (London: Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Maclure, *Chapman*, p. 84.

<sup>63</sup> The Enchanter in the first of Duke Alphonso's entertainments tells her that she is 'Lady or princess, both your choice commands' (1.2.52). As the duke expects her to accept his marriage suit, this promise can be viewed as hollow - but, as shown, Margaret does choose for herself.

<sup>64</sup> Bradbrook, *Chapman*, p. 33.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, Introduction, *Usher*, p. xxvi.

<sup>66</sup> Had the couple only contracted marriage *per verba de futuro*, then disfigurement would have been a valid reason for dissolving the match. See above, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> See also 1.1.84-6; 1.2.38; 2.1.38; 3.1.316-17; 5.1.55; 5.1.151.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, Introduction, *Usher*, p. xxv. Smith discusses other parallels between Margaret and Strozza, pp. xxii-xxiv.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

<sup>70</sup> Bentley points to 1616 as the likely composition date, in part due to Martino's reference to 'hateful ... yellow bands' (5.1.52-3), an allusion to Mrs. Turner, who sold yellow ruffs: she was hanged in 1615 for her part in the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury. Bentley argues that 'presumably such an allusion would be worth writing for only a year or so after [her] execution'. *JC IV*, p. 902.

<sup>71</sup> Swapan Chakravorty, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 16n. 65.

<sup>72</sup> 'Alexander Dyce recorded the fact that in his copy of the quarto the names of Jonson and Fletcher had been scored through and "the word 'alone' is written in an old hand after Thomas Middleton".' *JC IV*, p. 901.

<sup>73</sup> For example *The Widow* is mentioned in a footnote in George E. Rowe Jr.'s *Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition*, (London: Nebraska University Press, 1979) and briefly by Chakravorty (*Society and Politics*, p. 117). See also David M. Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 140 and Dorothy M. Farr, *Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism*, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), pp. 17-19; 21-2. Twenty years ago, Kenneth Friedenreich argued that *The Widow* was worth reading both for its 'intrinsic interest' and also because it 'expand[s] the contexts of our appreciation' for other of Middleton's plays. 'Introduction: How to Read Middleton' in Friedenreich (ed.), *'Accompaning the players': Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980*, (New York: AMS Press, 1983), p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> *The Duchess of Malfi* was performed by the King's Men at both the Blackfriars and Globe theatres.

<sup>75</sup> For a study of the historical Duchess of Malfi, see Barbara Banks Amendola, *The Mystery of the Duchess of Malfi*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth M. Brennan, Introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi*, (London: A & C Black, 1987), p. xxvi.

<sup>77</sup> See for example Clifford Leech, *John Webster: A Critical Study*, (London: Hogarth, 1951).

<sup>78</sup> Frank W. Wadsworth, 'Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* in the Light of Some Contemporary Ideas on Marriage and Remarriage', *Philological Quarterly*, 35 (1956), pp. 396-8.

<sup>79</sup> See for example Vivien Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations' in Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson (eds.), *The World we Have Gained*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>80</sup> Brennan, Introduction, *Duchess*, p. xiv; Michael Neill, *John Ford: Critical Revisions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 172; Frank Whigham, *Seizures of the Will in Early Modern English Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 190-1.

<sup>81</sup> Nelson, 'Doing Things With Words', p. 361.

<sup>82</sup> This stands in contrast to the image of corrupt and decaying fecundity used to describe her brothers' courts (1.1.49-52).

<sup>83</sup> Richard A. Levin, *Shakespeare's Secret Schemers. The Study of an Early Modern Dramatic Device*, (London: Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 124. For a list of the critics who consider the ending to be optimistic, and those who argue the opposite, see A. L. & M. K. Kistner, 'Man's Will and its Futility in *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Studia Neophilologica* 68 (1996), p. 59n. 8.

<sup>84</sup> The horoscope found by Bosola foretold an early and violent death for this son. It can be considered significant, however, that Webster does not recall this at the end and that further, the horoscope better fits the fate of the Duchess' younger son, who is strangled to death.

<sup>85</sup> The imagery Valeria uses to describe the corruption which lurks beneath a painted exterior - 'I may perceive [his face] peel in many places;/ And under's eye lay a betraying foulness' (2.1.7-8) - is a motif



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more often applied to women by men in Jacobean drama. See for example Lussurioso in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1.2.29-31) and Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* (2.1.59-61).

<sup>86</sup> Ricardo's trick is similar to an episode in the anonymous play, *Fair Em*, in which the servant Trotter deceives Em into making a contract with him: Trotter pretends to be ill, and when Em promises that she will do anything to heal him, he says 'for thee my love, full sick I was, in hazard of my life./ Thy promise was to make me whole, and [therefore] to be my wife' (ll. 383-4).

<sup>87</sup> See Stretton, *Women Waging Law*. The Public Record Office contains documents which show widows litigating in various different courts, including the Chancery Court (see for example: C2/Eliz I/A1/15; C2/Eliz I/A1/46; C2/Eliz I/A2/58; C2/Eliz I/D1/30); the Star Chamber (see for example: STAC 7/4/22; STAC 7/4/32; STAC 7/15/58) and the Court of Requests (see for example: REQ 2/412/318; REQ 2/414/76; REQ 2/415/43; REQ 2/416/11; REQ 2/420/17).

### 3.

#### **The wife sale or barter in Renaissance society and plays**

... Pistor, a baker, sold his wife t'other day to a cheesemonger that made cake and cheese; another to a cofferer, a third to a common player; why, you see, 'tis common (*The Phoenix*, 1.4.251-5).

#### Divorce: the legal and social background

The previous chapter revealed images of single women legitimately negotiating a space within marriage in order to have some control over it. But what of wives and their opportunities for legitimate agency? This question will be explored via an examination of wife sales, which were a feature of sixteenth and seventeenth century society. As these sales were a means for some people to separate, this chapter begins with a discussion of marital separation at this time, before attempting to make sense of the appearance of wife sales in Renaissance society and drama.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Martin Ingram observes, 'divorce in the modern sense - the termination of a valid marriage, enabling the partners to marry again - was not recognised'.<sup>1</sup> Catholic canon law held that marriages were made by God and as such should not be dissolved. Prior to the Reformation, therefore, the sole option for couples who wished to separate was to have their marriage annulled by means of a papal dispensation. This was only possible in cases where the marriage 'was deemed to have been contracted outside ecclesiastical laws', in which case it was necessary that it be dissolved.<sup>2</sup> An annulment voided the marriage contract, leaving both parties free to remarry. Under common law, the woman lost her dower rights and any children from the marriage were declared illegitimate, an example of civil penalties being incurred for an area of law which came under ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

After the Reformation an annulment could be granted for three reasons: consanguinity/affinity, permanent impotence or the existence of a prior precontract (as discussed in the previous chapter). Consanguinity refers to the level of kinship existing between people. According to Richard Helmholz, 'the method was to count down each line of descent from the common ancestor' and

prior to 1215 if this took less than seven steps (on either side), the relationship was consanguineous.<sup>3</sup> In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council reduced the number of degrees from seven to four. In addition, the laws of affinity meant that people were also barred from marrying the relative of anyone they had engaged in sexual relations with. This would, for example, stop a man marrying his dead wife's sister. In a pre-Reformation example, it was for this reason that Henry VIII required a special dispensation from the Pope to marry his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Helmholz argues that very few people used consanguinity or affinity as bases for annulment, proposing that this was mainly due to the internalisation of state codes - people did not want to marry those they believed they may be related to. The reduction of the degrees from seven to four made it easier to check relations, and people tended to marry outwith their parish to reduce the possibility of kinship ties. Further, in practice, in a case which was difficult to prove, it was considered 'more tolerable to leave couples joined together against the statutes of man than to separate, against the statutes of the Lord those who are legitimately joined'.<sup>5</sup>

Another justification for annulment, permanent impotence, appears to have been just as difficult to prove: the woman could be inspected to ensure she was still a virgin (as in the case of Frances (Howard) Devereux, Countess of Essex), and both Stone and Helmholz record the incidence of seven 'honest women' employed to try to provoke a husband to erection.<sup>6</sup> Such humiliating treatment would presumably make it less likely for couples to seek an annulment this way, and the evidence suggests that annulments for any reason were rare at this time.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to annulment, after the Reformation a couple could be granted separation *a mensa et thoro*: this meant they could live apart, but could not remarry, and the courts hoped the couple would eventually be reconciled. Unlike annulment, judicial separation did not affect the legal rights of the wife or children. It could be granted for one of three reasons: adultery (on the part of the woman), heresy or apostasy, or cruelty.<sup>8</sup> Judicial separations were problematic: for plaintiffs, these reasons were hard to prove – for example, what constituted cruelty was difficult to judge as husbands were entitled to use a certain amount of force when 'disciplining' unruly wives. From the point of view of the courts, too

many people treated judicial separation as annulment, resulting in bigamous remarriage. The 1604 canons can be regarded as an attempt to clarify this problem as they reiterated that people could not remarry after judicial separation.

Some couples avoided the difficulties associated with proving a case in court by simply living apart. However, those who were caught doing so without judicial permission were prosecuted by the church, as evidenced by Bishop Still's visitation of Somerset in 1594. Couples there escaped punishment by swearing they were living together, such as Peter Hurd and his wife who 'since the visitation have been dwelling together', and Thomas Heath and his wife who said they were 'at this instant' cohabiting. The church forced illegally separated couples to live together, but if neither party appeared the penalty was often excommunication.<sup>9</sup> The evidence suggests that some couples did live apart unlawfully:

deserted wives comprised over eight per cent of all the women between thirty one and forty listed in the 1570 census of the indigent poor of the city of Norwich.<sup>10</sup>

There is a difference between living apart by mutual choice and abandonment, but in both cases, rather than going through the ecclesiastical court, people took separation into their own hands. It is this kind of self-regulation which the church was trying to discourage, hence the attempts to compel couples to live together under threat of punishment. The evidence shows, however, that churchmen were not wholly successful, as separations outwith the church continued. Separating in this manner, whether through mutual agreement or desertion, was one way for poor people to 'divorce' and ultimately detection must have been limited, in part due to the lack of a national police force.<sup>11</sup>

After 1534, the very rich had a different option for evading marriage law when it became problematic to them. Some noblemen who had been granted separation *a mensa et thoro* by the ecclesiastical courts used parliament to legitimise remarriage, as in the case of William Parr, Marquis of Northampton, discussed by Eric Josef Carlson. Parr had married Anne Bouchier in 1527, separated from her for adultery in 1542 and a year later 'secured passage of a private bill bastardising any children of the adulterous liaison in order to protect [his] estate'.<sup>12</sup> In 1547 Parr asked King Edward if he could remarry while Anne

was still alive, but without waiting for a decision, he married Elizabeth Cobham. As a result the council made them separate. However, a subsequent private bill passed both the Lords and Commons declaring Parr's second marriage 'lawful notwithstanding any statute, common or church law or custom'.<sup>13</sup> But despite this, parliament eventually repealed the bill validating Parr's second marriage, perhaps concerned it would encourage more such remarriages.

William Parr possessed money and power, but even so the process was difficult, long and costly, and ultimately did not constitute proper, secure legal divorce. By the late seventeenth century, divorce by Act of Parliament became an option for wealthy noblemen, but the costs involved were prohibitive, making it the preserve of the very rich.<sup>14</sup> It would appear therefore that the poor could unlawfully separate without going through the courts, while the wealthy and powerful could secure separation through the ecclesiastical court and remarriage by a parliamentary bill (providing more evidence of the overlap between the temporal and ecclesiastical courts). But the options for the majority of people - annulment or judicial separation - were limited and difficult to justify.

As previously discussed, marriage law remained unchanged between the twelfth century and 1753: yet despite this, during the sixteenth century there was a desire for divorce reform. Continental Protestants such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Bucer wanted divorce to be available for adultery and desertion, with the innocent person able to remarry.<sup>15</sup> These attempts to widen access to divorce are mirrored by the abortive *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*, the proposed reform of church law drawn up in the reign of Edward VI and defeated in the House of Lords in 1553. If it had been successful, divorce measures similar to those put forward by Luther would have replaced separation *a mensa et thoro*, which was considered by some as "alien" to scripture and leading to "great perversity".<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, however, the measures were considered too extreme, and although the bill was resubmitted during the reign of Elizabeth, it was again rejected.

In any discussion of the dissolution of marriage in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the difficulty of being granted a separation must be weighed up against the fact that the majority of marriages at this time seem to have been stable. This is partly because the expected life-span was shorter than today, but

also because many were economic partnerships, and broken marriages were in general socially unacceptable. But for those who did wish to separate, 'the potential avenues for escape were few and narrow'.<sup>17</sup> It will be shown that for a minority of people, the wife sale became one of these avenues.

#### Separation and remarriage: wife sales

Wife sales existed in Britain until the twentieth century;<sup>18</sup> however it is not known when or where they originated. It is generally agreed that they derive from an ancient custom, but without agreement as to its exact nature. Samuel Menefee, in his 1981 study, *Wives for Sale*, has commented on the parallels drawn with customs outwith Britain, such as the Babylonian marriage market: there, the most attractive virgins were bought, while the less attractive were given away to men with some of the money earned from the sale of the others. Christina Hole links wife sales to the old African custom of brideprice, a payment by the groom's family to the bride's family, the reverse of the dowry.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Keith Thomas relates wife selling to Anglo-Saxon feudal law from the time of King Ethelbert – then, if a man committed adultery with another man's wife he had to financially recompense the husband, and buy him another wife.<sup>20</sup>

Samuel Menefee, the one author who has made a study of wife sales, finds the theories advanced as to their origins unsatisfactory: 'first in that most do not relate to the wife's husband, and second in that no real evidence of continuity suggesting development from such historical antecedents is offered'.<sup>21</sup> Menefee uses the fictional wife sale in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) as a starting point for his study, then goes on to argue that wife sales were not just a literary device, but did actually take place in Britain. He focuses on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when sales appear to have been most prevalent, arguing that by the mid-1700s wife sales had developed a recognisable form: the wife, with a halter around her neck, was taken to market by her husband then led away by her new 'owner'.<sup>22</sup> With the exception of Menefee, critics and historians are in agreement that, prior to this time, wife sales were either rare or non-existent. Martin Ingram says they were virtually unknown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while John Bradbury Brooks argues that 'wife selling

was ... illegal and uncommon ... in England' and relegates it to the realm of folklore.<sup>23</sup> The question posed by one *Notes and Queries* contributor, 'Has there ever been any foundation in law for the practice of selling wives...?' received many replies, all of them concerning eighteenth and nineteenth century cases, and Lawrence Stone also confines wife selling to these centuries.<sup>24</sup> Yet despite this, Menefee has provided evidence that wife sales *did* exist in England (and Scotland) before the eighteenth century. His discussion of these particular sales is understandably brief, as less evidence is available.

This study will look at the details extant in an attempt to make sense of the practice of wife-selling prior to 1700, before analysing the role and status of the woman in such sales. In examining the argument that these sales were symptomatic of a society which viewed women as property, this study will put forward the possibility that wife sales can be viewed from a different angle - that they allowed not only men, but also some women a chance to negotiate a space for themselves in separation and remarriage. In the second part of the chapter, this study will analyse the wife sale and related barter as dramatic device during the English Renaissance.

The earliest mention of wife sales in the British Isles, as Menefee notes, is in the eleventh century, when Pope Gregory VII complained to Archbishop Lanfranc (1005?-84) that he had heard that the 'Scoti' not only deserted their wives but also sold them.<sup>25</sup> While it is possible that the term 'Scoti' referred to the Irish, at the end of the eleventh century it seems to indicate Scotland.<sup>26</sup> There appear to be no more records of wife sales until 1536. C. K. Kenny includes a thirteenth century case in his article on wife sales, but this is not a sale.<sup>27</sup> The case involves Margaret, daughter of and heir to Sir John de Gatesden, who married Sir John de Camoys before 1300. Some time after this, Margaret ran away with her lover, Sir William Paynell, and eventually John gave her to William as a gift: 'by a formal grant in writing, under his seal, quitted unto him all his right and title to her, as also to all her goods and chattels'.<sup>28</sup> When John died in 1300 Margaret married William. Two years later, when she tried to claim dower rights on John's land, she used the deed of gift as evidence against adultery, producing certificates from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Chichester to show the couple had been acquitted of this charge by the ecclesiastical court by compurgation.<sup>29</sup> Yet

despite this, the king's advocate classed them as adulterers, refusing to allow the deed of gift as evidence:

a statute of Edward I expressly punished with loss of dower the woman who eloped and abode with her adulterer, unless her husband, without being coerced thereto, by the church, took her back again and 'reconciled her'.<sup>30</sup>

It was for this reason that the court decided not to allow Margaret to plead for her dower. The court concluded that

William and Margaret cannot deny that Margaret in the life-time of her husband John went off and abode with William, altogether relinquishing her husband, John, as plainly appears because she never in [John's] life-time ... raised any objection, and raises none now, either in her own person or by another in any manner whatsoever, but by way of making plain her original and spontaneous intention and continuing the affection which in her husband's life-time she conceived for the said William, she has, since John's death, allowed herself to be married to the said William.<sup>31</sup>

Margaret's agency is shown by the fact that she ran away from her husband, and the court argued that the elopement was her 'spontaneous intention'. Further, she did not reconcile with Sir John, indicating that she had no desire to return to him. Although the court used Margaret's compliance in order to condemn her, this record emphasises her willingness to take part in the exchange: the belief of the court, that although she had every opportunity to complain about the exchange (whether personally, or through another party) but chose not to, illustrates her free agency in the matter. This case provides an early example of female self-regulation in separation and remarriage; however, it is not a wife sale.

Ingram mentions wife sales in passing in his seminal study *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, 1570-1640*. He approaches the subject from a legal perspective and his claim that wife sales were 'very rare if not totally unknown' at this time is based on his understanding that such cases did not involve the sale of wives at all. Rather, he argues, they involved women who were precontracted rather than those who had been formally married in church: he distinguishes between "'selling" contracted wives' and 'the sale of wives after a marriage had actually been solemnised'.<sup>32</sup> As previously shown, precontract cases formed the bulk of



matrimonial litigation, and Ingram provides evidence that towards the end of the sixteenth century some of these cases were being settled out of court. In these instances one party might renounce their claim on the other for a fee, and this is how Ingram accounts for wife sales. His point is that it is the contract or spousal which is sold: the seller gives up his claim on the woman, and this situation could arise, for example, when a precontracted person wanted to marry someone else. As has already been argued, however, a *de presenti* contract without solemnisation, while discouraged by the church, did constitute binding marriage: it was viewed as such by many and had to be ratified by the church. Therefore Ingram's definition of a precontract was still recognised as marriage at this time. It is interesting that Hale's gloss of an Essex case in 1585 – 'selling a right in a contract of marriage' – contrasts with the gloss of a wife sale case in Humble (1646) which reads 'a wife sold',<sup>33</sup> indicating that a distinction did exist between the sale of precontracted wives and the sale of solemnised wives. Ultimately, however, it would appear that sixteenth and seventeenth century examples of wife sales included both precontract sales (which would involve married couples if the precontract was *de presenti*) and the sale of women whose marriages had been solemnised.

In the 160 year period between 1536-1696 there are fourteen recorded cases of wife sales, including four precontract cases and one example of a man who murdered his wife using a sale as an alibi. This study will investigate the possibility that wife sales derive from the tradition of self-regulation which, as previously argued, was a feature of Middle Ages marriage which continued into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although the fourteen cases are not many – evidence appears less than once every ten years – it cannot be assumed that there were no others. The casual way the subject is used in plays by Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker and John Ford suggests they were common knowledge. In addition, as most wife sales are documented in church court records, the people involved had to be caught for the case to be registered. Fewer records existed before the sixteenth century and marriages were not registered until 1538. Further, many of Menefee's later examples are drawn from newspapers, which appeared after about 1620: only one newspaper report of a wife sale (1642/3) appears to have survived in the years prior to 1700.<sup>34</sup>

The fourteen cases can be found in state papers, church records, a diary and a newspaper article. The first is one not mentioned by Menefee: at some point before 1536, Sir John Bulmer bought Margaret Cheyne (or Cheyney) from her husband William, and when both their spouses were dead he married her.<sup>35</sup> Seventeen years later, in 1553, the diary of the London citizen Henry Machyn records that Thomas Sowdley ('Parson Chicken') was publicly shamed for selling his wife to a butcher.<sup>36</sup> In 1581, in Cambridge, Thomas Upchurch bought the wife of Edward Scayles for sixteen shillings. Thomas Huckle, a vicar, had been present at the *de presenti* contracting of Isabel Bower and Scayles; 'afterwards [he was] the means to sever and separate them asunder and to dissolve the same contract', then to marry Bower to Upchurch. All three men, along with Nicholas Badford, who had persuaded Scayles to sell Bower, were presented.<sup>37</sup> The Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office documents the 1582 sale of a precontracted wife, Edith Myllat of Overton, while two years later, in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, Richard Baldwyn and Thomas Griffys completed penance for participating in a wife sale: Griffys, who bought Baldwyn's wife, is said to have 'given offence to the congregation'.<sup>38</sup> In 1585 Henry Marshall of Essex sold the rights of Joanna Brewer to Edward Coxen for ten shillings, but when the money was not forthcoming he forbade the banns, stating his prior precontract with Brewer as the impediment to the marriage.<sup>39</sup>

The next recorded case took place in South Wraxall in 1598, and concerns Joanne Moxam who married Walter Tiler, having allegedly already married Henry Malteman. Malteman asked for the forty shillings he lent Joanne to be repaid.<sup>40</sup> The 1613 Minutes of the Synod of Fife record the case of David Fotheringham who was sent to the High Commission for, among other crimes, selling his wife.<sup>41</sup> In Stirling in 1638 William Williamson, Agnes Crawford and Edward Blair were all punished for taking part in a wife sale.<sup>42</sup> Between 1642 and 1643 the newspaper *The Kingdome's Weekly Intelligencer* reported that a Warwickshire yeoman had sold his wife. On the husband changing his mind, the wife refused to leave her new partner.<sup>43</sup> In a 1646 case in Humble, James Steill sold his wife to Patrick Fowler: although they claimed the sale was a joke, both were enjoined to perform public penance.<sup>44</sup> John Aubrey records the case of William Barwick who, in 1690, used a wife sale as an alibi: he claimed 'he had sold his wife [Mary] for

five shillings', when in actual fact he had murdered her.<sup>45</sup> In Bilston, Staffordshire in 1692 John Whitehouse sold his wife to Mr. Bracegirdle, and finally, in Thame in 1696 Thomas Heath was accused of buying the wife of George Fuller and 'cohabiting unlawfully' with her. He was presented by two churchwardens, William Pecke and John Young.<sup>46</sup>

Geographically, sales do not appear to have been restricted to any one region: although they took place mainly in urban areas, from London to Staffordshire, there were occurrences in England and Scotland, reinforcing the argument that sales were widespread. For example, the 1613 wife sale entry in the Minutes of the Synod of Fife is, the nineteenth century editor claims, 'the only instance which [he] has observed in Scotland of a practice not uncommon among the lowest vulgar of England'.<sup>47</sup> And other cases have been recorded in Scotland (outwith Pope Gregory's comment about the 'Scoti' selling their wives), such as that of Crawford, Williamson and Blair in Stirling in 1638, and of Steill and Fowler in Humble (1646).<sup>48</sup>

Only six records give any indication of prices, and these vary. In the Cambridge case (1581), Thomas Upchurch bought Isabel Bower from Edward Scayles for sixteen shillings, while in the Essex case (1585), Henry Marshall sold the 'rights' of Joanna Brewer for ten shillings. Interestingly, both of these cases involve women married by precontract alone. It is not until sixty years later that the price of a sale which involved a solemnised marriage is recorded: in 1642/3 a woman was sold in Warwick for £5, while James Steill of Humble sold his wife for £4 in 1646.<sup>49</sup> In the 1690 case where William Barwick used a wife sale as an alibi, he claimed he had sold his wife for five shillings, a much lower amount than real sales seem to have fetched. Finally, in 1696, in a case which makes explicit the association of women with property, Thomas Heath of Thame bought a woman 'of her husband at 2<sup>1/4</sup>d the pound'.<sup>50</sup> The figures involved in the Warwick and Humble cases in particular represent substantial amounts, indicating that the transactions were taken seriously, and perhaps pointing to an economic motive for the sales, as in Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1603-4) and Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635-6). Further, the formal nature of the Humble transaction seems clear: Steill claims that 'he took his wife by the hand to give her to the other'. This gesture, symbolising the transference of ownership, is used in the marriage

ceremony, where the woman is given from father to husband. This indicates that while wife sales involve the dissolution of marriage, the hand to hand transfer to the new 'owner' instigates the second. In the Humbie case, however, despite being authenticated by traditional ritual, and despite the amount of money involved, once brought to court the offenders claimed the sale had been intended as a joke, declaring they were 'in an idle merriment and at drinking'.<sup>51</sup>

Economic concerns could therefore be one motive for wife sales, but it can be argued that they were not the only, or even the main, reason for their occurrence. Related transactions which involved rich men who had affairs with lower class women are of interest here. If the women became pregnant, instead of marrying them, these men paid lower class men to marry the women: 'they were sometimes willing to pay handsomely to secure the necessary substitute'. This is illustrated by the case of Alice Graie (1603), who told the court that Richard St John had made her pregnant, but then forced another man, Francis Smith, to marry her 'by promising to provide the couple with diet for three years'. In a case in 1616, Anthony Looker was given five pounds by John Pleydall to marry a woman Pleydall's son had impregnated.<sup>52</sup> As with the case in 1300, money is given with and not for the women, yet the thinking behind these cases is similar to that of wife sales, particularly if the possibility of these men having formed precontracts with the women is considered. Ingram argues that 'undoubtedly the single most important reason why unmarried women were prepared to commit fornication was with marriage in mind'.<sup>53</sup> It seems fair, therefore, to speculate that a promise of marriage would have been made to many of the women in these cases. And, this argument can be taken a step further: if not only a promise but a *contract* had been made, then these women were legally the wives of these men. In the examples cited above it is of course the 'husband' who gives money to the 'buyer' - the opposite of a wife sale transaction. These cases do, however, provide evidence that despite the church's attempts to control the formation and dissolution of marriage, self-regulation - especially where rich men were concerned - was still a possibility.

As argued, there is evidence that some people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries chose to separate unlawfully. In light of this, it is interesting that some decided instead to become involved in a wife sale, indicating that this

was a kind of self-regulated divorce. Menefee (referring to post-seventeenth century cases) argues that people viewed these sales as 'a legal and valid form of divorce'.<sup>54</sup> But while he provides evidence that in later centuries people considered wife sales to be legal, it is not always clear in the extant pre-eighteenth century cases whether or not the participants believed their actions constituted a valid way to separate.

Wife sales, like unlawful separations, were dealt with by church courts, evidence that whether or not lay people viewed these sales as legal, the courts did not, and every extant example of a wife sale brought before the court resulted in punishment. The specific punishments the church could enforce were limited: their methods of discipline were restricted to the spiritual, so their main options were penance or excommunication.<sup>55</sup> Penance often involved public shaming, the most extreme version of which required the person to dress in a white sheet and confess their sins in front of a full Sunday congregation, or alternatively, in the market place. In lesser cases the offender wore ordinary clothes and only confessed to the minister. The idea behind public penance was reform of sinful behaviour, and the evidence suggests it was the favoured method of punishment. In 1553 Thomas Sowdley ('Parson Chicken'), a clergyman at St. Nicholas Coleabbey, was reported in Machyn's diary as being made to 'ride in a cart ... round about London, for he sold his wife to a butcher'.<sup>56</sup> It is not stated who forced him to do this. On the one hand, it is possible this was an ecclesiastical punishment. On the other hand, being made to ride in a cart suggests the alternative possibility that the punishment was carried out by the local community: ritualistic 'shaming' rides involved humiliating people who were considered to have transgressed dominant societal codes, such as cuckolded husbands and unruly women.<sup>57</sup> If this was such a case it would indicate that, in common with the church, certain communities also viewed wife sales as 'wrong' and topsy-turvy.

As the other recorded punishments are confined to church records, however, ultimately it is the reaction of the law-makers - the church - which are extant, not the attitudes of different communities. In 1584 in Hertfordshire Richard Baldwyn and Thomas Griffys both completed penance for participating in a wife sale. The church's perspective is further illustrated by the case of David Fotheringham of Fife (1613), a drunkard and profaner of the Sabbath who was condemned for

selling his wife. The words used were: 'for the aforesaid filthy crimes he is to be charged to the High Commission'.<sup>58</sup> The passing over of sentencing to the High Commission indicates the seriousness with which the sale was taken, and again shows civil law providing support for ecclesiastical law. The High Commission had crown authority and therefore possessed more powers than ordinary church courts: 'they were able to fine, imprison and take bonds to enforce appearance or the performance of court orders'.<sup>59</sup>

Even more extreme is the reaction of the Presbytery of Haddington who, in 1646 wanted to send two men charged with wife selling to prison: once again the severity of the desired punishment indicates a backlash against this practice, and a need to assert authority. In this specific case the traditional punishment was decided upon in the end: 'James Steill and Patrick Fowler made their public repentance as was directed by the Presbytery'. Interestingly, these defendants were not punished with excommunication. Excommunication resulted in the exclusion of people from the community of the church, and could incur civil penalties.<sup>60</sup> Ingram says it was a strong weapon, but Helmholtz argues that the religious upheaval of the Reformation meant it had 'lost its terror through over-use and application to trivial and unworthy goals': if this was the case, it may explain the church's preference for public humiliation in wife sale cases.<sup>61</sup>

In the wife sale case in Stirling (1638) the couple involved are called 'adulterers' and in 1696 Thomas Heath of Thame was presented for committing adultery with the wife of George Fuller 'having bought her of her husband'.<sup>62</sup> It appears, therefore, that the church refused to recognise wife sales as anything other than adultery. The evidence here, and in the cases of 1584, 1638 and 1646, shows that both buyers and sellers were prosecuted. In the 1638 case the wife is also punished – however in a later case (1646, also in Scotland) the wife is required to give evidence but does not seem to have been punished.<sup>63</sup> This raises the question, what was the role of the wife in these sales? The connection between women and property at this time is well-known, and wife sales have been viewed as an extreme manifestation of this perception. Keith Thomas argues that

one does not have to prove the widespread existence of wifeselling in order to be able to assert that until the mid-nineteenth century the ownership of most women was invested in men, but it provides an interesting ... example.<sup>64</sup>

Thomas makes a valid point, and it is clear that wife sales owe something to this association of women with commodity, yet this study is interested in discovering whether there is a possibility that these sales allow for a more complex reading. The argument has already been considered that wife sales show men regulating their own lives. Is it possible that in some cases it was not only the men, but also the women who were able to exercise choice, and in so doing, to negotiate a space for themselves within marriage? Further, could some of these women have utilised wife sales to make 'better' matches, whether in terms of economics or with regard to constructing affectionate matches? The term 'some of' has to be used because the interpretation in all but one of the examples invented in plays between 1599 and 1636 do show the women being ill-treated through the sale. And Menefee finds that many eighteenth century sales were 'a way in which the husband could avoid responsibility for maintaining and supporting his wife and children'.<sup>65</sup> In other cases, however, Menefee has drawn different conclusions regarding the wife's involvement. He argues that the wives were often in their late teens or early twenties and were usually younger than the husbands they were leaving, and concludes that, as in these later sales the buyers were often richer than the sellers, 'this trend may have been responsible for many wives' willing consent to such transactions'. Further,

such conjugal sales were often pre-arranged, taking place at market or in a pub ... The woman was supposed to give her consent; often she was disposed of to a lover.<sup>66</sup>

Menefee emphasises the importance of the wife's consent, yet for various reasons his conclusions cannot be applied to pre-1700 cases: not only is there less evidence available for the sixteenth and seventeenth century cases, but at this time wife sales had not yet reached a recognisable form - this did not happen until the mid-1700s. Not least, there are also societal differences between the two periods. This study will therefore attempt to determine the role of the woman in pre-

eighteenth century wife sale cases by looking in depth at the 1536 case of John and Margaret Bulmer. Of all the early modern wife sales recorded, this reveals the most information on the participants and further, evidence exists as to the nature of the sale and to the woman's attitude towards it.

#### The wife sale of Margaret Cheyne to John Bulmer

At some point before 1536 Sir John Bulmer of Wilton bought Margaret Cheyne from her husband, William Cheyne of London, and made her his mistress.<sup>67</sup> The reason evidence pertaining to the relationship between Margaret and John exists is mainly due to their involvement in the 1536 rebellion, the Pilgrimage of Grace, which resulted in their arrest (along with others) and trial for treason.<sup>68</sup> In 1537 the rebels were found guilty and sentenced to death. While the men were hanged Margaret was 'drawn when she came to Newgate into Smithfield, and there burned the same fore-noon'.<sup>69</sup>

Margaret's role in the Pilgrimage and her subsequent trial and execution have been discussed by Madeleine and Ruth Dodds in their detailed 1915 study of the rebellion. The Dodds sisters attempt to rescue Margaret from her portrayal by historians such as J. A. Froude, who argued that Margaret's punishment fitted her crime.<sup>70</sup> Madeleine and Ruth Dodds argue that, contrary to this view, Margaret does not appear to have committed an overt act of treason, and even if she had, 'although burning was the ancient penalty for treason, it was seldom enacted'.<sup>71</sup> The attitude of the Dodds sisters regarding Margaret's role in the wife sale is, however, ambiguous: they argue that John bought Margaret to be his mistress, and that her acceptance by his family 'may indicate the low state of morality in the North, or the power of Margaret's charms'.<sup>72</sup> Since 1915 Margaret has been mentioned only briefly by commentators, for example in R. W. Hoyle's *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (2001), which does not refer to the wife sale.<sup>73</sup> This study aims to reassess Margaret as an active woman able to have agency, from the perspective of the wife sale and her subsequent relationship with John Bulmer.

John Bulmer, who was descended from an 'ancient and honourable family' (his father had fought and gained distinction at the battle of Flodden<sup>74</sup>), was



originally married to Anne, daughter of Sir Ralph Bigod. It can be inferred that this was an arranged marriage to facilitate family ties, as the evidence shows that the marriages of John's brothers were arranged: Sir Ralph Bulmer married the daughter and co-heir of Roger Aske, while Sir William married Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of William Elmedon of Durham, in 1505, when both parties were around eleven years old.<sup>75</sup> It would appear that William and Elizabeth became estranged, but it is not clear when or how John separated from Anne.

Women are often absent from records, so as would be expected, less is known of Margaret Cheyne. She is named as the illegitimate daughter of Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham in Ord's *History and Antiquities of Cleveland* – however, her son claimed her father was Henry Stafford, who was possibly a relative of the Duke's. According to Madeleine and Ruth Dodds, John Bulmer's father worked for Buckingham, and this was probably how he met Margaret.<sup>76</sup> Margaret was married to a man named William, but there are no extant details of their marriage and life together.<sup>77</sup> The sale is mentioned in the *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*: Margaret is recorded as 'wife unto Sir John Bulmer, and he made her his wife, but she was the wife of one Cheyny, for he sold her unto Sir Bulmer'.<sup>78</sup>

The court depositions relating to the trial of the rebels provide evidence of Margaret and John's relationship. In John's confession he insisted on referring to Margaret as his 'wife', a term to which the judges objected.<sup>79</sup> This raises two points: firstly, John's insistence on the legitimacy of his relationship with Margaret (he also referred to her as his wife in letters<sup>80</sup>) and secondly, the response of their contemporaries to the match. Margaret is continually referred to as 'Cheyne' by the court, rather than 'Bulmer', and this refusal to acknowledge Margaret's position is echoed in the sentiments of the priest John Watts, who called her 'that wicked woman Margaret, Sir John's pretended wife'.<sup>81</sup> The perception that Margaret was at this time still married to William Cheyne is repeated by the nineteenth century editor of Henry VIII's *Letters and Papers*, James Gairdener.<sup>82</sup>

The priest and the judges were not willing to accept Margaret as Sir John's lawful wife, yet despite this, the evidence suggests they *were* married by 1536, by which time both their spouses were dead. Ord's pedigree of Bulmer records their marriage, while the *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London* refers to Margaret as

'wife unto Sir John', as does the compiler of a list of the costs incurred by prisoners held in the Tower of London.<sup>83</sup> Further, in a letter to Sir John dated January 11<sup>th</sup> 1537, Sir Ralph Evers wrote 'I pray you have me recommended to my lady your wife', a term echoed in a letter written fourteen days later by John's brother William, in which he congratulates John and his 'wife' on the birth of their son.<sup>84</sup> Additional evidence comes from the testimony of this son: Margaret and John had two daughters together while their spouses were living, but their son, born January 1537, claimed he was born in wedlock.<sup>85</sup>

In the eyes of the church, however, the status resulting from the wife sale was that Sir John had no legal connection with Margaret. As has already been established, to the church courts, wife sales amounted to adultery:

The church seems long to have felt a special repugnance towards the man who has lived in adultery with a woman, then gone on to marry her after the death of his first wife.<sup>86</sup>

The church viewed people in these cases as 'stained' by adultery and therefore not fit to remarry. It is true that aristocratic men often kept mistresses. By marrying and legitimising the relationship, however, it can be argued that it could no longer be ignored by the authorities, and the church's attitude to adultery and remarriage seems likely to account for the priest John Watts' condemnation of Margaret. Watts not only denounced Margaret as an adulteress, but also as a witch: he warned another priest not to fall under her spell 'for if you do you will be made as wise as your master and both will be hanged then', and claimed in his deposition that Margaret 'shows [John] things and trifles and makes him believe he may do that thing that is impossible'.<sup>87</sup> The emphasis is on Margaret's transgression rather than that of John: by classing Margaret as an enchantress, Watts was effectively shifting responsibility, and by extension blame, onto her. His attitude can be viewed as symptomatic of a society which often demonised those women who did not conform to the chaste ideal.

Sir John, however, despite contemporary censure of Margaret, seemed determined to emphasise their attachment by referring to her as his wife. There is also evidence of warmth between them. In response to Margaret saying to her husband 'for my sake break a spear', John is recorded as having replied 'Pretty Peg,

I will never forsake thee', the use of a nickname revealing affection. Further, John was overheard saying that he would rather be put on the rack than be separated from Margaret.<sup>88</sup> That this devotion was mutual can be inferred from Margaret's conduct at the trial. Although John eventually confessed that Margaret had been involved in the rebellion, in contrast she refused to give evidence or to confess, and thus avoided incriminating her husband.<sup>89</sup> While there is no evidence that the Bulmers were tortured, King Henry was not averse to using such means to extract information from prisoners: this possibility emphasises Margaret's strong character, particularly when compared to her husband's actions during the trial. Ultimately it is unclear how guilty Margaret really was. It seems likely that she knew about the rebellion plots, reinforcing the argument that the couple shared a close relationship, as when John was sent for by the king, Margaret urged him to flee to Ireland or else 'to get a ship to carry her and him into Scotland'.<sup>90</sup> But this is evidence of self-preservation rather than treason, and it can perhaps be viewed as significant that most of the evidence against Margaret came from the deposition of John Watts.

In Madeleine and Ruth Dodds' study, Margaret's refusal to give evidence is paralleled and contrasted with the conduct of William Bulmer's wife, Elizabeth. The Dodds sisters point out that Margaret, whom the authorities refused to acknowledge as John's lawful wife, stood by him, while Elizabeth betrayed her legitimate husband: after an argument, she discovered a letter incriminating him, which she gave to the courts. Elizabeth's actions can be easily explained: she was in an unhappy marriage, mainly because 'Sir William squandered his own estates and involved his wife's by his extravagance', and she often lived apart from him.<sup>91</sup> The Dodds sisters argue that this indicates that Elizabeth was motivated by revenge. While this may have been the case, it should also be remembered that Elizabeth found the letter while accompanied by a servant and friar: to retain it would have been to risk implicating herself. What is interesting, however, is that comparing the two women shows that Margaret and John's irregular marriage was indeed happier than the arranged marriage of Elizabeth and William. It can therefore be argued that John Bulmer bought a woman from her husband, apparently with her consent, and that the two were to have a loving relationship. Margaret's willingness is clear: she married John when they were free to and the

fact that this was more than simply the compliance of a lower class woman with an aristocrat can be inferred from her conduct at the trial. The Bulmer case therefore shows a wife sale, not in terms of an economic transaction, but rather as a means for two people to facilitate a match based on love and affection, one which stands in contrast to Bulmer's previous arranged marriage.

The evidence suggests that John and Margaret Bulmer's relationship was a close and affectionate match. While it would be false reasoning to argue that because one wife sale reveals evidence of affection then all (or even most) sales must be similar, the Bulmer case does highlight the potential for wife sales to be used as a means to construct an affectionate match, one which suited not only the buyer, but also the wife. And, while evidence pertaining to the aristocracy cannot be used to deduce the attitudes and actions of the lower classes, there is one example from the lower classes which reinforces the argument that some of these early sales facilitated affectionate matches. The only other specific evidence of a pre-eighteenth century woman's reaction to a sale can be found in the newspaper report of 1642/3. The wife was sold for five pounds to a yeoman, and when her husband later changed his mind and wanted her back, 'his companion left it to her choice, not without some intimation that he was loathe to leave her'.<sup>92</sup> It is interesting that, despite the fact that she had been sold to another man, the new 'husband' did not exercise his rights of ownership, rather letting the woman make her own decision. Her resolution to remain with the buyer rather than the seller indicates her ability to take control of the situation and assess which partner would be best: she stayed with the man she wanted.<sup>93</sup>

This study shows that wife sales did exist in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Whether this was in small numbers or otherwise cannot be ascertained, but their appearance in plays suggests they were well known to the audience. This study has attempted to make sense of this phenomenon, not only with regard to economics, but also in terms of what the existence of wife sales reveals about people - both men and women - continuing to regulate their own lives. It can be argued that as spousals were an example of self-regulation in the formation of marriage, wife sales appear to be an example of self-regulation in the dissolution of marriage, and also in the formation of a new marriage. The analysis of the case of Margaret and John Bulmer, reinforced by the 1642/3 case, illustrates that,

although economics were undoubtedly a factor in some instances, wife sales cannot be read simply as emphasising the link between women and property. Rather, it has been shown that these sales could lead to affectionate matches and further, that they could allow some women the opportunity to exercise a degree of choice over their partner, something they may have been denied in their original match.

#### Wife sales and wife bartering in plays 1599-1636

In light of these findings, the second part of this chapter examines the use and occurrence of a wife sale plot in the plays of Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton and John Ford. In terms of women as property, much has been written about the change from the single to the married state and how, from the woman's point of view, this is often treated by Middleton and others as a commercial transaction: there is the well-known protest by Isabella in *Women Beware Women* that unmarried women are obliged to marry their masters who, in the case of the Ward, gives Isabella a physical examination, as though she were an animal. What is under investigation here, however, are transactions in which the wife is bartered. Of course, it cannot be assumed that, because the evidence in some records for wife sales shows they could provide a means for women to change from an arranged and loveless marriage to a second, more fulfilling relationship, this is also what they illustrate in the drama. Rather, this study aims to discover the extent to which the sale or barter does result in the wife taking control of the action, and whether, in cases where she does, this is legitimised within the plot of the play.

Isabella takes independent action as a wife, but for corrupt purposes; therefore it would appear that the assumed autonomy is condemned: when wives attempt to take control they fall into evil ways. Against this it can be argued that, in giving women a voice at all, Middleton is legitimising the woman's point of view on marriage. The context in which this occurs, however, delivers a message of ambiguity. The point of examining the sale of a wife, or related barter of her, is that there are three plays in which a wife's independent action is endorsed, and it is the moment of the wife transaction which provides the context for this legitimised

activity. However, outwith the brief mentions in John Bradbury Brooks' critical edition of *The Phoenix* (1980) and in Samuel Menefee's *Wives for Sale* (1981), there has as yet been no attempt to make sense of the appearance of wife bartering in these plays. This study will therefore examine the inclusion and function of this motif, arguing that all of the plays which include a sale involve issues of female autonomy.

The Renaissance plays which incorporate wife transactions are Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599), Middleton's *The Phoenix* (1603-4), Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605), Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* (1611), Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c.1621) and Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635-6).<sup>94</sup> *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* are examined only briefly, in conjunction with analysis of *The Roaring Girl*. The first five plays listed can broadly be described as city comedies. City comedy can be viewed as playwrights' response to the growth of London as an economic and trade centre and to the emergence of the new citizen class which accompanied this growth,<sup>95</sup> and four of the plays being analysed here are set in London. City comedies satirised Londoners, often making use of what Theodore Leinwand terms 'a triangular social formation' of gallants, citizens and women (who may be maids, citizens' wives, widows or prostitutes).<sup>96</sup> These plays, without being an exact mirror of life in London, were informed by the social, sexual and economic reality of the time, reflected by the playwrights' use of this genre to explore different forms of marriage, in particular financial matches. The wife sale plot is part of this wider exploration of marriage and economics, and this study begins by looking at *The Phoenix*, as this is the play which gives the fullest description of the process of a sale and the fullest condemnation of it.

*The Phoenix* was written for the Children of St. Paul's, and was performed at court, possibly in February 1604.<sup>97</sup> At the beginning of *The Phoenix*, the Duke of Ferrara, on the advice of his courtiers, led by the nobleman Proditor, sends his son and heir, Phoenix, travelling. The courtiers have persuaded the duke that this will prepare Phoenix to rule, but in reality it is so they can kill the duke and the son (1.1.19; 24-5; 69). However, Phoenix and his friend Fidelio decide to remain in Ferrara: they adopt the role of moral commentators and 'In disguise mark all abuses ready for reformation or punishment' (1.1.102-3). These abuses include an

adulterous liaison between a Jeweller's wife and a knight, a bid by a judge to commit incest with his niece, and an attempted wife sale. In what has been viewed by critics as a parallel with the second marriage of Middleton's own mother, in the play a sea captain has married Fidelio's mother, the widow Castiza, for financial gain.<sup>98</sup> However, the Captain has grown tired of Castiza as she is not as wealthy as he thought (1.2.66-7), and tries to sell her to Proditor, who has been unsuccessfully wooing her. The disguised Phoenix and Fidelio pretend to go along with the sale, but when the transaction is complete, they unmask themselves, beat the Captain and banish him. At the end of the play, Phoenix reveals himself to all, the rest of the criminals are expelled and order is restored.

The presentation of the attempted wife sale in *The Phoenix* is problematised by Castiza having been a widow before she married the Captain. As discussed in the previous chapter, some moralists condemned the remarrying widow. The 'good' widow was considered such because she had no thought of remarriage, and in *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (translated by Richard Hyrde, 1540), the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives argued against second marriages, writing 'better it is to abstain than marry again', and characterising remarriage as lustful:

none of you taketh a husband but to the intent that she will lie with him,  
nor except her lust prick her. What ragiousness is it, to set thy chastity  
common like a harlot, that thou maist gather riches!<sup>99</sup>

Puritans also viewed second marriages in these terms. For the preacher William Page, the good widow was not simply one who remained contentedly single, 'but there is also required ... many inward virtues and heavenly endowments of the mind'. These 'inward virtues' were suffering and affliction: the widow's first duty was desolation.<sup>100</sup> In *The Phoenix* it is this view which stands: the conception of the remarrying widow as motivated by sexual desire is emphasised in Act One with the Captain's reference to 'insatiate widows' (1.2.87). Phoenix says that marriage is all that makes a difference between 'our desires/ And the disordered appetites of beasts' (2.2.168-9): humans were distinguished from animals by reason and the ability to keep passion under control. Yet Phoenix also uses the word 'beast' to describe Castiza: 'Indeed she was a beast/ To marry him, and so he makes of her' (1.4.272-5), indicating that he too views Castiza's second marriage

as driven by sexual impulses. This is reinforced by the fact that he only calls her 'chaste' when she is single again (2.2.341-2).

One reason for moralists arguing against widows remarrying was because, even though in one sense the widows were relinquishing their independence, in another they had an opportunity to exercise free will in their choice of partner. It does appear that in this case Castiza married of her own volition: Fidelio says the marriage was 'her private choice' (1.1.266). Also, Castiza is of higher status than the Captain: she says 'for love to you did I neglect my state' (1.2.77) and when the Niece tells Fidelio that 'methinks she's much disgraced herself', he replies 'nothing so .../ A Captain may marry a lady, if he can sail/ Into her good will' (1.1.161-4). If a woman made a match with a lower class man, her status could give her more control than she would have in a conventional match, as evidenced by the Duchess' relationship with Antonio in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Further, Castiza's superior standing indicates that, unlike many widows who were often left destitute by the death of their husbands, her second marriage was not motivated by financial reasons. The evidence therefore suggests that from Castiza's point of view the match was affectionate, reinforced by her own testimony that she loves the Captain (2.2.77).

The final piece of evidence which points to the marriage being Castiza's choice is that it was clandestine. The Captain says it took place at 'four o'clock i'th' morning' (1.2.42) and, as discussed, the 1604 canons, contemporaneous with the performance of this play, stated that people could only lawfully marry between the hours of eight in the morning and noon.<sup>101</sup> Within the play, by having characters marry clandestinely, Middleton shows them regulating their lives. This evidence of self regulation in the formation of their marriage then continues with the Captain's decision to separate from Castiza since, as previously argued, wife sales were an example of self regulation in the dissolution of marriage. But in this case Castiza has no autonomy: the independence she employed as a widow is gone, and her husband is wholly in control. Ultimately, the match shows Castiza's bad judgement, and the reader/spectator asks along with the Captain, 'What could'st thou see in me, to make thee dote/ So on me?' (1.2.84-5). In her marriage to the Captain, it appears that the 'lusty widow' Castiza is being punished for exercising independence.



The sale of Castiza is presented by Middleton as iniquitous. The aristocratic buyer, Proditor, is a potential murderer, his nature established by his name which means 'traitor', while the seller, the Captain, who sees everything in commercial terms (2.2.7), is hypocritical (2.2.77-8), a 'rogue' (2.2.309) and brutal in his treatment of Castiza (1.2.73). Brooks argues that Middleton intended 'his audience to laugh at the Captain's bawdy - and cruel - puns at his wife's expense'.<sup>102</sup> Despite this, both buyer and seller are unsavoury characters, indicating to the reader/spectator the terms in which the sale is to be viewed.

Before opting for the wife sale, the Captain had considered judicial separation - which he calls divorce - or murder:

Nothing but a divorce can relieve me: any way to be rid of her would rid my torment. If all means fail, I'll kill or poison her and purge my fault at sea. But first I'll make a gentle try of a divorce: but how shall I accuse her subtle honesty? (1.2.141-5).

The Captain's use of the phrase 'subtle honesty' reveals his belief, reiterated throughout the play, that Castiza, like all women, is only pretending to be chaste: 'Wherefore serves modesty but to pleasure a lady now and then, and help her from suspect?' (2.2.45). In light of this belief, the Captain decides to give Castiza the opportunity to cuckold him with Proditor, his intention being to then sue for a judicial separation on the grounds of her adultery. However, Castiza is chaste, therefore Tangle the lawyer comes up with the alternative solution of selling her.

The wife transaction is presented by Middleton as an exchange of property. According to Tangle, Proditor 'has bid five hundred crowns for [Castiza] already' (1.4.242-3), while the visual image of the Captain counting his coins one by one as the transaction is completed provides a constant reminder of the mercenary nature of the event. This is reinforced when the Captain tells Proditor 'you have bought a jewel i'faith, my lord' (2.2.104). The sale takes the form of a deed, read out by Fidelio (in his disguise as a scrivener), which lists the conditions of the exchange. As Brooks has pointed out, 'the terms ordinarily applied, in a deed or conveyance, to a piece of real estate, are applied to a lady'.<sup>103</sup> Middleton's decision to adapt a document of land transfer for his wife sale makes explicit the ownership aspect, as does the phrasing of the deed:

know you for a certain that I, Captain, for and in the consideration of the sum of five hundred crowns, have clearly bargained, sold, given, granted, assigned, and set over, and by these presents do clearly bargain, sell, give, grant, assign, and set over, all the right, estate, title, interest, demand, possession, and term of years to come ... in and to Madonna Castiza ... [and] utterly disclaim forever any title, estate, right, interest, demand, or possession, in or to the said Madonna Castiza ... (2.2.86-144).

The wording is reminiscent of the deed of gift by which John de Camoys gave up his rights to his wife, Margaret, although in that case money was given with the wife and not for her.

Included in the deed of sale is an itinerary of Castiza's virtues:

the beauties of her mind, chastity, temperance, and above all, patience ... excellent in the best of music, in voice delicious, in conference wise and pleasing, of age contentful, neither too young to be apish, nor too old to be sottish ... and, which is the best of a wife, a most comfortable, sweet companion ... (2.2.104-18).

This itemised list not only frames Castiza as a commodity, it also indicates that she is a cipher for the virtuous wife: her name, which means 'the chaste one', delineates her character. Even after the sale, Castiza continues to defend the Captain: when Phoenix and Fidelio beat him, she cries 'who hath laid violence upon my husband, my dear sweet Captain?' (2.2.293-4), her almost masochistic support of him, as Brooks argues, making her a type of Patient Grissell.<sup>104</sup> Castiza is therefore presented and perceived as an amalgamation of the virtuous wife and the lusty widow.<sup>105</sup>

The Captain claims unambiguously that the sale constitutes a 'divorce' (1.4.228), arguing that his actions are legitimate because 'I sell none but my own' (1.4.281). However, Phoenix lets it take place in order to have enough evidence to be able to lawfully separate the couple 'on the grounds of the Captain's cruelty to his wife' (2.1.13).<sup>106</sup> Therefore the sale results in a separation, not because it is considered a valid way to separate, rather because it constitutes cruelty. The sale is wholly condemned by the virtuous characters: for Phoenix, 'of all deeds yet, this strikes the deepest wound/ Into my apprehension' (2.2.159-60). He calls the sale 'monstrous and foul,/ An act abhorr'd in nature, cold in soul ... the ugliest deed

that e'er mine eye did witness ... [a] deformèd deed' (2.2.190-222). Fidelio calls the sale 'a base, unnatural deed' (2.2.289) and even Proditor condemns the Captain for selling Castiza (2.2.229-30). The sale is not only cruel, but against the natural order, reinforced by its juxtaposition with Phoenix's speech on 'reverend and honourable matrimony' (2.2.161). Here he compares a good marriage with actual examples of corrupt marriage: the deviancies he lists are the 'doctor'd virgin' (2.2.176), jealousy ('another devil [that] haunts marriage' (2.2.180)) and the wife sale - and of these he considers the wife sale to be the worst. This is reinforced by the fact that the perpetrators, the Captain and Proditor, both of whom are unrepentant (2.2.336-7; 5.1.203-4), are banished.

After the Captain is banished, Phoenix offers Castiza a choice: she can return to the status of chaste widow or go with Proditor: 'Thus happily prevented, you're set free,/ Or else made over to adultery' (2.2.312-13). Phoenix, by his use of the word 'adultery', makes it clear that Castiza's is a moral decision, one on which she will be judged: as such it is not a real choice and the reference to freedom is ironic. When Castiza has refused adultery and regained the moral probity of widowhood, Phoenix gives her the five hundred crowns from the sale (2.2.303-6). Despite the circumstances, therefore, Castiza ends up with wealth and autonomy: but as her independent action in her second marriage was condemned, and as she had no opportunity to control the plot, the overall representation of her independence is negative, and the humiliation of the sale becomes a kind of purgation for the sin of Castiza's lust. It is not for nothing that *The Phoenix* has been described as 'Middleton's first and most brutal treatment of widow-hunting and property management'.<sup>107</sup>

*The Phoenix* also contributes to the discussion of the frequency of wife sales. Tangle the lawyer claims that such sales were common:

... did'st ne'er hear of that trick? Why Pistor, a baker, sold his wife t'other day to a cheesemonger that made cake and cheese; another to a cofferer, a third to a common player; why, you see, 'tis common. Ne'er fear the Captain; he has not so much wit as to be a precedent himself (1.4.251-6).

Samuel Menefee regards this speech as evidence of the existence of historical wife sales, arguing that: 'although sales for this period are scanty, the occupations of

seller and purchaser (baker, cheesemonger, cofferer and actor) appear to be consistent with real transactions'.<sup>108</sup> Despite the fact that these occupations are not consistent with pre-eighteenth century cases (those few which are recorded at this time include a butcher, a priest and a yeoman, none of which are listed by Tangle), they are of the same class. As so few wife sale documents are extant for this period, it is possible that Middleton was listing real sales for which no records remain.

In contrast to Menefee, Brooks argues that Tangle's claim cannot be taken at face value: lawyers are satirised in the play, and 'Tangle's enumeration of specific cases of wife-selling, which he says was common in Ferrara, is the same kind of satirical exaggeration as his twenty-nine simultaneous law suits'.<sup>109</sup> On a cursory reading, Brooks' argument against Tangle's assertion that wife sales were widespread is reinforced by Phoenix's response to the sale - 'why, does he mean to sell his wife? ... Why I have never heard of the like' (1.4.250) - and his condemnation of it. Despite this, however, Tangle lists a number of trades which participate in wife selling, and it is more likely that Phoenix's lack of knowledge of the phenomenon is part of his naivety: he is sent travelling to gain 'experience' and 'knowledge' of the world (1.1.26-8) and throughout the play his inexperience is emphasised, for example when he is easily tricked by Falso's pretend trial (3.1.66-197). This is reinforced by David M. Holmes' argument that one of Middleton's early dramatic themes is 'that most of the virtuous are uninformed about vice'.<sup>110</sup>

Brooks, however, argues that for *The Phoenix* Middleton took the idea for a wife sale, not from society, but from Dekker's *Shoemakers' Holiday*, which had been written in 1599. This is a possibility since the playwrights collaborated on *The Honest Whore* in 1604 and that same year Middleton contributed material to Dekker's commission for the coronation pageant of King James, *The Magnificent Entertainment*. Yet Middleton's detailed handling of the sale, in particular his inclusion of the legal deed, allows for the possibility that he had his own knowledge of the practice. Even if Brooks is correct in saying that *The Shoemakers' Holiday* was Middleton's source for his wife sale plot, the question would still remain as to where Dekker himself took the idea from, as *The Shoemakers' Holiday* appears to be the first play to include such a sale. Dekker's

source for two of the plots in *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (the Eyre and Rose/Lacy plots) was Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1597), but the Ralph/Jane/Hammon wife sale plot appears to have been of Dekker's own devising. Anthony Parr argues that Dekker's plays are 'always somehow addressed to the problems and aspirations of citizens and working people' in London, while R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells argue that there is a 'sharpness of social realism' in the Ralph/Jane plot.<sup>111</sup> The same has been said of Middleton: Paul Mulholland argues that 'The realism of Middleton's comedies, as R. C. Bald has observed, derives largely from the adaptation of local experience to dramatic purposes'.<sup>112</sup> Critical opinion on other aspects of social realism in the work of both dramatists therefore supports the conclusion that both Dekker and Middleton adapted their knowledge of the wife sale in society to suit their explorations of financial matches.

Dekker, like Middleton, uses a sale to examine the concept of women as commodity; however, the sale in *The Shoemakers' Holiday* functions differently from that in *The Phoenix*, not least because it provides the context for female autonomy. David Farley Hills has called *The Shoemakers' Holiday* an example of a 'comedy of good cheer'.<sup>113</sup> The central theme is the goodness of the people, as represented by the gentle craft, and their unity with the monarch against the machinations of the aristocracy and the rising city class, exemplified respectively by the Earl of Lincoln and the wealthy young citizen, Hammon. It has been noted that this play, unusually, contains the crossing of social boundaries, with 'a poor but resourceful man [Simon Eyre] becom[ing] Lord Mayor of London'.<sup>114</sup>

The play also contains two subplots: in the first, the gentleman Lacy, having managed to absent himself from the war in France, disguises himself as a Dutch shoemaker in order to secretly marry his forbidden love, Rose. In the second (which parallels the Rose/Lacy plot to ironic effect<sup>115</sup>) Ralph, a poor shoemaker, is forced to go to France to fight, leaving his wife Jane behind in London. When Jane, working as a seamstress, receives news of Ralph's death from Hammon, the rich man who has been wooing her, she agrees to marry him. However, unknown to her - but known to the reader/spectator - Ralph has already returned to London, lame from fighting in France. Accompanied by other shoemakers, he is just in time to stop the wedding, and it is at this point that the attempted wife sale occurs:

faced with losing his bride, Hammon offers to buy Jane from Ralph for twenty pounds. Ralph refuses, is reunited with Jane, and Hammon leaves. The play ends with a feast being provided for all the shoemakers by the new Lord Mayor of London.

The attempted sale is part of Dekker's exploration of the interaction between love, marriage and economics.<sup>116</sup> A rich gentleman tries to buy the wife of a poor shoemaker:

Dekker dramatises the gulf between their two worlds by introducing Eyre and his journeymen at work in Eyre's shop in the city, while Hammon is introduced, not in the world of work, but rather in the world of the hunt.<sup>117</sup>

In the first scene the shoemakers try to convince Lacy not to send 'honest Ralph' (1.1.133) to the war in France, and when their appeal fails they give Ralph money (1.1.222-7), indicating his popularity. In contrast, Hammon is insincere, shifting his affection from Jane to Rose and back to Jane again. It has been argued recently that there are moments when Hammon has the potential to gain sympathy, for example when he says 'I still love one, yet nobody loves me' (4.1.7) and 'enforced love is worse than hate to me' (3.1.50).<sup>118</sup> But, particularly in the latter case, Hammon is hypocritical: he continues to press Rose when she has said she does not love him, and refuses to take no for an answer from Jane (4.2.109-17). It is not clear whether he deliberately deceives Jane about Ralph's death or whether it was a genuine mistake: he does not seem to know the name of Jane's husband (or even that she was married) until she tells him to look for it on the list, and it is Jane who reads Ralph's name. But his reaction to Jane's grief reveals that he has little empathy for others: 'Forget the dead, love them that are alive;/ His love is faded, try how mine will thrive' (4.2.101-2). And when he discovers Ralph is alive, although he apologises, he refuses to relinquish Jane (5.2.51).

In terms of Dekker's handling of the wife sale it can be considered significant that it is the hypocritical and insincere Hammon (whose name is reminiscent of Mammon) who tries to buy Jane from 'honest' Ralph: 'Mark what I offer thee: here in fair gold/ Is twenty pound, I'll give it for thy Jane./ If this content thee not, thou shalt have more' (4.2.78-80). This is not the first time in the play that Hammon has combined the language of commerce with that of love and

marriage. Previously, he was shown watching Jane working.<sup>119</sup> She, not recognising him, asks: 'Sir, what is't you buy?' (4.1.21), her words anticipating why Hammon has come. He asks her, 'How sell you ... this hand?' (4.1.27). When Jane replies that her hands are not for sale, Hammon says: 'To be given, then?/ Nay, faith, I come to buy' (4.1.28-9). For Hammon, then, love and marriage can be bought and his attempt to buy Jane from Ralph can be regarded as a logical extension of this. Hammon treats Jane as property, whether in a simple first marriage or in the wife sale.

When Hammon offers money to Ralph in exchange for Jane, the shoemaker's reply is unequivocal:

Sirrah Hammon, Hammon, dost thou think a shoemaker would be so base,  
to be a bawd to his own wife for a commodity? Take thy gold, choke on  
it! Were I not lame I would make thee eat thy words (5.2.84-7).

The wife sale is wholly condemned by Ralph. His use of the word 'bawd' indicates that he, in common with the ecclesiastical courts, views such a sale as adultery. This attitude is prefigured by the shoemaker Hodge, who tells Ralph 'sell not thy wife ... make her not a whore' (5.2.81). Hammon's response to Hodge's accusation of adultery is to ask Ralph, 'wilt thou freely cease thy claim in her,/ And let her be my wife?' (5.2.82-3). Hammon seems to believe that if Ralph willingly gives up his contractual rights to Jane, it would not be adultery and further, that he would be free to marry her. This viewpoint is similar to the thirteenth century deed of gift case, in which John de Camoys signed away his rights to his wife, Margaret, so that she could live with her lover. In the de Camoys case, however, the lovers did not try to remarry while John was still alive, which is what Hammon is proposing here. Hammon's suggestion also anticipates the deed of sale in *The Phoenix*, indicating that wife selling was believed by at least some of the characters in these two plays to be a valid form of separation. Ultimately, in the eyes of the shoemakers, Hammon offers only dishonour to Jane, and therefore it could be argued that Dekker's use of the wife sale is conventional. Rather than exploring its potential as an opportunity for women to gain control over their lives, or to facilitate an affectionate match (as in the historical case of Margaret and John Bulmer), Dekker uses the proposed sale to examine marriage

as a financial transaction, and the concept of women as property.

Dekker's use of the sale, however, is more complex. Within the play, the wife, Jane, initially appears to be a stereotypical model of virtue: as would be expected, she is sad when Ralph leaves ('O let him stay, else I shall be undone' (1.1.144)), but is unable to voice many more objections because, as Margery says, 'she cannot speak for weeping' (1.1.208). It becomes apparent, however, that Jane is not simply passive and one-dimensional. She actively seeks work when Ralph leaves; she fends off Hammon's advances skilfully, but also sympathetically (4.1.58), and from Hammon's own testimony the audience know that she has successfully repelled him on three previous occasions ('thrice have I courted her' (4.1.3)).

When Ralph interrupts the wedding, Hodge says: 'Hark, fellow Ralph, follow my counsel. Set the wench in the midst, and let her choose her man, and let her be his woman' (5.2.53-5). The implication is that everyone will stand by Jane's decision (although the fact that Hammon does not once again reveals his disregard for her as an autonomous person). Without hesitation, Jane chooses to remain with Ralph: 'Whom should I choose? Whom should my thought affect,/ But him whom Heaven hath made to be my love!/ Thou art my husband' (5.2.56-8). At this point in the play Jane is not simply a passive object of exchange, as Hammon tries to make her: instead she is active and further, has a voice. By deciding to remain with Ralph, rather than the rich Hammon, Jane puts love before financial security, summed up by her words to her husband: 'these humble weeds/ Makes thee more beautiful than all his wealth' (3.1.58-9) and reinforced by her earlier comment, when she thought Ralph was dead, that 'death makes me poor' (5.2.13). Both Ralph and Jane reject money in favour of love: Ralph refuses the substantial sum of twenty pounds, Jane refuses to marry Hammon, a choice which is endorsed. By his use of the wife sale motif, therefore, Dekker shows an affectionate match being privileged over a financial match.<sup>120</sup>

More interesting is the fact that Jane is given the opportunity to choose a new husband, a potentially subversive and socially challenging moment in the play. Jane's autonomy is, of course, limited. She is given the chance to end her marriage, but does not take it. Yet, the situation is that found in some historical examples: that of choosing a second marriage; and its presentation indicates that



her peers would stand by her decision. The fact that Jane's choice is the conventional one reinforces the possibility of freedom and even affection within traditional marriage: the unconventional is harnessed in favour of the conventional. Nevertheless, the situation is one where the possibility of a wife's autonomy is recognised.

In Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*,<sup>121</sup> female agency is a more marked theme, with a pretended sale providing the context for a wife to take control of the action. *The Roaring Girl* was performed by Prince Henry's Men at Henslowe and Alleyn's Fortune Theatre in 1611 which, according to Elizabeth Cook, 'was well placed to attract as great a cross-section of the population as the play depicts'.<sup>122</sup> *The Roaring Girl* is a comedy based on *mundus inversus*. The central plot focuses on a woman, Moll, dressing as a man and righting wrongs and, through her, the playwrights explore current debates on transvestism and concepts of masculinity and femininity.<sup>123</sup> The play also centres on commerce: as Cook says, 'we are plunged, in Act One, into a world of conspicuous consumption'.<sup>124</sup> And, as before, this mercantile ethos is inextricable from representations of marriage. The main plot concerns a forbidden love match: Sebastian Wengrave cannot marry Mary Fitz-Allard, the woman to whom he is precontracted (1.1.77-9),<sup>125</sup> because his father, Sir Alexander, considers her too poor. Sebastian pretends to shift his affections to Moll, knowing her unacceptable to his father; Moll helps Sebastian, and in the end Sir Alexander claims he would rather have 'a wench with her smock dowry' (5.2.113) as his daughter-in-law than Moll. Sebastian then marries Mary, love triumphs over parental constraints, and the play ends with Sir Alexander proclaiming happiness for everyone (5.2.267).

The interconnection between sex and commerce is made explicit in the subplot: the playwrights focus on three sets of citizen shopkeepers and their wives - the Openworks, Tiltyards and Gallipots - and the gallants who try to woo the wives, Leinwand's 'triangular formation'. The gentleman Goshawk betrays the confidence of Openwork in an attempt to seduce his wife, while the wife transaction is instigated by Prudence Gallipot, the apothecary's wife, who is being wooed by the effeminate Laxton (lack stone/testicle). Although a gentleman, Laxton is poor, and he pretends to be interested in Prudence in return for a steady supply of money and tobacco. He writes her a letter, asking for thirty pounds and,

in order to get the money from her husband, Prudence pretends that she was previously precontracted to Laxton and that he now wants her back. Gallipot gives Laxton thirty pounds in exchange for Prudence, but afterwards is blackmailed by the gallant for more money. In doing so Laxton overreaches himself: the continuation of the trick requires the complicity of Mistress Gallipot and when she discovers Laxton's extortion, she confesses all to her husband, and Laxton ends up with nothing.

The precontract trick is similar to the one Middleton earlier employed in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605): in *A Trick*, Witgood pretends to be precontracted to a Courtesan, who is masquerading as a rich widow, to make her new husband pay off Witgood's debts. Concerned that Witgood will expose her, the Courtesan agrees to go along with the trick.<sup>126</sup> In exchange for the money, Witgood agrees to sign a form of release, giving up 'any title, right, estate, or interest' (4.4.229) in the 'widow', a document reminiscent of the deed in *The Phoenix*.<sup>127</sup> In *The Roaring Girl*, the handling of the pretended precontract is more complex. It is the wife, Prudence, who instigates it. Further, she ensures that Gallipot thinks the invented contract was a *de presenti* one: 'This hand which thou call'st thine, to him was given,/ To him was I made sure i'th'sight of heaven' (3.2.116-17). A *de presenti* contract constituted legal marriage and was upheld as such by the church. A second marriage would be made void even if it had been publicly solemnised, something Gallipot is aware of: 'If thou should'st wrestle with him at the law,/ Th'art sure to fall, no odd sleight, no prevention' (3.2.130-1). Gallipot also assumes that the 'precontract' was made in front of witnesses: he asks Laxton why he would want to 'call [his] friends together ... to prove/ [His] precontract, when sh'has confessed it?' (3.2.219-20). Witnesses were not necessary to contract spousals but if a dispute arose, a public precontract was much easier to prove. Therefore, had the precontract been real, as Gallipot believes it is, according to ecclesiastical law Prudence would be considered the legal wife of Laxton, and this is what she is pretending to be. And, as Gallipot buys Prudence from Laxton (3.2.137), the precontract trick is transformed into a wife sale.

Instead of a rich man attempting to buy the wife of a poorer citizen, in this play a citizen husband buys a woman from a gentleman.<sup>128</sup> Further, the buyer,

Gallipot, is actually the rightful husband, while the 'seller', Laxton, is pretending to be the husband. Laxton is immoral, hypocritical and a misogynist, viewing women as 'apples-eaters all, deceivers still' (3.2.255) and diseased (1.2.15-16). He takes money from Prudence, yet believes all women can be bought (1.2.180-2), and Cook's comment that he is 'diabolical' seems fitting.<sup>129</sup>

In contrast, Gallipot the apothecary is comic, overly exuberant (2.2.386-91) and slightly foolish: his wife calls him an 'apron husband' (3.2.30-1) and he can be seen as a 'Haec Vir' character. He appears to have married for love, speaking to Prudence affectionately, using tender nicknames such as 'duck', 'mouse', 'sweetest Pru', 'honey Pru' (3.2.6-16) and 'pigsney' (2.1.381), and this fondness is reinforced by his determination not to lose her. His first suggestion on hearing of the precontract is to make Prudence appear less desirable to Laxton: 'I'll tell him th'art with child .../ Or give out/ One of my men was ta'en abed with thee' (3.2.132-3). Although the second solution dishonours his wife, it also serves to reveal that Gallipot is willing to be wrongly thought a cuckold in order to keep his wife: 'Before I lose thee, my dear Pru,/ I'll drive it to that push' (3.2.133-4). When Prudence vetoes these options, Gallipot comes up with an alternative: 'I'll buy thee of him, stop his mouth with gold' (3.2.137).<sup>130</sup>

Gallipot's decision to offer money for his wife indicates his affection for her, and can be viewed as answering Prudence's challenge that 'Your love is all words; give me deeds' (3.2.22-3). Not only does he decide to buy her from Laxton, he refuses to put a price on her, instead letting Prudence decide the amount of money to be offered. Gallipot is therefore not a stereotypically greedy London citizen, an interpretation emphasised by his offer to raise Prudence's suggested figure of thirty pounds to forty. Further, when Laxton blackmails Gallipot, the apothecary pays him an extra fifteen pounds and is even willing to increase this sum: 'the gentleman offers thus,/ If I will make the moneys that are past/ A hundred pound, he will discharge all courts,/ And give his bond never to vex us more' (4.2.252-5). The sale therefore operates on one level to show a citizen husband valuing his wife over money, made explicit when Gallipot says: 'we venture lives/ For wealth, but must do more to keep our wives' (4.2.144-5). More interesting, however, is the fact that in *The Roaring Girl*, a wife instigates a sale for her own ends.

Prudence uses her knowledge of marriage law to invent the precontract. She

creates circumstances which enable her to turn the societal conception of women as commodity to her advantage: 'the alternative elaborate story Mistress Gallipot composes to get the money ... turns on her credit in the social world which regulates the exchange of women in marriage'.<sup>131</sup> Prudence's trick depends on Gallipot offering to buy her, which he does, indicating that wife selling was well-known. A transaction therefore takes place, with the wife positioned as a marketable commodity, but as Prudence has instigated it, the sale can be viewed as empowering, for she makes use of patriarchal conceptions of women for her own ends.

It could be argued that the potentially subversive effect of this is undermined by the fact that it is a means for her to facilitate a relationship with a liar and a hypocrite, indicating that, like Castiza, she is a bad judge of character. However, here it is part of the comedy. Laxton claims he is in control of the relationship, receiving tobacco and money in exchange for unfulfilled promises of sex, and at first this appears a fitting interpretation of the situation, particularly as Prudence gets him the money. Yet after the precontract episode, but before she knows of the blackmail, Prudence publicly refers to Laxton's impotence, calling him 'a lame gelding' (4.2.40). This, coupled with her refusal to speak to him in this scene, points to the relationship being on Prudence's terms and not on his, as Laxton would have the others, and the audience, believe. This is reinforced when he tries to command Prudence to speak to him and she insults him: 'Away, soused sturgeon, half-fish, half-flesh ... poor Laxton, I think thy tail's cut already' (4.2.89-91). In addition, when she discovers he is blackmailing her husband, she decides to admit everything to Gallipot. Prudence is not forced to confess - she does so of her own free choice. Her decision reveals firstly, that she feels loyalty and perhaps affection for her husband (her declaration, 'I'll now tear money from [Laxton's] throat' (4.2.260) echoes Gallipot's words when the sale was instigated (3.2.137)) and secondly, that she will not allow Laxton to best her. Her actions are paralleled by those of Mistress Openwork who, by exposing Goshawk, chooses her husband over the gallant who was trying to seduce her. As Mulholland argues, 'The wayward parties in the end return to their faithful spouses, but contrary to tradition, they decide to do so of their own accord'.<sup>132</sup> Mistress Openwork sums up the relationship between the wives and the gallants:

'we shopkeepers, when all's said and done, are sure to have 'em in our purse-nets at length, and when they are in, Lord what simple animals they are' (4.2.47-9). It is therefore the women who are in control, not the men, and in Prudence's case this is illustrated by the pretended wife sale.

Prudence Gallipot clearly has more opportunity for autonomous action than Castiza or Jane, and this is partly due to her position as a shopkeeper's wife. As discussed in the introduction, early modern moralists argued that women, especially wives, should remain within the home, isolated from female company, and this is reflected in *The Phoenix*, in which Castiza is wholly isolated, and in *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, in which it is the shoemakers who are a community, not the women. In practice, however, many historical women ignored the moralists' strictures, as evidenced by, for example, the number of women who attended the theatre, and also the comments of foreign visitors: Emanuel van Meteren considered English women to be 'not kept so strictly as they are in Spain or elsewhere', while Frederick, Duke of Wittenberg, called England 'a paradise for women'.<sup>133</sup> This freedom is apparent in *The Roaring Girl*: women interact in the public sphere and walk freely on the streets of London. Moll Frith is the most obvious example as she crosses between the different worlds of the gallants, citizens and thieves. But while Moll's liberty can be considered a result of her transvestism and her refusal to accept conventional conceptions of femininity, the citizen wives are also able to gain freedom via their position as shopkeepers. The opening of Act Two is striking in having three shops on stage all operated by the wives. Mistresses Gallipot, Tiltyard and Openwork run the businesses with their husbands,<sup>134</sup> and as Kathleen McLuskie argues, as members of this commercial group, the women constitute a female community:

When the women get together to expose their erstwhile suitors, their solidarity, like that of the citizen women in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* depends on their communal identity as citizens and as women.<sup>135</sup>

Prudence's behaviour, antithetical to her name, is not criticised by Middleton and Dekker in this comic play; the precontract trick is creative and empowering, and within the play it is condoned.

Ford's tragicomedy, *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635-6), like *The*

*Roaring Girl*, includes a precontract and a wife sale; however, Ford's handling of each is different. In this play a bankrupt merchant Fabritio sells his loving wife Flavia to Lord Julio for ten thousand ducats. In order to annul his marriage to Flavia, Fabritio claims in court that he was previously precontracted to another woman. Here the pretended precontract and sale have a wholly economic motive: 'the gain repriev'd [Fabritio] from bankerouts statute' (2.1.52). Despite his actions, Flavia remains in love with Fabritio, but Ford makes it clear that Julio loves her: he calls her 'My only, precious dear' (2.1.170). While Flavia is the most interesting and well-developed character in the play, ultimately she is treated as property, made explicit when she says to Fabritio: 'Without my knowledge/ Thou soldest me' (2.1.108-9). Further, outwith helping her former husband, she has little opportunity for autonomy.

Ford's play reinforces the argument that wife sales were known of; however, Flavia is not given agency. By contrast, in *The Roaring Girl* Prudence instigates the sale, and as such is shown acting independently of her husband and taking control of the plot; in this she has more agency than Jane. It could be argued however, that in *The Roaring Girl* and in *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, the autonomy of the wives is no more validated than are other examples of unconventional behaviour by women in the upside-down world of comedy, such as that of Rosalind in *As You Like It*, who dresses as a boy. However, this cannot be said of the wife in Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life*: in this play, the inclusion of a sale allows for a more socially challenging perspective on a wife taking control of the plot.

*Anything for a Quiet Life* appears to have been written soon after 6<sup>th</sup> September 1620, when Middleton was appointed Chronologer of the City of London, but it was not published until 1662.<sup>136</sup> The date of the first performance is not known, but G. E. Bentley argues that it was probably acted by the King's Men at the Globe.<sup>137</sup> This play has in general been neglected: A. W. Ward called it 'one of Middleton's hastiest performances', while Holmes argues that 'it seems to lack the structural integrity and coherence which his other plays possess', concluding that Middleton's main purpose was to 'entertain ... the audience with surprises'.<sup>138</sup> In contrast, A. A. Bromham has recently argued that *Anything for a Quiet Life* is of interest as it engages with topical political debate.<sup>139</sup> Yet outwith

Holmes' and Bromham's analyses, in the main *Anything for a Quiet Life* has been ignored by commentators. Even Swapam Chakravorty in his invaluable 1996 study, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton*, only mentions it in passing.<sup>140</sup> Yet *Anything for a Quiet Life* reveals Middleton's continued focus on the interplay between marriage and economics, as well as evidence of a developing interest in the representation of women. Further, this play provides the most interesting and subversive example of a wife transaction facilitating a married woman's legitimate autonomy.

As the title indicates, the play is concerned with peace at any cost: weak husbands who are partnered with domineering wives claim they will do 'anything for a quiet life'. Further, at all levels of society in the play, from aristocrat to citizen, no one is what they seem: many of the characters are in disguise, either literally or figuratively, from the gentleman who feigns death to escape his creditors, to the French prostitute who pretends to be his cousin, to those members of society who are outwardly respectable while inwardly corrupt. Middleton uses this discrepancy between appearance and reality to explore other themes: honour, class distinctions and divisions, father/son rivalry and briefly, transvestism. But once again his main focus is on changes in marital relationships, specifically separations and second marriages.

The first match explored is the second marriage of Sir Francis Cressingham, 'a man well sunk in years' (1.1.24), to a fifteen year old girl. She seemingly cons him out of his property, although at the end reveals that she only did it 'to reclaim faults' in him, such as 'the swift consumption of many large revenues, gaming' (5.2.270-1). Middleton also includes two citizen couples, the Water-Camlets and the Knavesbys. The Water-Camlets, in particular the domineering wife Rachel, provide a comic parallel to the Cressinghams. Water-Camlet, a mercer, has been looking after the son and daughter of Francis Cressingham, but Rachel believes they are really her husband's illegitimate offspring, and as a result seeks a separation. In response to her leaving home, their servant George tricks Rachel into believing that Water-Camlet is to marry a French woman, really a prostitute, who (like Water-Camlet) is unaware of George's plot. The couple is eventually reunited, with the provision that Rachel will always speak quietly. Their reconciliation is phrased by Water-Camlet as 'A second marriage 'twixt thyself and

me' (4.3.80).

In the second citizen match the lawyer Knavesby tries to persuade his wife Sibyl<sup>141</sup> to prostitute herself to Lord Beaufort, in order to gain Knavesby preferment at court and a grant 'of a new lease/ Which he and his should forty years enjoy' (3.2.105-6). Sibyl refuses to have anything to do with the scheme, asking 'Are you stark mad?' (2.1.83). In the end she pretends to accede, but constructs a plan whereby she avoids having sexual relations with either Beaufort or her husband. At the end of the play the Knavesbys are also reunited, but in contrast to the *Water-Camlets*, where the wife was tamed, this reconciliation is on Mistress Knavesby's terms. The play ends with 'happy reconcilements' (5.2.384), but this is problematised by the fact that the promised feast is to be given by the corrupt and immoral aristocrat, Beaufort.

The exchange of Mistress Knavesby involves a rich man buying the favours of a citizen's wife. Knavesby constructs this financial transaction in terms of a divorce and their own eventual remarriage: 'Let's divorce ourselves so long .../ When 'tis done, we will be married again, wife' (2.1.100-21). Although there is no deed, as there is in *The Phoenix*, the language of both Knavesby and Beaufort positions the exchange as a business deal, fitting as Knavesby is a lawyer. Beaufort says of Knavesby 'Here is a gentleman whose business must/ Engross me wholly' (2.1.207), asking him 'How thrives my weighty suit which I have trusted to your bosom?' (2.1.275-6), while Knavesby speaks of the arrangement as being 'concluded' (2.1.172). In light of the fact that the wife sale document in *The Phoenix* was an adaptation of a deed of land transfer, it is interesting that Knavesby's reward for renting his wife is a lease of property. Knavesby makes explicit the ownership aspect of the deal:

what's the viewing any wardrobe or jewel-house, without a companion to confer these likings? Yet now I view thee well, methinks thou art a rare monopoly, and great pity one man should enjoy thee (2.1.93-6).

Knavesby's attitude is not unlike that of Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-4) who, after his wedding with Kate, says



I will be master of what is mine own:  
 She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,  
 My household stuff, my field, my barn,  
 My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything (3.2.218-21).

Further, Beaufort asks Knavesby (not Sibyl) if he can have sex with her, telling Sibyl when she refuses that 'your husband has promised me' (2.1.167). Both men therefore try to control Mistress Knavesby's body, viewing it as something which can be exchanged without her permission.

In contrast to the other wives discussed in this chapter, Sibyl explicitly rejects this classification of women as property, instead using the transaction to take control of the plot. She agrees to go to Lord Beaufort's house, intending to turn the situation to her advantage: 'What I'll do there, a' my troth, yet I know not./ Women, though puzzled with these subtle deeds,/ May, as i'the Spring, pick physic out of weeds' (2.1.193-4).<sup>142</sup> She appears to fall in love with Beaufort's page, Selenger (3.1.114), asking the lord to act as pander for her and telling him that he can have sex with her afterwards: 'the servant oft/ Tastes to his master of the daintiest dish/ He brings to him' (3.1.147-9). At the end of the scene Mistress Knavesby reveals to the audience that this is part of her plan:

This trick hath kept mine honesty secure;  
 Best soldiers use best policy; the lion's skin  
 Becomes the body not when 'tis too great,  
 But then the fox's may sit close and neat (3.1.168-71).

Pretending to fall in love with the page is 'best policy'. Sibyl knows that Lord Beaufort will be repelled by the request, as indeed he is: 'I succeed my page!' (3.1.146). Sibyl also exploits Beaufort's attitude towards women. At the beginning of the play he argues that Cressingham's new wife will be unfaithful because she is 'A girl of fifteen, one bred up i'the court' (1.1.11), contrasting her with Cressingham's late wife whom he praises as 'one that, to speak the truth,/ Had all those excellencies which our books/ Have only feign'd to make a complete wife/ Most exactly in her practice' (1.1.7-9). Beaufort therefore sees women in terms of the societal stereotypes (virtuous woman/whore) perpetuated by conduct literature. This is an aspect of his character which Mistress Knavesby is here able

to use to her advantage, as it is what allows him to believe that Sibyl is what she pretends to be. He calls her 'a common creature' (3.1.132) and 'a base strumpet' (3.1.146), associating her 'loose' behaviour with both her sex and class. To his insults she replies 'Did you doubt it?/ Wherefore came I hither else?' (3.1.133-4). In the exchange which follows, Sibyl makes explicit Beaufort's hypocrisy, agreeing that she is unchaste, but saying that as this is what he wanted her to be, he cannot complain: 'Did you think/ That honesty only had been immur'd for you,/ And I should bring it as an offertory/ Unto your shrine of lust?' (3.1.122). She tells him to 'Judge your own sin' (3.1.154) (something which he never does), arguing that in desiring the page, her crime is lesser than his: 'What degree of baseness call you this?/ 'Tis a poor sheep-stealer, provok'd by want,/ Compar'd unto a capital traitor' (3.1.159-61). Sibyl denounces both the transaction and its instigator. Beaufort, however, does not acknowledge the validity of Sibyl's speech, nor does he allow her any autonomy, instead placing responsibility for her words and actions with Knavesby: 'Your husband shall smart for this' (3.1.164). But Mistress Knavesby has succeeded in her plan: she has ensured that she does not have to have sex with Lord Beaufort, and thus retains control over her body.

Sibyl is given further command of the plot when she uses similar tactics to teach her husband a lesson: once again she plays on societal conceptions of women and class. She pretends that she has slept with Beaufort and, having enjoyed a lord, will never have sex with a lower class man again: 'Never touch me more;/ I'll keep the noble stamp upon my lip,/ No under baseness shall deface it now' (4.2.18-20). The role which Mistress Knavesby pretends to play is the same as that acted out for real by Bianca in *Women Beware Women* who, after being raped by the Duke, decides to remain with him in the aristocratic sphere, claiming that her husband is no longer good enough for her (3.1.45-6).<sup>143</sup> In addition, when playing her role, Sibyl blames her husband for her behaviour, as she had previously blamed Beaufort: 'You taught me the way,/ Now I am in, I'll keep it' (4.2.21-2).

Mistress Knavesby therefore uses and manipulates patriarchal discourses of women, sexuality and class in order to gain control over her body: by persuading both men to believe she is a 'whore', and that as such, she is only being what they desired her to be, she succeeds in not having to engage in sexual relations with

either. Like Prudence Gallipot, Sibyl manages to use an exchange to negotiate a space for herself although, in contrast to her predecessor, she does not instigate the sale, instead appropriating it for her own ends. But while for Prudence the sale is a way to get money for another man, for Sibyl it is a means to reject the male right to exchange women like property, and as such her actions can be considered more subversive. Further, these actions are condoned within the play: Sibyl is the only character to talk directly to the audience, which she does on three separate occasions (2.1.180-95; 3.2.165-71; 4.2.154-6), making the audience her co-conspirators.

Mistress Gallipot's freedom was in the context of her position within a female community. In contrast, Mistress Knavesby is not part of a female group - her husband is a lawyer, not a shopkeeper - nor does she interact with Rachel Water-Camlet, despite being related to her (4.2.138). Yet Sibyl's ability to rebel against male strictures is in part enabled by a same-sex friendship: Lord Beaufort's page Selenger, an integral part of her plan, is really the wife of George Cressingham in disguise (apparently working because the Cressinghams needed the money, although this is not made explicit by Middleton). The explanation provided by George Cressingham for the disguise is that 'in her own I durst not place her so near your Lordship' (5.2.339-40), thus confirming Beaufort's lustful and treacherous nature. Selenger's true identity is not revealed until the end of the play. Although Dyce and Bullen's nineteenth century editions of the play read 'Enter Mistress George Cressingham disguised as a page', in the 1662 edition the stage directions read simply 'Enter Selenger'.<sup>144</sup> However, while Sibyl, in common with the audience, was initially unaware that the page was a woman, soon after leaving Beaufort's house, she must have discovered (off-stage) Selenger's true identity and adapted her trick accordingly. The two women set up home together, with Mistress George Cressingham still masquerading as the page, and let it be known that they have 'lain together' (5.2.206), in order to humiliate Knavesby. Mistress George Cressingham, a gentlewoman, helps Sibyl Knavesby, a citizen's wife: therefore, in contrast to *The Roaring Girl*, in which the women were bound by class, in *Anything for a Quiet Life* Middleton shows two women of different classes uniting against the dominant patriarchy.

Mistress Knavesby, like Mistress Gallipot, decides of her own volition to

return to her husband, but in this play the reconciliation is entirely on Sibyl's terms. She makes Knavesby promise that he will 'play the pander no more' (5.2.348). He agrees, but seems petulant rather than genuinely sorry, placing himself in the role of henpecked husband: 'I'll do anything for a quiet life' (5.2.357). It can be argued that by speaking this phrase, an exact rendition of the title, Knavesby threatens to undermine Sibyl's actions, positioning her as nothing more than a shrewish wife. Unlike Rachel Water-Camlet, however, Sibyl is never depicted by Middleton as a stereotype of the domineering wife, rather as resourceful and clever: she is a skilled user of language and, as mentioned, is the only character in the play to speak directly to the audience, one way for Middleton to encourage audience sympathy. Further, although she has deceived her husband, this is her only crime and it is this deceit which enabled her to remain honest: in this way her actions are legitimised. At the end she says 'I come with a bold innocence to answer/ The best and worst that can accuse me here' (5.2.214-15). Her position as one of the most moral characters in the play is made explicit by George Cressingham when he tells Knavesby to get 'Down a' your knees ... to your wife; she's too honest for you' (5.2.344-5). The wife transaction is thus condemned, reinforced by the fact that, although his wife returns to him, Knavesby has not escaped unpunished, having been humiliated and driven almost to suicide.<sup>145</sup> And, the moral reformer is not male, like Phoenix, but a wife.

Middleton's satire of both Knavesby and Beaufort is partly facilitated by the presentation of the transaction: in Lord Beaufort, Middleton shows the man who valorised the chaste wife arranging a deal which required a wife to be unchaste. Despite judging others, Beaufort is seemingly unaware of his own sins: when Mistress Knavesby tells people about the transaction, he refuses to listen, saying 'I'll hear no more of this' (5.2.220).<sup>146</sup> And Knavesby, like the Captain in *The Phoenix*, wanted his wife to cuckold him with a lord. However, while the Captain aimed to use this as an excuse to separate from her, in *Anything for a Quiet Life*, Knavesby wanted to rent out his wife, and in this way he is more like Allwit in *A Chaste Maid*. Allwit (whose name is a reversal of 'wittol') allows Sir Walter Whorehound to have sex with his wife in exchange for financial support: as Allwit says, Sir Walter 'Not only keeps my wife, but a keeps me' (1.2.17). This settlement is permanent, to the extent that

the cuckold takes over from the husband so completely that he can jealously accuse the husband of daring to sleep with his own wife and the husband to protest that he has not.<sup>147</sup>

But Knavesby wanted it both ways – to keep his wife and to lease her out; in his own words he wanted to 'divorce' and then to be 'married again'. He was unsuccessful, and Sibyl Knavesby's actions are endorsed via her ingenious interpretation of the wife transaction. Of the wives discussed in this chapter, Sibyl's presentation is the most complex and subversive as the situation produced by the wife-barter gives her not just comic licence, but moral authority.

The plays discussed in this chapter reveal indisputable examples of wife bartering furthering their plots. *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, *The Phoenix* and *The Fancies*, *Chaste and Noble* include undoubted sales, while *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Roaring Girl* and *Anything for a Quiet Life* contain variations on this motif: the first two involve pretended precontracts, the third an attempted prostitution. In *The Phoenix*, the sale is an example of vice being uncovered and punished and involves the humiliation of a remarried widow: however, despite the negative context, the wife involved gains unexpected liberty. In *The Shoemakers' Holiday* and *The Roaring Girl*, the wives have more opportunity for autonomy: in Dekker's romantic comedy a woman is given the opportunity to end her marriage, while in Dekker and Middleton's comedy, which portrays a world upside-down, a wife instigates a sale, turning patriarchal conceptions of women as property to her advantage. In *Anything for a Quiet Life*, the transaction facilitates a woman's rebellion against society's dictate that her body should be controlled by men, and demonstrates that active women can further morality rather than undermine it. In this play the husband goes against the laws of matrimony, and it is the wife who maintains the sanctity of their marriage.

Reading these less well known plays through the lens of wife bartering provides evidence of Middleton and Dekker's approach to the question of women's autonomy within marriage. The wife transaction can be viewed as the perfect dramatic device through which to continue the exploration of women being bought and sold in marriage, and since much of society condemned it, it can be used to illustrate the worst aspects of proprietary rights assumed by husbands. It

can therefore be argued that Middleton and Dekker were not affirming dominant patriarchal codes, but questioning them. In *The Shoemakers' Holiday* Hammon sees Jane as property, but she is not viewed as such by the other characters, and in *The Roaring Girl* although Mistress Gallipot accepts that women are treated as commodities, she uses this to her advantage. In *Anything for a Quiet Life* Sibyl, the most moral character, explicitly rejects the patriarchal right to exchange women.

In three of the plays married women have the opportunity for legitimate independent action and it is the moment of the sale or barter which provides the context for this, illustrating the value of studying this social practice to illuminate the meaning of the plays. The limited autonomy of Jane and Mistress Gallipot is endorsed, and while it is possible to argue that their actions operate as part of the licentious world of comedy, in *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, the fact that Jane is given the chance to end her marriage can be considered potentially socially challenging. However, the actions of Sybil Knavesby have moral authority and as such present the strongest challenge to society's strictures. Of all the wives, Sibyl is the most subversive, the most complex and the most vividly depicted. Yet *Anything for a Quiet Life* is one of the least-studied and least critically acclaimed of Middleton's plays. It is hoped that this present study will go some way towards reversing this, and that any future discussion of Middleton's women will take into account Mistress Knavesby. Through her, Middleton shows a married woman guiding the plot and going against her husband, but unlike Livia, Bianca, Isabella and Beatrice-Joanna, her actions are legitimised. Sibyl can thus be viewed as a moral counterpart to the subversive, but ultimately corrupt women of the contemporaneous tragedies, *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling*.

Analysing spousals and wife sales and their use as dramatic plots extends understanding of Renaissance Englishwomen's opportunities for agency in marriage, and of the different ways in which this agency was depicted on the public stage. In Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher*, Middleton's *The Widow* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, unmarried women use ecclesiastical law to legitimately defy men and gain control over marriage, and private conscience is placed above duty to family and to the church. In *The Gentleman Usher* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, the female protagonists' actions challenge the dominant

patriarchy and are endorsed. In the plays which incorporate wife transactions, the sales are viewed as negative, as they seem to have been by most of society - yet they still function as a means to explore women's potential for legitimate authority within marriage. Jane's actions are potentially socially challenging, as she is offered the opportunity to end her marriage, but it is in *Anything for a Quiet Life* that the question of married women's autonomy is focused on in a socially challenging way. The female characters examined in the first part of this thesis are given a space in which to have legitimate agency; and, as this autonomy is endorsed by the playwrights, it is possible to argue that similar autonomy is suggested to the women in the audience.

Having examined the depiction of proactive female characters on the public stage through the lens of female agency in marriage, the second part of this thesis looks at the only women able to appear on stage at this time, Anna of Denmark and her female retinue, analysing the ways in which these women were able to have agency at the Jacobean court through female homosocial bonding and through their participation in court masques.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Menefee, *Wives for Sale*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> When Henry wanted to marry Anne Boleyn he had to try to convince the Pope to admit that, due to the laws of affinity, he should never have been allowed to marry Catherine in the first place. Apart from the obvious difficulties of getting the Pope to admit he had been wrong to grant Henry a dispensation. Henry also had the problem that he would need a similar dispensation to marry Anne, as he had previously had sex with her sister.

<sup>5</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> *FSM*, p. 691n.49.

<sup>7</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Shorrocks (ed.), *Bishop Still's Visitation, 1594 and the 'Smale Book' of the Clerk of the Peace for Somerset, 1593-5*, (Somerset: Somerset Record Society, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *FSM*, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, pp. 153; 256-9.

<sup>19</sup> Christina Hole, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1961), p. 363.

<sup>20</sup> Keith Thomas, 'The Double Standard', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XX (1959), No.2, p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 207n.47; John Bradbury Brooks (ed.), *The Phoenix*, (New York: Garland, 1980), p. 237n.

<sup>24</sup> The following references are from *Notes and Queries*. 'Wives, Custom of Selling', Series 1, Volume 2, 31 August 1850 (p. 217); 'Selling a Wife', Series 1, Volume 7, 30 April 1853 (pp. 429-30); 'Selling a Wife', Series 1, Volume 8, 27 August 1853 (p. 209); 'Notes on Wife Selling', Series 2, Volume 1, 24 May 1856 (pp. 420-1); Series 2, Volume 6, 11 December 1858 (p. 490); Series 3, Volume 3, 20 June 1863 (p. 486); 'Selling a Wife', Series 3, Volume 10, 14 July 1966 (p. 29); 'Wife Sales', Series 4, Volume 10, 14 December 1872 (pp. 468-9); 'Wife Selling', Series 6, Volume 4, 13 August 1881 (p. 133); *FSM*, p. 40. Only Menefee has undertaken a detailed study of wife sales – outwith the references in *Notes and Queries*, the phenomenon is usually referred to briefly



by commentators, often in a footnote. See Brooks, *Phoenix*, p. 237n. Although Margot Heinemann writes that wife sales were 'not ... all that uncommon' in England, her examples are also post-seventeenth century cases. *Puritanism*, p. 70. n.12.

<sup>25</sup> *Tuam vero fraternitatem ... admonemus, quatinus ... inter omnia et prae omnibus nefas quod de Scotis audivimus, videlicet quod plerique proprias uxores non solum deserunt sed etiam vendunt, omnibus modis prohibere contendat.* Extract from letter from Pope Gregory VII to Archbishop Lanfranc, 1073, quoted in Alan Orr Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1922), pp. 160-1.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur West Haddan & William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869-78), Vol. 2.2, p. 161n.a.

<sup>27</sup> C. K. Kenny, 'Wife-selling in England', *Law Quarterly Review*, 45 (1929), p. 494.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the deed reads: *Omnibus Christi fidelibus, ad quos praesens Scriptum pervenerit, Johannes de Cameys, filius & haeres Domini Radulphi de Cameys, salutem in Domino Noveritis me tradidisse & dimisisse, Spontaneâ voluntate meâ, Domino Willielmo Paynel militi, Margaretam de Cameys, filiam & haeredem Domini Johannis de Gatesden, uxorem meam: Et etiam dedisse & concessisse eidem Willielmo, relaxasse & quietum clamasse, omnia bona & catalla, quae ipsa Margareta habet, vel de cætero habere posset: & etiam quicquid mei est de praedictâ Margaretâ, bonis & catallis ipsius Margaretæ cum suis pertinentiis, de cætero exigere, vel vindicare poterimus nec debemus imperpetuum. Ac volo & concedo & per praesens Scriptum confirmo; quod praedicta Margareta, cum praedicto Domino Willielmo, sit & maneat, pro voluntate ipsius Willielmi. In cujus rei Testimonium huic praesenti Scripto Sigillum meum apposui; Hiis testibus, Thomâ de Depeston, Johanne de Ferrings, Willielmo de Icome, Henrico le Biroun, Stephano Camerario, Waltero le Blound, Gilberto de Batecumbe, Roberto de Bosco & aliis.* Quoted in William Dugdale, *Baronage of England, Volume I*, (London: Abel Roper et al, 1675-6), p. 767.

<sup>29</sup> Compurgation was a method of trial whereby a defendant might be acquitted if a sufficient number of people swore to their innocence.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Pollock & Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 395.

<sup>31</sup> Church ruling quoted in Pollock & Maitland, *History*, p. 396.

<sup>32</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 207n.47.

<sup>33</sup> NAS, Ch 2/389/1.

<sup>34</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, pp. 213-57, *passim*; Keith Williams, *The English Newspaper*, (London: Springwood Books Ltd., 1977), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> *PG I*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> J. G. Nichols (ed.), *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, (London: Camden Society, 1848), p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> EDR K2/50. This is one of the cases listed by Ingram as a sale of a contract rather than a sale of a wife. However, Isabel is referred to as the wife of Edward Scayles, to whom she had been lawfully contracted and 'ma[d]e sure' in front of witnesses: it appears, therefore, that this couple

were precontracted by a *de presenti* contract (and were thus married).

<sup>38</sup> The Wiltshire case is the first of the two cases recorded by Ingram as an example of a contract sold. My thanks to J. Johnston (Archivist, WRSO) for providing details of this case (WSRO D1/42/8 fo.161). The Hertfordshire case is detailed in HRO ASA 5/5. See also HRO ASA 7/11, quoted in Menefee, *Wives*, p. 211. ASA 7/11 is mainly in Latin and unable to be photocopied (my thanks to S. J. McNeilly, Archivist, HRO for this information).

<sup>39</sup> William Hale, *A Series of Proceedings and Precedents in Criminal Causes, 1475-1640*, (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1847), p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> This is the other of the two Wiltshire cases mentioned by Ingram as examples of contracts being sold. My thanks to J. Johnston (Archivist, WRSO) for providing details of this case (WSRO D1/42/8 fos. 87-94).

<sup>41</sup> G. R. Kinloch (ed.), *Selections from the Minutes of the Synod of Fife, 1611-1687*, (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1837), p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> NAS Ch 2/1026/3.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, *Newspaper*, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> NAS, Ch 2/389/1; Ch 2/185/5.

<sup>45</sup> John Aubrey, *Miscellanies Upon Various Subjects*, (London: Reeves and Turner, 1890), p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> F. W. Hackwood, *Staffordshire Customs*, (Wakefield: E. P. Publishing, 1974), p. 70. There are no further details on the Bilston case in the Staffordshire Record Office (email from Liz Street, Archivist, to me, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2000), the Lichfield Record Office (email from Martin Sanders, Archivist-in-charge, to me, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2000) or the Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies Office (email from Christine Brown, Archives and Local Studies Assistant, to me, August 11<sup>th</sup> 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Kinloch, *Minutes*, p. 68n.

<sup>48</sup> NAS, Ch 2/1026/3; Ch 2/389/1.

<sup>49</sup> Williams, *Newspaper*, p. 11; NAS, Ch 2/389/1.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, 'Double Standard', p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> NAS, Ch 2/389/1.

<sup>52</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 282.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>54</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, p. 1. Kenny, also referring to post-1700 cases, argues that participants believed it was legal. 'Wife-selling', p. 494.

<sup>55</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Nichols (ed.), *Diary of Henry Machyn*, p. 48. Sowdley was deprived of his living in 1554 (the year after his transgression). However, as he was reinstated after the death of Queen Mary, it seems likely that this had more to do with the fact that he was a Protestant minister with a Catholic Queen on the throne, rather than a result of the wife sale.

<sup>57</sup> 'All over Europe festive processions - charivari - had for centuries been employed to shame people who violated their communities' social or sexual standards.' David Underdown, *Revel, Riot*

and Rebellion: *Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 100. See also pp. 102-3, 106, 110-11, 216, 264, 279.

<sup>58</sup> Kinloch, *Minutes*, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> NAS, Ch 2/389/1. Excommunication was a punishment also available to the Scottish Kirk. David Wright *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p. 245.

<sup>61</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 216; Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 114.

<sup>62</sup> NAS, Ch 2/1026/3. Thomas, 'Double Standard', p. 213.

<sup>63</sup> It is possible this lack of punishment was a result of the common law fiction of coverture.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, 'Double Standard', p. 213.

<sup>65</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1; 2.

<sup>67</sup> It is interesting that the couple opted for a wife sale rather than attempting to secure separation and remarriage through parliament. Perhaps a sale was quicker, particularly in difficult political times, or they may have believed it would attract less attention. The fact that the sale was chosen over simply making Margaret John's mistress reveals his positive attitude towards her.

<sup>68</sup> The Pilgrimage of Grace 'was the largest rebellion to occur in England between the peasant's revolt in 1381 and the civil war of the 1640s'. (Michael Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. x). Sir John's part in the Pilgrimage can be at least partly attributed to family loyalty. After the King's pardon he withdrew from overt rebellion, but remained involved in various plots, 'none of them sufficiently well-contrived for success, but each enough to cost him his life' (*PG II*, p. 201).

<sup>69</sup> J. G. Nichols (ed.), *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, (London: J.B. Nichols & Son, 1851), Camden Series, 53 (1851), p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> J. A. Froude, *The History of England*, (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1858), p. 219n. In contrast, G. Brenan & E. P. Stratham in *The House of Howard*, Vol. 1, (London: Hutchinson, 1907) argue that Margaret's character was 'foully and has been shown, falsely' defamed. However, M. & R. Dodds could not find this defence of her character (*PG I*, p. 61n.a).

<sup>71</sup> *PG II*, p. 215. Burning is most often associated with witchcraft and it is tempting to draw parallels - however, this was the European punishment for the crime - in England the likely method of execution for a witch was hanging. It would seem Margaret's death was intended as an example - as the Dodds sisters argue, without a powerful family she was an easy target: other, more powerfully connected women who were 'ardent supporters' of the Pilgrimage (such as Lady Hussey) did not receive the same punishment.

<sup>72</sup> *PG I*, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> R. W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 397-9, 406, 407, 410. Other books on the rebellion do not mention Margaret at all, for example Scott Harrison's *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Countries 1536-*

7, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981).

<sup>74</sup> J. W. Ord, *The History and Antiquities of Cleveland*, (Stockton-on-Tees: Patrick & Shotton, 1846. 1972), p. 385; *PG I*, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31; 39.

<sup>77</sup> I have been unable to find any reference to William Cheyne other than that previously recorded.

<sup>78</sup> Nichols, *Chronicle*, pp. 40-1.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret is referred to as the woman 'whom [Bulmer] calls his wife'. Court depositions, *L&P XII (I)* 1087, p. 494. This sentiment is repeated in a letter from Norfolk (and others) to King Henry, April 8<sup>th</sup> 1537, in which Margaret is called John's 'pretended wife'. *L&P XII (I)*, 870, p. 392. Memoranda from the depositions, written in Cromwell's hand, repeat this exact phrase. *L&P XII (I)*, 1088 (2), p. 502.

<sup>80</sup> 'My wife recommends her to you and my daughter'. Extract from letter from John Bulmer to Matthew Boynton, January 1537, *L&P XII (I)* 304, p. 137.

<sup>81</sup> *L&P XII (I)* 1088 (1), pp. 501; 1199 (3 & 11), pp. 551; 1227 (7), p. 564. Margaret is also wrongly referred to as 'Anne Cheyney' in a letter from John Hussee to Lord Lisle, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1537, *L&P XII (I)* 1239, p. 568. Confession of John Watts, 1537. *L&P XII (I)*, 1084, p. 491.

<sup>82</sup> 'Margaret Cheyney - who passed as Lady Bulmer, Sir John's wife, though she seems to have been another man's.' James Gairdener (ed.), Preface to *L&P XII (2)*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> Ord, *History*, p. 386; Nichols, *Chronicle*, p. 41; *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, Vol. XVI (1812), p. 296.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Ralph Evers to John Bulmer, January 11<sup>th</sup> 1537, *L&P XII (I)*, 66, p. 31. Letter from William Bulmer to John Bulmer, January 25<sup>th</sup> 1537, *L&P XII (I)*, 236, p. 114.

<sup>85</sup> *PG I*, p. 39.

<sup>86</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> Watts, *L&P XII (I)*, 1084, pp. 491-2. The Dodds sisters' mention of Margaret's charms echoes Watts' condemnatory words.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>89</sup> *PG II*, p. 202.

<sup>90</sup> *L&P XII (I)*, 1084, p. 492.

<sup>91</sup> *PG I*, p. 40.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, *Newspaper*, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> This example appears at a time when newspapers were finding it difficult to fill their pages: parliamentary censorship pressurised editors to find stories which would hold their readers' interest, therefore journalistic licence must be taken into account. *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Menefee, who discusses *The Phoenix* briefly, argues (*Wives*, p. 198) that *Measure for Measure* also contains a reference to wife sales: 'Nay, if there be no remedy for it, but that you will needs buy and sell men and women like beasts, we shall have all the world drink brown and white bastard' (3.2.1-4). However, put in context, these lines refer to prostitution.

<sup>95</sup> Jonson's preface to *The Alchemist* (1610) reads: 'Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known/ No country's wit is better than our own./ No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,/ Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,/ Whose manners, how call'd humours, feed the stage:/ And which have still been subject, for the rage/ Or spleen of comic writers' (ll. 1-7). For discussions of the city of London in this period, including its rapid growth, see N. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935); A. L. Beier & Roger Finlay, *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, (London: Longman, 1986); Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>96</sup> Theodore B. Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613*, (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> *ES IV*, p. 118. Since the Children of St. Paul's were not the boys' company patronised by James' wife, Queen Anna, this too lends credence to the possibility that James may have invited them to court. For a brief discussion on the satire against James played by Anna's Children of the Revels, see Chapter 4.

<sup>98</sup> Middleton's mother Anne married Thomas Harvey, who tried to claim Middleton's inheritance for himself. Brooks writes, with reference to this event, that 'Middleton .. seems to have had a special grudge against [the Captain], for he gives him the most severe punishment of any of the villains in the play'. *Phoenix*, p. 119.

<sup>99</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* in Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 73-4.

<sup>100</sup> William Page, *The Widow Indeed* (written 1620, never published) cited in Barbara J. Todd, 'The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England', in Sandra Cavallo & Lyndon Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999), p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Even before 1604, a marriage performed at this time in the morning would have been considered clandestine. For example 'the vicar of Greasley, Nottinghamshire, faced censure and suspension for marrying Mr. Lancelot Rollston and Margaret Ashe in his parish church on the Wednesday before Whit Sunday, 1594, "about four of the morning"'. *BMD*, p. 319.

<sup>102</sup> Brooks, *Phoenix*, p. 131.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265n.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266n. See also Dekker, Chettle & Haughton, *Patient Grissell* (1600).

<sup>105</sup> Brooks, *Phoenix*, p. 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258n.

<sup>107</sup> Heinemann, *Puritanism*, p. 69.

<sup>108</sup> Menefee, *Wives*, p. 199.

<sup>109</sup> Brooks, *Phoenix*, p. 237n.

<sup>110</sup> Holmes, *Middleton*, p. 24.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Parr (ed.), Introduction, *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, (London: A. & C. Black, 1990), p. x; R. L. Smallwood & Stanley Wells (eds.), Introduction, *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 29.

<sup>112</sup> Paul A. Mulholland (ed.), Introduction, *The Roaring Girl*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> David Farley-Hills, *The Comic in Renaissance Comedy*, (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 108.

Julia Gaspar and Paul S. Seaver focus on the darker elements of the play: Gaspar, *The Dragon and the Dove*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 35; Seaver, 'The Artisanal World' in David L. Smith, Richard Strier & David Bevington (eds.), *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576-1649*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 87. *ES III*, p. 291. Court records show that *The Shoemakers' Holiday* was performed before Elizabeth on New Year's Day, 1600 by the Admiral's Men, with a suitably obsequious prologue for the aged queen.

<sup>114</sup> Billington, *Mock Kings*, p. 253.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Lacy refuses to excuse Ralph from going to war, yet avoids going himself.

<sup>116</sup> Gaspar argues that the economic aspect of Dekker's work has been overemphasised to the detriment of other themes, such as his militant Protestant convictions. *Dragon*, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> Seaver, 'Artisanal World', p. 96.

<sup>118</sup> Gaspar, *Dragon*, p. 34.

<sup>119</sup> His language at this point can be viewed as conventional posturing. However, the word choice hints at unpleasant, sexual voyeurism, meaning the audience are less likely to sympathise with him: 'It doth me good to stand/ Unseen to see her; thus often have I stood,/ In frosty evenings, a light burning by her,/ Enduring biting cold, only to eye her' (4.1.14-17).

<sup>120</sup> The match is further endorsed by the fact that Hammon gives Jane the twenty pounds. The triumph of love is an obvious theme for a romantic comedy; this is encapsulated at the end of the play in another moment which challenges the social realities of 1599, when the king refuses to separate Rose and Lacy at the request of her father and his uncle, saying 'love respects no blood/ Cares not for difference of birth or state' (5.5.105-6) - and, with reference to Ralph and Jane, it could be added, 'cares not for money'.

<sup>121</sup> For a brief discussion of the authors' shares, see Elizabeth Cook (ed.), Introduction, *The Roaring Girl*, (London: A. & C. Black, 1997), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii. See also Andor Gomme, who argues 'the controlling hand' was Middleton's (Introduction, *The Roaring Girl*, (London: Benn, 1976), p. xxxv). Mulholland ascribes 3.2 (the precontract scene) to Middleton, arguing that Lake and Johnson's ascription of it to Dekker 'disregard[s] evidence of Middleton'. In light of the precontract trick in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, this seems likely. He also argues that 'the final moments of the Gallipot action ... are more in keeping with Middleton's preference for ironic revelation'. Introduction, *Roaring Girl*, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> Cook, Introduction, *Roaring Girl*, p. xxiii.

<sup>123</sup> For material on the cross-dressed woman in society (including Moll Frith), and on the effeminate man see Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance*, (Brighton: The

Harvester Press, Ltd., 1984); Sandra Clark, 'Hic Mulier. Haec Vir and the Controversy over Masculine Women', *Studies in Philology*, 82:2 (1985), pp. 157-83 and the Introduction to this thesis, n. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Cook, Introduction, *Roaring Girl*, p. xxvii.

<sup>125</sup> See also Mary's comments, 1.1.55-9; 72-5.

<sup>126</sup> The Courtesan says 'My state being yet uncertain, I deem it not unconscionable to further him' (4.4.96-7).

<sup>127</sup> In contrast to *The Roaring Girl*, the pretended precontract is a minor episode in *A Trick*.

<sup>128</sup> However, the gentleman is impoverished, so a rich man does give money to a poorer man to secure a wife.

<sup>129</sup> Cook, Introduction, *Roaring Girl*, p. xxx.

<sup>130</sup> These words reverse Ralph's rejection of Hammon's offer in *The Shoemakers' Holiday*: 'Take thy gold, choke on it!' (5.2.85-6).

<sup>131</sup> Kathleen E. McLuskie & David Bevington (eds.), *Plays on Women*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>132</sup> Mulholland, Introduction, *Roaring Girl*, p. 19.

<sup>133</sup> Levin, 'Women', pp. 165-74; W. B. Rye, *England As Seen By Foreigners*, (London, 1865), pp. 72, 14.

<sup>134</sup> Such partnerships were common among citizens, with many wives inheriting businesses after the death of their husbands. In the fifteenth century this was almost automatic, but by the seventeenth century restrictions were being imposed. Guilds put pressure on women, attempting to exclude them: one solution was for city widows to marry their apprentices so they could continue running the business. See P. J. P. Goldberg (trans. & ed.), *Women in England c.1275-1525*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 20; Brodsky, 'Widows'.

<sup>135</sup> McLuskie & Bevington, *Plays*, p. 24.

<sup>136</sup> *JC IV*, pp. 857-9.

<sup>137</sup> 'The title-page assignment of the play to Blackfriars may be correct but ... the play sounds more like Globe than Blackfriars fare.' *Ibid.*, p. 861.

<sup>138</sup> A. W. Ward, *The History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne II*, (London: Macmillan, 1875), p. 523; Holmes, *Middleton*, p. 153. The most recent edition (outwith Nancy Katz's unpublished 1975 dissertation) is in Bullen's nineteenth century *Complete Works*. A modern edition of Middleton's complete works is at present being prepared by Joel H. Kaplan & G. B. Shand. See Holmes, *Middleton*, p. 155 and A. A. Bromham & Zara Bruzzi, *The Changeling and the Years of Crisis, 1619-1624*, (London: Pinter, 1990), p. 166.

<sup>139</sup> 'It presents a fable which allows the dramatist to refer to, in an indirect manner, the matter of the king's peace policy, the dangers of the proposed marriage to the Infanta, and particularly the domestic situation of the early 1620s ... [D]omestic matters are frequently talked about in public or

political terms, with reference to rulers ... government and ... religion.' Bromham & Bruzzi, *Changeling*, pp. 166-9.

<sup>140</sup> Chakravorty, *Society*, pp. 22, 28n., 107.

<sup>141</sup> She is called 'Sib' by her husband, which I assume is short for Sibyl (as Water-Camlet calls Rachel, 'Rac').

<sup>142</sup> It is interesting that Sibyl here uses the analogy of women as healers, referencing their abilities in medicine - a male domain - as well as their skill and cunning.

<sup>143</sup> In contrast to Sibyl, Bianca was a gentlewoman who married beneath herself. Leantio's mother had previously warned her son that women are 'not confined/ By their conditions, virtues, bloods or births,/ But flowing to affections, wills and humours' (1.1.68-70).

<sup>144</sup> Holmes, *Middleton*, p. 154.

<sup>145</sup> More problematic is the fact that Lord Beaufort escapes without punishment: he refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoing and agrees to go guarantor for Knavesby's future behaviour, even though the sale was his idea.

<sup>146</sup> The blindness of the aristocracy is a theme previously explored by Middleton. See for example Sir Alexander Wengrave in *The Roaring Girl*, Sir Walter Whorehound in *A Chaste Maid* and the Duke in *Women Beware Women*.

<sup>147</sup> Alan Brissenden (ed.), Introduction, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1974), p. xx.



**Part Two**  
**Female agency at the Jacobean court**

#### 4.

### **A female support network: Anna of Denmark and the women of her court**

The Queen gave me a warning not to trust my matters absolutely to the King, lest he should deceive me (Extract from the diary of Anne Clifford, 1617).

In 1603 Elizabeth I died. Her successor, James, brought with him to the court a consort, Anna of Denmark,<sup>1</sup> the first Queen of England for fifty years who was not the monarch. Historical perceptions of the role which Queen Anna played at both the Scottish and English courts have changed dramatically in recent years. Forty years ago historians such as G. P. V. Akrigg and Ian McInnes marginalised Anna, characterising her variously as childish, frivolous, stupid, 'dull and indolent' and interested in little other than clothes and merry-making.<sup>2</sup> Scholars from this era construct Anna's role at the Jacobean court as little more than decorative, her extravagance and other perceived faults highlighted by her participation in her fantastic and expensive masques. Ethel Carleton Williams' 1970 study is more sympathetic,<sup>3</sup> but it is only within the last decade that historians have begun radically reassessing Anna of Denmark, positioning her as an active figure in early modern historical and theatrical studies. For example, Barbara Lewalski argues that at the Jacobean court, Anna was constantly in opposition to James: 'Queen Ann[a]'s more direct forms of resistance centred on her children and household, the Roman Catholic religion, court appointments, theatre patronage and political manoeuvring'.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of theatre patronage, as well as being the patron of at least two adult companies, Anna was the patron of the Children of the Queen's Revels between 1604 and 1608.<sup>5</sup> As is well-known, and as was perceived by the theatre historian E. K. Chambers in 1923, this boys' company became a public way for Anna to challenge the authority of her husband. Anna had appointed her own censor, Samuel Daniel, and this allowed her control over the plays performed: these included Ben Jonson, George Chapman and John Marston's city comedy *Eastward Ho!* (1604/5) which contained material insulting to the Scottish and criticising James' policy of awarding knighthoods for cash.<sup>6</sup> In June 1604 the French Ambassador wrote of James

Consider for pity's sake ... what must be the state and condition of a prince, whom the preachers publicly from the pulpit assail, whom the comedians of the metropolis bring upon the stage, whose wife attends these representations in order to enjoy the laugh against her husband.<sup>7</sup>

Anna therefore not only patronised these productions but was also a very visible audience member, and the French ambassador's letter indicates the damage to James' international reputation. In May of the following year Samuel Calvert wrote that the players represented the King 'in so great absurdity and with such liberty, that any would be afraid to hear them'.<sup>8</sup> In 1608 Anna was forced to withdraw her patronage, an action instigated not by James, as perhaps would be expected, but by the French ambassador who complained that the company had 'meddled in the current affairs of France'.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1610, a patent was granted for another children's company patronised by Anna, this time with the name 'the Children of her Majesty's Revels'.<sup>10</sup>

The leading critic in the recent re-evaluation of Queen Anna is Leeds Barroll. Rather than examining Anna's opposition to James, Barroll instead analyses the Queen's promotion of her own authority. In his seminal work, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England* (2001), which he calls a 'cultural biography', Barroll argues that the cultural developments of the Jacobean era stemmed not only from James and Prince Henry, but also from Anna, who was at the centre of a network of patronage of the arts. Barroll has conducted important research in uncovering the artistic and political connections which existed between members of Anna's retinue, both male and female. The intention of this study is to examine in greater detail and to give more value to the lives of Anna's women, since many of them were, like herself, independent and running their lives successfully, often in opposition to male relatives. Barroll has touched on several of these women, however, not specifically from the perspective of considering them as women striving to control their own lives nor as a group of women interacting and constructing friendships and alliances.

Some of the ways in which early modern women interacted with each other have been explored in Susan Frye and Karen Robertson's collection *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens* (1999).<sup>11</sup> Frye and Robertson argue that

The study of men's alliances is far advanced, because male economic, political, intellectual, and military relationships constitute such well-known and well-studied institutions as guilds, parliament, the university and the military. While the gap between the study of men in groups and women in groups is understandable because the activity of men has been so much more public and recorded, the need for the study of women's alliances has grown in proportion to our increasing awareness of and information about women's roles. Studying the subject of women's alliances is fundamental not only to the study of women but also to our emerging picture of early modern English society as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

Queen Anna's retinue provided an opportunity for a separate, legitimate female space, both physical and imagined, at the Jacobean court, and Lewalski has argued briefly that Anna's women were 'a separate female community'.<sup>13</sup> This study explores and expands upon this observation, looking at the activities of Anna's women in more detail. However, rather than arguing that these women formed a female community, unproblematically allied by gender, the suggestion here is that the support network was complex, available to different women at different times and in different ways. The aim in this chapter is to discuss Anna's retinue as a group of similarly-minded women forming alliances and mutually supporting each other, and to argue that these alliances directly facilitated their agency at the court.

Robert Cecil had drawn up a list of which women were to attend the Queen, but Anna ignored it: therefore her initial retinue comprised only those selected by the Queen herself.<sup>14</sup> The women of most significance here (who will be examined thematically rather than chronologically, and whose maiden names are included in brackets), are Elizabeth (de Vere) Stanley, Countess of Derby (1575-1627); Lucy (Harington) Russell, Countess of Bedford (1581-1627); Frances (Howard) Seymour, Countess of Hertford (1578-1639); Lady Penelope (Devereux) Rich (1563-1607); Lady Mary (Sidney) Wroth (c.1586-1651/3); Susan (de Vere) Herbert, Countess of Montgomery (1587-1629); Anne (Clifford) Sackville, Countess of Dorset (later Countess of Montgomery) (1590-1676); Queen Anna's daughter, Elizabeth Stuart (later Elizabeth of Bohemia) (1596-1662); Lady Elizabeth (Cecil) Hatton (1578-1646) and Lady Arbella (Stuart) Seymour (1575-1615).<sup>15</sup>

### Elizabeth de Vere

The Countess of Derby, Elizabeth de Vere, successfully conducted her affairs on her own behalf and for her own gain, including administering the Isle of Man from 1610 until her death in 1627.<sup>16</sup> As Peter Thomson observed in 1992, she is 'one of the remarkable Elizabethan women ... who have been ignored by historians'.<sup>17</sup> Those historians who have recorded her life have been primarily interested not in de Vere herself, but in either the Isle of Man (J. R. Dickinson) or in the history of her husband's family, the Earls of Derby (Barry Coward, J.J. Bagley),<sup>18</sup> and Barroll only mentions her briefly. Consequently, the full remarkable nature of her life has not been taken into account, and this study wishes to reposition Elizabeth de Vere within the framework of an investigation into female agency.

In contrast to many of the Renaissance women who took part in the public sphere, Elizabeth de Vere was not a widow, nor was she operating on behalf of her husband. In addition, she was not only a competent and successful businesswoman, but was also part of a family which was involved in the theatre. And, in common with all the women discussed in this chapter, she actively participated in theatrical productions herself, dancing in the court masques commissioned by Queen Anna, which are discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Yet her position as a prominent member of Queen Anna's inner circle of women at the Jacobean court is rarely taken into account.<sup>19</sup> In order to gain as complete a picture as possible of the different ways in which Elizabeth de Vere was able to negotiate a space for herself, it is necessary to examine both her business life and her role at court. The former shows her operating on her own behalf, the latter as part of a supportive group of women.

Elizabeth de Vere had powerful relations: she was the daughter and co-heir of Edward, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, her mother Ann was the daughter of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and Ann's brother (Elizabeth de Vere's uncle) was Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury. On January 26<sup>th</sup> 1595, Elizabeth married William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby. The Stanleys were one of the most powerful families in England, controlling most of Lancashire and Cheshire, and R. H. Curphey argues that the marriage between Elizabeth and William was engineered by Lord Burghley for political reasons.<sup>20</sup> However, prior to the match with William

Stanley, Burghley had tried to marry Elizabeth to the Earl of Southampton, then to the Earl of Northumberland, and was in fact at first opposed to her marrying William.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that Elizabeth resisted the attempts of her powerful grandfather to push her into a match, instead choosing her own husband, despite Burghley's disapproval. There is no decisive evidence for this point of view - it is possible that it was other family members who resisted the matches rather than Elizabeth. However, if Conyers Read is right that 'the match [with William] was of Elizabeth's making'<sup>22</sup> - as seems probable in view of the evidence which exists of Elizabeth's strong will - then Elizabeth de Vere rejected her family's right to choose her marriage partner for her.

The evidence relating to Elizabeth and William's marriage leads to contradictory conclusions. On many levels it was not a success. For example, William's violent temper towards his wife is well documented: in a letter to Robert Cecil, Edward Mylar writes of William being in a 'frenzy', furious with his wife:

he is in such a jealous frame as we have had such a storm ... But such it appeareth, though [her ladyship] lived in a cell unseen, all is one. Mr Ireland ... did ... prevail so with all my lordship's officers seeing my lord's madness and my ladyship's patience, whose only defence was patience with tears ... [the officers] told him ... if he would hate her and [not] desist from this humour, they must all hate him and follow her in those honourable courses she professeth and performeth, wishing him to desist from this jealousy and bitterness.<sup>23</sup>

Here Elizabeth is portrayed as the opposite of William, her patience contrasting with his jealous madness, and the fact that the servants were willing to support her indicates both the severity of William's jealous rages and also that Elizabeth was liked, or at least respected, by them. This is reinforced by Mylar's assertion that 'she hath by courtesy and virtue got the love of all here' and his belief that 'if my lord had come [to London] I think scarce one man had come with him to attend him'.<sup>24</sup> Although William appears to be the stereotypical patriarchal husband, ruling his wife and servants, the servants are actually on the side of his wife and further, are willing to vocalise their support of her. Two days after writing this letter Mylar wrote to Cecil 'of a calm', saying that William had promised 'to show his love to his lady'.<sup>25</sup> But the couple remained unhappy and soon after there was a

rumour that Elizabeth had committed adultery with the Earl of Essex. This was commented on by Thomas Audley:

My Lord of Essex is in no great grace, neither with Queen or Commons: with the Queen for that he lay with my Lady of Derby before he went, as his enemies witness.<sup>26</sup>

William believed this rumour, and the outcome was that Elizabeth's powerful grandfather and uncle forced him to sign a denial that he had ever suspected his wife of infidelity. The intervention of the Cecils illustrates Elizabeth's ability to use her family connections to protect her reputation. But William's jealous temper was not the only problem for the couple. A dispute with his sister-in-law Alice before his marriage left William with debts, resulting in him being unable to provide for Elizabeth as he had promised, and this was a cause of ill-feeling between them. On April 24<sup>th</sup> 1595 the Earl of Oxford complained in a letter to Robert Cecil:

Whereas I have dealt with the Earl of Derby about my daughter's allowance, and he hath promised me to assure her to that intent £1,000 a year, I now understand, upon some discontentment that he hath not attained to that honour.<sup>27</sup>

This attempt to ensure that Elizabeth received her money failed, as did a further effort a year later and, subsequently, Elizabeth concentrated on building up her fortunes outside the marriage.

Elizabeth had not been made completely destitute on marrying into the Stanley family as she had kept control of her own lands. As previously mentioned, during this period women who brought lands to a marriage often lost all rights to them, as under common law a woman's property automatically became that of the husband. Widows who remarried often had marriage settlements drawn up to safeguard their property, but maids were in a weaker position to insist on such protection. Part of the reason Elizabeth was able to retain such control was because she was co-heir partial (along with her two sisters Bridget and Susan) of her father, the Earl of Oxford, and this financial autonomy remained once she was married. In addition, when married, Elizabeth utilised her family connections to

augment her property: with the help of Robert Cecil she bought estates throughout England, some of which were former Stanley estates her husband had been forced to sell in the 1590s due to debts and bad management.<sup>28</sup> This situation presents a reversal of the expected roles - in this instance the wife is the one with the astute and capable business mind, reinforced by the fact that in 1604 William passed over to Elizabeth 'the full moiety of all profit and fees yearly due to him by reason of his office of Chamberlain of the County Palatine of Chester'.<sup>29</sup>

The evidence of jealousy and of financial tensions gainsays the Derby family historian J. J. Bagley's characterisation of the marriage as 'essentially happy',<sup>30</sup> but admittedly the evidence of the first fifteen years is contradictory. In July 1598 the couple appear to have separated, as evidenced by a letter from Thomas Ireland to Robert Cecil:

I find his lordship most loving kind to my very good lady, as not taking any discontentment at anything happened at the departure. But his discontentment grows by reason of her absence, and they do not honourably dispose themselves to live together in ... honourable hospitality.<sup>31</sup>

The couple could have been granted judicial separation by the ecclesiastical court in 1598, which would have allowed them to live apart but not to remarry and this appears to be Thomson's conclusion. Under ecclesiastical law, as previously mentioned, judicial separation was granted for adultery, heresy and cruelty and, despite the fact that cruelty was difficult to prove, it is possible that Elizabeth may have gained a separation on the strength of William's behaviour towards her. Yet nine years after their separation, in 1607, Elizabeth and William had their first child, James, the future seventh Earl of Derby, and two more children followed soon after, a son Robert and a daughter Anne, named after the Queen.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that any separation was not through the courts, a conclusion reinforced by the lack of evidence pertaining to such a legal separation. What is clear is that any separation in 1598 had only been temporary. The word 'discontentment' in the above letter suggests that, in contrast to the evidence of their tempestuous relationship, the Earl missed his wife - however, it is unclear whether this is due to affection or because she was the one who skilfully controlled their estates. Only



after 1610 do the Stanleys seem to have had little to do with each other, with Elizabeth conducting her affairs from the family home at Lathom, while William lived at Knowsley house. This later separation, in contrast to the experiences of many other women at this time, did not leave Elizabeth in financial difficulty. In fact, as she was now able to operate wholly on her own behalf, she became richer, and it was after her separation that Elizabeth's career as businesswoman and administrator became even more remarkable, when she took over the rule of the Isle of Man after 1610.

The Isle of Man was part of the Stanley family estates. On April 6<sup>th</sup> 1406 Sir John Stanley had been granted 'kingship' of the island by Henry IV as a reward for services to the crown. The proximity of the island to four different countries (England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales) meant it had considerable strategic worth, and as a consequence, Scotland and England had fought bitterly for control, with the island repeatedly changing hands. It was Stanley rule which at last brought stability to the island. The title bestowed upon the Stanleys was 'King of Man' (later changed to 'Lord of Man'), and the name was fitting: the Isle of Man, which has its own flag, its own currency and its own parliament, Tynwald, is outwith the jurisdiction of England and English acts of parliament do not automatically become law there.<sup>33</sup> This meant that the Lord of Man had king-like powers – according to Dickinson he 'had the power to impose the death penalty, to banish offenders from the island, to mitigate their punishment or to pardon them'.<sup>34</sup> The Lord controlled the church, received all revenue from customs, had the right to keep all treasure found and received a share of all food grown or caught, and the subject nature of Man's inhabitants was total. As R. H. Kinvig puts it:

[The Lord of Man] ... claimed to control their personal freedom. Thus no tenant could leave the island without special licence, and if he did so he was to be treated as a felon and his goods forfeited.<sup>35</sup>

This notion of the 'Lord of Man' as quasi-regal is important when considering that this was the role Elizabeth de Vere took on. Before examining her achievements in this capacity, however, it is necessary to establish how Elizabeth was in a position to control the island.

At the end of the sixteenth century Man was part of a dispute within the Stanley family between Alice, wife of Ferdinando, the late fifth Earl of Derby, and Elizabeth's husband William, who was Ferdinando's brother. Ferdinando was only thirty-five years old and had been Earl for just seven months when he died, leaving three daughters and no male heir. His will, which made his widow Alice the 'sole executrix', bequeathed all his lands to Alice and on her death or remarriage, to his eldest daughter Anne.<sup>36</sup> Alice argued that Ferdinando's will should be followed to the letter, while William claimed that regardless of the will the estates by law were to descend to the heir male. Despite Ferdinando's will making it clear that he did not want his lands to go to William, as collateral male heir William had a valid claim.<sup>37</sup> Alice brought legal cases against William and eventually, in 1595, they settled out of court, with Alice relinquishing her claim on the estates in return for money.

This settlement, however, was not the end of the dispute. As Earl of Derby William had also gained the title Lord of Man, and Alice challenged William's right to this. She claimed that the settlement of 1595, in which she had given up all right to Ferdinando's English estates, had not been intended to include the Isle of Man, although William clearly believed it had. The issue was ultimately to hinge on whether or not the Isle of Man counted as part of England. In the end the judges ruled that it did not, using the precedent of a case in 1523: Anne, Dowager Countess of Derby, had claimed Man as part of her dower, but had been overruled by the judges who decided Man was separate from England. This meant that in the present dispute Alice had a valid claim. On June 17<sup>th</sup> 1595, however, the captain of the island, Sir Randolph Stanley, died. Alice and William each believed they should be in charge of appointing a new captain; the result of the legal wrangling was that Queen Elizabeth stepped in and appointed a captain herself. The island was able to be taken under English crown rule in this way due to a technical flaw in the original grant to the Stanleys.<sup>38</sup> Various reasons have been advanced as to why Queen Elizabeth involved herself in the dispute, but the main one seems to have been the problem of succession - the Stanleys were powerful and had a claim to the throne (through William's mother, Margaret Clifford) and Queen Elizabeth may have wanted to curb this power.<sup>39</sup>

The island remained under crown control until 1610 by which time the question of succession had been resolved by the accession of James I. James, characteristically in need of money, renounced his claim on the island for £2,000, with the decision being made to award the island back to the Stanleys, and to give both William and the daughters of Ferdinando a share in the Manx estates.<sup>40</sup> In the end the daughters relinquished their share to William, once again in return for money and in 1610 an act was passed by parliament granting joint ownership of the island to 'William Earl of Derby and the ... Lady Elizabeth his wife for and during their lives and the longer liver of them'.<sup>41</sup> No precedent existed for the island being put in joint charge of William and Elizabeth, as it had always been ruled by the Stanley heirs male. The reference to 'the longer liver of them' is also significant: if William died first, by law the island would remain in Elizabeth de Vere's control rather than automatically passing to the next male heir.<sup>42</sup> Curphey, in a continuation of his argument that Lord Burghley engineered the match between Elizabeth and William, puts forward the suggestion that:

Elizabeth probably secured her joint share in the island, for she had no possible legal claim, for her past services to her uncle, Sir Robert Cecil, who had negotiated the deal. Her marriage had given him access to the Derby household, and she had acted as his agent in the profitable work of finding guardians for the Royal Wards.<sup>43</sup>

This possibility further highlights Elizabeth's ability to use her family connections and to do so by making herself useful to them. On the other hand, Elizabeth's eldest son, James, later seventh Earl of Derby, stated that the arrangement to rule the island jointly was made 'by certain agreements between her and my father'.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that Elizabeth assisted William in the dispute with Alice, for there is at least evidence that Elizabeth was taking a keen interest in its development. Robert Cecil wrote to her informing her of the latest progress, making it clear that the future of Elizabeth's son James was his primary concern: '[if] the little infant may be Lord of his island again, my care shall be somewhat unburdened'.<sup>45</sup>

The 1610 act had given William and Elizabeth joint ownership of the Isle of Man, indicating that they had not been legally separated in 1598, or if they had been, that they had been officially reconciled by this time. It was Elizabeth alone,

however, who controlled and administered the island, lending credence to their son's argument that his parents had agreed joint ownership in advance; the intention always seems to have been that William would pass over control to his wife. There is much evidence to support this: A. W. Moore says there is no record of William having anything to do with the island after 1610.<sup>46</sup> Orders for the island were signed by the Countess alone, while petitions from the islanders were addressed to her and not William.<sup>47</sup> There is no indication that William was not content to leave the island to the control of his wife, yet it is interesting that he was willing to relinquish power after having fought so hard for the island in the dispute with his late brother's widow. However, securing an inheritance for future children and keeping the estates in his family would have been of paramount importance, and it seems that as soon as this was achieved William was willing to retire into the background. And the evidence does suggest that his wife was the better manager.

Elizabeth, however, did not run the island on behalf of her husband, as would be expected: rather, she ran it in her own right. This is illustrated by a document of September 20<sup>th</sup> 1614, which is headed: 'an estimate of the yearly value of the ... lands of the Right Honourable Elizabeth Countess of Derby belonging to her Ladyship two castles [Peel and Rushen] within her ... Island of Man'.<sup>48</sup> The Manx estates are considered to belong to Elizabeth rather than the couple jointly. Elizabeth was therefore Lord of Man in every way except in name.<sup>49</sup> All the powers and privileges of the title were hers: she had complete control over the islanders, who were her 'subjects', and all revenue on the island went to her alone. In contravention of the expected female role Elizabeth de Vere ruled the Isle of Man, and did so as a single woman rather than as a wife. In many ways Elizabeth's situation mirrored that of the financially independent widow, yet her married status meant she had none of the social stigma or problems associated with operating as a widow or a single woman.

Details of Elizabeth's administration of the Isle of Man reveal her extensive legal and administrative expertise. In common with most of the Stanleys who had ruled the island before her, the Countess never actually visited the Isle of Man. Instead a Lord's Council, which included the Captain, resided on the island to govern it in her absence. Elizabeth's father-in-law, Henry, the fourth Earl of

Derby had been the first Stanley for many years to investigate what was happening there. He discovered that, due to a lack of involvement by previous Stanleys, many of the Lord's rights had ceased to operate and, in light of this, set about reasserting the Lord's position. Like Henry, and in contrast to the other previous Lords of Man, Elizabeth adopted a proactive role. One of her first actions was to attempt to eradicate corruption from the ranks of Stanley servants on Man. As Coward notes, she believed her servants were not passing on all the rents and taxes which were due to her and she dealt with this problem immediately and with severity, writing

Because my officers of the island are more greedy to take allowance at their own hands of their own fees and wages than forward to pay or cause to be paid to me my due rents and revenues but remain in arrearage, therefore as I am minded to have truly paid unto them their allowance so I expect due service to be done for the same. And so I require that before any fees or wages be paid or allowed other than to the poor soldiers, schoolmaster and chaplains I first have paid unto me or taken up for my use all such rents and revenues as shall be due to me.<sup>50</sup>

This letter indicates her displeasure and her determination to take whatever steps necessary to safeguard her profits. However, as she also ensured that fees were paid immediately to the poorest servants, it shows a degree of fairness. The use of 'I' rather than 'we' makes it clear that the directives come from Elizabeth herself rather than jointly from her and William.

In addition to addressing the question of dishonest servants, Elizabeth also began reinstating the customary Lord's privileges which had been allowed to lapse. The main industries of Man were agriculture and herring fishing and Elizabeth reintroduced the tax due to the Lord on every catch of herrings (one fifth) known as the 'Castle Mazes'. In response to this increased tax, the residents of Man stopped fishing,<sup>51</sup> so in 1613 Elizabeth decided to lower the tax. This could indicate that she was willing to listen to the residents of the island. Alternatively, lowering taxes was a politic move, as Coward points out: lower taxes encouraged fisherman to fish more, thereby ultimately increasing the taxes going to Elizabeth.<sup>52</sup>

A further example of the Countess' authority on the island is found in the incomplete record of a Chancery Court held at Rushen Castle on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1615. This document details the case of one officer who tried to leave the island, which, as mentioned, they were forbidden to do without permission. John Woods would have left Man except that the 'wind and weather' were against him. He was arrested and although no record of the punishment has survived it is clear that it was the Countess who had the final say in what this was to be. The Captain responsible for carrying it out was said to be 'enjoined to attend within the Isle for furtherances of the Lord's services to have been performed according to the Right Honourable Countess of Derby her discretions'.<sup>53</sup> There is no mention of recourse to William and it appears that Elizabeth was actively involved in disparate aspects of the administration of the island, from taxation to the punishment of offenders.

Elizabeth de Vere successfully ruled the Isle of Man until her death in 1627 and through her skilled management of it and of her other estates she became very rich. She belonged to one of the most powerful families in England with strong connections to the court: these connections could have constrained her and forced her to comply with the role of submissive wife and daughter, but the evidence suggests that she instead used them to increase her agency. Elizabeth de Vere cannot, of course, be viewed as representative of women at this time, or even of noblewomen. While other noblewomen participated in the public sphere by managing their husbands' estates, in contrast, Elizabeth conducted her business affairs for her own gain. She alone administered her estates - including, as shown, the Isle of Man, despite it being jointly allocated to her husband - and she alone took their profits. Elizabeth de Vere therefore successfully negotiated a space for herself within the public 'male' sphere.

Elizabeth de Vere's business achievements, remarkable as they are, do not represent the sum of her activity. As mentioned, she was well-connected to the theatre world. For example, Thomson has argued that

There is fairly wide agreement that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written, or adapted, for a wedding, and that of William Stanley to Elizabeth Vere ... is one of three strong candidates.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, Elizabeth's sister-in-law, Alice, Dowager Countess of Derby (who had challenged William for possession of the Isle of Man) was an important patron of the arts.<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth's father, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, was patron of a theatre company and was also a playwright, as was her husband, whose initials led some commentators to conclude that William Stanley was in fact the true identity of William Shakespeare.<sup>56</sup> E. K. Chambers says that: 'letters of 30 June 1599 relate that the Earl of Derby was then "busy in penning comedies for the common players"' and this could refer to the theatre company he was patron of, the Lord Derby's Men, with whom Shakespeare seems to have been involved in his youth.<sup>57</sup> A letter to her uncle, Robert Cecil, shows that Elizabeth encouraged her husband's interest in the theatre:

Being importuned by my Lord to entreat your favour that his man Brown, with his company, may not be barred from their accustomed playing, in maintenance whereof they have consumed the better part of their substance, if so vain a matter shall not seem troublesome to you, I could desire that your furtherance might be a means to uphold them, for that my Lord taking delight in them, it will keep him from more prodigal courses.<sup>58</sup>

Elizabeth is asking that the theatre be used to distract William from other business: the turn of phrase indicates disdain, but it is unclear what the prodigal courses may be. It is possible this is a reference to estate management, as William was a notoriously poor administrator. For Elizabeth, however, the theatre was not just a useful means of distracting her husband: she took her family's involvement in theatre a step further by publicly appearing in at least five of the six court masques commissioned by Queen Anna, which are discussed in the next two chapters.

Elizabeth de Vere was also a successful courtier. She had been a lady in waiting to Queen Elizabeth and became a member of Queen Anna's retinue in 1603. She was twenty eight, only a year younger than Anna, to whom she became a close companion; she was also a member of the Queen's Drawing Chamber. Elizabeth was chosen to hold the Princess Mary at her christening and was present during Anna's last illness; she was one of the few to be granted access to the Queen at this time,<sup>59</sup> indicative of her continued valued status. Further, as will be shown, Elizabeth helped another of Anna's women, Anne Clifford, to defend her

land rights, and in so doing, to defy the King. Elizabeth de Vere possessed the skills to participate successfully in two different worlds, the financial world and the world of the court. Her business interests showed her operating in the public sphere, challenging patriarchal constraints for her own gain. At the Jacobean court, however, she constructed alliances with other women which helped facilitate their agency, revealing that she was not only concerned with herself, but also with the actions of her female friends.

### Lucy Russell and Frances Seymour

Two of the women with whom Elizabeth de Vere spent time at the Jacobean court were Lucy (Harington) Russell, Countess of Bedford and Frances (Howard) Seymour, Countess of Hertford. Lucy and Frances were the two ladies of Anna's bedchamber, the women closest to the Queen. Lucy is the most well-known member of Anna's female retinue, primarily for her role as a patron: 'Patronage ... was a complex system functioning not merely on the surface of society to provide luxuries, but as an essential and inevitable element in Renaissance culture'.<sup>60</sup> Patrons provided economic gain, protection and, at times, preferment. Barroll considers Lucy's patronage in relation to her contribution to Anna's court, highlighting her skills as a collector of paintings and as a significant patron of musicians, poets and playwrights such as Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Ben Jonson, John Donne and the composer John Dowland: 'Lucy Bedford's cultural activity and her intimacy with Anna are of the greatest importance to our understanding of the new Queen's court'.<sup>61</sup>

Lucy Russell was indeed close to Anna. On hearing of the death of Queen Elizabeth, Lucy and her mother had hurried to Scotland to meet Queen Anna, arriving before any of the other English ladies. Lucy was the first woman to be admitted into Anna's inner circle when she formed her English court and she remained one of Anna's closest friends until the Queen's death. Anne Clifford, arriving in Scotland soon after (recording in her diary that she and her mother had killed three horses in one day in their haste), noted Lucy's favour with Anna: 'my Lady of Bedford was so great a woman with the Queen as everybody much respected her'.<sup>62</sup> Events prevented the Earl of Bedford from residing at court, and



Lucy lived there free from the usual domestic restrictions, becoming one of the most powerful women at the court.<sup>63</sup> Not all of Lucy's actions can be assessed in terms of her being the Queen's favourite courtier; she often acted independently, both in her role as a patron and in her other activities at the court.

Both at court and at her home in Twickenham, Lucy was the head of a literary coterie similar to that of Mary (Sidney) Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Sir John Harington made explicit the link between the two women by sending Lucy poems written by Herbert:

as you are near to in blood, of like degree in honour; not unlike in favour;  
so I suppose, none comes more near her, than yourself in those, now rare,  
and admirable gifts of the mind, that clothe Nobility with virtue.<sup>64</sup>

Her coterie meant that Lucy had a space physically separate from the Queen in which to operate: she may have been the second most important woman in Anna's circle, but she was the most important in her own circle, giving her even more power at the court. For example, Lucy was the patron of Anna's two masque writers, Samuel Daniel and Ben Jonson and, as discussed in the next chapter, Daniel's preferment was at her bequest. Those Lucy patronised depended on her power and influence, as can be seen in the case of Jonson. Jonson had dedicated a version of his play *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) to Lucy:

Go little book, go little fable  
unto the bright, and amiable  
Lucy of Bedford; she that bounty  
appropriates still unto that County  
Tell her, his Muse that did invent thee  
to Cynthia's fairest nymph hath sent thee,  
And sworn, that he will quite discard thee,  
if any way she do reward thee  
But with a kiss, (if thou canst dare it)  
of her white hand, or she can spare it.<sup>65</sup>

Jonson required more than this reward when he was imprisoned for his part in writing *Eastward Ho!* (1604/5). A letter he wrote requesting help whilst in the Tower is generally thought to be addressed to Lucy Russell:

Excellentest of Ladies, and most honoured of the Graces, Muses and me; if it be not a sin to profane your free hand with prison polluted paper, I would entreat some little of your aid, to the defence of my innocence, which is as clear as this leaf was (before I stained it) of any thing half-worthy this violent infliction; I am committed and with me, a worthy friend, one Mr Chapman, a man I cannot say how known to your Ladyship, but I am sure known to me to honour you; and our offence a play, so mistaken, so misconstrued, so misapplied, as I do wonder whether their ignorance, or impudence be most, who are our adversaries. It is not now disputable, for we stand on uneven bases, and our cause so unequally carried as we are without examining, without hearing, or without any proof, but malicious rumour, hurried to bondage and fetters; the cause we understand to be the King's indignation, for which we are heartily sorry, and the more, by how much the less we have deserved it. What our suit is, the worthy employed solicitor, and equal adorer of your virtues, can best inform you.<sup>66</sup>

Jonson's letter highlights the role of the patron as protector. He clearly expects that Lucy will be willing and able to aid him, and he was indeed released. It was of course the Children of the Queen's Revels who performed *Eastward Ho!*: the play, criticising James, was produced under the name of one powerful woman (Anna), and Jonson was released from punishment by another powerful woman (Lucy).

Lucy was also a poet, and one of her poems is an elegy on the death of her friend and kinswoman, Cecily Bulstrode. The poem is an answer to Donne's 'Death be not proud', and mirrors his construction, so much so that for years the poem was ascribed to Donne.<sup>67</sup> Rather than contributing to the Queen's circle, this writing was done independently of Anna, as were other of Lucy's activities. For example, at court she became known as a matchmaker, helping to facilitate love matches to which there was parental objection, such as that of Lord James Hay and Lady Lucy Percy in 1617. Lucy Percy's father, the Earl of Northumberland considered Hay an 'upstart Scot' and banned the marriage. Despite this, Hay's friend Ludovic Stuart, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Lennox was

solemnly invited by the Lord Hay to the wardrobe to a supper and a masque, where the Countess of Bedford is to be Lady and Mistress of the feast, as she is of the managing of his love to the Earl of Northumberland's younger daughter.<sup>68</sup>

Here Lucy is using her connections to further the match. She also participated in the clandestine marriage of Sir John Smith to Lady Isabella Rich in 1619, allowing the couple to consummate their marriage in her bed. It is difficult to determine Lucy's motive for engineering such matches, unless her own words are to be taken as the complete explanation. In a letter to her friend Lady Jane Bacon (whom Lucy always referred to as 'Cornwallis', the name of Lady Jane's first husband), she wrote:

Sir Robert Chichester's scurvy dealing hath broken up the match betwixt his daughter and my lord of Arran, which drives me to play my game another way than I had laid my cards.<sup>69</sup>

Lucy's use of the phrase 'play my game' indicates that she found matchmaking fun, but whether this is because the matches were in opposition to the parents – in all three cases it was the bride's father who objected – or for another reason, perhaps pure delight in power, is not clear. Lucy's actions here do not appear to have converged with those of the Queen.

Lucy was therefore patron, poet and matchmaker. There is also evidence that within Anna's circle she valued her female connections. As well as her friendship with Anna, examined by Barroll, Lucy also gave emotional support to Anne Clifford (discussed later in this chapter) and was close to Anna's daughter, Princess Elizabeth.<sup>70</sup> The fact that Lucy chose to write a poem expressing her loss of a female friend demonstrates the importance of female companionship to her, a conclusion reinforced by her letters to female acquaintances, in particular those to Lady Jane Cornwallis. In these letters Lucy rarely mentions her husband, instead constructing herself as a courtier and discussing her life in terms of the court and Anna's circle. Yet when Queen Anna dismissed Lucy's friend Lady Jane Roxborough from her service,<sup>71</sup> Lucy decided to register her disagreement with this by leaving the court. Lewalski views the Roxborough incident as presenting 'a conflict of loyalties' for Lucy.<sup>72</sup> However, the fact that Lucy was willing – and, importantly, able – to leave her mistress to support another friend whom she felt had been mistreated indicates that she could confidently act independently of the Queen, reinforcing the argument that her power did not only stem from her

relationship with Anna. This also shows that the interests of the Queen and her women did not always converge and that the women were not always unproblematically allied with each other. As with Elizabeth de Vere, Lucy Russell was independent: but while Elizabeth developed a successful financial life away from the court, Lucy's independence stemmed from her position as the head of a literary coterie. This gave her, in contrast to Elizabeth de Vere, a separate sphere of power and influence at the court, allowing her to help not only those women in Anna's circle, but also those who were out of favour with the Queen.

The second Lady of the Bedchamber was, as mentioned, Frances Seymour, a woman who also tried to take control of her life. Unlike Elizabeth de Vere and Lucy Russell, however, Frances was unable to develop an independent role for herself, either at the Jacobean court or away from it. Frances was the daughter of Viscount Howard of Bindon and the granddaughter of the Dukes of Norfolk and Buckingham.<sup>73</sup> Her first marriage to a rich London vintner named Pranell ended with his death in 1599, and within a year she had married Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, forty years her senior. As a rich young widow Frances would have been in the strong position of being able to choose her own husband, and John Pitcher argues that the marriage was indeed engineered by Frances: marriage to the Earl not only increased her status, but also gave Frances access to the court.<sup>74</sup> The marriage was conducted secretly, implying that one or other of the couple feared it would be disapproved of by Elizabeth I. Before her second marriage, Frances had approached the issue of controlling her life from a different angle to that of the other women discussed in this chapter: she made regular visits to the doctor and astrologer Simon Forman to discover the future.<sup>75</sup> While still married to Pranell she asked Forman on many occasions whether or not Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton would ever love her and 'whether she will be a widow or not', and after Pranell's death she asked Forman if she should marry the Earl of Hertford.<sup>76</sup>

The inclusion of Frances within the Queen's retinue seems also to have been Anna's choice. According to Anne Clifford, Anna 'wore [Frances'] picture' before 1603,<sup>77</sup> which indicates an intimacy. This is most obvious from the appointment of Frances as Lady of the Bedchamber: as the only other woman in this position was, as already mentioned, Anna's favourite, Lucy Russell, this shows Frances'

high favour with the Queen. However, despite this - or perhaps because of it - Frances was to spend only two years at the Jacobean court before her husband called her home to live with him on his family estate. She would not return until after his death in 1621, two years after the death of Anna. Barroll points to the Earl's removal of his wife – 'something he might not have done if the appointment had been seen as James' reward to him' - as evidence that Anna, rather than James, chose Frances for her retinue.<sup>78</sup>

Frances felt trapped at her husband's estate in the country, far from the court life to which her marriage was supposed to give her access. She had married by her own choice but, as with Elizabeth de Vere, choice did not necessarily guarantee happiness. Isolated from Anna's retinue, it was to her closest female relative that Frances turned for support, her sister-in-law Mary Seymour. Mary tried to intervene on behalf of Frances, but Hertford was unsympathetic:

I cannot understand why my wife's estate is to be pitied, unless she does not discern her own happiness or acknowledge from whom, next under God, it came. Whatever she has been to me, I resolve to deal honourably with her.<sup>79</sup>

Hertford's characterisation of himself as the source of Frances' happiness reveals his belief that his wife belonged with him in a domestic setting, rather than at court. It was the conventional expectation that a wife would remain with her husband, but Lucy Russell and Elizabeth de Vere managed to circumvent this in a way Frances could not. Hertford's phrase 'whatever she has been to me' indicates that Frances did not accept the passive role in marriage but, in contrast to Lucy and Elizabeth, she was unable to continue the opportunity for female interaction and for agency open to members of Anna's retinue.

#### Penelope Rich, Mary Wroth and Susan de Vere

Penelope Rich, Mary Wroth and Susan de Vere were members of Anna's retinue who, despite their different ages and circumstances, all claimed autonomy for themselves and in achieving it, defied patriarchal hegemony. In addition, all three were supported in their actions by the Queen. In the words of Barroll, Penelope Rich had 'a decided intellectual orientation' even before joining Anna's court:

Bartholomew Young's dedication to her in 1598 indicates that she was well-versed in Spanish and had 'perfect knowledge' of French.<sup>80</sup> Like Elizabeth de Vere, Penelope challenged her husband - but in contrast to Elizabeth, in her attempt to gain control over her life, Penelope contravened marriage laws. The daughter of Lettice Knollys (who famously married Robert Dudley, much to the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth), Penelope is best known in the literary world as the 'Stella' of Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophel and Stella*, and has often been considered of interest for this reason. However, rather than viewing Penelope through the lens of male-authored poetry - in which Penelope/Stella is constructed as a stereotype of the cold, Petrarchan mistress - this study instead repositions her and her activity within the context of being a member of a mutually supportive female group.<sup>81</sup>

Penelope was married, aged eighteen, to Sir Robert Rich, a man thirty five years her senior. She objected to the match, which had been arranged by her family for financial reasons, but as Queen Elizabeth approved and Penelope was one of her ladies in waiting she had no choice but to marry the bullying Rich. Penelope, however, did not submit willingly: rather 'she did protest at the very solemnity and ever after'.<sup>82</sup> Once married it was Penelope, not her husband, who made powerful connections at both the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts, and as with Elizabeth de Vere, Penelope used these connections for financial gain. For example,

In a letter of 1588 to Lord Burghley she wrote requesting the guardianship of a rich orphan, which was a way of getting the profits from his lands during his minority.<sup>83</sup>

Her position at the Elizabethan court was, however, compromised by her role in the Essex rebellion. Penelope was the sister of the Earl of Essex, and in his confession Essex named her as a protagonist in his uprising. This left Penelope the near-impossible task of proving her innocence to Queen Elizabeth. Penelope's biographer, Sylvia Freedman, argues that Penelope was successful in doing so partly through her connections with Lord Mountjoy who had control of the army in Ireland, and partly through her ability to play the role required of her. Penelope used intelligence and judgement to save herself, shown by the fact that 'She alone

of all those actively participating in the events of the rebellion was released without any penalty whatsoever'.<sup>84</sup> When James came to the throne he promoted the Essex family to its original standing before the rebellion, and Penelope became one of Anna's closest friends and was appointed as one of her Ladies of the Drawing Chamber.<sup>85</sup>

Penelope's married life was not just unconventional but irregular, indicative of her decision to live her life as she chose, despite her family and enforced marriage. Around 1590 Penelope had become the mistress of Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy (later Earl of Devonshire): he later claimed they had been unofficially engaged before Penelope's marriage to Rich, allowing for the possibility that they may have formed a contract.<sup>86</sup> Penelope still carried out her wifely duties for Rich whenever necessary, for example caring for him when he was sick, but she lived with Mountjoy, with whom she had six illegitimate children. Penelope was therefore public in her transgression and in her refusal to conform to the expected feminine role. She was also a prominent member of Anna's retinue, and the implications of her appearance in two of the Queen's court masques are discussed in Chapter Five.

Rich finally decided to separate from Penelope in 1605 and to facilitate this Penelope agreed to confess to adultery – but to save Mountjoy's reputation she said it had been with a stranger. Rich and Penelope, granted judicial separation, were enjoined not to remarry – but in contravention of this, on December 26<sup>th</sup> 1605 Penelope and Mountjoy were married by William Laud (later Archbishop Laud). This was to signal Penelope's fall from grace at the court: perhaps her adultery could be allowed because it could be ignored, but her marriage could not as the relationship then had to be officially recognised. When Mountjoy died only a year later, he left everything to Penelope in his will, but despite this she had to fight to prove its authenticity against accusations of forgery and died before she could reap the benefits. Unfortunately there is no evidence pertaining to Anna's response to the illegal marriage or to Penelope's subsequent legal battle.

Another of Anna's women whose life was, like that of Penelope Rich, unconventional and irregular was Mary Wroth, who was one of the most prolific female writers of this period.<sup>87</sup> Wroth was married to one of James' favourites, Robert Wroth, and after his death bore her cousin William Herbert (whose brother

Philip was later the husband of Wroth's friend Susan de Vere) two illegitimate children, William and Catherine.<sup>88</sup> Wroth spent some time at court, and Barroll views her as an occasional member of Anna's group, arguing that she was not the recipient of particular favour.<sup>89</sup> However, Wroth was supported by Anna, as at some point before 1612, she wrote to the Queen requesting her help in maintaining her family estates at Loughton which were part of her jointure, a request Anna apparently granted.<sup>90</sup> In her letter Wroth made reference to 'the infinite favours' and the 'high and unspeakable favours' she had received from the Queen in the past. And, since the death of her husband in March 1614 did not lead to her total exclusion from the court, it is clear that Wroth's favour with the Queen was not a result of her husband's status with James.

By 1621, two years after the death of Anna, Wroth had to leave the court altogether, in part due to the publication of her thinly veiled satire *Urania*. Had Anna still been alive, it would have been interesting to see whether the Queen would have continued (or been able) to protect and support Wroth through this controversy.<sup>91</sup> Despite leaving the court, however, Wroth remained close friends with Anne Clifford and also with Susan de Vere, to whom she had dedicated *Urania*.

Mary Wroth's friend Susan de Vere was the recipient of other dedications, including ones from Chapman, Jonson and Donne.<sup>92</sup> Like her sister Elizabeth, Susan was strong-willed, and this is best illustrated by her marriage, which was discussed briefly in the introduction to this thesis. In 1601 Susan wrote to her uncle, Robert Cecil, that she would never 'match with any without your consent', signing her letter 'Your obedient niece'.<sup>93</sup> However, three years later she clandestinely married Philip Herbert. William Herbert (Mary Wroth's cousin and lover) wrote that 'after long love and many changes, my brother on Friday last was privately contracted to my Lady Susan without the knowledge of any of his or her friends'.<sup>94</sup> Barroll discusses this event as a 'wedding of two favourites',<sup>95</sup> but his study gives a misleadingly passive picture of Susan's role. Her decision to choose her own husband and to take control of her life is reminiscent of her sister's marriage to William Stanley. But while Elizabeth was twenty when she married, Susan was only seventeen. Further, Elizabeth de Vere's marriage was not clandestine. By contracting a secret love match to James' favourite without



seeking approval from either her male guardian or the royal family, Susan displayed a determination to regulate her life despite the possibility of incurring the wrath of the King. In choosing to precontract, she ensured her marriage was binding and would have to be accepted. Her clandestine marriage recalls that of Frances Howard to Edward Seymour, although clearly the circumstances were different, in particular as William Herbert's letter shows that in Susan's case - in common with female characters who chose their own husbands in the drama of the time - the marriage was a love match.

Susan had already been a favourite of Queen Anna when unmarried, evidence that her inclusion within Anna's retinue had been on her own merits rather than because her husband was a favourite of James. In addition, after the marriage was revealed, Susan continued to receive the same favour from the Queen that she had before. Rather than punishing Susan - as Queen Elizabeth did when her ladies in waiting married without permission - instead Anna publicly supported Susan's decision by celebrating the match at court.

The inclusion of these women in Anna's circle indicates that the Queen was gathering together a group of similarly strong-minded and independent women for companionship. These women were not influential because of the status of their husbands - they were taking control of their lives, interested in advancing their own position rather than that of a male family member, and many of the women closest to Anna challenged their husbands. By contrast it would appear significant that the two women within Anna's circle with powerful husbands,<sup>96</sup> Margaret (Stuart) Howard, Countess of Nottingham, wife of James' Lord Admiral and Catherine (Knyvet) Howard, Countess of Suffolk, wife of James' Lord Chamberlain, played little part in the supportive community. Anna may have included them in her retinue in 1604 (the only date for which there exists an official list) but there is little mention of their relationship with the Queen after this date, and these women appear to have been given no special favour, indicating that their inclusion was at the request of James as a reward for their husbands.

The fact that the majority of Anna's women who were singled out for support led unconventional and, in the case of Penelope Rich and Mary Wroth, irregular lives seems to be more than a coincidence. While this study, as mentioned, does not want to posit the existence of an unproblematically united

community of women, Anna's actions towards those women closest to her suggest that she felt a certain loyalty towards them, that there was a common bond. Further, the Queen's support of these women validated their oppositional positions and facilitated female agency. Within Anna's circle two different kinds of supportive friendship are apparent. The first is that already discussed, the kinship of strong, independently-minded women who were often in opposition to their husbands. The second, to be considered below, is the help given to women ill-treated by men and/or the patriarchal system as represented by King James.

#### Margaret Vinstarr, Beatrice Ruthven and Anne Clifford

There is evidence that Anna's active support of her women began before she moved to England. At the Scottish court she refused to dismiss one of her Danish waiting ladies who was openly defiant to James. Margaret Vinstarr was the mistress of the Laird of Logie and when he was imprisoned in 1592 she helped him escape. As he had to exit through the rooms of the sleeping Anna and James, the King was convinced Anna was involved, and demanded that Vinstarr be sent back to Denmark. Anna refused and Vinstarr remained in Scotland. The fact that Anna was only seventeen years old at the time of this incident makes her defiance more extraordinary: however, it was also understandable as her Danish maids were all she had to remind her of her home country.

This support for her ladies at the Scottish court is also evident from Anna's role in the Gowrie conspiracy, which took place in Scotland in 1600, and which shows that it was not only the Danish maids who were under the Queen's protection. James claimed that he had been asked to go to the house of John Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie. Whilst there the King was heard to shout from a turret chamber 'Treason, help, I am murdered',<sup>97</sup> at which Sir John Ramsay (later Viscount Haddington) ran in and killed both the Earl and his brother Alexander Ruthven. The evidence suggests, however, that James had engineered the entire situation as a means to get rid of Gowrie, who had a claim to the English throne and was said to be high in favour with Queen Elizabeth. Queen Anna was one of the many who refused to believe James' version of events: this can in part be attributed to the fact that three of her ladies in waiting were sisters of the murdered

men. In open defiance of James and, as noted by both Williams and Lewalski, Anna supported these sisters, steadfastly refusing to dismiss them and using her limited means of resistance to great effect:

For two days she lay motionless in bed, not speaking to anyone, declining all food and refusing to be dressed, unless her lady in waiting, Beatrice Ruthven, were there to attend her.<sup>98</sup>

Not only did Anna succeed in retaining Beatrice, as she had retained Margaret Vinstarr, she also made her disapproval of James' part in the Ruthven affair clear by forcing him to award Beatrice a pension, an action which meant the King had to publicly accept Beatrice. This active support of her women at the Scottish court can be found on a larger scale at the English court, in particular in the case of Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset who opposed both her husband and King James in an attempt to keep control of lands which were rightfully hers.

Barroll argues that the support which Anne Clifford received from the Queen highlights 'the insistence with which [Anna] asserted her royal will'.<sup>99</sup> Barroll does not connect this aid to the existence of a female community of support - partly because, as with Mary Wroth, he does not view Anne Clifford as a member of Anna's group - nor does he see it in terms of helping Clifford take control of her life. In contrast, Lewalski argues that Clifford was at the centre of a female community, focusing her study on Clifford's relationship with her mother and daughter and mentioning the role of the Queen and her women only briefly. However, this study would argue that the support which Clifford received from the Queen was a major contributing factor in her continued resistance to her husband and the King and additionally, that this support reveals more than just the Queen's self-assertion: it provides evidence for the presence of a network of female support at the court and shows the members of Anna's circle helping another woman to take charge of her life. In addition, although Anne Clifford was not an official member of Queen Anna's retinue, she was a regular visitor to the court and her participation in at least three of the court masques commissioned by Anna (as discussed in Chapters Five and Six) indicates her continued favour.

Anne Clifford was the only daughter and sole heir of Margaret Russell and George Clifford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Bedford. Writs drawn up under Edward II stated that

the family estates were to descend to direct heirs, male or female. In contravention of this, Clifford's father (who died in 1605) effectively disinherited her by willing his property to his brother Francis and succeeding male heirs. According to the terms of the will Clifford would only possess the land if Francis' male line failed. Clifford, with the support of her mother, fought to retain the estates. She married in 1609<sup>100</sup> and her husband, Richard Sackville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Dorset, instead of supporting Clifford, tried to force her to adhere to her father's will by rescinding her right to the property in exchange for money. Sackville was an extravagant man and a gambler who had squandered his own estates, and he viewed the sale of Westmoreland as an opportunity to pay off his debts. Clifford refused, earning her the lasting enmity of her husband: in an attempt to force her to his will, Sackville used various forms of mental torture, including separating her from her daughter and, in 1617, cancelling her jointure. Thanks to Clifford's record-keeping we have her own perspective on many of these events. In her writings she makes reference to the network of women who helped her, which, as mentioned, included the Queen and her women.

For example, when King James became involved in the dispute, Clifford recorded in her diary that the Queen advised her against letting James decide the case as he strongly supported Dorset: 'the Queen gave me warning not to trust my matters absolutely to the King, lest he should deceive me'.<sup>101</sup> This indicates that Anna wanted to ensure that Clifford was well-informed and therefore in a position to retain some control over the outcome of the dispute. According to Clifford the Queen 'was ever inclining to [her] part and very gracious and favourable'<sup>102</sup> and this support played a major part in the strengthening of her resolve, as did the support which she obtained from the women of Anna's circle. On New Year's Day 1617 Clifford visited Elizabeth de Vere and Lucy Russell and received emotional support from both, and immediately prior to her meeting with King James on January 20<sup>th</sup> she spent the day with Lucy.<sup>103</sup> Two of the other women Anne mentions in connection with the dispute are her cousin Mary Neville and Lady Ruthven. When Anne travelled to London on February 8<sup>th</sup> 1616 to discuss the legal battle with her husband, it was Mary Neville who accompanied her; despite being Sackville's sister she was Anne's friend, and can be seen here providing emotional aid and visibly supporting Clifford's oppositional stance.<sup>104</sup> Although

she was not a member of the Queen's court, Mary Neville was known to Queen Anna, having been invited to dance in the third masque the Queen commissioned, *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), in which Anne Clifford also danced.<sup>105</sup>

Lady Ruthven also comforted Clifford: in the days leading up to her meeting with James in 1617, the two women attended a masque, then dined together, and on the day of the appointment Anne 'stayed in Lady Ruthven's chamber till towards 8 o'clock'.<sup>106</sup> Lady Ruthven was almost certainly one of the Ruthven sisters who were supported by Queen Anna in the aftermath of the Gowrie conspiracy in 1600. Uncovering this connection is of value as it provides evidence of another woman living her life as she chose. At this time Lady Ruthven's brother Patrick was still imprisoned in the Tower of London, and her presence at the English court despite the disgrace of her family indicates Anna's continued protection of her. Further, after the Gowrie conspiracy, on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1600, James had passed an Act of Parliament abolishing the surname Ruthven.<sup>107</sup> Yet from Anne Clifford's diary we know that Lady Ruthven was continuing to use the banned name, in contravention of James' decree. In addition, Lady Ruthven, having been supported by Queen Anna against James when she was younger, can be seen to be helping a young woman to defy the King.

Something else which has not been previously commented on is that Elizabeth de Vere went further in her assistance than the other women by actively intervening with the Queen on Clifford's behalf: 'my Lady Derby told the Queen how my business stood'. Anna's response was to promise that 'she would do all the good in it she could'.<sup>108</sup> As well as showing Elizabeth's intimacy with the Queen this incident reveals that she was not simply concerned with advancing her own interests - the impression often given by historians who only discuss her financial life - but with helping the interests of those women close to her. In contrast to Queen Anna, Lucy Russell and Elizabeth De Vere, however, Alatheia (Talbot) Howard, Countess of Arundel (from 1608 a member of Anna's retinue) counselled Clifford to 'yield to the King in all things', as did Clifford's friend Susan de Vere, who 'persuaded [her] to refer these businesses to the King'.<sup>109</sup>

Another woman who played a key role in Clifford's determination to oppose the King and her husband was her mother Margaret (Russell) Clifford, Dowager Countess of Cumberland. Lewalski discusses this relationship in detail, but it is

worth reiterating briefly here. Between 1614 and 1616 mother and daughter exchanged letters which reveal 'Margaret's role as primary strategist, comrade in arms and emotional support for her daughter'.<sup>110</sup> Margaret was determined that Clifford would not lose her inheritance, counselling her to be steadfast:

Lay all on me and neither cross him [Dorset] in words but keep your resolutions with silence and what gentle persuasion you can, but alter not from your own wise course.<sup>111</sup>

Margaret is here encouraging her daughter to outwardly play the part of the submissive wife, whilst in reality to resist. By her use of the word 'wise' she is emphasising the legitimacy of Clifford's actions. And, when Clifford was sent to her mother to persuade her to comply, Margaret's refusal to do so encouraged her daughter to follow her example. Of her mother Clifford wrote: 'she would never be brought to submit or agree to it, being a woman of a high and great spirit, in which denial she directed for my good'.<sup>112</sup> Margaret Russell was clearly instrumental in strengthening her daughter's resolve and her death on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1616 caused Anne 'unspeakable grief'.<sup>113</sup> Three years later Queen Anna died, and an entry from Anne's diary reads:

the Queen died at Hampton Court between two and three in the morning. The King was then at Newmarket. Legge brought me the news of her death about four in the afternoon, I being in my bedchamber at Knole where I had the first news of my mother's death about the same hour.<sup>114</sup>

There is a suggestion here that Clifford linked the death and loss of the Queen with that of her mother, and the implication that she viewed the Queen in a maternal role reinforces the argument that the Queen's support was of great significance to her: she may have found it difficult to continue her resistance after the death of her mother without the support of Anna and her women. This is evidenced by Clifford's recollection in 1676, almost sixty years after the event, that the 'admonition of [Anna] and other of my friends did much to confirm me in my purpose'.<sup>115</sup> The Queen is here classed by Clifford as a friend.

In the meeting with James on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1617 Anne followed the advice of her late mother and of the Queen and refused to yield, but in doing so was 'brought

to many and great troubles'.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately the matter was taken from her hands: on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1617 her father's will was accepted and Dorset received money in exchange for Anne's land. The land was only to revert to Anne if her uncle's male line failed. The issue of inheritance following the female line is the same as that behind the Stanley land disputes. However, while Anne Clifford's father used his will to try to disinherit his daughter, Ferdinando Stanley's will was an attempt to ensure that his daughters would inherit his estates. The Clifford exchange also differs from the Stanley exchange in that it was wholly without Anne Clifford's agreement, and although in theory the money was hers, in practice it was her husband who benefited. Yet despite losing the estate, Clifford was able to continue her resistance – the money, totalling £20,000 was to be paid in instalments, the last £3,000 to be paid when she signed her agreement to the deal. Clifford would not sign, so Dorset received a total of only £17,000. The son of her uncle, Henry, eventually died in 1645 without a male heir, and despite his attempts to have the writ changed to allow his own daughter to inherit, the lands finally passed to Anne Clifford.

Queen Anna's decision to help Anne Clifford was intentional rather than accidental, but despite this active support she only managed to delay the transfer of the land to Clifford's uncle, not halt it altogether. Barroll regards the outcome of the struggles as a victory;<sup>117</sup> however, it can be considered a defeat as the decision was taken to follow Clifford's father's will, the contents of which she had been contesting. The lands did come to Clifford eventually, but only because she was fortunate to live to an old age. The conflict provides evidence that she was part of a female group who supported her in her attempt to control her life. She never betrayed her beliefs or the memory of her mother by yielding to the King, and her refusal to sign the documents meant her claim continued to the point where eventually she was able to have some limited control over the outcome. This may not have happened without the support of Anna's circle of women. The Queen's support of Anne Clifford was in direct opposition to both their husbands. In addition, Clifford's diary and letters show she was conscious of being part of a female network, stressing the continuation of her matrilineal line by ensuring that her own daughters would inherit property by assigning them part of her jointure lands in Suffolk.<sup>118</sup> This female community as perceived by Clifford included her

mother and her aunts (with whom she was brought up) but also, significantly, Queen Anna and women such as Elizabeth de Vere and Lucy Russell.

The women of Anna's circle clearly interacted with one another and actively supported each other, as illustrated by the case of Anne Clifford. The result was a network of support, with friendship and gender ties cemented by kinship. Elizabeth and Susan de Vere were sisters; Lucy Russell was cousin to Anne Clifford (Anne's mother was a Russell as was Lucy's husband) and was kin to Mary Wroth through her Sidney connection. Mary Wroth was related to Arbella Stuart and Susan de Vere, who became kin to Wroth when she married Wroth's cousin Philip Herbert. Susan's sister Elizabeth de Vere was therefore also related to Mary Wroth and, more distantly, Arbella through this marriage. Wroth was also linked to Penelope Rich through Penelope's stepfather, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (who had died in 1588): Dudley was the uncle of Wroth's father, Robert Sidney. Queen Anna's women were therefore part of a complex family network.

#### Elizabeth Stuart, Elizabeth Hatton and Arbella Stuart

The evidence shows that Anna's women comprised a support network and that the strength of the group was reinforced by kinship ties. However, not all of the women at the court were recipients of support, as shown by the experiences of Princess Elizabeth, Lady Elizabeth Hatton and Lady Arbella Stuart. Queen Anna refused to support her daughter's proposed marriage to Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine. The match had been arranged by James, and both Elizabeth and her brother Henry approved. Anna, however, wanted her daughter to marry a Catholic king rather than a Protestant prince of a small state in Germany. She reportedly mocked her daughter that she would be known as 'Goodwife Palsgrave' while Elizabeth, apparently having inherited her mother's strong will, angrily retorted that she 'would rather be the Palsgrave's wife than the greatest papist Queen in Christendom'.<sup>119</sup> Their religious differences seemed irreconcilable. The fact that Anna was unwilling to support her daughter even though Elizabeth was happy with the match, indicates that the Queen was more concerned with forming a useful connection than ensuring her daughter married happily.<sup>120</sup> In contrast to



Anne Clifford, who viewed Anna as a supportive mother-figure, Elizabeth appears to have found her mother overbearing and unsupportive.

The betrothal festivities took place on December 27<sup>th</sup> 1612 and 'the Queen did not appear at any point during the[m] ... Gout was announced as her reason for indisposition'.<sup>121</sup> Anna did, however, attend the wedding on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1613. There is also evidence that, despite her estrangement from her mother, Princess Elizabeth was still part of the female network, since a member of Anna's retinue after 1608, Alatheia Howard, Countess of Arundel, accompanied Elizabeth and her new husband to Heidelberg, while Anne Clifford and Lucy Russell offered emotional support while Elizabeth was in exile in the Hague: both wrote letters and Lucy visited Elizabeth in 1621.<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth welcomed these letters; Lucy, in her letters, insisted on 'always addressing [Elizabeth], against James' express command, as Queen of Bohemia', thus demonstrating her support for the exiled Queen and challenging James by ignoring his decree.<sup>123</sup>

Elizabeth Hatton was the niece of Robert Cecil and the cousin of Elizabeth and Susan de Vere. Anne Clifford noted her as one of the women (along with Lucy Russell) who was preferred by Queen Anna – 'we saw the Queen's favour to Lady Hatton' - and Hatton appears to have been part of the community for a time.<sup>124</sup> Yet she was not made a member of Anna's Drawing Chamber, nor was she given the post which she actively sought, that of Keeper of the Queen's Jewels. Previously the wife of Sir William Hatton (the nephew and heir of Sir Christopher Hatton), Elizabeth had been widowed in 1597 and in 1598 had married Sir Edward Coke. As with the marriages of Frances Howard and Susan de Vere, the couple married clandestinely. Elizabeth chose to retain the title of her late husband and it has been assumed that this is because she did not want to use the lower status 'Mistress Coke'.<sup>125</sup> In common with Frances Seymour, Elizabeth Hatton had been a wealthy widow, in a position to choose her own marriage partner. And, also in common with Frances, Elizabeth's second marriage turned out unhappily, as is well documented by contemporaries of the couple.<sup>126</sup> By using the name 'Hatton', Elizabeth continued to style herself as a widow rather than a married woman, which suggests a desire to maintain an element of independence from her husband.

Elizabeth Hatton constantly challenged Coke, one possible reason why her portrayal by both contemporaries and historians is generally negative. She is variously characterised as greedy, shrewish and stubborn, and Catherine Drinker Bowen's comment that she was absorbed 'in dress and society' is reminiscent of Akrigg's portrayal of Queen Anna as only being interested in clothes.<sup>127</sup> Like many of the women surrounding Anna, however, Elizabeth Hatton was strong-willed and independent, and one of the major clashes between Hatton and her husband was over the marriage of their only mutual child,<sup>128</sup> Frances Coke (then aged fourteen), to John, the eldest brother of George Villiers, Earl of Buckingham, in 1617. The marriage was instigated by the groom's mother, Lady Compton, and, despite the fact that his wife and daughter opposed the match, Edward Coke supported it. Elizabeth Hatton's actions regarding the match, rather than revealing her as a bully who wanted to control every aspect of her daughter's life, as Bowen characterises her,<sup>129</sup> show her cunning attempts to rescue her daughter from a forced and unwanted marriage.

One of these attempts involved hiding her daughter at the house of her cousins, Sir Edmund and Lady Withipole. Coke managed to find them, and when refused admittance he played out the role of the stereotypical father by breaking down the doors and removing his daughter. Hatton responded by getting a warrant signed by Francis Bacon (who was Lord Keeper and Coke's rival), enabling her to rescue her daughter. Coke claimed this constituted kidnapping, to which Hatton replied that such action was necessary because her daughter was being 'forced against her will contrary to her ... liking to the will of him she disliked'.<sup>130</sup>

Hatton's next strategy, a month later, was to produce a written precontract between her daughter and Henry de Vere, eighteenth Earl of Oxford.<sup>131</sup> Henry was the son of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford by his second wife Elizabeth Trentham,<sup>132</sup> and was the step-brother of Elizabeth and Susan de Vere. Frances had signed this precontract (while in hiding at the Withipoles' house), but the circumstances surrounding it are not clear. Hatton's enemies claimed she had forged a letter from the Earl, who knew nothing of the match, and shown it to Frances to encourage her to sign the precontract.<sup>133</sup> Yet Henry de Vere, who was in Venice at this time, offered to do what he could, indicating that he was not

wholly uninterested in a marriage with Frances. But, as the match between Frances and John Villiers was favoured by James, in the end Henry decided not to incur the King's displeasure by getting involved.<sup>134</sup> Henry's actions stand in contrast to those of Elizabeth Hatton who (like Anne Clifford with regard to her lands) did not let the possibility of the King's wrath stop her support of her daughter's position.

The willingness of Frances to sign the precontract indicates her antipathy towards the marriage with John Villiers, and this is reinforced by a letter from John Chamberlain, in which he wrote that both Frances and her mother had their sights set on 'a younger son of the Lord Treasurer'.<sup>135</sup> If this son was, as Elizabeth McClure Thomson suggests, Sir Robert Howard, then this is the man with whom Frances Coke was to have an extra-marital affair and to whom she was to bear a child in 1625.<sup>136</sup> The evidence would therefore suggest that Elizabeth Hatton was supporting her daughter in a love match with Sir Robert Howard. Chamberlain's letter was written a month before Henry de Vere decided to distance himself from Frances, revealing that Hatton was involved in two strategies to foil the arranged marriage at the same time. Neither worked, however, and despite the opposition of both mother and daughter, the marriage to John Villiers went ahead.<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth Hatton did not attend.

Williams argues that although Queen Anna attended this wedding she too did not agree with it;<sup>138</sup> however, there is no documentation to support this point of view. At this time Anna was actively supporting Anne Clifford in her legal battle against her husband, yet there is no evidence of the same kind of aid for Elizabeth Hatton.<sup>139</sup> In 1615 Anna had supported George Villiers in an attempt to thwart the power of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and the Howard faction whom Anna despised, which is one possible reason why she did not help Elizabeth in this dispute with George's brother, John. In 1616 Hatton had been banished from the court for insulting Lady Compton, Buckingham's mother, and was still out of favour a year later.<sup>140</sup> Yet not long after the marriage of Frances Coke and John Villiers, Lady Hatton and Queen Anna were reconciled.<sup>141</sup> Hatton was at times a member of Anna's retinue (her participation in the court masques which Anna commissioned is discussed in the next chapter) and through her cousins, the de Vere sisters, she had kinship ties with two of the women closest to Anna. Hatton

and her daughter challenged a marriage arranged by Edward Coke and their actions show women allying themselves against patriarchal authority. Despite this, other concerns appear to have precluded active support from the Queen.<sup>142</sup>

One final woman who demands inclusion here is Arbella Stuart. The great-granddaughter of Henry VII's eldest daughter Margaret, and James' cousin, Arbella is famous as James' potential rival to the throne. Arbella was granted a high position at the Jacobean court befitting her royal blood, but her letters indicate that she never felt wholly part of it, nor did she feel that as member of Anna's retinue she was part of a supportive female community. Instead she bemoaned the childishness of Anna's women:

... will you know how we spend our time in the Queen's side. Whilst I was at Winchester there were certain childplays remembered by the fair ladies. Viz. I pray my Lord give me a course in your park. Rise pig and go. One penny follow me etc. and when I came to the court they were [as] highly in request as ever cracking of nuts was. So I was by the mistress of the revels not only compelled to play at I knew not what for 'til that day I had never heard of a play called *Fire*, but even persuaded by the princely example I saw to play the child again.<sup>143</sup>

Yet despite distancing herself from these 'childplays' and denying kinship with the Queen and her women, it was to Arbella, rather than his daughter Lucy, that Sir John Harington wrote when he needed someone to intercede with Queen Anna. This indicates that even if Arbella did not count herself part of the network, others did.<sup>144</sup> And, eventually, she too was to call on the Queen for assistance, when she was imprisoned in the Tower for marrying against James' decree.<sup>145</sup>

In October 1610, from her cell in the Tower, Arbella wrote a letter to Anna, which shows that she was relying on the Queen to intervene: 'now to whom I may so fitly address myself with confidence of help and mediation, as to your Royal person (the mirror of our sex)'.<sup>146</sup> In framing Anna as the 'mirror of our sex', it is possible that Arbella, in using their common gender and appealing to a sense of shared female experience, was manipulating Anna by intentionally raising an issue which was close to the Queen's heart – if this was the case, it shows that Arbella was aware that a female support network existed for her to exploit, even if she herself did not feel a part of the group. Anna did intercede with James on

Arbella's behalf, and made public her support by sending Arbella a gift. Other women also sympathised with Arbella's plight: Lady Frances Chandos, a relative of Elizabeth and Susan de Vere, 'told Dr. Moundford that she and her husband would provide for Stuart's needs [and] Jane Drummond, waiting lady to Queen Anna, passed on Stuart's letters to the Queen'.<sup>147</sup> As in the case of Anne Clifford, however, Queen Anna's support was not enough. James viewed Arbella as having defied his patriarchal authority: she 'had eaten of the forbidden tree'<sup>148</sup> and on this matter Anna could not influence him. Despite an escape attempt (disguised as a man), Arbella was to die in prison in 1615. She refused all medicine and food, in effect starving herself to death. This refusal to eat can be viewed as a more desperate example of self-starvation as an attempt to gain some control over her life than that of Queen Anna in 1600.<sup>149</sup>

Frye and Robertson argue that 'while the individual female subject remains of enduring concern ... each subject came to consciousness and lived out her life within communities of interconnection and social interaction'.<sup>150</sup> Their collection of essays does not include the women of Anna's group, yet their observation is particularly true of the women examined in this chapter: as part of the Queen's retinue, these women were able to interact, create alliances and be mutually supportive. The women were not always united in their aims and the case of Elizabeth Hatton shows they were not always aided by the Queen. Yet, despite this, there is much evidence of Anna's women being supported in their independent decisions: Anne Clifford in her struggle to retain lands; Mary Wroth in her attempts to maintain her jointure lands; Susan de Vere and Arbella Stuart in their choices of husband and Penelope Rich in her decision to choose a love affair over her arranged marriage.

In addition, bearing in mind the Queen's active support of these women, it is tempting to speculate that the reason control of the Isle of Man was awarded to both William Stanley and Elizabeth de Vere (rather than to just William as would be expected) was due to Queen Anna's intervention. There is no documentation to prove that Anna was involved, but as the State Papers are incomplete it is not possible to disprove this theory either. In light of the evidence of Anna's involvement in politics, it is probable that the Queen would have been interested in a legal battle which involved the fortunes of one of her favourite courtiers, and

we do have Anne Clifford's own testimony that Queen Anna was later involved in her land dispute.

When viewed through the lens of female homosocial bonding it is clear that, while these women are not representative of all Renaissance noblewomen, equally, they are not anomalies. For example, Elizabeth de Vere, rather than being viewed as a notable exception, as it can be argued she was in the business world, is revealed as one of a group of similarly strong-minded, capable, independent and oppositional women. Her active support of Anne Clifford indicates that she was not just concerned with advancing her own interests, but also in advancing those of her female friends. In addition, in attending the Queen through her illness, Elizabeth de Vere gave Anna the support which the Queen has been shown to have given her women. Elizabeth de Vere forged a space for herself in the patriarchal financial sphere, but rather than remaining in isolation, she was part of a group of women who promoted the interests of others and helped facilitate female agency.

Some of the women of Anna's retinue, such as Anne Clifford and Mary Wroth, viewed themselves as part of a female community, as is revealed in their writings, and in this way they may be classed as 'proto-feminist'. Others may not necessarily have consciously viewed themselves in this way, but even those who rejected an affinity with the women, such as Arbella Stuart, were still aware of the existence - and made use - of this female support network. Clearly none of the group presents the conventional picture of women who obeyed the status quo. Not all of these women succeeded in their quests but, without mutual support, and particularly help from the Queen (and sometimes from Lucy Russell acting independently), the goals would have been far harder to obtain.

Examining the interaction of Anna and her women is of value as it gives an insight into the way in which one group of seventeenth century women constructed friendships and alliances. In addition, the evidence of female homosocial bonding helps build a more complex picture of the position of women at the Jacobean court - which in the past was believed to be wholly male-oriented - and of their opportunities for agency.

<sup>1</sup> In referring to the Queen as 'Anna' I am following Barroll, who argues that she never referred to herself as 'Anne'. Barroll, *Anna*, p. 173n.1.

<sup>2</sup> G. P. V. Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant, or the Court of King James*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 21; Ian McInnes, *Arabella: The Life and Times of Lady Arabella Seymour, 1575-1615*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1968), pp. 134-8. This attitude continued into the 1980s - see for example Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth Century England*, (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 148 - and the 1990s: see Anne Somerset, *Unnatural Murder: poison at the court of James I*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ethel Carleton Williams, *Anne of Denmark*, (London: Longman, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> The adult companies under Anna's patronage included the Queen's Men, who performed in London and who were originally under the patronage of the Earl of Worcester, and 'at least one provincial ... company'. *JCI*, p. 158. On January 31<sup>st</sup> 1604 a licence was awarded to Edward Kirkham, Alex Hawkins, Thomas Kendall and Robert Payne to train children under the name 'the Children of the Revels to the Queen'. *SP(Dom.)*, 1603-1610, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Petronel Flash is at most 'one of my thirty-pound knights'. Jonson, Chapman & Marston, *Eastward Ho!*, 4.1.168.

<sup>7</sup> The French ambassador quoted in *ES I*, p. 325.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Samuel Calvert, March 28<sup>th</sup> 1605 quoted in *ES I*, p. 325. For a discussion of the plays performed see Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 234-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Holdsworth, Introduction, *Epicoene*, p. xvii. In addition, in July 1615 a company was formed called 'The Youths of Her Majesty's Royal Chamber of Bristol', which was licensed to perform comedies and tragedies.

<sup>11</sup> The essayists in *Maids and Mistresses* examine different kinds of female homosocial bonding, for example the alliances formed between London maidservants (Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Maidservants of London: Sisterhoods of Kinship and Labour'), and the portrayal of female alliances in plays (Jessica Tvordi, 'Female Alliance and the Construction of Homoeroticism in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*'; Simon Morgan-Russell, "'No Good Thing Ever Comes Out of It": Male Expectation and Female Alliances in Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho*').

<sup>12</sup> Frye & Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses*, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>13</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 43. Barroll also mentions this possibility, saying these women would have been 'a coherent and highly visible social entity'. *Anna*, p. 160. However, his specific aim is to reposition Queen Anna historically and theatrically, and he does not fully explore the question of the existence of a female community.

<sup>14</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>15</sup> Other women who danced in the Queen's masques but were not major members of her retinue, or were later members, such as Alatheia Howard, are discussed in the next two chapters.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth, as with most of the women in this study, is referred to mainly by her first name.

Surnames are used where confusion may arise, for example when discussing Anne Clifford, whose first name is almost identical to that of the Queen.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> J. R. Dickinson, *The Lordship of Man Under the Stanleys*, (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1996); Barry Coward, *The Stanleys: Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby 1385-1672*, (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1983); J.J. Bagley, *The Earls of Derby 1485-1985*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Barroll's recent book on Anna of Denmark is the exception. See pp. 49, 71.

<sup>20</sup> R. A. Curphey, 'The Background to the Derby Succession 1594-1612', *Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 7:4 (1970-2), p. 612.

<sup>21</sup> Coward, *The Stanleys*, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 502n.60.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Edward Mylar to Robert Cecil, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1597, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 7, pp. 339-40.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Mylar to Cecil, August 11<sup>th</sup> 1597, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 7, p. 344.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Thomas Audeley to Edward Smyth in Paris, September 20<sup>th</sup> 1597, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 7, pp. 391-2.

<sup>27</sup> HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 5, p. 181; letter from Earl of Oxford to Robert Cecil, September 17<sup>th</sup> 1596, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 6, p. 389.

<sup>28</sup> Coward, *The Stanleys*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from William Stanley to Hugh Glasiour, June 30<sup>th</sup> 1604, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 16, p. 156.

<sup>30</sup> Bagley, *Earls*, p. 70.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Thomas Ireland to Robert Cecil, July 30<sup>th</sup> 1598, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 8, p. 281.

<sup>32</sup> Dickinson, *Lordship*, Appendix One, p. 353. Thomson mistakenly states that the three children were born before the separation in 1598. *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the government of Man under the Stanleys see Dickinson, *Lordship*, pp. 13-74.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> R.H. Kinvig, *The Isle of Man: a social, cultural and political history*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> LRO, DDK 6/21.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the complex legal situation regarding land law and inheritance at this time see Coward, *The Stanleys*, pp. 41-6.

<sup>38</sup> 'This defect was that the grant of 1406 by Henry IV, although made after the commission of treason by the Earl of Northumberland, the former lord of the island, was made before the actual



attainder of that Earl, and that therefore the King had no power to make the grant.' Curphey, 'Derby Succession', pp. 602-3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 605-7. For a contrasting view see J. R. Dickinson, 'Eliza Endangered? Elizabeth I, the Isle of Man and the Security of England', *Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, Vol. X, No.1 (1992), p. 125 and G.W. Bernard, *The Power of the Early Tudor Nobility*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985), pp. 197-206.

<sup>40</sup> MNHL, Derby Papers, 10/4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. PRO, C 89/9/10.

<sup>42</sup> After Elizabeth de Vere's death the island would transfer to the control of her son, James.

<sup>43</sup> Curphey, 'Derby Succession', p. 615.

<sup>44</sup> Dickinson, *Lordship*, p. 32n.92.

<sup>45</sup> MNHL, Derby Papers, 1716/5.

<sup>46</sup> A.W. Moore, *A History of the Isle of Man, Volume I*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. 225.

<sup>47</sup> MNHL, Libri Scaccarii, 1612, 7, 13; 1625, 5; 1626, 33, 37.

<sup>48</sup> MNHL, Derby Papers, 1716/21.

<sup>49</sup> In 1620 King James leased the island's abbey lands to William and Elizabeth jointly. MNHL, Derby Papers 10/11c.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Countess Elizabeth to her officers quoted in Coward, *The Stanleys*, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Dickinson, *Lordship*, p. 117-18.

<sup>52</sup> Coward, *The Stanleys*, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> MNHL, Derby Papers, 1716/23.

<sup>54</sup> Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> See Barroll, *Anna*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>56</sup> This possibility was first mentioned by J. H. Greenstreet in *A Hitherto Unknown Writer of Elizabethan Comedies* (1891). Barry Coward lists other texts which discuss this in *The Stanleys*, p. 64n.6. The possibility that Elizabeth's father was Shakespeare has also been advanced. See J. Thomas Looney, *Shakespeare Identified*, (London: Cecil Palmer, 1920) and Gerald H. Rendall, *Shakespeare Sonnets and Edward de Vere*, (London: John Murray, 1930).

<sup>57</sup> *ES II*, p. 127. For a discussion of William Stanley as a patron, see Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career*, pp. 44-8.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Elizabeth, Countess of Derby to Robert Cecil, undated (sometime after 1595), HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 13, p. 609.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from J. Tunstall to Dudley Carleton, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1619, *SP (Dom.)*, 1619-1623, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Introduction in Guy Fitch Lytle & Stephen Orgel (eds.), *Patronage in the Renaissance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. xi.

<sup>61</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> Introduction to Anne Clifford, *Lives of Anne Clifford ... and of her Parents, Summarised by Herself*, (printed from the Harley Ms 6177), p. xxiv. Clifford quoted in Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 331n.32.

<sup>63</sup> For an account of Lucy's life and of her husband's connections with the Earl of Essex's rebellion see Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 95-123.

<sup>64</sup> John Harington quoted in Richard Harp & Stanley Stewart, *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 208.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Jonson, dedication to *Cynthia's Revels*, 1601 quoted in David M. Bergeron, 'Women as Patrons of English Renaissance Drama' in Lytle and Orgel, *Patronage*, p. 283.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Ben Jonson thought to be to Lucy Russell, quoted in *BJ I*, p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> For the poem see Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>68</sup> *JC IV*, p. 650.

<sup>69</sup> Miller & Waller, *Reading Mary Wroth*, p. 124.

<sup>70</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, pp. 54-6. One of the women who attended the Princess Elizabeth on her journey from England to live in Heidelberg was Lucy's mother, Lady Harington who, along with her husband, had tutored Elizabeth when she was younger. Like Clifford, Lucy appears to have had a strong bond with her mother, who died in the same year as Queen Anna.

<sup>71</sup> Anna's lady in waiting Jane Drummond, the daughter of Patrick, 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Drummond, had married Robert Kerr of Cessford, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Roxborough on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1614. Lady Roxborough was dismissed for attempting to promote her husband without the knowledge of Queen Anna. Anna's actions in this case are reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth who did not like her women to act without her permission. However, Anna did not send Roxborough from the court empty handed: she was given a gift of £3,000 for devoted service. March 14<sup>th</sup> 1617, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 446.

<sup>72</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>73</sup> John Pitcher, 'Samuel Daniel, the Hertfords and the Question of Love', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. Volume 35 (1984), p. 449.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> For a biography of Forman see A.L. Rowse, *Simon Forman: Sex & Society in Shakespeare's Age*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>77</sup> Anne Clifford quoted in Barroll, *Anna*, p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Edward Seymour to his sister Lady Mary quoted in Rowse, *Forman*, p. 231.

<sup>80</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 51. Dedication to Bartholomew Young's translation of George Montemayor's *Diana* quoted *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Orgel discusses Penelope as an exceptional individual; further, rather than connecting her with the Queen's court, he calls her 'one of the stars of [James'] court'. Orgel, *Impersonations*, pp. 129-33.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Charles Blount to King James, British Library Lansdowne Ms 885.f.86 quoted in Sylvia Freedman, *Poor Penelope: Lady Penelope Rich. An Elizabethan Woman*, (Buckinghamshire: The Kensal Press, 1983), pp. 1-2. The subsequent discussion on Penelope is

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drawn from this book.

<sup>83</sup> Freedman, *Poor Penelope*, p. 65.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>85</sup> According to the Earl of Worcester, in 1604 the others were Elizabeth and Susan de Vere, Audrey Walsingham (who, along with her husband, was Keeper of the Queen's Wardrobe), and the Countesses of Suffolk and Nottingham.

<sup>86</sup> George Edward Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), IX, 346n.a. This could not have been a *de presenti* contract, as this would have been binding.

<sup>87</sup> For an excellent biography of Mary Wroth, see the introduction to Josephine A. Roberts (ed.), *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 1-60.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts suggests that Mary Wroth may have been precontracted to William Herbert with a *de presenti* contract before her marriage to Robert Wroth. 'The Knott Never to Bee Untide' in Miller & Waller, *Reading Mary Wroth*, p. 121.

<sup>89</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 90.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Mary Wroth, before 1612, to Queen Anna, quoted in Roberts, *Poems*, p. 233.

<sup>91</sup> *Urania* contained obvious satirical references to members of the court. For an account of this controversy, the involvement of Edward Denny and the subsequent suppression of the text see Roberts, *Poems*, p. 34; Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 249-51.

<sup>92</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 54.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Susan de Vere to Robert Cecil, 1601, HMC, *Salisbury*, Vol. 11, p. 581.

<sup>94</sup> Letter from William Herbert quoted in Roberts, 'The Knott Never to Bee Untide' in Miller & Waller, *Reading Mary Wroth*, p. 123.

<sup>95</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 53.

<sup>96</sup> Susan de Vere's husband, Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery can be viewed as powerful (although not as powerful as later favourites, Robert Carr and George Villiers): however, Susan had been a member of Anna's retinue when unmarried, indicating that the status of her husband was not related to her inclusion within the group.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Cowan, *The Ruthven Family Papers*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., 1912), p. 99.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Anne*, p. 63. McManus also discusses Anna's strategy of refusal in *Women*, pp. 59, 65-6, 94-6.

<sup>99</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 152.

<sup>100</sup> The marriage was, like those of other of Anna's women, clandestine.

<sup>101</sup> January 18<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 66.

<sup>102</sup> Clifford, *Lives*, p. 38.

<sup>103</sup> January 1<sup>st</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 64; 'I went to my aunt Bedford in her lodging'. January 20<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 67.

<sup>104</sup> Mary is not to be confused with her aunt, who was also called Mary and was the daughter of Thomas Sackville, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Dorset. Anne Clifford and Mary Neville appear to have been close:

Clifford records Neville ('Moll') reading to her from *Arcadia*, August 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 90.

<sup>105</sup> It is possible that Mary Neville was asked to dance at the request of Anne Clifford.

<sup>106</sup> January 20<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 67. And, five months later (June 19<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 81), Anne 'wrote a letter to the Queen of thankfulness and enclosed it to the Lady Ruthven desiring her to deliver it'. This indicates Ruthven's continued closeness to Anna.

<sup>107</sup> Cockayne, *Peerage*, XI, 250. The name Ruthven was not reinstated until November 17<sup>th</sup> 1641.

<sup>108</sup> January 18<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 66.

<sup>109</sup> January 20<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 67. It is interesting that Susan de Vere wanted Clifford to concede to the King, when she herself had not sought his permission to marry his favourite in 1604. It is possible she was worried about what would happen to her friend if Clifford continued defying the King. Susan's reaction (and that of Alatheia Howard) reinforces the argument that the women were not always united in their convictions.

<sup>110</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Margaret Clifford to Anne Clifford, September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1615 quoted in Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 134.

<sup>112</sup> Clifford, *Lives*, p. 42.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> March 1619, *Diary*, quoted in Randall Martin (ed.), *Women Writers in Renaissance England*, (New York: Longman, 1997), p. 270.

<sup>115</sup> Clifford quoted in Barroll, *Anna*, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> Clifford, *Lives*, p. 44.

<sup>117</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 153.

<sup>118</sup> Clifford, *Lives*, p. 44.

<sup>119</sup> Carola Oman, *Elizabeth of Bohemia*, (London: Hodder & Stroughton Ltd., 1938), p. 62.

<sup>120</sup> Of course, James also placed politics over his daughter's happiness - it was just luck that the princess was paired with a man she fell in love with.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70. Part of the reason would have been the recent death of Prince Henry.

<sup>122</sup> 'A late, undated letter from Elizabeth to Clifford in the Hothfield papers refers to "the familiarity and affection [that] hath been betwixt you and me".' Acheson, Notes, *Diary*, p. 118.

<sup>123</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 117.

<sup>124</sup> Clifford quoted in Lewalski, p. 331n.32.

<sup>125</sup> Catherine Drinker Bowen, *The Lion and the Throne: the life and times of Sir Edward Coke*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), p. 108.

<sup>126</sup> See the various letters in Elizabeth McClure Thomson, *The Chamberlain Letters*, (London: John Murray, 1965), pp. 172, 175-6, 182-4, 187, 230, 242, 259 and also *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, pp. 469, 488, 375, 411, 476, 495, 530.

<sup>127</sup> Bowen, *Lion*, p. 106.

<sup>128</sup> Hatton had brought one child from her previous marriage, Coke eight.

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<sup>129</sup> Bowen, *Lion*, p. 344.

<sup>130</sup> Fraser, *Weaker Vessel*, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Sir Horace de Vere to Dudley Carleton, August 12<sup>th</sup> 1617, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 481.

<sup>132</sup> Cokayne, *Peerage*, X, pp. 253-4.

<sup>133</sup> Bowen, *Lion*, p. 345. Fraser also assumes the letters were forged by Hatton, and that Hatton then 'obliged' her daughter to sign the precontract. *Weaker Vessel*, pp. 17-18. The contract appears in full in Bowen, *Lion*, p. 345.

<sup>134</sup> Letter from George Gerrard to Carleton, August 18<sup>th</sup> 1617, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 482.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from John Chamberlain to Ralph Winwood, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1617 in Thomson, *Letters*, p. 182.

<sup>136</sup> For a discussion of Frances' life after her marriage, of her affair with Howard, and of her subsequent flight with Howard, firstly disguised as a page (reminiscent of Arbella Stuart's escape to France dressed as a man), to Howard's estates in Shropshire and secondly to France, where both became Catholics, see Fraser, *Weaker Vessel*, pp. 19-24.

<sup>137</sup> Letter from Chamberlain to Carleton, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1617, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 476. Fraser writes that Frances was beaten into submission. *Weaker Vessel*, p. 19.

<sup>138</sup> Williams, *Anne*, p. 193.

<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, one of the women who provided Anne Clifford with support was raised by Elizabeth Hatton: Lady Frances Rich, daughter of William Hatton and Elizabeth Gawdy, and wife of Robert Rich.

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Chamberlain to Carleton, July 6<sup>th</sup> 1616, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 379; letter from Edward Sherburn to Carleton, July 11<sup>th</sup> 1616, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 380.

<sup>141</sup> Letter from Chamberlain to Carleton, November 8<sup>th</sup> 1617, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 494.

<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth Hatton's attempt to place her daughter's happiness before political connections stands in contrast to Queen Anna's attempt to halt Princess Elizabeth's marriage.

<sup>143</sup> Letter from Arbella Stuart to Gilbert Talbot, December 8<sup>th</sup> 1603 in Sara Jayne Steen (ed.), *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 193. This letter hints that Arbella viewed Queen Anna as playing at being Queen, though it is difficult to determine whether Arbella had any serious ambition for the throne. Her grandmother, Elizabeth Cavendish (Bess of Hardwick), was determined that Arbella would be Queen, and her servants were instructed to address Arbella as 'your Majesty'. Lewalski speculates that Arbella's 'fixation on the Seymours ... has to be explained as an effort to give her progeny – and possibly herself – some chance at the throne' (*Writing Women*, p. 84). However, Steen claims that 'nothing in Stuart's writing argues that her primary goal was the throne'. (*Letters*, p. 30) Even if the throne was not Arbella's primary aim, from her letter she can be interpreted as viewing Queen Anna, with her childish games, as a less worthy recipient of a crown than herself.

<sup>144</sup> Arbella was also close to Princess Elizabeth. See Oman, *Elizabeth*, p. 40.

<sup>145</sup> Arbella had been kept unmarried by Queen Elizabeth and King James. For two contrasting discussions on her decision to marry Seymour, and of the repercussions, see McInnes, *Arabella*,

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pp. 156-82 and Steen, *Letters*, pp. 62-102.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Arbella Stuart to Queen Anna, October 1610 in Steen, *Letters*, p. 248.

<sup>147</sup> Steen, *Letters*, p. 72. Jane Drummond - whom Anne Clifford asked on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1617 to 'remember my service to the Queen' (*Diary*, p. 81) - was the Lady Roxborough who would later be dismissed from Anna's service.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from Jane Drummond to Arbella Stuart in Steen, *Letters*, p. 71.

<sup>149</sup> 'According to the Venetian ambassador, the court did not go into mourning, although Queen Anna wished it, because [Arbella] Stuart had died "contumacious" or rebellious'. Steen, *Letters*, p. 101.

<sup>150</sup> Frye & Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses*, p. 4.

## 5.

### **Destabilising patriarchal conceptions of 'woman': Queen Anna, her women and the masques of *Blackness* and of *Beauty***

It was for Beauty that the world was made,  
And where she reigns, Love's lights admit no shade  
(*The Masque of Beauty*, ll. 255-6).

The women of Anna of Denmark's retinue were trying to control their lives and their agency was facilitated by same-sex alliances. In addition, they were the only women to appear on stage at this time, dancing in the court masques commissioned by the Queen. The evidence of homosocial bonding and female activity discussed in the previous chapter therefore provides a useful angle from which to explore these masques.

The court masque was a theatrical event, in theory presented to honour the monarch. It incorporated text, music, magnificent sets, stage machinery, songs, dancing and finally the revels, where the masquers danced with the spectators. The first full-length study of the masque was Enid Welsford's *The Court Masque* (1927). Welsford provided a detailed history of the masque, recording and analysing the continental models and popular origins from which the English masque derived. Welsford was 'chiefly pre-occupied with the significance of the masque',<sup>1</sup> and examined the influences of poetry and drama on the masque form and vice-versa. Other early criticism focused on the iconology of the masque, such as that found in D. J. Gordon's influential essays of the 1940s on Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones.<sup>2</sup> It was in the 1960s and 1970s, however, that masque criticism began to develop in new directions, in particular due to the groundbreaking work of Stephen Orgel. In his 1964 study *The Jonsonian Masque*, Orgel analysed the printed texts of Ben Jonson's masques in the context of 'the changing relationship between the masque as spectacle and the masque as literature'.<sup>3</sup> In conjunction with Roy Strong, Orgel also brought the work of Inigo Jones to the foreground, reproducing every extant masque design (with explanatory notes) in *Inigo Jones: the Theatre of the Stuart Court* (1973). In 1975 the publication of Orgel's *The Illusion of Power* signalled a major shift in masque criticism, for many modern commentators had concurred with Francis Bacon's assessment that masques were

'toys', viewing them as trivial and superficial.<sup>4</sup> Orgel, however, argued that the masque of the seventeenth century was an important tool of court politics. The Jacobean court masque, Orgel concluded, was intended to glorify James - he was the central figure, his presence as a spectator necessary to give the masque coherent meaning: 'the masque presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its centre is a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealisation'.<sup>5</sup> Orgel showed the ways in which the masques contributed to the creation of the image of the monarch - they were 'significant expressions of royal power', reinforcing the myth of absolutism and allowing James to present himself as he wanted others to see him.<sup>6</sup>

Orgel's work changed the direction of masque criticism, and all those who have come after him are indebted to his seminal studies. However, some critics have argued that a less monarch-centred approach to the masques is needed, to take into account the fact that the Jacobean court was not homogeneous, but instead the site of a multiplicity of voices.<sup>7</sup> These often competing discourses make the masques fertile grounds for ambiguity, tension and multiple-readings. Roy Strong, Martin Butler and Tom Bishop focus on the role of Prince Henry as providing an alternative and often oppositional discourse to that of James. Their analyses, while shifting the emphasis from James, still focus on a royal, *male* discourse. In contrast, in the last decade critics such as Barbara Lewalski, Leeds Barroll and most recently Clare McManus have analysed the masques in terms of the involvement of the central female presence at the Jacobean court, Anna of Denmark. Anna introduced the masque to the Jacobean court on a large scale: between 1604 and 1611 she commissioned and danced in six masques, two by Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604) and *Tethys' Festival* (1610) and four by Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), *The Masque of Queens* (1609) and *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1611). She also took part in Thomas Campion's *The Somerset Masque* (1613) and watched Robert Whyte's female masque *Cupid's Banishment* in 1617.

Lewalski, focusing mainly on the poetry of the printed masques, argues that masques commissioned by Anna would have been a challenge to James, labelling them as 'the Queen's subversive entertainments'. However, she argues that this subversion would have been accidental -



We need not suppose contestation and subversion to be fully conscious on the Queen's or the author's parts, or to be in the service of a consistent political agenda – save that of enhancing the Queen's status

- suggesting that Anna did not have 'the intellectual power or political consciousness to mount a consistent opposition policy'. Yet, Lewalski concludes that the masques Anna commissioned would have undermined James' position and 'offered a patently subversive royal example to Jacobean patriarchal culture'.<sup>8</sup>

Barroll approaches the question from the opposite perspective; rather than viewing the masques as subverting James' position he looks at how Anna deliberately clarified and asserted her own separate identity. In his study, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England* (2001), Barroll is concerned with the way in which the visual display of Anna and her women helped strengthen the Queen's authority, using the example of the all-male *The Masque of the Orient Knights* (1603) as a model. Barroll argues that there was personal benefit to be gained for the men chosen to dance in this: 'To be included ... either validated one's own current court status or, at the very least, augured well for one's court future'.<sup>9</sup> This possibility therefore needs to be taken into account when considering the six masques Anna commissioned between 1604 and 1611. Would the status of the women have been similarly enhanced? In addition, in the examination of Anna's demonstration of power, Barroll comes to the conclusion that the substance of the text is of minor importance, stating that, with regard to *Orient Knights*:

In all instances, contemporary comment indicates that it was not the written script, or the lavish scenery, or the dancing, or the music of the masque that most interested most courtiers. It was the participants.<sup>10</sup>

For this reason he eschews a study of the masque texts considering, along with Martin Butler, that these carry Jonson's 'symbolic messages to monarch or peers, regarding the manner in which England was to be governed'.<sup>11</sup> His perspective views the text as a distraction from the chief purpose of these masques, which Barroll sees as Anna's 'insistence on her own royal authority'.<sup>12</sup>

The most recent study of Queen Anna's masquing is Clare McManus' *Women on the Renaissance Stage* (2002). McManus, like Barroll, ignores the

printed text, arguing that it has been privileged to the detriment of other aspects of the masque. She instead examines the relationship between the female body and dance, stage architecture and costume, concluding that 'Anna of Denmark's masque commissions and performances and her active political and cultural engagement contributed to the emergence of seventeenth century female performance'.<sup>13</sup>

From their different perspectives Lewalski, Barroll and McManus focus on the implications of Anna's involvement in the masques. This study also analyses Anna's role, but does so in order to discover whether the Queen was doing more than displaying her royal authority and opposing her husband. In light of the evidence of homosocial bonding found within Anna's retinue, the aim here is to give more attention to the aristocratic women who participated in the masques, examining the implications of their appearance on stage in specific roles and as a united group. In contrast to Barroll and McManus' analyses, this discussion also looks at the poetry of the masques.

This chapter examines the first two masques which Anna commissioned from Ben Jonson (the second and third written for her), *The Masque of Blackness*, performed on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1605 and its sequel *The Masque of Beauty*, performed on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1608. In the first masque the Queen and her women appeared on stage in black paint as the twelve daughters of Niger. In the sequel they were presented as having been transformed into white noblewomen by the power of King James. *The Masque of Beauty* was intended to be performed the year after *Blackness*, but it was delayed until 1608, due in part to wedding masques taking place in the intervening years. In Jonson's printed folio of his plays, however, he ignores chronology and places the masques together, indicating that they were two parts of a whole. This chapter therefore considers the masques as such, arguing that when analysed together they reveal evidence of a coherent strategy of representation regarding the appearance of Anna and her women. As not only the staging, but also the written text of *Beauty* directly addresses the portrayal of these women and their agency, this is where the argument will begin, even though, chronologically, *Beauty* came after *Blackness*.

*The Masque of Beauty* (1608)

In general critics, with the exception of Lewalski, view the text of *The Masque of Beauty* as patriarchal. Orgel interprets *Beauty* as wholly patriarchal in its glorification of James and its claims for his powers of transformation, arguing that 'Jonson ... has devised a metaphor [James as the sun] to express the King's central position in the masque and a fiction within which the metaphor is true'.<sup>14</sup> This centrality is established with the opening words of *Beauty*: the messenger Boreas asks 'Which, among these, is Albion, Neptune's son?' Januarius replies:

What ignorance dares make that question?  
Would any ask, who Mars were, in the wars?  
Or which is Hesperus, among the stars?  
Or of the bright planets, which is Sol? (ll. 23-7).

This hyperbole, constructing James as god-like, continues for several lines and can be found elsewhere in the masque: James is the sun which never sets, a miracle worker, and Leah Marcus argues that patriarchal idealism of the empire is at the centre of *Beauty*.<sup>15</sup> King James possesses the power to enact the impossible, 'to blanch an Ethiop and revive a cor'se' (*Blackness* l. 227). As Martin Butler argues, the concepts of colonialism and integration are placed in the foreground by the use of the word 'Britannia', a reference to James' well-known, but highly unpopular, desire to create a united Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> This study would argue, however, that the text of the masque is not monolithically patriarchal; rather it lends itself to a pro-female reading, one which is mirrored by the performance text, and by the inclusion of specific female dancers from Anna's retinue.

*The Masque of Beauty* opens with a messenger, Boreas, informing the spectators that the nymphs' transformation from black into white is now complete. However, they have been delayed in their return to Britain: four other sisters, who also wanted to be turned white, had been trapped by Night, angry that the nymphs had shunned her colour in favour of whiteness. Night claimed that only the sight of their transformed sisters would free them; but when the twelve, 'in piety mov'd and kind' (l. 79) came to rescue them, they too were imprisoned. All sixteen were placed on a floating island, condemned to wander forever on the ocean. At this

point a second messenger, Vulturnus, enters saying that the moon goddess has freed the nymphs and they are on their way to Britain to dance for James, here figured as 'Albion, Neptune's son' (l. 23). The floating island attaches itself to Britain and the nymphs, all sixteen of them now white, are revealed sitting upon the Throne of Beauty.

In *The Masque of Beauty* the Queen and her women perform various intricate dances accompanied by songs. Although the dances only take up a tiny part of the printed masque, they were a major component of the masque in performance. Barroll argues that masques were divided into five parts, of which the printed masque constituted the first part. Part Two was 'the measure', where the masquers danced alone; Part Three was the 'taking out', where the masquers chose spectators to dance with them; in Part Four different spectators were selected to dance and finally, in Part Five, the masquers danced their final dance alone. Jerzy Limon argues that the masquers' dances 'were significant and were analysed as text', while Clare McManus, whose discussion focuses on the implications of the dance-as-speech for these silent performers, says that dance 'was the courtly woman's primary point of entry to the masque form itself and its importance to the masque form cannot be overrated'.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of the dances is clear from the payment list for the last masque which Anna commissioned, Jonson's *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1611). Jonson and Inigo Jones were each paid £40 for their parts in creating the masque: in contrast, Mr. Confesse 'for teaching all the dances' was paid £50, ten pounds more than the writer and designer, while a Mr. Bochan was given an additional £20 'for teaching the Ladies the footing of two dances'.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, many masque scripts include very little information about the dances; often there is only the stage instruction 'they dance' without further elaboration.<sup>19</sup> It can be viewed as significant, therefore, that Jonson's notes draw attention to the complexity of the dances in *Beauty*. The first was, he wrote, 'a most curious dance, full of excellent device, and change [which] ended ... in the figure of a diamond' (ll. 282-5) while the second was 'more subtle, and full of change than the former, and so exquisitely performed' (ll. 294-5). The third was a 'most elegant and curious dance ... not to be describ'd again, by any art, but that of their own footing' (ll. 333-5). The dance is self-defining, too sophisticated to be described in

any way other than by the dance itself. The dances can therefore be interpreted as displaying the considerable ability of the women, presenting not only their physical skill but also their intellectual qualities such as memory, comprehension and judgement. In addition, the song which precedes the most complex dance contains the lines:

Had those that dwell in error foul  
And hold that women have no soul,  
But seen these move; they would have, then  
Said, 'Women were the souls of men'.  
So they do move each heart and eye  
With the world's soul, true harmony (ll. 328-33).

As previously discussed, Renaissance thought was grounded in the belief that women were intrinsically inferior to men, morally, physically and intellectually, and were therefore naturally subordinate. One strand of misogynist theory went so far as to argue that women lacked souls; the reasoning behind this was that while there is specific reference in the Bible to God breathing a soul into Adam, there is no mention of a soul being breathed into Eve.<sup>20</sup> These lines in *Beauty*, perhaps surprisingly in light of the general agreement that Jonson's script is patriarchal, effectively refute this misogynist theory, and in doing so reveal a desire to change the perception of these women.<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis falls on the words 'error foul': the 'profane paradox', as Jonson terms it in his notes, is rejected. The ordered rhythm and structure of the song, three rhyming couplets, eight syllables to each line, climaxing in the word 'harmony' is reinforced by the juxtaposition with the ordered dances of the women. This association with harmony is emphasised by other poetic language in the masque. The Cupids surrounding the women are not mischievous, rather they are said to 'strike a music of like hearts' (l. 323), hinting that they too support the harmonious dances. As D. J. Gordon pointed out, these are the 'seeing' cupids of Neoplatonic doctrines who were associated with higher love, in contrast to their blind brother, who signified earthly desires.<sup>22</sup> The women dancing, the incarnation of Beauty, are figured as being in tune with the 'world's soul' (l. 333), indicating that their movement mirrors that of the turning earth, an image reinforced by the reference to 'beauty's sphere' (l. 364). Their movements also mirror those of

heaven: 'And who to Heaven's consent can better move/ Than those that are so like it, Beauty and Love' (ll. 121-2). This image is built upon in the last song: 'Still turn, and imitate the heaven/ In motion swift and even' (ll. 357-8).

The conception of the ordered universe was central to Renaissance cosmology, and the movement of the universe as the perfect dance can be found throughout Renaissance literature. Thomas Elyot, in his *Book, Named the Governor* (1531), figured dancing as an imitation of 'the wonderful and incomprehensible order of the celestial bodies ... and their motions harmonial'.<sup>23</sup> In Sir John Davies' unfinished poem *Orchestra, or a Poem of Dancing* (1594) the planets are portrayed as participating in the perfect dance, their movement above that of human movement:

Under that spangled sky, five wandering flames,  
 Besides the King of Day and Queen of Night,  
 Are wheel'd around, all in their sundry frames,  
 And all in sundry measures do delight:  
 Yet altogether keep no measure right.  
 For by itself, each doth itself advance,  
 And by itself, each doth a Galliard dance (37.1-7).

According to the extreme misogynist theory, since only man had a soul, his alone could correspond to the soul of the universe. Yet, in *Beauty* it is women who are portrayed as corresponding with the universe through their dancing. The emphasis on their dances as mirroring the ordered dance of the universe associates the women with a higher level of intelligence and perfection and this transforms any negative preconceptions.

The purposeful and ordered dances of Anna and her women also counter the earlier anti-female trope of the nymphs as trapped on the floating island, wandering aimlessly. This wandering connected the nymphs with instability, the ocean motif linking them with fickle Fortune (only a year previously Shakespeare's Antony followed the sails of Cleopatra, associated with his ill-fortune). The women's dancing is visible and present, as opposed to the wandering, which was only reported, ensuring that the lasting impression of the women is of their skill and grace rather than their instability and giddiness. The dances can therefore be viewed as being constructed to display the positive

qualities of the women, an aim which is further reinforced by the poetry. Januarius, the central speaker in the masque, praises the nymphs for their grace, which is 'great, as is your beauty, dames' (l. 338) and the ancient poets are imagined coming back to life 'to sing hymns in celebration of their worth' (l. 130).

After the final dance Jonson notes: 'they danced their last dance, into their throne again: and that turning, the scene clos'd' (ll. 354-5). The set therefore appears to have stopped moving during the dancing and songs; this would have been necessary for practical reasons, to allow the women to descend onto the dance floor. In addition, if the set remained still, the poetry and dancing would not become subsumed beneath the magnificent spectacle. This was a definite possibility, as the words of Samuel Daniel show in the printed text of his first masque for Queen Anna:

the eyes of the spectators might ... beguile their ears, as in such cases it ever happens, whiles the pomp and splendour of the sight takes up all the intention without regard what is spoken (*Twelve Goddesses*, ll.140-3).

On the other hand, the set, which was a magnificent spectacle of pillars and arches, can also be read as further reinforcing the women's association with the higher power of the universe. The throne was set upon a base of steps on which sat 'a multitude of Cupids' (l. 206), with two fountains, an orchard and maze behind and 'curious and elegant arbours' (ll. 209-10) to the sides. The throne and steps revolved in different directions. The throne, on which the masquers sat, moved from east to west 'imitating that which we call *motum mundi*' (ll. 226-7), the motion of the world, an image which can be found in Davies' poem *Orchestra*: 'Behold the world how it is whirled round .../ From East to West .../ ... it seems to dance' (34.1-7). The steps 'had a motion contrary ... *ad motum planetarum*', the movement of the planets (ll. 230-1). At the end of the masque the women were seen again sitting on the revolving throne; therefore the final, and thus the most memorable, image of the masque was of the women in tune with the universe.

These component parts of *Beauty* work together to build a coherent meaning, highlighting the positive qualities of these women. Other elements in the masque reveal a related purpose: to present images of female empowerment. The characters Night and Aethiopia, the moon goddess, embody two sides of

female power: one evil, with 'charms of darkness', (l. 77) the other 'chaste' and 'virtuous' (l. 138), following the standard stereotyping of patriarchy. However, as Aethiopia would have been painted black, the binary opposition is destabilised. Night has witch-like qualities, capturing the nymphs 'by malice and her magic' (l. 73), and an attack on witches featured in James' book *Demonology* (1597). Night, a dark force, battles with Aethiopia for control of the nymphs, but is defeated: 'The Night's black charms are flown./ For being made unto their Goddess known,/ Bright Aethiopia, the silver moon,/ As she was Hecate, she brake them soon' (ll. 121-4). Aethiopia frees the nymphs: female power conquers female power and James (or any male agency) is markedly absent. It is Aethiopia who stage-manages the action (as she does in the prior *Masque of Blackness*), emphasising female agency and capability. And, after being called Aethiopia throughout both masques, the moon goddess is at this point referred to as Hecate,<sup>24</sup> a goddess first mentioned by Hesiod, who saw her as a benevolent power over earth, sea and sky. After 5BC, however, Hecate was represented as the powerful goddess of the underworld and witchcraft, sometimes conflated with Proserpina. Hecate is one of the aspects of the moon, which is commonly figured as a triple deity, for example in John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608/9) (3.1.33), and *The Valiant Welshman* (possibly by Robert Armin and published in 1615) (3.4.34). The moon is represented by Cynthia in heaven, Diana on earth and Hecate in the underworld: 'as ... Diana represent[s] the splendour of the night, so Hecate represents its darkness and terrors'.<sup>25</sup> Jonson refers to her in his notes to *Beauty* as 'light-bearing Hecate', a reference to the torch she was said to carry, but does not make explicit her association with witches. However, this would have been well-known: in Book One of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) the evil enchanter Archimago invokes 'the dreaded name/ Of Hecate' (1.43.2-3) and it is Hecate who leads the three witches in *Macbeth* (c.1606), a production it is possible the spectators of *Beauty* would have recalled. The most convincing piece of evidence to link Jonson's use of the name Hecate with witchcraft can be found in another of his masques for Queen Anna, *The Masque of Queens* (1609). In the antimasque to *Queens* the Queen of the witches invokes Hecate as 'thou three formed star' (l. 233) and Jonson's notes to this masque make explicit Hecate's association with witches: 'she was believed to govern in witchcraft and is remembered in all their



invocations'.<sup>26</sup> Witchcraft is therefore associated with both characters, Night and Aethiopia. However, as Aethiopia is portrayed in a positive way, as virtuous, the association of witchcraft with evil is destabilised.

The centrality of Aethiopia, established through the poetry, is also achieved via her physical placing on the stage. She is positioned above the Throne of Beauty, as if overseeing the action, 'in a silver chariot, drawn by virgins, to ride in the clouds, and hold them greater light' (ll. 233-4). Yet it is Anna, seated below Aethiopia, who is said to have raised the throne, 'that still is seen/ To turn unto the motion of the world' (ll. 113-15): this places the Queen as the actively creative and skilful power. The throne, incorporating nine female statues wearing crowns<sup>27</sup> with the moon goddess above and the sixteen masquers seated on it becomes symbolic of exclusively female rule, a visual statement reinforced by the poetry: 'It was for Beauty that the world was made,/ And where she reigns, Love's lights admit no shade' (ll. 255-6). As all the women sit on the throne, this comment on female power applies directly to all of the female dancers, not just to the Queen.

The costumes 'orange-tawny and silver, and green and silver' were also striking:

several-coloured lights ... reflected on their backs ... The habit and dressing ... was ... so exceeding in riches, as the Throne whereon they sat, seem'd to be a mine of light, struck from their jewels and their garments (ll. 169-70, 247-55).

The combination of set, costumes and positioning therefore creates an image of female splendour and power. As a participant in the masque, Anna was physically present in a way James, as spectator, could not be and despite the opening celebratory praise, James is referred to only twice more. Januarius, in his last speech, calls him the sun which never sets. However, immediately afterwards, Januarius praises the women, in terms which negate the previous image of James' everlasting power: 'Beauty, at large brake forth, and conquer'd men' (l. 353).

Jonson's own words explaining the genesis of the masque show that the Queen had input into both its theme and content:

it was her Highness' pleasure, again to glorify the Court, and command, that I should think on some fit presentment, which should answer the former [i.e. *The Masque of Blackness*], still keeping them the same persons, the daughters of Niger, but their beauties varied, according to promise, and their time of absence excused, with four more added to their number. To which limits ... I ... apted my invention (ll. 2-9).

The word 'command' and Jonson's comment that these instructions were 'limits' indicate that he was writing under orders. Other of Anna's actions regarding this production also suggest a desire to maintain control over the process. For example, the Venetian ambassador reported that she prepared the masque 'at her own charges'.<sup>28</sup> In addition, her understanding of the political potential of the masque form is illustrated by her well-known decision to invite the Spanish ambassador and to exclude the French ambassador. James, who wanted to maintain peace with Spain and France, did not want any preference to be shown to either and, along with the Privy Council, tried to force Anna to withdraw her invitation. Knowing a Queen's masque was useless without the Queen, Anna refused to dance unless the Spanish ambassador was present. She had employed the same tactic for the first masque she commissioned, Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, to ensure the Spanish ambassador attended, which he did, 'revelling it in red, while Anna paid him the compliment of wearing a red favour on her costume'.<sup>29</sup> Anna's actions regarding *The Masque of Beauty* led the French Ambassador to comment on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1608 that James was not master in his own house.<sup>30</sup>

The Venetian ambassador called Anna 'the authoress of the whole'.<sup>31</sup> This is often dismissed by modern commentators as flattery - for example, Richard Dutton calls it a 'polite fiction'.<sup>32</sup> Lewalski, however, takes the opposite view, including Anna in her seminal study on writing women in Jacobean England. To include someone who did not actually write highlights Lewalski's subscription to the argument that Anna was the 'authoress' of these masques. But despite this, Lewalski argues that Anna was 'not in any usual sense a third partner with Jonson and Inigo Jones'.<sup>33</sup> Yet Jonson's own words are testimony to the fact that Queen Anna was a co-creator of meaning.

On some levels *The Masque of Beauty* is for James. In the written text he is exalted through hyperbolic language and his unionist policies are highlighted by

the emphasis on Britannia and by the integration of other cultures, while in terms of staging, the transformation of the women from black (other) into white can be read as patriarchal in its claims for James' power. Yet the masque is a site of ambiguity, tension and multiple meanings, and analysing the text and spectacle from the angle of the women who danced reveals a dominant image of female power in a world governed by the moon, a world from which James is absent. *The Masque of Beauty* highlighted female intellect, worth and capability, and figured images of female influence. The visual elements and the poetry when analysed together provide evidence of a coherent aim: to demonstrate examples of female empowerment which refuted male assumptions with regard to this specific group of women.

#### *The Masque of Blackness (1605)*

The 1605 *Masque of Blackness* has received more critical attention in the last decade than its sequel, due partly to Anna and her women appearing on stage blacked up. Yumni Siddiqi argues that *Blackness* contains a patriarchal argument, and that the glorification of James stems from the protocolonial discourse of the masque, a discourse which is grounded in the feminisation of blackness. Siddiqi argues that the African body and the gendered female body are conflated in *Blackness*: both are portrayed as fluid and uncontrollable - Niger has travelled from his proper place because the tears of his daughters caused his banks to burst: 'They wept such ceaseless tears, into my stream,/ That it hath, thus far, overflow'd his shore' (ll. 147-8). For Siddiqi 'the successful ordering of African culture would entail a disciplining of the feminine in it', and she argues that the African is disciplined via the transformation and the feminine is disciplined in *Beauty*.<sup>34</sup> Siddiqi further concludes that ultimately the women are subordinated to the monarch. Kim Hall also examines the connection in *Blackness* between the African body and the female body, looking at the configuration of cultural identity and gender difference. Hall suggests that blackness highlighted Anna's marginalised role at the court and thus figured her as inferior: 'In this special sense of inequality, all women were 'Black' in King James' court. Female beauty was fairly powerless next to the 'fair' men who enjoyed James' acutest attention'.<sup>35</sup>

Hardin Aasand suggests that Anna's adopted blackness privileged the grotesque and thereby estranged her from James, and that there was political danger in the resulting image of marital disruption:

An intimate relationship was essential for a monarchy in which patriarchal domination of family members was a model for the subject's submission to the King and in which any fissure in this domestic structure would severely compromise the King's prerogative.<sup>36</sup>

According to Aasand this discord was due to the presence of Anna, but he does not explore this argument further.

Jonson's prologue to *Blackness* reveals that Anna was as involved in this masque as she was in its sequel, and that the central theme was conceived by her:

In duty ... to that Majesty, who gave them their authority, and grace; and, no less that the most royal of predecessors, deserves eminent celebration for these solemnities ... I add this later hand ... Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemy and of late Leo the African, remember unto us a river in Ethiopia, famous by the name of Niger; of which the people were called ... Negroes: and are the blackest nation of the world ... Hence (because it was her majesty's will, to have them blackamoors at first) the invention was derived by me and presented thus (ll. 8-20).

As with *Beauty* it appears that Jonson was writing *Blackness* under orders, emphasised by his references to his 'duty' to Anna and to her 'authority' (ll. 8-9). According to Jonson, Anna wanted the women to appear in blackface 'at first'. This suggests that she had already planned a sequel in which the women would be transformed. It is interesting that Jonson points to his role in providing a 'learned' invention to accommodate Anna's request; this perhaps indicates a need to assert his authorship in view of the fact that 'at first' foresees further subordination. It is also worth considering the results of Anna's choice of representing blackness with paint rather than masks as had been traditional. The inevitable outcome was that the transformation into whiteness could not be enacted at the end of the masque - the women could not wash their make-up off in time, so the metamorphosis necessarily had to be delayed until the next masque.<sup>37</sup>

*The Masque of Blackness* begins with the river Niger being greeted by his father, the King of the Ocean, Oceanus. Niger has travelled from the east with his

twelve daughters who are in despair, having discovered from poets that only white skin is considered beautiful. The nymphs were instructed in a vision '[t]hat they a land must forthwith seek,/ Whose termination (of the Greek)/ Sounds –*tania*' (ll. 164-6) and in search of this country they have passed through 'Black Mauritania', 'Swarth Lusitania' and 'Rich Aquitania' (ll. 174-6), finally ending up in a strange place. At this point the moon goddess Aethiopia appears, revealing to Niger that it was she who 'was that bright face/ Reflected by the lake' (l. 206) and that they have arrived at their destination – Britannia. James, as Sol, is said to have the power to transform the nymphs from black into white. In order for this to happen they must wash in the ocean 'thirteen times thrice, on thirteen nights' (l. 303) – only when they are white will they be able to reach Britain.

The performance opened with a painted curtain being dropped to reveal an ocean scene:

an artificial sea was seen to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, raised with waves, which seemed to move, and in some places the billow to break, as imitating that orderly disorder, which is common in nature (ll. 23-5).

Six sea-gods were placed at the front of the stage with two sea-maids behind them. In between the sea-maids were two giant seahorses: 'upon their backs, Oceanus and Niger were advanced', the face of the former painted blue, the face of the latter black. (ll. 35-6). Behind and above this scene were Queen Anna and her women,

placed in a great concave shell, like mother of pearl ... [T]he top thereof was struck with a chevron of lights, which, indented to the proportion of the shell, struck a glorious beam upon them, as they were seated, one above another: so that they were all seen, but in an extravagant order (ll. 48-53).

Surrounding the shell were the nymphs' twelve attendants, the Oceaniae, who rode on the back of six giant sea monsters and carried torches. As with Oceanus, their faces were blue.

Anna was six months pregnant when she danced as a Nymph in *Blackness* and the implications of this have not always been taken into account.<sup>38</sup> Inigo Jones' design for Anna's costume (Fig. One) shows that it, like those of the eleven other masquers, was loose and flowing. This perhaps indicates, in common with



Figure One: Costume for Daughter of Niger (drawing by Inigo Jones).

the Duchess of Malfi's 'loose-bodied gown',<sup>39</sup> an attempt to disguise her pregnancy, although it would be impossible to hide it completely, especially when dancing. However, despite this apparent attempt to downplay Anna's condition, pregnancy appears to have been turned into a creative idea, seemingly deliberately designed into the 'sea-green' (l. 64) costumes of the twelve Oceaniae. Inigo Jones' sketch (Fig. Two) shows that the stomachs of the Oceaniae were padded, and a bodice over the costume was opened from the breasts to the waist, framing and drawing attention to the stomach. The Queen and the other Nymphs also wore identical dress – in Jonson's words 'the attire of the masquers was alike in all without difference' (l. 59) – dress which contrasted with that of the Oceaniae: as already noted, the masquers' costumes were loose-bodied, reducing the visual impact of Anna's pregnancy. In terms of costume therefore, pregnancy can be viewed as a deliberate visual effect rather than simply the accidental condition of one of the performers: the real is metamorphosed into the created. Further, the pregnancy motif is reinforced by the iconology of the masque. Each of the twelve nymphs carried a fan inscribed with a symbol: Anna, portraying Euphoris (Abundance) in partnership with Lucy Russell (Splendour) displayed the picture of a golden tree borne down with fruit.<sup>40</sup> This image of fertility is also reiterated by the poetry: the first song in the masque speaks of the nymphs being 'full of life' (l. 86), Niger calls them 'my most loved birth' (l. 114) and their travels are referred to by Aethiopia as 'labours' (l. 205). Birth is also connected to the prevalent sea motif (and by extension to the nymphs, who are '[d]aughters of the subtle flood' (l. 281)): it was in the ocean that 'bright Venus, Beauty's Queen/ Is said to have begotten been' (ll. 322-3).<sup>41</sup>

Pregnancy can therefore be viewed as a deliberate motif which, in terms of text and iconology, puts across a positive female role – expressing fruitfulness. The act of generation is undeniably creative. Visually, however, this motif is one which draws attention to woman's appointed role in society as a wife and mother; even Anna was ultimately a wife, carrying the subordinate role of producing heirs. So far it can be argued that the pregnancy motif contradicts Barroll's argument that the masque display helped assert Anna's authority. But the skin colouring and the style of costumes argue for a more complex reading. In early modern society black people and women were both associated with property, as suggested by



Figure Two: Costume for Oceania (drawing by Inigo Jones).



Orgel when he argues that Queen Anna in blackface 'is ... merely representing herself in the terms set by the culture', although he concludes that 'it is doubtful that ... this has any direct connection with the conceit of the Queen's masque'.<sup>42</sup> However, black people were marketed as slaves<sup>43</sup> while women, in particular aristocratic women, were, as has been previously discussed, often viewed as possessions. The origins of this were Biblical and the perception that women were commodities was common throughout sixteenth and seventeenth century society, as revealed in plays of the time. For Anna to appear in blackface and pregnant, surrounded by twenty three other women, twelve of whom also appeared to be pregnant would have therefore constituted a striking comment on the masquers' position as women in society.

Further, there is the contribution of the masquers' dress. Jonson describes their costumes thus:

the colours, azure, and silver; but returned on the top with a scroll and antique dressing of feathers, and jewels interlaced with ropes of pearl. And, for the front, ear, neck and wrists, the ornament was of the most choice and orient pearl; best setting off from the black (ll. 59-63).

The emphasis here is on the exotic, reflected in the comments of the Venetian ambassador who reported that the masque was 'very beautiful and sumptuous'.<sup>44</sup> However, the reaction of an English spectator allows for a different interpretation. Dudley Carleton's comment in a letter to Sir Ralph Winwood that the masquers' 'apparel was rich, but too light and courtesan-like for such great ones' is often quoted.<sup>45</sup> The fact that Carleton repeated the same phrase almost verbatim in a later letter to John Chamberlain shows how immodest and transgressive he found the costumes.<sup>46</sup> The masquers' costumes, as previously mentioned, were loose-bodied and fell to the ankles, a design which does not at first appear to evoke associations with prostitution. But Inigo Jones' drawings (in particular the colour version)<sup>47</sup> show that the lower arms of the masquers were completely bare while the upper arms were draped with a piece of transparent material, through which the black arms were clearly visible. Despite the fact that the standard outfits worn by women at the Jacobean court had low necklines, exposing flesh, the evidence suggests that the arms were always concealed by sleeves.<sup>48</sup> This belief that

women's arms should be covered is expressed in Francesco Barbaro's moral treatise *On Wifely Duties*:

it is proper ... that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.<sup>49</sup>

It appears, therefore, that it was the bare arms of the Queen and her women, inadequately concealed by the 'light' material of the costumes, which Carleton found 'courtesan-like'.

Orgel has argued convincingly that Anna had input into the design of the costumes: 'Jones would do his designs, and submit them, with his suggestions, to the Queen. She then chose the colours, and made whatever changes in the design that she wished'.<sup>50</sup> Anna therefore not only agreed to wear the 'courtesan-like' costumes, it would appear that she had a say in their creation as well, especially as the pictures from which Inigo Jones designed the costumes for *Blackness* – Vecellio's drawings of a Thessalonian wife, an Ethiopian virgin and an Ethiopian soldier – show the arms covered.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the Queen would obviously know what constituted 'decorous' and 'indecorous' wear at court. Orgel argues that Anna intended the costumes to initiate a new fashion rather than to present a shocking image. If it was the case that Anna was simply attempting to introduce a new clothing style, it is reasonable to assume that subsequent masquing costumes and/or court fashions would begin to mirror this style of exposed arms: where the Queen led, others followed. However, the costume designs for *The Masque of Queens* (1609) show that the masquers' arms were concealed. The same is true of fashions at the English court – throughout the first two decades of the seventeenth century long sleeves continued to be the norm: this is illustrated by two portraits of the Queen, one from around 1610, the other painted in 1617, both of which show her with her arms 'properly' covered.<sup>52</sup> This indicates that there was substance behind Carleton's complaint, and the bare arms in *Blackness* did not introduce a new fashion because they contravened Jacobean ideas of decency. It would appear, therefore, that the design had a purpose specific to this masque alone. But what aim could there have been in the Queen consort displaying herself and her ladies as courtesans? Bearing in mind the designed incorporation

of pregnancy in the costumes of the Oceaniae, it is possible to argue that the masquers' costumes conveyed a theme which complemented them.

The costumes of the Oceaniae were designed as emblematic of wifely status and the Nymphs were the polar opposite - the whores, according to dominant patriarchy the only two alternative roles they as women could play in society. Ecclesiastical court records from this period contain references to slander cases relating to women being called whores<sup>53</sup> and the concept of the whore is also prevalent in early modern plays. To take only a few examples the word is used by Corvino of Celia, by Ferdinand of the Duchess of Malfi, of Annabella both by her husband and in the title of Ford's play and also of John Marston's 'Dutch courtesan' (who *is* a prostitute).<sup>54</sup> In Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* Moll Cutpurse, despite being constructed as wholly chaste, is figured by various characters, including Sir Alexander Wengrave, Laxton and Curtalax as a whore.<sup>55</sup> Perceptions of the whore therefore permeated the fabric of early modern society, and ultimately included any woman who did not conform to society's strictures. As Ruth Karras argues:

Prostitutes were simply the market-oriented version of a more general phenomenon. Because any woman could be considered a whore whether or not she was paid for sex, any woman could be placed in the same category of lust and venality as the commercial prostitute.<sup>56</sup>

The inextricable relationship between wives and commodity has already been demonstrated, yet conceptions of property and possession were equally intertwined with societal perceptions of the whore, as can be seen in *The Duchess of Malfi*:

Duchess: Diamonds are of most value  
They say, that have passed through most jewellers' hands.  
Ferdinand: Whores, by that rule, are precious (1.2.220-2).

In Webster's earlier play, *The White Devil*, Brachiano, in tempting Vittoria to commit adultery (and thus to become a 'whore'), figures her loss of chastity as a financial transaction: 'I will but change/ My jewel for your jewel.' (1.2.237-8).

Both pregnancy and the 'courtesan-like' costumes displaying bare arms can be interpreted as commenting on the roles available to these courtly women. It can be argued further that the costumes - twelve incorporating pregnancy, twelve 'courtesan-like' - in conjunction with blackness (also functioning as costume) presented a striking visual comment on societal perceptions of them as women: they were commodities, confined within this framework to be either wife or whore. All three images are combined in the person of Queen Anna who was blacked up, pregnant and wearing a 'courtesan-like' costume. The significance of Anna's choice to appear on stage blacked up cannot be underestimated, despite Orgel's claim that the use of blackness in masques was nothing new and would have been viewed as 'pleasing'.<sup>57</sup> Judging by the negative response of Dudley Carleton, the use of the black paint was shocking. Further, as the transformation is delayed, at the end of the masque the nymphs remain black.

Ben Jonson termed the visual elements of masques the 'outward celebration'. During this period theatricality often equated with power, as evidenced by the actions of Queen Elizabeth, and in light of this association, Anna's women, while silent, were not simply decorative, nor were they trapped within a controlling male gaze: rather, the Queen was in control of the image being presented on stage. The staged appearance of Anna - Queen consort, subject and wife - presented images of both the wife/slave and the whore and can thus be viewed as destabilising the binary opposition.

The subject of female empowerment, apparent in *Beauty* is, unsurprisingly, also in the prior display. This can be found particularly in the portrayal of Aethiopia, the moon goddess. As in the sequel she is placed above the masquers, overseeing the action. She was:

triumphant in a silver throne, made in a figure of a pyramis. Her garments white, and silver ... crown'd with a luminary, or sphere of light: which striking on the clouds, and heightened with silver, reflected as natural clouds do by the splendour of the moon (ll. 188-94).

This central positioning is reinforced by the poetry. Aethiopia is the stage-manager of the action: it is she who appears to the nymphs in the lake, her face 'all circumfus'd with light' (l. 161) directing them in a riddle to seek out Britannia, and

it is she who solves the riddle for Niger. Significantly, Niger directs his plea for his daughters' metamorphosis not to the patriarchal representative Oceanus<sup>58</sup> but to Aethiopia, placing the power of transformation with her: 'Beautify them, which long have deified thee' (l. 204). As Lewalski points out, the ritual of transformation is not located in James/Sol, but in the moon goddess:

Thirteen times thrice, on thirteen nights,  
(So often as I fill my sphere  
With glorious light, throughout the year)  
You shall (when all things else do sleep  
Save your chaste thoughts) with reverence, steep  
Your bodies in that purer brine,  
And wholesome dew, called rosemarine (ll. 312-18).<sup>59</sup>

As the rituals are figured as taking place at night - traditionally represented as female - they are further associated with Aethiopia, and at the same time exclude Sol/James. Although the last words of the masque are 'Albion, Neptune's son' (l. 338), immediately prior to this Aethiopia's power is underlined by reference to her control of the tides: 'Now Dian, with her burning face,/ Declines apace:/ By which our waters know/ To ebb, that late did flow' (ll. 331-4). The nymphs are therefore also associated with the powerful moon goddess through their mutual connection with the ocean.

*The Masque of Blackness* presented two visual statements: one on the limited roles available to the performers as women in society and the other on women's empowerment. *The Masque of Beauty* also figured images of female empowerment, but rather than showing the limitations of these women, the poetry and spectacle placed their capabilities in the foreground, rejecting misogynist theory. The performers whose status was enhanced in Anna's masques were successful women who had refused to conform to society's expectations and who, in different ways, had challenged the social roles available to them. Further analysis will show that the allocation of roles in the masques, something which has not yet been fully taken into account, was another way for the Queen to support her women.

### The female masquers

Dancing with Queen Anna in *The Masque of Blackness* were Penelope Rich, Elizabeth de Vere, Susan de Vere, Lucy Russell, Catherine Howard (Countess of Suffolk), Mary Wroth, Anne Herbert (the daughter of Mary Sidney and therefore a cousin of Mary Wroth), Audrey Walsingham (who, along with her husband, was the Chief Keeper of the Queen's Wardrobe), Elizabeth Howard, Lady Anne Effingham and Lady Frances Beville.<sup>60</sup> As Barroll argues, the positioning of the women on the stage was an exercise in configuring power relations between the Queen and her women, as illustrated by his example of the arrangement of the women within the shell in *Blackness*: Anna sat on the lower tier next to Lucy Russell, one of her two Ladies of the Bedchamber. The other, Frances, Countess of Hertford was absent due to the measles:

That the other ladies were parcelled out into the last three tiers, and that Anna did in fact restrict this first tier to herself and Bedford emphasises how the physical deployments of masquing were revelatory of court status.<sup>61</sup>

Barroll has concluded that the ordering of the women would have been Anna's decision rather than Jonson's. This indicates that the roles the women portrayed and the symbols they carried in *The Masque of Blackness*, which present positive female attributes, would also have been Anna's choice.<sup>62</sup> Even if the specific emblems had been devised by Jonson, as he claims,<sup>63</sup> Anna would have been the one who allocated them to different women. One of the emblems, a raining cloud (carried by Susan de Vere and Elizabeth Howard) symbolised education, an area of life from which Jacobean women were largely excluded, although the women who danced were all educated.<sup>64</sup> More interestingly, Penelope Rich was chosen to symbolise purity - her drawing was a pair of naked feet in a river. As has already been shown, Penelope's life was highly irregular: having rejected her husband she was at the time of this masque living in open adultery with Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy. For Anna to represent Penelope, a blatant and unrepentant adulteress, as pure can be viewed as the Queen showing her support for Penelope and validating Penelope's position by destabilising the standard equation of purity with married fidelity.<sup>65</sup> This support of Penelope is also clear from the casting of the

previous masque which Anna had commissioned, Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*. In this masque Penelope, aged forty-one, was chosen to portray the role of Venus, Goddess of Love. Previous to Anna's involvement masques had been the province of the young and beautiful and the selection of Penelope, who was eleven years older than Anna, to play the traditionally beautiful goddess can be viewed as radical. The visual association of Penelope with Venus suggests an additional reading: as Venus, Penelope's choice of a love affair over her arranged marriage would have been highlighted and legitimised. Anna was therefore able to make visible her support for a woman who had openly repudiated her husband, firstly by including Penelope in her masques and secondly, by assigning her roles imbued with specific and pointed meanings. The inclusion of certain women within the masques can therefore be interpreted as a further way in which Anna was able to publicly support their unconventional positions. In addition, the readings of Penelope as Venus and as purity show that the roles which these women portrayed, allocated as they were by the Queen, were rich in meanings, something which will be taken into account in this present discussion.

Elizabeth de Vere, estranged from her husband and, as has been shown, equally successful as a courtier and a businesswoman, was one of only two women who danced in all five of Anna's masques for which cast lists survive, indicating her continued high favour with the Queen. Taking into account Elizabeth's extraordinary business acumen and financial success it is perhaps appropriate that her role in *Twelve Goddesses* was Proserpina, Goddess of Riches, who 'in her hand doth hold/ The mine of wealth' (ll. 306-7). The other woman who participated in all five masques was Elizabeth's younger sister Susan: therefore both de Vere sisters took the family involvement in theatre one step further by appearing in court masques. In 1605 Susan, as previously mentioned, married Philip Herbert without seeking the consent of her male relatives. *The Masque of Blackness* was part of the celebrations to publicly solemnise what had been a secret contract: Anna was therefore able to validate Susan's decision to choose her own husband and to marry secretly by not only celebrating the wedding, but also by including Susan in *Blackness*.

Anna's closest friend Lucy Russell danced in four masques (and probably *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*, for which no cast list survives) and Barroll

argues that her exclusion from Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* (1610) was more likely to have been due to the death of her new-born baby, rather than to any loss of favour.<sup>66</sup> Lucy's participation in the masques Anna commissioned emphasised her association with the Queen, illustrated by the characters she portrayed: in *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* she was Vesta, Goddess of Religion, a role which Lewalski argues connected her with the Queen, who had chosen to portray Pallas,<sup>67</sup> and in *Blackness* she was physically partnered with Anna. In contrast to Penelope Rich and the de Vere sisters, however, Lucy's involvement in masques extended beyond dancing alongside the Queen. She was the patron of both of Anna's masque writers, Samuel Daniel and Ben Jonson, and it was she who secured Daniel's commission to write *Twelve Goddesses*: Daniel's dedication to the printed version of the masque thanks Lucy for 'preferring such a one to her Majesty in this employment' (ll. 192-3). In addition, Lucy not only influenced the selection of writer, but was also involved in the production of *Twelve Goddesses*, as can be seen from a letter sent by Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1603:

We shall have a merry Christmas at Hampton Court, for both male and female masques are already bespoken, whereof the Duke [of Lennox] is *rector chori* of the one side and the Lady of Bedford the other.<sup>68</sup>

The *rector chori* was in charge of organising the masque, including rehearsals, thereby allowing Lucy a degree of control over the proceedings. There is also evidence that she was involved in the production of *The Masque of Queens* (1609): a letter tells of her hurrying to the court to help organise it.<sup>69</sup> And while Jonson claimed that the roles in *Queens* 'were disposed rather by chance, than election' (l. 452), given Lucy's involvement, it is probable that she would have chosen her role, Penthesilea, 'the brave Amazon' (l. 376) who 'is nowhere named but with the preface of honour and virtue' (ll. 460-1). Penthesilea is said to be 'always advanced in the head of the worthiest women' (l. 461) and, accordingly, Lucy was the first of the Queens to descend on to the stage, demonstrating her precedence over Anna's other women.

In common with other of her actions at the court, discussed in the previous chapter, some of Lucy's masquing activities did not converge with those of the



Queen: she danced in Jonson's wedding masque *Hymenaei* (performed January 5<sup>th</sup> 1606), in which Anna took no part, and she became well-known for organising various masques and entertainments for people other than the Queen, such as Lord James Hay. By her dancing in Anna's masques, Lucy's status as the Queen's favourite courtier was reinforced. In addition, by taking a more active role - by influencing Anna and by helping organise masques - Lucy was able to make visible and to promote her position as a powerful and influential woman in her own right, as distinct from the Queen.

Anna not only chose who was to dance in her masques but also who was to be excluded: for example, Margaret (Stuart) Howard, Countess of Nottingham, who had danced in *Twelve Goddesses* was not asked to dance in *Blackness* the following year. It was said that this was due to a growth on her nose,<sup>70</sup> but there may have been the additional reason that her marriage to the elderly Earl of Nottingham in 1603 - which had immediately increased her social status - had offended Queen Anna. Barroll argues that Margaret's inclusion in the 1604 masque was probably a gesture to her husband, James' Lord Admiral: 'to exclude the new Lady Nottingham ... this first Christmas would obviously be offensive to the Earl'.<sup>71</sup> Margaret was given the role of Concordia, Goddess of Union, who was included as a reference to James' well-known desire to unite England and Scotland. Bearing in mind Anna's use of the masque to support her women and endorse their actions, the choice of Margaret to play this role could be interpreted as Anna validating Margaret's match: as Concordia she was 'dress'd/ With knots of union, and in her hand she bears/ The happy joined roses of our rest' (*Twelve Goddesses* ll. 325-7). However, as it is known that Anna was offended by the marriage and had ridiculed Margaret and her new husband as 'fools' in a letter to James,<sup>72</sup> this suggests a different reading: that Anna was mocking her former friend - a young woman who had married an elderly man for financial reasons - by portraying her as the goddess of happy unions. Margaret never danced in another of Anna's masques, indicating that her inclusion in *Twelve Goddesses* was due to the high status of her husband rather than any favour with Queen.<sup>73</sup>

Elizabeth Hatton 'would feign have had a part [in *Blackness*], but some unknown reason kept her out'.<sup>74</sup> Hatton, like Margaret Howard, had previously participated in Daniel's *Twelve Goddesses*. She had danced the role of Macaria,

Goddess of Happiness, who was described as bearing 'in either hand/ Th'ensigns both of wealth and wits, t'express/ That by them both her majesty doth stand' (ll. 320-2). From the evidence, 'wealth and wits' was a fitting description of Elizabeth Hatton, and the mention of intellect favours her. It is unclear why she was excluded from *Blackness* since in contrast to Margaret Howard, this exclusion did not signal the end of her masquing activities: Hatton danced in *Beauty*, making her the only woman to be deliberately excluded from one masque only to be invited to dance in the next.<sup>75</sup> Hatton can therefore be viewed as moving in and out of the Queen's favour, indicating that once Anna's favour was lost it could be regained. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interests of Anna and Hatton had diverged regarding the marriage of Frances Coke, so it is entirely possible they diverged at other times as well.

Anna's exclusion of specific women, in conjunction with her support of others, is more obvious when the casting of *Beauty* is examined. Sixteen women danced in *Beauty*, four more than in Anna's previous masques - *Blackness* and *Twelve Goddesses* - and eight more than danced in the first public masque at court, the all-male *Masque of the Orient Knights*. As has been shown, Anna asked Jonson for a device which would incorporate the same twelve daughters of Niger, 'with four more added to their number' (*Beauty* l. 8). But the same twelve women did not dance the parts of the nymphs. Queen Anna, Lucy Russell, Audrey Walsingham, Mary Wroth and the de Vere sisters were the only women to participate in both *Blackness* and *Beauty*. Although Mary Wroth's name is absent from the printed list of masquers in Jonson's 1610 *Quarto*, it is clear from the comments of an Italian visitor Antimo Galli, who praised her 'gracefulness' that Wroth did dance in *Beauty*,<sup>76</sup> and her exclusion from the list of dancers initially reads as a mistake. However, there were sixteen dancers and Jonson lists sixteen names, indicating that Wroth's name was not only left out deliberately, but that it was also replaced with the name of another woman who did not take part. It is not clear why Wroth's name was excluded and it is impossible to know which of the women on the printed list did not participate. It could have been, as Louise Schleiner argues, that Wroth was out of favour by the time the masque was published.<sup>77</sup> This is possible, as another masque in which names were omitted on publication is Jonson's *Hymenaei* (1606). The masque was written for the

wedding of the Earl of Essex to Frances Howard, second daughter of the Earl and Countess of Suffolk. As is well-known, the wedding, which was supposed to join the Devereux and Howard (and, through them, the Cecil) family factions, ended in scandal. Frances claimed non-consummation due to the Earl's impotence in order to get a divorce so she could marry Robert Carr, the King's favourite. In 1615 Carr and Frances (by then Earl and Countess of Somerset) were imprisoned for the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury. Jonson's 1616 Folio edition of *Hymenaei* tactfully omits the names of all performers.<sup>78</sup> However, the evidence shows that Anna continued to support Wroth after 1610 (for example with her jointure lands), and Wroth appeared in the Queen's funeral procession. There is no obvious answer to this mystery; but it is certain that Wroth danced in *Beauty*.

Eleven new women appear to have been asked to dance in *Beauty*: four were daughters of the Earl of Worcester - Elizabeth Guildford (who married Henry Guildford in 1596, celebrated by Spenser's *Prothalamion*); Baroness Katherine Petre (who married Baron Petre in a joint ceremony with her sister Elizabeth); Anne Winter (who married Edward Winter in 1597) and Catherine, Countess of Windsor (who was married to the sixth Earl of Windsor). These four were to become part of Anna's inner circle, dancing in her next masques: and, as with many of Anna's women, their husbands were not powerful. The other new dancers were James' cousin Arbella Stuart (who would also dance in *Tethys' Festival*), Alatheia Talbot (the newly married Countess of Arundel, who was kin to Arbella and who would be included in both *The Masque of Queens* and *Tethys' Festival*), Elizabeth Hatton (who had been excluded from *Blackness* but was now apparently again in favour, although *Beauty* would be her last masque), Elizabeth Gerard (the second wife of Thomas, Baron Gerard), Mary Neville, (the daughter of Sir Thomas Sackville, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Dorset and kin to Anne Clifford), Frances Chichester, (who was most likely included because she was the sister of Lucy Russell), and finally Anne Clifford.

*The Masque of Beauty* was the first masque in which Anne Clifford had been invited to dance. Three years earlier, as discussed in the previous chapter, the death of her father brought about her struggle to stop her inheritance lands passing to her uncle. Queen Anna's decision to include the (then) unmarried Anne Clifford in *Beauty* (the first masque she had commissioned since Clifford's legal

battle began) could have been a visible way to indicate her support for Clifford's oppositional position. The next year Anne Clifford danced in *Queens*, in which she portrayed Berenice, victorious Queen of Egypt, who was said to have restored 'the courage and honour of [her father's] army, even to a victory' (ll. 521-2). Clifford also took part in *Tethys' Festival*, something which is not often commented on as she is listed, not by her name, but by her title, Countess of Dorset.<sup>79</sup> In *Tethys' Festival* 'the Ladies [were presented] in the shape of nymphs, presiding several rivers, appropriate either to their dignity, signories [domains] or places of birth' (ll. 63-5). It is interesting that Anne Clifford is one of the only women in the masque (and the only countess) who did not portray a river which ran through her husband's territory: instead she depicted the nymph of the River Air, which ran near Skipton Castle, where she was born. In her writings Anne always stressed the importance of her family heritage.<sup>80</sup> Further, the association of Clifford with the land where she was born can be viewed as publicly displaying the legitimacy of her claim to her father's lands. The active support which Clifford received from the Queen in 1617 can therefore be viewed, not as an isolated incident, but rather as a continuation of support which had begun in 1608 with Clifford's inclusion in *The Masque of Beauty*.<sup>81</sup>

Frances Bevill, Anne Herbert and Penelope Rich had died in the period between *Blackness* and *Beauty*. In 1605 (after *Blackness* had been performed), as already discussed, Penelope's husband, Robert Rich had been granted judicial separation on the grounds of her adultery, and soon after Penelope married her lover against the express command of James, an action which led to her disgrace at court. Had she still been alive at the time of *Beauty* it would have been interesting to see whether Anna would have included her after this public defiance of James. But even taking into account the deaths of Rich, Bevill and Herbert, this still leaves three women who were not asked back to dance in the sequel: Anne Effingham, Elizabeth Howard and Catherine (Knyvet) Howard, Countess of Suffolk. Barroll argues that the Queen's masques revolved around a 'core' of her closest women, with 'visitors' being invited to dance - usually (but not always) young, unmarried women. This core group incorporated the de Vere sisters, Audrey Walsingham and Lucy Russell and later included the four daughters of the Earl of Worcester and Alatheia Talbot. The policy of including different visitors

may account for the exclusion of Lady Effingham, who only danced in *Blackness* - her husband was the heir of the powerful Earl of Nottingham and she may have been included in this one masque as a substitute for Nottingham's wife, the out of favour Margaret Howard.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that Elizabeth Howard was also a visitor and therefore not included in *Beauty* to enable other visitors to participate. However, she had danced in the Queen's previous two masques, indicating her favour and suggesting that she was more than just a visitor: in *Vision* she played the role of the sea-goddess Tethys, 'Albion's fairest love' (l. 344) and in *Blackness* she had been partnered with Anna's favourite, Susan de Vere.<sup>83</sup>

Of the three women who were excluded from *Beauty*, Catherine Howard, the Countess of Suffolk had initially appeared to be part of Anna's core group: in 1604 she was a member of the Queen's Drawing Chamber and had portrayed the lead goddess, Juno in *Twelve Goddesses*, a role which Anna had rejected. But unlike the majority of the women in Anna's inner group, the Countess of Suffolk, as previously noted, appears to have been included because of the position of her husband, Thomas Howard, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Suffolk who was James' Lord Chamberlain. It seems likely that Anna had invited the Countess (as with Margaret Howard) as a gesture to James, reinforced by the fact that *Blackness* was the last of Anna's masques in which the Countess danced. Barroll argues that the exclusion of Catherine Howard (and also of Margaret Howard) was due to Anna's growing estrangement from the dominant Howard faction at the court.<sup>84</sup> The exclusion of some women shows that Queen Anna used her masques to support certain women, and also to indicate who was out of favour, thus reinforcing the point that gender alone was not enough to be part of Anna's retinue. But even acknowledging Anna's dislike of the Howard faction, Howard women did continue to dance in Anna's masques, for example Frances (Howard) Devereux and Alatheia (Howard) Talbot: this indicates that in certain cases personal liking may have transcended factional politics, and perhaps that Anna simply did not like Catherine Howard. The women Anna continued to favour did, however, have some elements in common, such as intelligence, education and unconventional and oppositional standpoints. Inviting women such as Penelope Rich, Elizabeth and Susan de Vere, Lucy Russell, Mary Wroth and Anne Clifford to dance in masques can be read as a public way for the Queen to surround herself with similarly independent and

strong-minded women, and in addition, to signal her personal validation of their actions.

Anna's involvement in both masques is clear. Jonson's prologue to *The Masque of Blackness* tells the reader that the Queen chose the blackness motif and since this was conveyed by paint rather than by masks, it appears that Anna elected to portray the motif in a way which could not be easily removed on the night. Anna decided that the women would be transformed in the sequel – Jonson tells us she only intended the women to be black 'at first'. Anna was in charge of who danced in the masque, which roles they portrayed and who was excluded; she contributed to the theme and content and was in control of the image she and her women projected when they were on the stage.

The fact that the Queen employed Jonson to write *The Masque of Beauty* three years later indicates that her aims had been served by *Blackness*, and rather than perceiving *Beauty* as an apology for *Blackness* (as Williams does<sup>85</sup>) *Blackness* and *Beauty* can be viewed as two parts of a whole with different but complementary aims. *Blackness*, through the visual combination of blackness and the wife/whore dichotomy figures the limited roles available to women in society, whilst at the same time displaying and giving precedence to women who rejected those roles: it thus destabilises patriarchal conceptions of femininity. In *Beauty*, women's limitations are not figured; instead female empowerment is a more defined theme (a theme reinforced by Anna's decision to have sixteen of her women appear on stage, rather than twelve) and the visual images, in particular the dances, highlight the capabilities of these women, with even some of Jonson's lines ('foul error') giving evidence of a desire to change the perception of these female performers. Barroll and McManus eschew the printed texts, and their decision to focus on other aspects of the masque is legitimate; however, analysis of the written text and spectacle, in conjunction with an examination of the women who participated and the roles they portrayed, indicates that it was not just Jonson's ideas which were being presented in the masques of *Blackness* and *Beauty*, but those of Anna. In addition, in both masques Anna appeared alongside her proactive women, who were presented as a united female group.

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- <sup>1</sup> Enid Welsford, *The Court Masque*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. viii.
- <sup>2</sup> D. J. Gordon, 'The Imagery of Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VI (1943), pp. 122-41; 'Poet and architect: the intellectual setting of the quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XII (1949), pp. 152-78.
- <sup>3</sup> Orgel, *Jonsonian Masque*, p. vii.
- <sup>4</sup> Bacon, 'Of Masques and Entertainments' in *Essays*, p. 99.
- <sup>5</sup> Orgel, *Illusion*, p. 40.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>7</sup> Orgel's recent work has looked at Anna's role in the masques: see 'Marginal Jonson' in David Bevington & Peter Holbrook, *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- <sup>8</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 28; 29; 43.
- <sup>9</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 81.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- <sup>13</sup> McManus, *Women*, p. 213.
- <sup>14</sup> Orgel, *Jonsonian Masque*, p. 66.
- <sup>15</sup> Leah S. Marcus, 'Jonson and the Court' in Harp & Stewart, *Ben Jonson*, p. 34.
- <sup>16</sup> Martin Butler, 'The Invention of Britain and the Early Stuart Masque' in R. M. Smuts, *The Stuart Court and Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 69, 75.
- <sup>17</sup> Jerzy Limon, *The Masque of Stuart Culture*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 23; McManus, *Women*, p. 8.
- <sup>18</sup> Payment list ('Rewards to the persons employed in the masque') for *Love Freed* quoted in *BJ X*, p. 529.
- <sup>19</sup> McManus has looked at aristocratic dance as a way of understanding representations of gender in the court masque. *Women*, pp. 18-59.
- <sup>20</sup> See *BJ X*, p. 464.
- <sup>21</sup> Lewalski, analysing the poetry of the masque, views *Beauty* as challenging James by figuring female power in general. I would argue, however, that the images are specific to these female dancers - there is no evidence that Anna and her women were interested in changing the position of women in general.
- <sup>22</sup> Gordon, 'Imagery', p. 130.
- <sup>23</sup> Thomas Elyot, *Book, Named the Governor* (1531), ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), p. 218.
- <sup>24</sup> The name Hecate derives from the Greek for 'she who works her will'. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Volume 5*, (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992), p. 793.

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- <sup>25</sup> Jenny March, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, (London: Cassell, 1998), p. 179.
- <sup>26</sup> Jonson, Notes to *Queens*, p. 81.
- <sup>27</sup> The nine female statues 'represent[ed] the Elements of Beauty' (l. 160), and were: Splendour (which was also the role which Lucy Russell had played in *Blackness*), Serenitas (Clearness), Germinatio (Budding), Laetitia (Joy), Temperies (Temperance), Venustas (Loveliness), Dignitas (Merit) and Perfectio (Perfection). The ninth was Harmonia 'whose dressing had something of all the others' (l. 201) and whose seven crown jewels were emblematic of the seven planets and their spheres.
- <sup>28</sup> Zorzi Giustinian. Venetian ambassador to the Doge and Senate, December 27<sup>th</sup> 1607, *SP (Ven.)*, 1607-1610, p. 76.
- <sup>29</sup> *ES III*, p. 281.
- <sup>30</sup> French ambassador's report, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1608 quoted in *BJ X*, p. 456.
- <sup>31</sup> Giustinian to the Doge and Senate, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1608, *SP (Ven.)*, 1607-1610, p. 86.
- <sup>32</sup> Dutton, Introduction, *Beauty*, p. 55.
- <sup>33</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 28.
- <sup>34</sup> Yumni Siddiqi, 'Dark Incontinents: the discourses of race and gender in three Renaissance masques', *Renaissance Drama*, 23 (1992), p. 146.
- <sup>35</sup> Kim Hall, 'Sexual Politics and Cultural Identity in *The Masque of Blackness*' in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, *The Performance of Power*, (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1991), p. 10.
- <sup>36</sup> Hardin Aasand, '"To blanch an Ethiop and revive a cor'se": Queen Anne and *The Masque of Blackness*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 32 (1992), p. 280.
- <sup>37</sup> Lewalski argues that the delayed transformation shows the limitations of James' power.
- <sup>38</sup> Orgel points to the visible pregnancy as potentially masculine in its sexually aggressive display. 'Marginal Jonson', p. 150.
- <sup>39</sup> Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, 2.1.153-5.
- <sup>40</sup> This association with fertility was to have a sad irony for both women. The child Anna was carrying, Princess Mary, died young and Anna's next (and last) child, a daughter named Sophia after Anna's mother, died within hours of her birth. Lucy was to die childless: both of her children died soon after birth.
- <sup>41</sup> Venus was said to have been born when Jupiter, having castrated his father Saturn (or in an earlier version, when Saturn, having castrated his father Uranus), threw his genitals in the sea. H. David Brumble (ed.), *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), p. 337.
- <sup>42</sup> Orgel, 'Marginal Jonson', p. 163.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- <sup>44</sup> Nicolo Molin, Venetian Ambassador to the Doge and Senate, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1605, *SP (Ven.)*, 1603-1607, p. 213.
- <sup>45</sup> Letter from Carleton to Ralph Winwood, quoted in Chambers, *ES III*, p. 376
- <sup>46</sup> Letter from Carleton to Chamberlain quoted in Dutton, Introduction, *Blackness*, p. 16. Orgel



cautions against relying too heavily on eyewitnesses, in case we become too dependent on personal tastes. However, in order to gauge the impact of the masques at the time it is necessary to make use of such reports, as personal tastes reflect an aspect of public opinion.

<sup>47</sup> Reproduced in Stephen Orgel & Roy Strong, *Inigo Jones: the Theatre of the Stuart Court*, (London: Sotheby, Parke, Bernet, 1973), as are all extant masque designs.

<sup>48</sup> See Marion Sichel, *Costume Reference 3: Jacobean, Stuart and Restoration*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1977) and Valerie Cumming, *A Visual History of the Seventeenth Century*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Francesco Barbaro, *On Wifely Duties* quoted in Aasand, 'Queen Anne', p. 277. Barbaro's text is medieval (he lived from 1398-1454) – however, it was reprinted in 1514, 1535 and 1612, indicating that the ideas still carried authority.

<sup>50</sup> Orgel, 'Marginal Jonson', pp. 152-3.

<sup>51</sup> See Orgel and Strong, *Inigo Jones*, p. 98.

<sup>52</sup> Cumming, *Visual History*, p. 24. The second portrait is reproduced on the jacket cover of Barroll, *Anna*.

<sup>53</sup> See Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*.

<sup>54</sup> Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, 2.5.26. John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, 2.5.47-9. John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, 4.3.1. Malhereux asks of Franceschina in John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*, 'Ha, she is a whore, is she not?' Freevill replies: 'Whore? Fie, whore! You may call a courtesan a cockatrice, or (as that worthy spirit of an eternal happiness said) a suppository. But whore, fie! 'Tis not a thing in fashion to call things by their right names' (1.2.99-103).

<sup>55</sup> Although this labelling is in part due to Moll's transvestism and her association with the underworld, it is also partly a result of her avowed rejection of marriage. (Middleton & Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 5.2.216-24). She has no desire to be a wife, therefore she is a whore.

<sup>56</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 141.

<sup>57</sup> Orgel argues that the blackness device would not have been shocking as it had already been employed before, in two masques performed at the Scottish court. 'Marginal Jonson', p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Oceanus is a supporter of James and his Kingdom: 'This land, that lifts into the temperate air/ His snowy cliff, is Albion the fair;/ So called of Neptune's son, who ruleth here:/ For whose dear guard, my self, (four thousand year)/ Since old Deucalion's days, have walked the round/ About his empire, proud, to see him crown'd/ Above my waves' (ll. 182-8).

<sup>59</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Bevill, the daughter of Henry Knevvyt and the widow of Sir William Bevill, had married Francis Manners (later 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Rutland) in 1602. It is interesting that even after her second marriage, she was referred to by the name of her late husband. This is reminiscent of Elizabeth Hatton, whose refusal to take her second husband's name allowed her to suggest a distance and independence from her husband.

<sup>61</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 101.

<sup>62</sup> The order of the women, their names and the symbols depicted on their fans were as follows.

Anna (Euphoris – Abundance) and Lucy Russell (Agalia – Splendour): a golden tree laden with fruit symbolising fertility. Anne Herbert (Diaphane – Transparent) and Elizabeth de Vere (Eucampse – Flexibility): a twenty-sided figure representing water. Penelope Rich (Ocyte – Swiftmess) and the Countess of Suffolk (Kathare – Spotless): a pair of naked feet in a river symbolising purity. Lady Bevill (Notis – Moisture) and Lady Effingham (Psychorate – Coldness): a salamander symbolising the salamander who is not harmed by fire. Elizabeth Howard (Glycyte – Sweetness) and Susan de Vere (Malacia – Delicacy): a cloud full of rain dropping symbolising education. Mary Wroth (Baryte – Weight) and Audrey Walsingham (Periphere – Revolving): an urn sphered with wine symbolising the globe of the earth. See Gordon, 'Imagery' and *BJ X*, p. 454.

<sup>63</sup> 'Which manner of symbol I rather chose, than *impresse*, as well for the strangeness, as relishing of antiquity, and more applying to that original doctrine of sculpture, which the Egyptians are said, first, to have brought from the Ethiopians' (ll. 241-4).

<sup>64</sup> By the Jacobean era the humanist phase, which had promoted education for aristocratic women, had declined. See texts listed in Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 326n.11.

<sup>65</sup> With hindsight it is interesting that the other woman representing purity, the Countess of Suffolk was to be put on trial in 1619 for fraud and bribery. There were also rumours that she was the mistress of Robert Cecil. See Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>66</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 191n.86.

<sup>67</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 100. McManus argues convincingly that Anna's decision not to play Juno, the head of the goddesses, meant that *Twelve Goddesses* 'eschewed any representation of the incoming royal couple through the gendered construct of the patriarchal family'. *Women*, p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Carleton to Chamberlain, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1603 quoted in *ES III*, p. 279. The men's masque is lost.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Edmund Gosse to John Donne, November 1608 quoted in Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 361n.20. Lewalski argues that the masque referred to is *Beauty*.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from John Packer to Ralph Winwood, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1604 quoted in Chambers, *ES III*, p. 375.

<sup>71</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 93.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Queen Anna to James I, 1603 quoted in Barroll, *Anna*, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Barroll also considers this possibility. *Anna*, p. 101.

<sup>74</sup> Packer to Winwood, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1604 quoted in *ES III*, p. 375.

<sup>75</sup> Arbella Stuart and Katherine Petre, who both danced in *Beauty* and *Tethys' Festival* were not deliberately excluded from the in-between masque, *Queens*: they were ill.

<sup>76</sup> Michael G. Brennan (ed.), *Lady Mary Wroth's Love's Victory: the Penshurst Manuscript*, (London: The Roxburghe Club, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Schleiner says, 'Presumably at the time of [*Beauty's*] publication the Queen no longer wanted to be publicly associated with [Wroth]. The omission of her name is, I believe, a strong clue that her

disgrace started from c.1610'. *Women Writers*, p. 266n. The evidence, however, suggests this was not the case.

<sup>78</sup> See Introduction to Jonson, *Hymenaei* in Dutton, *Masques I*, p. 29. For further information on Frances Howard see Chapter 6 of this thesis; David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: fact and fiction at the court of King James*, (London: Routledge, 1993) and Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*.

<sup>79</sup> Daniel's notes make it clear that the Countess of Dorset who participated was Anne Clifford and not the Dowager countess (Richard Sackville's step-mother). The river she personated, Air, was 'a river that runs near Skipton, where this Lady was born' (*TF*, p. 103): Anne Clifford was born in Skipton Castle in Craven, Yorkshire.

<sup>80</sup> Clifford, *Lives*, *passim*.

<sup>81</sup> Anne Clifford's kinswoman, Mary Neville, from whom Clifford received emotional support in her dispute, was also invited to dance in *Beauty*: it would be her only masque.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Howard was the daughter of Catherine Howard, Countess of Suffolk (her mother was also excluded from this masque), and the sister of Frances Howard (later Frances Carr). In 1605 Elizabeth had married William, Baron Knollys. Like other of the women who surrounded Anna, Elizabeth's life was irregular: it was rumoured that she 'produced two sons who were presumed to be fathered by her lover Lord Vaux rather than her husband'. Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*, p. 30. If this is true, it is not wholly surprising - Elizabeth's husband William, whom she had married when she was eighteen, was forty years her senior.

<sup>84</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, pp. 203-4n.77.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, *Anne*, pp. 126-8.

## 6. Representing sorority in masques and plays

I/ Will rescue her or for her sake die  
(Silvesta, speaking about her friend Musella, in  
*Love's Victory* (5.176-8)).

Of the last three masques commissioned by Queen Anna, two - *The Masque of Queens* (1609) and *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1611) - have text written by Ben Jonson, while the text for *Tethys' Festival* (1610) is by Samuel Daniel, who had not written a masque for the court since 1604. *Queens* was a Christmas masque, as was *Love Freed*, which was performed in the same season as the better known masque, *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, also by Jonson.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, *Tethys' Festival* was written for performance immediately after the investiture of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales: it was part of the rites of passage celebrating his emergence into independent, adult life as prince and heir apparent.

Critics have looked for explanations as to the recall of Samuel Daniel by the Queen to write the text for this specific masque. Richard Dutton wondered

whether Queen Ann[a]'s choice of Daniel for this important masque in any way reflects dissatisfaction with Jonson's masques for her: do Daniel's criticisms perhaps echo her own feeling that the growing use of professional actors, necessary for Jonson's more 'dramatic' antimasques, was socially unfortunate or, indeed, stealing fire from her own performances?<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Leeds Barroll argues that Daniel was the writer Anna called on when 'she wanted to mount a spectacle of great personal significance'.<sup>3</sup>

In order to assess the strengths of the two viewpoints, it is necessary to consider the masque preceding *Tethys' Festival*, *The Masque of Queens*, which Barroll examines as an entertainment through which Anna addressed 'the question of her royalty'.<sup>4</sup> In terms of this study, the purpose is to discover whether the written and stage text of *Queens* continue the process established in the last chapter - that Anna achieved more than highlighting her royal authority through her masques, by using them to display and express belief in her capabilities and in those of her ladies as equal to, if not greater than, that of the traditional male authority surrounding them, and to subvert patriarchal conceptions of femininity.

This study will also determine whether in *Queens* a change of emphasis can be detected in Jonson's writing from the texts of *Blackness* and *Beauty*, before examining what *Tethys' Festival* reveals of the Queen's continuing use of the form, in particular with regard to the representation of her women, the roles they were allocated by the Queen and their continuing presentation as a united community.

*The Masque of Queens* (1609)

*The Masque of Queens* was performed on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1609 and was divided into two parts: an 'antimasque', or 'spectacle of strangeness' (l. 17) as Jonson termed it, and the main masque. The scene of the antimasque was 'an ugly hell, which flaming beneath, smoked unto the top of the roof' (ll. 21-2). Out of this hell came twelve witches, who chanted evil charms and danced

a magical dance, full of preposterous change and gesticulation ... dancing back to back, hip to hip, their hands joined, and making circles backward to the left hand, with strange fantastic motions of their heads and bodies (ll. 318-23).

The witches, headed by their Dame, who was 'naked-armed, barefooted, her frock tucked, her hair knotted and folded with vipers' (ll. 84-5) intended 'to overthrow the glory of this night' (l. 112).<sup>5</sup> A burst of loud music signalled the end of the antimasque - the hellish setting disappeared 'and the whole scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of any such thing' (ll. 327-9). In its place appeared the House of Fame, on top of which sat Anna and her women as twelve Queens. Perseus, signifying Heroic Virtue, introduced and praised the Queens, who then descended to the stage in chariots drawn by 'far-sighted eagles' (l. 432), griffins and lions. Each chariot had four of the witches from the antimasque bound before it. The Queens danced before returning to sit on their throne and the masque ended with a song praising the immutability of Good Fame.

Critical opinion on *The Masque of Queens* is divided. Hardin Aasand argues that it was 'written without Ann[a]'s involvement' and that the Queen's 'voice had been stifled by the time Jonson presented [it]'.<sup>6</sup> Orgel, while acknowledging Anna's involvement and arguing that the presentation of the

military Queens can be interpreted as challenging James' misogyny and his pacifist political stance, ultimately believes that 'the women are disarmed even as they are empowered' because Jonson's embodiment of Heroic Virtue is not female, but Perseus, slayer of the (female) gorgon.<sup>7</sup> In contrast Barbara Lewalski argues that although Perseus killed the gorgon, he was the servant of Pallas, the goddess identified with Queen Anna, and the role she had portrayed in Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*. For Lewalski

the masque of the famous Queens bears yet more strongly the imprint of Queen Ann[a]'s 'authorship' in its subversion of the trajectory of power and of James' own ideology of gender and male sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Aasand's assertion that Anna was not involved in *Queens*, a warrant from James to the exchequer on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1608 shows that the masque was written at her instigation:

Whereas the Queen our dearest wife hath resolved for our greater honour and contentment to make us a masque this Christmas attended by most of the greatest ladies in the kingdom forasmuch as she is pleased that the Earl of Suffolk ... and the Earl of Worcester ... shall take some pains to look into the ... provision of all things necessary for the same.<sup>9</sup>

Further, the Venetian ambassador reported on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1609 that Anna 'held daily rehearsals and trials of the machinery',<sup>10</sup> showing that as with her previous masques she was involved in all aspects of the production. As to authorship of ideas, in the preface to *Queens* Jonson wrote: 'her Majesty had commanded me to think on some dance or show that might precede hers, and have the place of a foil or false masque' (ll. 10-11). In contrast to the prefaces to *Blackness* and *Beauty*, which revealed evidence of Anna's active part in the conception of the themes of these masques, Jonson's phrasing here indicates that the job of creating the masque was divided between him and the Queen. The idea to incorporate an antimasque is presented as Anna's, but Jonson seems to have had control over its content, while the masque is said to be 'hers'.<sup>11</sup> Jonson's antimasque was long and dramatic and would clearly have been a competitor for attention with Anna's masque. In addition, given King James' fascination with witches - his treatise,

*Demonology*, had been published in 1597 and again in 1603 - Jonson's choice of theme associates the antimasque with James rather than with Anna.<sup>12</sup> The antimasque can therefore be viewed as shifting the focus away from the Queen.

For the main masque, Jonson wrote in his preface of

my being used in these services to her majesty's personal presentations, with the ladies whom she pleaseth to honour [and] it was my first and special regard to see that the nobility of the invention should be answerable to the dignity of their persons (ll. 1-5).

Although Orgel, perhaps unable to see the anti-female Jonson presenting military women without help, claims that 'the militant heroines were the Queen's idea',<sup>13</sup> there is no mention here of 'her majesty's will' that Jonson should present a certain topic in the masque, as there had been in *Blackness* and *Beauty*. The preface reads as though Jonson knows, or thinks he knows, what was expected for the main masque.

In Anna's previous masques her personal royalty had been an integral aspect, but as the masque title indicates, in this case queenship itself was the central theme. In *Queens* Anna portrayed a mythical version of herself, appearing as 'Bel-Anna ... Queen of the Ocean' (ll. 382-3) and Barroll argues that 'for the first time she employed the court masque not to symbolise but to *signify* her queenship'.<sup>14</sup> In the masque the top of the pyramid is said to be 'the sovereign place/ Of all that palace' (ll. 387-8) and this is where Anna rightfully sits as 'the worthiest Queen' (l. 389). Yet Anna is figured as deferring her power to James: she 'confesseth all the lustre of her merit/ To you, most royal and most happy King' (ll. 398-9). This can be interpreted as an attempt at containment, that Anna is being displayed not as Queen but as Queen consort. This deference to James is, however, subverted, firstly by the use of the phrase 'sovereign place' and secondly by the description of Anna sitting at the top of the pyramid, as its 'head' (l. 385).<sup>15</sup> Not only is she literally the head of the pyramid, making it complete, she is also symbolically the head. The use of the word 'head' echoes James' own rhetoric with regard to the monarchy: he argued in *Basilicon Doron* (1599) that the King/husband was the superior 'head' to the inferior 'body' of the state/wife. Therefore although James is at this point in the masque ostensibly honoured, the reference to his power is

subverted by the masque's claim that Anna was the 'head': by using his own political rhetoric and inverting its paternalism, Anna can be viewed as extending a challenge to James' position as monarch. This provides further textual evidence for Lewalski's argument.

Anna's presentation as monarch is supported by the inclusion of historical and mythical Queens who, either in fact or in fiction, were famous for ruling in their own right. They were: Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons; Camilla, Queen of the Volscians; Thomyris, Queen of the Scythians; Artemisia, Queen of Caria; Berenice, Queen of Egypt; Hypsicratea, Queen of Pontus; Candace, Queen of Ethiopia; Voadicea (Boadicea), Queen of the Icenii; Zenobia, Queen of the Palmyrenes; Amalasunta, Queen of the Ostrogoths and Valasca, Queen of Bohemia. In contrast to *Blackness* and *Beauty*, the masquers' costumes in *Queens* were not identical - however, all of the women wore elaborately constructed crowns.<sup>16</sup> Some of these were spiked (Artemisia and Candace) while others incorporated luxurious plumes (Penthesilea, Camilla, Thomyris, Zenobia) or feathers (Camilla, Artemisia, Berenice). Bel-Anna's crown was, as would be expected, the most complex of all, combining feathers and plumes with a globe, which symbolised both a royal sceptre and the earth: 'the central attribute, an armillary sphere, is an appropriate symbol for Bel-Anna'.<sup>17</sup> These visual images of royalty were reinforced by the poetry: the Queens are said to be 'crowned the choice/ Of woman-kind' (ll. 377-8). The 'throne triumphal' (l. 330) further displays their royalty; the spectator would therefore have read meaning from the wearing of crowns, the throne and the fact that these women were supporters of Anna herself, as Bel-Anna.

Some of these points reinforce the argument that Anna was performing and displaying herself as an alternative royalty. However, the aspect not yet considered - as argued in the introduction to this thesis and in the previous chapter - is that Anna's self-presentation is never alone, but always supported by, and in support of, her chosen women and this study will focus, as before, on these women.



### The female masquers

In *Queens* Anna continued to include and support her core group of women, as well as introducing other women who were similarly independent and who also challenged society's strictures. As before, Anna would have decided on the dancers for this masque - in Jonson's words, who were to be 'the ladies whom she pleaseth to honour' (ll. 2-3) - and despite Jonson's claim that the parts 'were disposed rather by chance than election' (ll. 443-4), it is more likely that Anna would have apportioned the roles. Jonson's written text does not include a list of which part was played by each woman and Clare McManus argues that 'Jonson used the scholarly authority of the printed text to elide any traces of the female body and its performative agency'.<sup>18</sup> However, as she points out, the survival of Inigo Jones' designs, which record the parts played by the women, work against Jonson's apparent attempt to make the female performers invisible. The dancers were: Lucy Russell (Penthesilea); Elizabeth de Vere (Zenobia); Anne Clifford (Berenice); Susan de Vere (Thomyris); Elizabeth Guildford (Artemisia); Anne Winter (Candace); Catherine Windsor (Camilla); Alatheia Talbot; Frances (Howard) Devereux, Countess of Essex; Elizabeth (Stanley) Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon and Catherine (Howard) Cecil, Viscountess Cranborne. The final four women would each have played one of the following Queens: Voadicea, Hypsicratia, Amalasunta and Valasca.

Sixteen women had participated in *The Masque of Beauty*: in contrast, in *Queens* there were only twelve. Those who did not return for *Queens* were Arbella Stuart, Katherine Petre, Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Hatton, Mary Neville, Elizabeth Gerard, Frances Chichester and Audrey Walsingham. Arbella and Katherine were ill and returned the following year for *Tethys' Festival*. Wroth and Hatton had each danced in two masques (and did not dance again after *Beauty*), while Neville, Gerard and Chichester can be regarded as visitors in *Beauty*. In contrast, Audrey Walsingham had previously been a member of Anna's inner circle: she had danced in *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (as Astraea<sup>19</sup>) as well as in the masques of *Blackness* and *Beauty*. Additionally, along with her husband, she was the Keeper of the Queen's Wardrobe and in 1604 she had been

granted a personal pension of £200 a year for life for attending Anna.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore difficult to determine why *Beauty* was her last masque, particularly as a warrant of December 15<sup>th</sup> 1609 shows that it was not because she was out of favour: the warrant honoured Audrey, stating that she was to have precedence before Lady Hoby or 'any other lady of her rank of a knight'.<sup>21</sup>

New to the group were Elizabeth Hastings, Catherine Cecil and Frances Devereux and of the three, neither Elizabeth nor Catherine would dance in another masque. It seems likely that Elizabeth Hastings was included because of her family connections: she was the daughter of Alice Stanley, Dowager Countess of Derby, and therefore the niece of both Elizabeth and Susan de Vere.<sup>22</sup> Catherine Cecil (the sister of Frances Devereux) had married the eldest son of Robert Cecil and was also kin to the de Vere sisters, which reinforces the point that Anna's women comprised a family network. Catherine's marriage was arranged by her father, but despite this it was - like the marriages of Frances Seymour, Susan de Vere, Anne Clifford and Elizabeth Hatton - conducted clandestinely:

On 1<sup>st</sup> December [1608], Cranborne had been married - 'very privately', for some reason which does not appear, 'at the Lady Walsingham's lodging by the tilt-yard' - to Suffolk's daughter, Lady Catherine Howard.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting that it was another of Anna's women who provided the venue for the secret wedding. Even though she was only to dance in this one masque, Catherine continued to be supported by the Queen and others she had danced with: in 1613 Anna, Lucy Russell and Elizabeth de Vere were 'sponsors' for Catherine's daughter.<sup>24</sup>

The third of the new dancers was Frances Devereux, who was to have the most notorious life of all Anna's women. Frances was the daughter of Thomas and Catherine Howard, the Earl and Countess of Suffolk, but is better known as Frances Carr, Countess of Somerset, the woman found guilty of poisoning Sir Thomas Overbury. At the time of *Queens* she was still married to Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, a marriage which had been arranged by their parents for political reasons when Robert was fourteen and Frances thirteen.<sup>25</sup> Essex was sent to France to grow up; he returned to his bride in 1609, but at some point Frances had fallen in love with the King's favourite, Robert Carr, a man

whom Queen Anna despised. Frances, with the backing of her family, tried to have her marriage annulled on the grounds of non-consummation due to Essex's impotence.<sup>26</sup> Eventually in 1613, under pressure from James, the annulment was granted, leaving both parties free to remarry. It is indicative of her influence at court that, when she married Robert Carr, on December 26<sup>th</sup> of the same year he was promoted from Viscount Rochester to Earl of Somerset so that Frances could remain a countess. Two months previously, on September 15<sup>th</sup>, Thomas Overbury, a friend of Carr's who had tried to dissuade him from marrying Frances, had died in the Tower, and in 1616 Frances and Robert Carr were put on trial for his poisoning. Both were sentenced to death, but while the lower class people involved in the poisoning were hanged, both Frances and Robert escaped this fate, and were instead imprisoned.

In 1609 Frances' infamy lay ahead of her: when she danced with the Queen for the first time she had been married to Essex for three years and he had recently returned to London. It is possible, therefore, that it was Frances' Essex connections which originally led to her inclusion in the masque - Robert Devereux was the nephew of Anna's friend Penelope Rich, who had died the year previously, and many of Anna's close circle of friends, as well as members of her extended retinue, had Essex connections (for example, Lucy Russell). Despite Anna's hostility towards Carr, however, after Frances' marriage to him Anna continued to support her, and in July 1616 it was the Queen who ensured that Frances was granted a royal pardon.<sup>27</sup> It can perhaps be read as significant that Frances was pardoned before her husband. Anna's support of Frances provides another specific example of the Queen helping her women, and, in contrast to the case of Arbella Stuart, in this instance Anna was successful in securing Frances a pardon. The difference in the outcome of the two cases may have been that while Frances had committed a crime against a nobleman, Arbella had offended the King.

It would appear that already by 1609 Frances appealed to the Queen on her own merits: she was a strong-willed, independent young woman of sixteen who refused to conform to society's role for her and who eventually managed to extricate herself from an unhappy arranged marriage and then to form a love match. Additionally, some of Anna's women provided emotional support for Frances: while she was in the Tower her sister Elizabeth Knollys (who had danced

in *Twelve Goddesses*) visited her, as did Anne Clifford.<sup>28</sup> Frances and Clifford had danced together in *Queens* and *Tethys' Festival* and Clifford refers to her relationship with Frances in her diary: they sent each other letters and tokens, and on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1616, Clifford noted that she had 'gone to the Tiltyard to see my Lady Knollys where I saw my Lady Somerset's child'.<sup>29</sup> McManus has argued that 'Despite their shared non-conformity ... Anna and [Frances] Howard were polarised by their involvement in the Jacobean court's power structures'.<sup>30</sup> However, the evidence regarding the Somerset trial suggests that even though Frances was a member of the powerful Howard faction, to which Anna was opposed, the Queen still provided help for her, indicating that the Queen's liking for specific women could transcend the concerns of factional politics.

All of the other women who danced in *Queens* - Lucy Russell, Elizabeth de Vere, Susan de Vere, Anne Clifford, Alatheia Talbot, Anne Winter, Catherine Windsor and Elizabeth Guildford - were established favourites of Anna. As previously mentioned, Lucy played the role of Penthesilea, 'the brave Amazon' (l. 366) whom Lewalski views as the most subversive of the Queens.<sup>31</sup> Penthesilea is described in Jonson's notes as 'always advanced in the head of the worthiest women' (ll. 452-3) and her masculine attributes are emphasised, for example her warlike nature.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to *The Masque of Blackness*, however, in *Queens* no hieroglyphs were displayed to illustrate the roles portrayed by each woman; therefore the audience may not have been aware which Queens were being represented by which women. Yet despite this, Lucy's distinctive armour, the sash covering her breast (it was reputed that Amazons removed one breast to make shooting a bow easier) and her sword make it likely the spectators would have understood that her role was that of Penthesilea, the Amazon warrior Queen. Of all the Queens, the audience would have been most familiar with Penthesilea and her deeds: her part in the battle of Troy is described in Homer's *Iliad*, and she is mentioned throughout Renaissance literature.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible to argue that the other Queen who would have been familiar to the audience was Zenobia, Queen of the Palmyrenes, who was played by Elizabeth de Vere. In 1540 Thomas Elyot had published a Platonic dialogue entitled *The Defence of Good Women* in which he used the example of Zenobia to prove that women were capable of ruling without causing chaos to society. Zenobia is the

subject of Elyot's discussion, but she also appears in it and speaks for herself, which was unknown for women in such dialogues. According to Pamela Benson, Zenobia 'is a representative of the potential of womankind, if given the proper education'.<sup>34</sup> It seems likely that the audience would have connected Jonson's Zenobia with Elyot's, and thus with successful rule, and this argument is reinforced by other references to Zenobia in Renaissance texts.<sup>35</sup> Further, Anna's choice of Elizabeth de Vere to portray this Queen can be viewed as fitting: Elizabeth administered her property on her own behalf, and it was only one year after she had participated in *Queens* that she began her successful rule of the Isle of Man, a position which gave her quasi-regal powers.<sup>36</sup> But in contrast to Lucy's costume, which framed her as Penthesilea, Elizabeth's costume did not make her instantly recognisable as Zenobia; spectators would not necessarily have made these connections, nonetheless, such associations were present.

There are other elements in the masque which allow for the possibility that it was doing more than simply displaying Anna as an alternative, female royalty: *Queens*, like *Blackness* and *Beauty*, figures images of empowerment for her women as well. In the space of ten lines, six of the Queens are described in terms of their warrior nature: Penthesilea is 'brave' (l. 366); Thomyris 'victorious' (l. 368); Hypsicratea the 'glory of Asia' (371); Voadicea 'that Briton honour' (l. 373); Amalasunta 'wise and warlike' (l. 375) and Valasca 'bold' (l. 376).<sup>37</sup> The repetition of such masculine virtues in a short space of writing compensates for the brevity of description and conveys a clear message of strong, warrior figures. Further, while the masquers' costumes undoubtedly depicted royalty, Lewalski also points out that three had martial elements.<sup>38</sup> Penthesilea's costume incorporated a breastplate and helmet and she is shown carrying a sword. Thomyris carried a baton by her side and her costume suggests armour, as does that of Candace. In addition, a design for an unidentified Queen's crown (belonging either to Hypsicratea, Valasca, Voadicea or Amalasunta) combines a crown and a helmet. Jonson's intention to present the Queens in this way is confirmed in his background notes, which emphasise that they were powerful warriors: for example Penthesilea is described as 'the daughter of Mars' (l. 455); Thomyris went to war to revenge the death of her son; Hypsicratea dressed as a man in order to fight alongside her husband; Candace invaded Egypt.

In addition, the depiction of Good Fame - who, unlike the Queens, speaks - introduces a female voice, even if it is mediated by a male actor.<sup>39</sup> Fame is figured as possessing extensive powers - she has the ability to discover everything that has happened anywhere in the world, from the 'utmost lands' to the 'deepest seas' (l. 360). She also affects the action; it is the blast of her trumpet which signals the witches' banishment: 'So should at Fame's loud sound .../ All poor and envious witchcraft fly the light' (ll. 335-6). It is Fame who instructs Perseus to defer to the Queens: 'Do those renownèd Queens all utmost rites/ Their states can ask' (ll. 427-8); it is she who decides the Queens will ride in 'mine own chariots' pulled by 'mine own birds and beasts' (ll. 429-30). The repetition of the phrase 'mine own' makes it clear that this is her domain, not that of the male Perseus. It is also Fame who dictates that the witches 'be led as captives bound/ Before their wheels' (ll. 437-8). Fame is thus presented as controlling events, and inevitably the male heroic Perseus, positioned by Orgel as dominant, is in fact less so than the female controller of the masque's action.

Further, as in *Beauty* the masquers' dances seem designed to show the women's skill and grace. Jonson writes that the first two were 'both right curious and full of subtle and excellent changes' (ll. 663-4) while the third was

graphically disposed into letters, and honouring the name of the most sweet and ingenious prince, Charles, Duke of York. Wherein, beside that principal grace of perspicuity, the motions were so even and apt, and their expression so just, as if mathematicians had lost proportion, they might have found it (ll. 678-82).

The focus is on the proficiency and expertise of the women, but in contrast to *Beauty*, there is no specific argument within the poetry relating the dancing to these women's capabilities.<sup>40</sup> Finally, as in all the masques Anna commissioned, in *Queens* the women chose their male dancing partners, putting them, as well as Anna herself, in charge of the masque world.

Barroll has argued that *Queens* contains two of the Queen's agendas:

the first ... seems to have been aimed at symbolically establishing the very fact of her queenship at a court long accustomed to a monarch without a royal companion ... [The] second ... [was] part of a long range program through which she would [in future masques] be allied with the person thought to be England's future King, Henry, Prince of Wales.<sup>41</sup>

But Anna did not appear on stage alone, and the extent to which she included her women reveals that part of Anna's queenship lay in presiding over and supporting a sorority. In common with *Blackness* and *Beauty*, *Queens* includes images of the empowerment of her women as well as that of Anna herself. This is done in various ways: via the presentation of them as warrior Queens, via the fact that all the women continued to choose the partners in the dances, via the specific women who participated and via the roles they played.

The fact that *Queens* focuses on the subject of queenship itself rather than on the capabilities of Anna and her ladies - as in *Beauty* - or on their constraints - as in *Blackness* - does mean the importance of the sorority itself is less apparent. Also, in Jonson's published preface, he did not give Anna credit for the conception of any specific theme, and his interpretation of Anna's request for 'some dance or show' resulted in the long antimasque which would have been in competition with her main masque. This evidence supports Dutton's suggestion that the Queen's recall of Daniel may have reflected her growing 'dissatisfaction with Jonson's masques for her'. However, Anna is presented in *Queens* as being in opposition to James and as having constructed an alternative royal femininity, with her women displayed as oppositional powers. Further, the Queen returned to Jonson for *Love Freed*; dissatisfaction with his work cannot therefore be the full explanation. And, although Barroll argues that Anna used Daniel for those masques which were 'of great personal significance', analysis of *Blackness*, *Beauty* and *Queens* shows that all of Anna's masques contain matters of personal significance. Neither viewpoint, therefore, wholly accounts for Daniel's commission, and this study will suggest a different reason why Jonson was not asked to write the masque celebrating the investiture of Prince Henry, a reason which is connected to the argument that Anna's court was a space which enabled a supportive female community.

Epicoene (1609-10)

After *The Masque of Queens*, Jonson wrote a play for the public stage, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman*, which was performed in December 1609/January 1610, and analysis of it offers a possible explanation for why Jonson was not commissioned by Anna in 1610. In *Epicoene* a young man, Dauphine, plots to inherit the fortune of his rich, noise-hating uncle, Morose, by conning him into marrying an apparently silent woman. Epicoene turns out to be a shrew who is visited by many noisy women. In exchange for the deeds to Morose's estates, Dauphine promises to free his uncle from the disastrous marriage – to do so he reveals that Epicoene is really a boy dressed as a woman. The other women in *Epicoene* are part of a Ladies Collegiate and are portrayed by Jonson as monstrous in their lasciviousness, their never-ending speech and their masculinity.<sup>42</sup> According to Truewit (one of the male characters), '[the women] cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority' (1.1.75-7). 'Hermaphrodite' was the insult levelled at the cross-dressed woman<sup>43</sup> (and was the word which Edward Denny used to describe Mary Wroth in 1621, after the publication of her prose romance, *Urania*) and this image of monstrosity is developed through Jonson's decision to name one of the women Centaure, a reference to the mythological creatures who were half man, half horse. Centaurs were characterised by their vicious lust and were exclusively male: to reproduce they 'mated with mares, or, usually by raping them, women'.<sup>44</sup>

Juliet Dusinberre argues that the women in the play 'derive from no organised social clique of intellectual women';<sup>45</sup> however, this study would suggest that Jonson's misogynist depiction of the Ladies Collegiate was intended to satirise Queen Anna's retinue. Like many of the women of Anna's court, the women of *Epicoene* 'live from their husbands' (1.1.73) and throughout the play there are references to masques (1.3.31; 3.6.82-3). Louise Schleiner argues that *Epicoene* may have been Jonson's revenge on the women of Lucy Russell's circle for mocking his (unsuccessful) role as pander from Sir Thomas Overbury to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland.<sup>46</sup> Schleiner points to the fact that Morose's complaint that his 'masculine and ... commanding' (4.1.8-9) wife, Epicoene, was a



'Penthesilea' (3.4.51) could refer to Lucy, who had just played the role of the Amazon Queen in *Queens*. However, it is possible to argue that as Epicoene herself is not actually one of the college of women (although the women do want her to join (3.6.49-51)), this indicates that Jonson did not intend to be so blatant as to caricature Lucy directly. In fact, Epicoene is an acknowledged boy dressed as a woman; thus the satire is eased when the pretence is removed at the end. But to anyone watching *Epicoene* who had attended or participated in *The Masque of Queens*, the mention of Penthesilea would have brought Lucy Russell to mind.

Further, in *Epicoene* all-male and all-female groups are contrasted. Although Dauphine, Clerimont and Truewit keep secrets from each other (Dauphine is the only one who knows the exact nature of the gull), they still work as a team; as Helen Ostovich argues, 'as a group united against an outside target they are cohesive and supportive, even without being fully informed of one another's activities'.<sup>47</sup> The three are as witty as they are cruel, and Jonson allows a positive (in so far as anything in the play can be viewed as positive) reading of male bonding. In contrast, female companionships are portrayed as wholly negative and ultimately non-existent. Unlike Dauphine and his friends, the women are neither clever nor witty, they are fools: 'all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause; they know not why they do anything' (4.6.58-9). The illusion of a female community disintegrates when the women insult each other in their attempts to win Dauphine's affection. In claiming that she is of higher status than Centaure and Mavis, Haughty has eliminated any notion of an egalitarian sisterhood (5.2.9-11).<sup>48</sup> In addition, Centaure's warning to Dauphine that Haughty 'is a perfect courtier, and loves nobody but for her uses, and for her uses she loves all' (5.2.29-30) could be a satiric reference to any of the women of Anna's retinue. *Epicoene* is therefore a negative reading of the results when a group of women successfully appropriate male ambition, learning and acquisitiveness.<sup>49</sup>

Jonson's play was performed by the Children of her Majesty's Revels in the winter of 1609/10. It is interesting that Anna's theatre company, which in its previous incarnation had been a vehicle for criticism of James, should now produce a play which was highly critical of the Queen, her ladies and their role at court. It is possible that Anna was not aware of the content of the play, but this is

hard to believe when she was so involved in other productions, and was such a keen theatre-goer. It seems more likely that Anna allowed the satire of herself and her women to go ahead, perhaps finding it amusing rather than insulting. It would also have kept Anna and her circle in the public eye. In view of the fact that satire was prevalent at the time and usually directed at men, Anna was at least being treated as a man. Fifty years ago, Edmund Wilson argued that 'through Morose (and through the characters like him) Ben Jonson is tormenting himself for what is negative and recessive in his nature'.<sup>50</sup> Whether or not one agrees that Jonson was tormenting himself, it is possible to argue that with the character of Morose, Jonson was satirising himself: the name Morose is after all Latin for 'peevish and irritable', character traits associated with the playwright. If this was the case, then perhaps Anna and her women would have been more inclined to accept their own satiric portrayals. However, five months after the production of *Epicoene*, Anna commissioned Daniel rather than Jonson to write her next masque, raising the possibility that the Queen - or one of her women - was not happy with their satirical representation.

It is possible that a public play could lead to loss of court favour: in 1603, Jonson's tragedy *Sejanus* was considered seditious by the Privy Council and John Palmer and Eric Linklater argue that this was why he was not asked to write the first masque at the Jacobean court.<sup>51</sup> In the case of *Epicoene*, Lucy Russell - who was mocked by the mention of Penthesilea - was not only one of the women closest to the Queen and able to influence her, she was also the patron of both Jonson and Daniel, and had promoted Daniel to the Queen in 1604. Although it is impossible to tell whether Lucy was offended by *Epicoene*, there is evidence that another of Anna's women was. Arbella Stuart - who was to dance in *Tethys' Festival* - believed that a line in *Epicoene* referred to her as the mistress of the Prince of Moldavia ('the Prince of Moldavia, his mistress' (5.1.20-1)). Stephen Janiculo, the Prince of Moldavia, after visiting England in 1607, on his return home had claimed he was going to marry Arbella when he became King. As the prince was already married and as Arbella was forbidden from marrying without James' permission, even the rumour of such a match endangered her; as a consequence she had *Epicoene* suppressed. According to the Venetian ambassador, Arbella was also determined to have the offenders punished.<sup>52</sup> The

public performance of *Epicoene*, with its criticism of a female community, and implicit negative references to Lucy Russell and Arbella Stuart, thus provides one possible explanation why Jonson was not asked to write Anna's 1610 masque.

*Tethys' Festival* (1610)

It was instead Jonson's rival for court favour, Samuel Daniel, who was commissioned to write Anna's next masque, *Tethys' Festival*.<sup>53</sup> This was performed on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1610, the evening following the day of Prince Henry's investiture, ending a series of celebrations begun on 31<sup>st</sup> May with a reception in the city of London, where a Triton had 'presented Henry with the City's speech of greeting and ... farewell'.<sup>54</sup> Daniel's masque began with a children's dance, executed by Prince Charles (as Zephyrus) and 'eight little ladies near of his stature' (l. 117).<sup>55</sup> In the main body of the masque Anna represented the titular goddess Tethys, 'Queen of the Ocean and wife of Neptune' (l. 59), while thirteen of her women portrayed river nymphs. Tethys is reported by Triton as having sent her messenger Zephyrus to greet and congratulate Meliades (Prince Henry), and to bestow gifts. On behalf of Tethys, he gave the Ocean King (James) a trident 'as the seal/ And ensign of her love and of your right' (l. 193) and to Meliades a sword 'which she unto Astraea sacred found/ And not to be unsheathed but on just ground' (ll. 197-8) and a scarf, 'the zone of love and amity' (l. 200). After the presentation of the gifts 'the port vanished' (l. 227) and Tethys and her nymphs were revealed sitting in magnificent caverns 'gloriously adorned' (ll. 228-9). They descended to hang flowers on Apollo's Tree of Victory after which they danced, then returned to their caverns and disappeared. In the printed text of the masque Daniel wrote that after this,

When, to avoid the confusion which usually attendeth the dissolve of these shows, and when all was thought to be finished, followed another entertainment, and was a third show no less delightful than the rest (ll. 364-7).

For this third show Mercury appeared in a flash of lightning and sent Zephyrus to bring back the Queen and her women; he did so and they appeared in a grove, not

as Tethys and her nymphs, but in their own forms. The masque ended with a march towards the seated figures of James and Henry.

The main purpose of *Tethys' Festival* was to celebrate Henry, apparent in both the poetry and spectacle. Henry is 'Prince of th'Isles (the hope and the delight/ Of all the northern nations)' (ll. 195-6), while the central ocean motif references his well-known love of the Navy. The masque opened with a scene of the harbour of Milford Haven, and John Pitcher argues that the proscenium arch staging - something new - was used to connect the fictional world with the real world, and to link Prince Henry with Henry, Earl of Richmond arriving at Milford Haven, bringing peace and unity to England.<sup>56</sup>

King James is also praised in *Tethys' Festival*: he is 'the great monarch' (l. 191); but Lewalski argues that despite this, the masque's focus on the prince as the hope for the future subverts James' royal position:

the King's control is put in question. As giver of Astraea's sword, the Queen stands in for Astraea (and her recent embodiment in Queen Elizabeth) linking the promised return of the Golden Age to Henry - an association with less than complimentary implications for James' present rule.<sup>57</sup>

Barroll argues further that, as well as celebrating Henry, the masque was intended to publicly align Queen Anna with her son: '*Tethys' Festival* was so much a function of Anna's relationship with the Prince of Wales that its very existence as a masque can only be explained by this relationship'.<sup>58</sup> Barroll shows that Anna emphasised her connection with Henry, the future King of England, by presenting herself in the masque as a Queen and as the 'creator of a royal race':

With the new Prince of Wales watching the masque as Chief Auditor with his father, *Tethys' Festival* celebrated Anna Progenitrix by exhibiting the two other surviving children whom she had delivered to the world.<sup>59</sup>

This raises the question as to whether Anna's authority is strengthened simply because of being associated with her son (and other family members), or whether the text and spectacle of *Tethys' Festival* suggest a more complex reading. This study will focus on Anna's role as Tethys and, once again, on the presentation and

identity of her women, arguing that although the masque celebrates her eldest son and introduces her second son, Charles, Anna succeeds in emphasising her own authority, whilst also continuing the support and celebration of her women found in the earlier masques, in particular by presenting them more explicitly as a united community.

In his preface to the printed text of *Tethys' Festival*, Daniel says that he wrote it because 'it pleased the Queen's most excellent majesty to solemnise the creation of the high and mighty Prince Henry, Prince of Wales' (ll. 6-8). Daniel here makes himself subservient to the Queen's request, but in contrast to Jonson's prefaces, he does not mention the Queen again, nor does he credit her with the creation of any specific element of the masque.<sup>60</sup> However, *Tethys' Festival* is the only masque which Anna commissioned to include her in the title, and it is subtitled 'The Queen's Wake'.<sup>61</sup> This indicates that the masque was controlled by Anna - it is *her* feast, not Daniel's (as he says, 'I labour not with that disease of ostentation' (l. 12)), nor that of her son, nor even that of the fictional Tethys. The shift from the use of 'Tethys' in the title to 'the Queen' in the subtitle encourages the identification of Anna behind Tethys.<sup>62</sup>

Tethys/Anna is constructed as powerful in the masque world. As Pitcher argues, 'the prime mover of the masque, Tethys, is described as the "intelligence which moves the sphere/ Of circling waves"' (ll. 150-1).<sup>63</sup> The spectacle of the masque also served to centralise the Queen and to emphasise her power. The first scene depicted a harbour: 'in the midst was a compartment with this inscription: *Tethyos Epinicia* - Tethys' feasts of triumph' (ll. 99-100). Even in this first scene, from which the Queen was absent, Tethys' presence is proclaimed. For the second scene the set incorporated dolphins, whales, fountains, sea-horses, pillars, arches and friezes which Daniel takes sixty-six lines to describe (ll. 220-86). In the centre of this elaborate set were five niches. Each contained three nymphs, except for the middle niche, in which Anna was positioned on a throne, 'raised six steps, and all covered with such an artificial stuff as seemed richer by candle than any cloth of gold' (ll. 239-41); Princess Elizabeth sat at the Queen's feet.

Anna as Tethys, enthroned and surrounded by her women, is therefore the focus of this scene, not Henry or James. Further, detailed study of the poetry reveals that the visual regal image is reinforced. Lewalski has already commented

on the significance of the phrase 'my waters' (l. 209) as a claim by Tethys for 'the alternate sphere of power and worth'.<sup>64</sup> This is further emphasised by the words immediately following, which refer to '[Tethys]' watery government' (l. 209). The use of the word 'government' builds on the queenship theme and imagery. In addition, within the masque itself Tethys/Anna gives Meliades/Henry advice on how to rule: as both the poetry and the visual elements of the masque set her up as ruler as well as genitrix, she can be viewed as claiming her right to offer advice from one ruler to another as well as from mother to son.

The poetry and spectacle work in conjunction to centralise the Queen; thus, the masque which was performed to praise Henry, nevertheless constantly praised and focused on his mother, who was physically present within the masque world, in contrast to both Henry and James. Even when Anna was not on stage her influence was kept in public view by the banner which announced that these were Tethys' festivities. The evidence therefore supports Barroll's argument that in *Tethys' Festival* there is 'consistent emphasis on Anna'; in this he agrees with Lewalski, but for Barroll this focus on Anna as Queen and royal mother specifically works to display 'Anna's relationship with the Prince of Wales'.<sup>65</sup> In *Tethys' Festival* the Stuart family is undoubtedly honoured, with Anna in the role of genitrix regarding Henry, Charles and Elizabeth. But Anna did not just appear with her family. As Queen of the Ocean - the 'mother of nymphs and rivers' - she is also genitrix of a sorority, the women who danced with her as the nymphs of Tethys' tributary rivers.<sup>66</sup> As Daniel put it, these were rivers 'appropriate either to [the women's] dignity, signories or places of birth' (ll. 64-5). The women who portrayed the fictional daughters - the 'choice nymphs [Tethys/Anna] pleased to call away' (l. 167) - were Princess Elizabeth (portraying the nymph of the River Thames); Arbella Stuart (the nymph of the Trent); Alatheia Howard, Countess of Arundel (the Arun); Elizabeth de Vere (the Derwent); Frances Devereux (the Lea); Anne Clifford (the Air); Susan de Vere (the Severn); Elizabeth (Radcliffe) Ramsay, Viscountess Haddington (the Rother); Elizabeth (Talbot) Grey, Countess of Kent (the Medway); Elizabeth Guildford (the Dulas); Katherine Petre (the Olway); Anne Winter (the Wye) and Catherine Windsor (the Usk). The inclusion of the Princess Elizabeth, dancing in her first masque, and Arbella Stuart, the King's cousin, highlights the family orientation of the masque, but this study

focuses on a different aspect: the support and celebration of these women through their presentation as a sisterhood, led by Queen Anna.

### The female masquers

In this masque there were fourteen dancers altogether, two more than in *Queens*.<sup>67</sup> This was the first time that Elizabeth Ramsay and Elizabeth Grey had been invited to dance in a masque.<sup>68</sup> The marriage of Elizabeth Radcliffe to the Scotsman John Ramsay had been celebrated by Jonson's *Haddington Masque* on February 9<sup>th</sup> 1608, making the inclusion of Elizabeth Ramsay interesting. Her new husband was the man who had killed John Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie in the conspiracy of August 5<sup>th</sup> 1600.<sup>69</sup> As previously shown, Anna had protected Gowrie's sisters, who were her ladies in waiting, and had made it clear that she believed the murder had been planned by James. It would seem that Anna liked Elizabeth enough to include her in the masque in spite of John Ramsay, a possibility, as in 1616 Anna was to support Frances Carr, despite despising Frances' husband.

Elizabeth Grey, who was married to Henry Grey, Earl of Kent, was the daughter of Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury. Elizabeth, like her friend Anne Clifford<sup>70</sup> and like Mary Wroth, was a writer, the author of a work on cookery and also of a medical treatise entitled *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physic and Chirurgery*, published in 1653, two years after her death. Her medical text went through nineteen editions between 1653 and 1688, testimony to its popularity.<sup>71</sup> It was probably Elizabeth Grey's family connections which led to her inclusion in *Tethys' Festival*: she was the sister of Alatheia Howard, Countess of Arundel, one of the Queen's favourite women since 1608, and was also kin to Arbella Stuart. Elizabeth Grey's grandfather, George Talbot (the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury and, for a time, the jailer of Mary, Queen of Scots) was the fourth husband of Arbella's grandmother Bess of Hardwick; George's son Gilbert and Bess' daughter Mary had subsequently married and Elizabeth was their daughter. Arbella was emotionally close to her Uncle Gilbert - Elizabeth Grey's father - as her many letters to him testify.<sup>72</sup> In previous masques, relatives of the women in Anna's inner circle had been invited to dance, for example Lucy Russell's sister (Frances Chichester) in *Beauty* and Elizabeth and Susan de Vere's

niece (Elizabeth Hastings) in *Queens*. The women can therefore be viewed, as would be expected, as using their intimate position with the Queen in order to advance female family members. As already argued, inclusion within the masques signalled Anna's support of specific women; for these visitors, even dancing once would have been enough to indicate to the court that they were favoured and noticed by the Queen.

With the exception of Princess Elizabeth, the rest of the women who took part had danced with Anna before. Katherine Petre (one of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester) and Arbella Stuart, who had both missed *Queens* due to illness, returned to dance in *Tethys' Festival*. Of these women, the inclusion of Arbella Stuart in particular demands closer attention. Her participation is viewed by commentators as the result of Anna's desire to incorporate all members of James' family in *Tethys' Festival* as Arbella was 'the King's closest relative',<sup>73</sup> an interpretation which reinforces the argument that the Stuart family was being displayed as unified. It is possible, however, to read Arbella's inclusion in another way. Throughout her life she had been the subject of rumours, which had become more numerous between 1609 and 1610. Early in 1610 she had contacted William Seymour with the intention of marrying him. Like Arbella, Seymour was a potential claimant to the throne, and any children from such a match would have threatened the succession of James' own children. When James became aware of Arbella's plans he immediately forbade her to marry Seymour. Not long after this, however, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, Arbella danced in *Tethys' Festival* and, seventeen days later, despite James' command, she clandestinely married William Seymour at 4am in her chambers at Greenwich Palace, an action which, as previously indicated, was to lead to her imprisonment. While it is unlikely that Anna was aware of Arbella's plans to proceed with the forbidden marriage, she did know that Arbella was at this time in difficulties and had been reprimanded by James for her contact with Seymour. In light of Anna's later support of Arbella when she was imprisoned in the Tower, it seems probable that her participation in the masque was a deliberate means for the Queen to show her support of Arbella's situation (and perhaps of Arbella's right to choose her own husband).<sup>74</sup> Further, although the inclusion of Arbella has been viewed as honouring James, her continued defiance of the King



meant that her presence would have had a potentially subversive impact: her public appearance can never have been comfortable for the King.

The way in which the Queen honoured and supported her women in *Tethys' Festival* - by displaying them as the daughters of Tethys - is interesting. In Daniel's own words, already quoted, the nymphs the women portrayed 'presid[ed] over several rivers appropriate, either to their dignity, signories or places of birth' (ll. 64-5). Elizabeth Stuart portrayed the Thames: the river of London - the capital city and residence of the royal family - was obviously suitable to display the 'dignity' of the princess. Arbella Stuart represented the river Trent, which runs through much of Northeast England, including Derbyshire. This land had been owned by her grandmother, the late Bess of Hardwick, with whom Arbella had grown up.<sup>75</sup> Bess was an extraordinary woman: born the daughter of a poor squire she rose through the ranks to become a Countess and a very rich woman. She was independent, a skilful and successful businesswoman who built Hardwick Hall and Chatsworth House.<sup>76</sup> Bess had outlived four husbands, and had possessed many lands. Arbella's portrayal of the Trent can thus be viewed as connecting her with a strong-willed and unconventional woman who, in addition, had supported Arbella's claim to the throne over that of James. James would have been aware of the ancestry; thus, the identification with Bess can be viewed as magnifying the subversive impact of Arbella's appearance in the masque.

Five of the women portrayed rivers relating to their 'signories', or titles: Alatheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel portrayed a river in Arundel; Frances Devereux, Countess of Essex, a river in Essex; Elizabeth de Vere, Countess of Derby, a river in Derby; Susan de Vere, Countess of Montgomery, a river in Montgomeryshire and Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, a river in Kent. The status of these five countesses was thus obviously emphasised. In contrast, the other six women personated rivers connected not with their titles, but with their fathers. As previously argued Anne Clifford depicted the River Air which ran through her late father's land and past her birthplace; Elizabeth Ramsay, daughter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sussex portrayed the Rother, a river in Sussex, while the four daughters of Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester, personated rivers in Monmouthshire, where their father owned many estates.

On one level the connection of these six women with their fathers can be viewed as patriarchal, emphasising their status as daughters rather than as independent women. However, the political implications of Anne Clifford being connected to her father's land rather than that of her husband were discussed in Chapter Five, and in connecting Elizabeth Ramsay with her father's land, it is possible Anna was showing that Elizabeth's inclusion was not to honour Elizabeth's husband, the man who had killed the Earl of Ruthven. In addition, in light of Anna's presentation as mother of the rivers, framing the women as daughters strengthens their identification with their fictional mother, Tethys. Further, in the case of the daughters of Edward Somerset, they were also being displayed as sisters. These four sisters were married, but all represented rivers in their father's, not their husbands' land: because of this, the bond of sisterhood can be read as prioritised over that of husband and wife, reinforced by the poetry of the masque, which presents these four nymphs as a unit: 'And then four goodly nymphs that beautify/ Camber's fair shores, and all that continent,/ The graces of clear Usk, Olway, Dulas and Wye' (ll. 180-2). In addition, two other real sisters, Elizabeth and Susan de Vere, participated in *Tethys' Festival* and their presence alongside the four Somerset sisters reinforces the argument that these women comprised a sorority within the masque.<sup>77</sup> The appearance of these real sisters as fictional sisters recalls the duality of the title and subtitle - which presented Anna both as Tethys and as herself - and looks forward to the end of the masque.

As King, James would have been aware of these associations, but it is unclear how many spectators outside each family would have known which river each woman personated, and whether they would have made these connections. It is a possibility: whereas in *Queens* the women had taken the roles of historical and mythological Queens, in *Tethys' Festival* each woman had a concrete familial link with the river she was portraying. In addition, the names and descriptions of the rivers are listed over fourteen lines of poetry in the scene before the women appear: Daniel uses twice as many words as Jonson had in *Queens* to describe these roles, thus encouraging the spectators to take note of them. Despite this, however, the descriptive epithets mainly point to the women as rivers in general, rather than specifically identifying them,<sup>78</sup> and as in *Queens* no hieroglyphs were displayed to illustrate the women's roles. If the audience could see which rivers

they portrayed, the women would have been at the forefront of the masque, so perhaps their identities had to remain as much as possible within the printed text, to prevent the focus in the performance shifting from the royal family. In this respect, therefore, in particular to the reader, *Tethys' Festival* can be considered a closet record of these women as a sorority.

Anna's women were also visibly presented as a sorority. The Queen was displayed sitting on a throne with her real daughter at her feet, surrounded by her twelve other 'daughters'; the presentation of the real mother Anna was therefore combined with that of the fictional mother Tethys, resulting in a sorority led by the Queen. The visual image of unity is reinforced by the fourteen masquers' costumes, which were identical, depicting rivers: 'the long skirt wrought with lace, waved round about like a river, and on the banks sedge and seaweeds all of gold' (ll. 296-8). In addition, as the costumes also incorporated ocean motifs - their upper garments were 'all embroidered with maritime invention' (ll. 292-3) and their headgear was made of coral and shells - the outfits visually connected the river nymphs not only with each other but also with their mother, Tethys, Queen of the Ocean. Therefore the masque spectacle, in conjunction with analysis of the specific women included by Anna and the roles they portrayed allows for a more complex reading of *Tethys' Festival*. Anna, the royal genitrix, as already suggested, is also presented as the genitrix of a sisterhood.

As in *Queens*, Anna would have allocated the specific parts in *Tethys' Festival*, but it is interesting that Daniel's presentation of the Queen and her women in his masques differs from that of Jonson. In Jonson's, the women remain in their chosen roles throughout – for example in *Queens* they were Bel-Anna and her warrior Queens. In contrast, at the end of both *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* and *Tethys' Festival* the Queen and her women, having portrayed deities, appear in their own guises. At the end of *Twelve Goddesses* Juno's messenger Iris reports that the Queen and her 'choicest attendants' were the women whose

forms [the goddesses] presently undertook as delighting to be in the best-built temples of beauty and honour. And in them vouchsafed to appear in this manner, being otherwise no objects for mortal eyes (ll. 410-13).

Anna and her women are 'the best-built temples of beauty and honour', which can be interpreted as reducing their role to receptacles for powerful goddesses, and thus subsuming their identities beneath those of the goddesses. *Tethys' Festival* has a similar ending: Daniel has the Queen and her women appear, no longer as the goddess Tethys and her nymphs, but 'in their own form' (l. 392). Mercury says: 'And bring back those in whose fair shapes were shown/ The late-seen nymphs in figures of their own' (ll. 401-2). The transformation is described by the Triton as being 'of far more delight/ And apter drawn to nature than can be/ Described in an imaginary sight' (ll. 386-8). There was a sound of loud music, then 'suddenly appear[ed] the Queen's majesty in a most pleasant and artificial grove' (ll. 406-7). This was the second instance of scenic sleight of hand employed in the masque by Inigo Jones.<sup>79</sup> The first was used at the end of the opening scene: 'three circles of lights and glasses one within another' (ll. 222-3) descended to distract the audience from the scene change: 'the port vanished, and Tethys and her nymphs appeared in their several caverns gloriously adorned' (ll. 227-9).<sup>80</sup> On both occasions these technical innovations relate to the presentation of Anna, reinforcing the argument that the spectacle focused on her. Such instances also drew attention to the women who appeared with her. Anna's appearance as herself in this second transformation scene also returns the reader (if not the spectator) to the duality apparent in the title and subtitle, which presented her as both fictional and real Queen: the spectacle therefore also encourages the identification of Anna behind the powerful goddess and additionally, of the women behind the river nymphs.

Daniel, by displaying the Queen and her women as they were, draws attention to the actual women who participated; they are therefore honoured as themselves (as Anna's 'choicest attendants') rather than as fictitious goddesses, an interpretation which fits with Anna's apparent desire to honour and support specific women. Further, at the end of *Tethys' Festival*, as it is not just Anna, Charles and Elizabeth who are transformed into their real persons to come forward and join Henry and James, but all of Anna's ladies, the Queen is shown to remain with her sorority as well as with her family.

*Tethys' Festival* celebrated Henry and presented the Stuart family as unified with Anna as royal genitrix: the female/genitrix is presented as more important

than the male/generator. Further, as in her previous masques, Anna did not appear alone, but with her female attendants and as Tethys, mother of the river nymphs, she is presented as genitrix of a sorority. The masque therefore highlights Anna's relationship, not just with her son, but also with the women of her court; the fact that in *Tethys' Festival* Anna is presented not only as a Queen but as a mother means that the image of her presiding over and supporting a sorority is much stronger than in the previous masques.

Anne Clifford and Mary Wroth: authors

*Tethys' Festival* included no hieroglyphs to represent the women's roles meaning, as argued, that on one level the masque is a closet record of the individual worth of these women and of their presentation as a sorority.<sup>81</sup> But if *Tethys' Festival* is considered a closet record, it is still a record, and as such could be perceived by readers of the quarto text in 1610. This is similar to Anne Clifford's *Diary*, which 'may have been made available during [her] lifetime to a copyist', in which Clifford paid tribute to the sisterhood of women at the court.<sup>82</sup> She also recorded her relationships with other female friends outwith the court circle, such as the de Vere sisters' niece Lady Frances Bridgewater (the wife of Sir John Egerton and daughter of Alice Stanley)<sup>83</sup> and also Bridget (de Vere) Norris, sister of Elizabeth and Susan, with whom Clifford was 'very kind': on March 19<sup>th</sup> 1617 she wrote that she had 'much talk' with Bridget, who had separated from her husband, Francis Norris.<sup>84</sup> Anne Clifford's friends also included writers, such as Mary Wroth (who had danced with Clifford in *The Masque of Beauty*) and Elizabeth (Knyvet) Clinton, author of the mother's manual *The Countess of Lincoln's Nursery* (1622). At Queen Anna's funeral Clifford records that she and Clinton 'went all the way hand in hand', emotionally and physically supporting each other.<sup>85</sup> Clifford's *Diary* reveals that despite her husband, and despite his attempts to isolate her,<sup>86</sup> she maintained a strong network of supportive female friends, both at court and away from it.

Another of Anna's women, Mary Wroth, who had danced in the masques of *Blackness* and of *Beauty*, also wrote what can be considered a closet record of female community, and in light of the evidence of *Tethys' Festival*, her treatment

of sorority is interesting. In contrast to Clifford, Wroth did not write a personal diary, but a pastoral tragicomedy, *Love's Victory* (c.1620s) which was published for the first time in 1988.<sup>87</sup> Wroth inherited the literary legacy of the Sidney family: she was the daughter of Sir Robert Sidney (later Viscount Lisle) and the niece of Mary (Sidney) Herbert, Countess of Pembroke and also of Philip Sidney. In the past, scholars have examined Wroth's work from the perspective of her male family members, for example comparing her sonnet sequence with Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*.<sup>88</sup> While this is undoubtedly a useful approach, more recent critics, such as Naomi Miller and Josephine Roberts, have instead focused on the specifically female nature of Wroth's work, as does this study.<sup>89</sup>

Wroth was one of the most impressive women writers of the early seventeenth century and it was in widowhood that she appears to have been most prolific – her financial struggles seem to have been less of an obstacle to writing than was her husband. Ben Jonson praised her writing skills, dedicating *The Alchemist* to her, his next play after *Epicoene*. In view of Jonson's condemnation of women adopting masculine behaviour in *Epicoene*, his praise of Wroth is interesting, as she appropriated traditional masculine forms of writing – the sonnet form in *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus*, prose in *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* and pastoral in *Love's Victory*.<sup>90</sup> *Love's Victory*, written in five acts, draws from and responds to the traditions of pastoral and tragicomedy, in particular the Italian plays, Tasso's *Aminta* (1580) and Guarini's *Pastor Fido* (1590). Wroth also incorporates into the play elements from masques and from the games which were played by the ladies of Anna's retinue (the 'childplays' of Arbella Stuart's letter). In appropriating a male genre and drawing on her own experiences of being part of a community of women, Wroth created a space in which to explore female experiences and companionship. As with Anne Clifford's *Diary*, *Love's Victory* is an example of a woman's viewpoint about women, unmediated by having to instruct a male writer, in the way that Queen Anna had to instruct Jonson and Daniel.

Women are not only central to the action in *Love's Victory*, they control it – Venus and Cupid oversee proceedings, but it is Venus who is the stage-manager, and female agency is also emphasised among the mortals. Musella's mother (taking on the role of her dead husband) arranges a marriage between Musella and

Rustic, and the two are precontracted.<sup>91</sup> In response to this Musella and her love Philisses decide to commit suicide. However, Silvesta, having found out about the proposed marriage, plans to save her friend: 'It should not be, nor shall be; no, no, I/ Will rescue her or for her sake die' (5.176-8). Silvesta convinces the lovers to drink a potion instead of stabbing themselves and they appear to die, thanking Silvesta for her great friendship (5.250-3). Silvesta's promise to die for her friend if necessary is put to the test as she is sentenced to death for her part in the suicide. But the Forester offers himself in the place of Silvesta, thus proving his love for her, while in contrast Rustic rejects Musella completely, thus dissolving their *de futuro* contract.

At this point the couple awake, Silvesta's potion having only brought on the appearance of death (an obvious borrowing from *Romeo and Juliet*): Silvesta has saved her friend and Philisses, the man both women love. The two sides of power in women's hands are included here - the negative, Jonsonian version, through the portrayal of Musella's mother, and the positive through Silvesta, and it is the positive which wins out. Silvesta's intervention results in a successful outcome, in contrast to that of the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. Silvesta's thoughts were always for her friend – there is never any hint that if Musella is forced to marry Rustic that would leave Philisses free to marry Silvesta. As Lewalski argues,

Wroth's drama portrays (beyond anything in this genre) an extended egalitarian community, without gender or class hierarchy, bound together by friendships strong enough to survive even rivalries in love – a community in which friends aid, console and even sacrifice themselves for each other.<sup>92</sup>

The importance of female friendship is emphasised throughout the play. Silvesta says to her friend 'Betray Musella? Sooner would I die' (3.48) and at the conclusion of the play Musella tells her in turn 'Silvesta, next to you our lives are bound/ For in you only was true friendship found' (5.505-6). This friendship, however, stands in contrast to the rivalry of Simeana and Climeana. Both women love Lissius, but Climeana, unlike Silvesta, sets herself up as her friend's competitor. In return, Simeana tells her that 'Folly, indeed, is proud, and only vain/ And you his servant feeds with hope of gain' (3.235-6). Ultimately it is Simeana that Lissius loves. Climeana, 'a stranger here by birth' (3.191), failed

because she was too eager to woo: according to Lissius this is 'the most unfitting'st, shamfull'st thing to do' (3.291). This apparently patriarchal sentiment is repeated in the play (Silvesta says 'Indeed a woman to make love is ill' (2.79), while Lissius asks Climeana: 'Is this for a maid/ To follow, and to haunt me thus?' (3.287-8)) – however, Wroth also depicts a negative outcome of women being reticent: Musella dutifully waits for Philisses to woo her, but when he does it is too late to stop her intended marriage to Rustic. Wroth is even-handed in the characterisation of plots – nevertheless, the positive aspects are the determinants in *Love's Victory*.

In Wroth's pastoral there are neither princesses nor great ladies in disguise; female friendship is constructed in terms of equality, as classless – as Naomi Miller argues, Wroth

reconfigures the 'heroine/confidante' pattern governing the presentation of female homosocial bonds in both nature and continental literary antecedents, to establish more equality of voice and role in her representations of ties between women.<sup>93</sup>

There are no Rosalind/Celia or Portia/Nerissa pairings in Wroth's play. Instead, her female characters are equal, exchanging constructive and helpful advice (Musella refers to it as 'kind advice' (3.101)). When Simeana mistrusts Lissius, Musella counsils her against 'this vile humour of base jealousy' (4.262). This female bonding is portrayed as positive, more so than the male bonding. The men do gather together, but their advice is not presented as useful: the men do not wholly understand each other's situations – they are not confidants – as highlighted by Lissius: 'Ah poor Philisses, would I knew thy pain' (1.181).

Wroth's play contrasts with Jonson's negative depiction of a female community in *Epicoene*. Jonson and Wroth set out, ten years apart, to write different plays from different perspectives. Jonson was writing a barbed and satirical city comedy, while Wroth was writing in the pastoral tragicomedy genre. Jonson's play was one of many and was performed on stage. *Love's Victory* was Wroth's only play and there is no evidence that it was ever performed – if it was, it would have been a private reading for friends: her play is a closet record of sorority, much like Clifford's *Diary*.



Both playwrights, however, appear to have derived material from a conception of retinues of women. For Jonson this translates as a misogynistic portrayal of the women as monstrous and foolish, ready to betray each other in a second and can be read as his perception of Anna's circle; perhaps this was his reaction to having to write for two strong female patrons, one of whom - the Queen - appears to have been very demanding. Wroth, on the other hand, has created a world in which female friendships and female support networks take precedence, and this can be equally related to her own positive experience of the same community of women.<sup>94</sup> Wroth's fantasy of an egalitarian female community could not have existed at the Jacobean court, a place dependent on hierarchy – the women of Queen Anna's marginalised court were part of this hierarchy too, as they were all noblewomen and the Queen was their mistress. However, the female support in the play was shown to be found within Anna's retinue, as is the sense that the women were bound by common gender. Wroth's idealisation of a community of women was also found in *Tethys' Festival*, which depicted the women as an unproblematically united sorority, indicating a desire for the women to be perceived in this way.

Wroth's conception is closer to the realities of Anna's court than is Jonson's. Women like Anna and Lucy were Jonson's patrons, but he was forever on the outskirts of the court life he so readily and cuttingly satirised and mocked. Mary Wroth on the other hand, like Anne Clifford, had been a willing and active participant in that court. When she came to write *Love's Victory* Anna was dead and Wroth had been excluded from court, and her play can be read as Wroth's idealisation of her time at court and as an attempt to return to a point when she was part of Anna's supportive circle.

<sup>1</sup> *Love Freed From Ignorance and Folly* is crucial for completing the discussion of the Jonson/Anna 'relationship'. It does not, however, contribute anything new to the subject of Anna and her retinue. For this reason, a study of Jonson's 1611 masque can be found in Appendix 2, pp. 252-9.

<sup>2</sup> Dutton, Introduction, *TF*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> The naked arms of the Dame could be considered Jonson's comment on Anna's bare-armed performance in *Blackness*.

<sup>6</sup> Aasand, 'Queen Anne', p. 281.

<sup>7</sup> Orgel, 'Marginal Jonson', p. 164. The Dame is connected to the Gorgon by the snakes in her hair.

<sup>8</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Warrant from King James to the Exchequer, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1609 quoted in *BJX*, p. 492.

<sup>10</sup> The Venetian Ambassador to the Doge, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1609, *SP (Ven.)*, 1607-1610, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> Jonson stresses that he had already used an antimasque for *The Haddington Masque*, performed the year previously. However, this antimasque of boys had acted as an introduction to the masque, rather than being in opposition to it, as the antimasque to *Queens* was. Anna's specific request for a 'false masque' rather than a prelude was therefore a request for an original device, despite Jonson's claims to the contrary.

<sup>12</sup> However, Orgel argues that 'Jonson ... marginalises the King's scholarship even as he praises it'. 'Marginal Jonson', pp. 171-2. Lewalski argues that the separation of the female figures into the binary opposition of evil (the witches of the antimasque) and virtuous (the Queens of the main masque) need not necessarily be read as patriarchal: 'there are some intimations that the Queens appropriate rather than destroy the power of the witches. They themselves are figures of fierce violence, overturning gender norms'. *Writing Women*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Orgel, 'Marginal Jonson', p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> For the attempted containment see Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 38. Lewalski argues (pp. 38-9) that subversion occurs because Anna is said to combine all the elements of the Queens.

<sup>16</sup> See Orgel & Strong, *Inigo Jones*, pp. 139-53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> McManus, *Women*, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth I had been associated with Astraea, so Audrey was honoured by being given this role.

<sup>20</sup> Grant to Audrey Walsingham, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1604, *SP (Dom.)*, 1603-1610, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Warrant of December 15<sup>th</sup> 1609, *SP (Dom.)*, 1603-1610, p. 573.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that Elizabeth Hastings was invited to dance in this masque, as at this time Elizabeth de Vere and her husband William Stanley were negotiating with Alice Stanley (Elizabeth Hastings' mother) for ownership of the Isle of Man.

<sup>23</sup> Algernon Cecil, *A Life of Robert Cecil, First Earl of Salisbury*, (London: John Murray, 1915), p. 366.

<sup>24</sup> Chamberlain to Carleton, February 11<sup>th</sup> 1613, *SP (Dom.)*, 1611-1618, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> Lindley, *Trials*, p. 16. Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*. William McElwee had previously characterised Frances as 'interested only in clothes and success at parties, artful and rather silly' (quoted in *Trials*, p. 45). This echoes traditional historical perceptions of both Queen Anna and Elizabeth Hatton as only interested in clothes and merry-making, perceptions which have been proved false by this study. In his book Lindley reassesses the traditional argument that Frances was lustful and silly.

<sup>26</sup> Essex told the courts that it was only with Frances that he was unable to perform.

<sup>27</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> June 20<sup>th</sup> 1617 (letter); May 19<sup>th</sup> 1617 (token); June 24<sup>th</sup> 1616, Marginal Note (child), *Diary*, pp. 86, 83, 54.

<sup>30</sup> McManus, *Women*, p. 179.

<sup>31</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> Penthesilea is described as 'the daughter of Mars' (l. 453) and she fought in the battle of Troy.

<sup>33</sup> See for example John Davies, *An Ecstasy* (from *Microcosmos*, 1603), ll. 597-8; William Painter, 'The Amazon, the first Novel' in *The Palace of Pleasure: The Second Tome* (1567) and Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, Book One, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Benson, *Invention*, p. 202.

<sup>35</sup> For example she is described as 'Zenobia that reigned six years in prosperity' in John Lyly, 'Euphues' Glass of Europe', *Euphues and his England* (1580), p. 439. See also William Painter, 'Zenobia, Queen of the Palmyrenes, 25<sup>th</sup> Novel' in *The Palace of Pleasure: The Second Tome*; John Harington, *Orlando Furioso* (1591), 37.5.45 and the anonymous play *The Tragedy of Tiberius* (1609), l. 3295.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>37</sup> Of the others Camilla is 'swift-foot' (l. 367); Artemisia is 'chaste' (l. 369); Berenice is 'fair-haired' (l. 370); Candace is the 'pride of Ethiopia' (l. 372) and Zenobia is 'virtuous' (l. 374).

<sup>38</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> The fact that the speaking parts were played by male actors does not detract from this argument as - at least to some extent - this was a convention. McManus argues that cross-dressed actors appearing alongside female masquers would have drawn attention to the fact that real women were on stage. *Women*, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> It could be further argued that as the women are dancing the name of Anna's second son the emphasis is on male royalty rather than female capability.

<sup>41</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 114.

<sup>42</sup> See also the portrayal of Lady Would-be in *Volpone*.

<sup>43</sup> Jonson's notes to *Queens* say that Hypsicratea dressed as a man in order to go to war.

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- <sup>44</sup> Holdsworth, *Epicoene*, p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> Dusiñberre, *Shakespeare*, pp. 226-7.
- <sup>46</sup> Schleiner, *Women Writers*, p. 112. However, the depiction better suits Anna's female retinue, as Lucy's coterie was not exclusively female.
- <sup>47</sup> Helen Ostovich (ed.), Introduction to Ben Jonson, *Epicoene in Four Comedies*, (London: Longman, 1997), p. 23.
- <sup>48</sup> The text is subtle here - Haughty actually gets Dauphine to say this out loud, rather than saying it herself.
- <sup>49</sup> This attitude is similar to that of Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester, who stated in 1604 that 'the plotting and malice amongst [Anna's women] is such, that I think envy hath tied an invisible snake around most of their necks to sting one another to death'. But his perception of the Queen's court contrasts with the evidence, and it is possible the Earl's comments were a reaction to the fact that none of his seven daughters had, as yet, been singled out for attention by the new Queen.
- <sup>50</sup> Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers*, (London: John Lehmann, 1952), p. 210.
- <sup>51</sup> John Palmer, *Ben Jonson*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1934, 1967), p. 76; Eric Linklater, *Ben Jonson and King James: biography and portrait*, (London, 1931), p. 122.
- <sup>52</sup> Letter from the Venetian Ambassador to the Doge, February 18<sup>th</sup> 1610, *State Papers (Ven.)*, p. 427.
- <sup>53</sup> For the rivalry see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 58; Joseph Loewenstein, 'Printing and "The Multitudinous Presse": The Contentious Texts of Ben Jonson's Masques' in Jennifer Brady and W.H. Herendeen (eds.), *Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), pp. 169-78; Dutton, Introduction, *TF*, p. 99. Daniel's attitude towards the masque form was different to that of Jonson: while Jonson argued that masques were lasting, Daniel believed they were transient: 'pleasures vanish fast/ Which by shadows are expressed' (*TF* ll. 349-50). Daniel's emphasis on the importance of the role of the architect (Inigo Jones) over his own role as writer appears to be a calculated response to Jonson, for whom the role of writer exceeded that of any other person involved in the masque process. See also *Queens* (ll. 89-96), where Jonson's choice of phrasing can be read as critiquing Daniel's introduction of the masquers in *Twelve Goddesses* (ll. 280-348).
- <sup>54</sup> John Pitcher, "'In those figures which they seem": Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival*' in David Lindley (ed.), *The Court Masque*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 35.
- <sup>55</sup> John Finnett, a contemporary observer, claimed twelve girls danced. Dutton, Introduction, *TF*, p. 100.
- <sup>56</sup> Pitcher, 'In those figures', pp. 36-7; Daniel's previous masque, *Twelve Goddesses*, had employed old-fashioned dispersed staging. Dutton, Introduction, *TF*, p. 100.
- <sup>57</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 39-40.
- <sup>58</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 126.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>60</sup> Instead, much of the preface to *Tethys' Festival* can be read as a rejection of Jonson's methods and style of masque writing. See ll. 1-58 and n. 52 above.

<sup>61</sup> 'Wake' means 'feast'.

<sup>62</sup> Further, the name, Tethys, Queen of the Ocean, echoes Anna's role in *Queens*, Bel-Anna, Queen of the Ocean.

<sup>63</sup> Pitcher, 'In those figures', p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> See Daniel's marginal note to the masque, which reads '*Tethys mater nympharum et fluviorum*'.

<sup>67</sup> This deviates from the normal incorporation of groups of four, which are thought to be necessary for the dances. Barroll argues that Anna and Elizabeth probably did not dance, which would leave twelve dancers, a multiple of four. However, the printed text of Daniel's masque makes it clear that Anna did dance (ll. 340, 361-3).

<sup>68</sup> They replaced Elizabeth Hastings and Catherine Cecil.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>70</sup> Clifford refers to this friendship in her *Diary*, for example recording that she dined with Elizabeth Grey in Grey's lodgings at court on December 27<sup>th</sup> 1616, and while there discussed her forthcoming meeting with King James. *Diary*, p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> Acheson, Annotations to *Diary*, p. 138; Steen, *Letters*, p. 43n.3.

<sup>72</sup> Steen, *Letters*, pp. 182, 187, 189, 190, 195, 200-2, 204, 207, 208, 221, 228, 230, 234, 235.

<sup>73</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 125.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>75</sup> Arbella's father, Charles Stuart, had died and the Lennox lands, instead of passing to Arbella, had been seized by Elizabeth, then passed on to James.

<sup>76</sup> The references to Bess are drawn from David N. Durant, *Bess of Hardwick: Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast*, (London: Peter Owen, 1999). Bess and Arbella had been estranged for many years. However, in 1605 they were reconciled: Arbella visited Bess who was very ill (she was in her eighties by this time) and they struck a deal over a blank peerage which Arbella had been given by James. When Bess died in 1608 she left Arbella one thousand pounds, money which Arbella badly needed to fund her expensive life at court.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth and Susan de Vere were not connected to their father's land which would have, as with the Somerset sisters, framed them as fictional as well as real sisters. The Earl of Oxford had been estranged from his daughters, and was dead by this time; his lands transferred to his son Henry, the step-brother of Elizabeth and Susan.

<sup>78</sup> For example 'clear-waved worthiness' (l. 172), 'crystal-streaming' (l. 173), 'streams of grace' (l. 177). Elizabeth Stuart is an exception: her river is referred to as 'stately Thames' and she is 'the darling of the Ocean' (ll. 169-70).

<sup>79</sup> Jones used a similar technique once in *Queens*, when the hell scene disappeared to be replaced by the House of Fame.

<sup>80</sup> The complete description reads: 'First at the opening of the heavens appeared three circles of lights and glasses one within another, and came down in a straight motion five foot, and then began to move circularly; which lights and motion so occupied the eye of the spectators that the manner of altering the scene was scarcely discerned; for in a moment the whole face of it was changed, the port vanished, and Tethys with her nymphs appeared gloriously adorned' (ll. 222-9). Pitcher discusses the symbolism of the lights and glasses, 'In those figures', pp. 38-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Tethys' Festival* more so because Daniel lists who played which parts - in *Queens* it is Jones' costume designs which point us to the roles played by the women.

<sup>82</sup> Acheson, Introduction, *Diary*, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> January 20<sup>th</sup> 1619, *Diary*, p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> March 19<sup>th</sup> 1617, *Diary*, p. 91. Mary Wroth was also very friendly with Bridget. Later (January 20<sup>th</sup> 1619, *Diary*, p. 98), Clifford records the visit of Frances (Stanley) Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater. Frances, daughter of Alice Stanley, was the niece of the de Vere sisters.

<sup>85</sup> May 13<sup>th</sup> 1619, *Diary*, p. 111.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>87</sup> Brennan (ed.), *Mary Wroth's Love's Victory*. All quotations are taken from this edition.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Gary Waller, *The Sidney Family Romance*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Roberts, *Poems*; Naomi Miller, *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and figurations of gender in early modern England*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

<sup>90</sup> Edward Denny, in response to Wroth's satiric portrayal of Denny in *Urania* wrote a poem, 'To Pamphilia [Wroth] from the father-in-law of Seralius [Denny's character in *Urania*]', in which he called her 'Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster' (l. 1) for choosing to write, a masculine pastime. As mentioned, Jonson used the term 'hermaphroditical' in *Epicoene* (1.1.77).

<sup>91</sup> Musella tells Philisses 'Hopeless of you, I gave my ill consent,/ And we contracted were which I repent' (5.71-2).

<sup>92</sup> Barbara Lewalski, 'Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* and Pastoral Tragicomedy' in Miller & Waller, *Reading Mary Wroth*, p. 95.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, *Changing the Subject*, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Lewalski discusses the theme of female agency in *Love's Victory* (*Writing Women* pp. 299-307), but does not connect this to Wroth's experiences as part of Anna's retinue.

## 7. Conclusion

The previous chapters offer new and alternative accounts of Renaissance Englishwomen's agency and of the ways in which this is represented in plays and masques of the period. While women at this time were not equal to men, this study has arrived at gaining as complex and complete a picture as possible of their opportunities to negotiate a space within this patriarchal society, in terms of both heterosexual and homosocial relationships. Further, the presentation of proactive female characters in public plays has been explored in conjunction with the actual appearance of proactive women on stage in court masques.

Agency in marriage appears in the records for spousals and wife sales, and these neglected social practices provided playwrights with different ways to explore women's potential for independent choice. With regard to the spousal plot, since the possibility of women using ecclesiastical law to make choices is openly shown, and since these female characters are free of moral condemnation, they can be seen as arbiters for such independent choice. Study of the spousal plot is valuable and other plays could benefit from this kind of analysis: for example, one play whose meaning is altered if the spousal law is not taken into account is John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1629). In this play Penthea, in love with Orgilus, is forced by her brother, Ithocles, to marry the jealous Bassanes: Penthea claims the marriage makes her a 'spotted whore' (3.2.76) and as a result, starves herself to death. However, *The Broken Heart* is not just about two people in love separated by a forced marriage. Ford makes it clear that Penthea and Orgilus were precontracted: they were 'join[ed] in a Hymenean bond' (1.1.31). Therefore Penthea and Orgilus are husband and wife and in the eyes of the church Penthea's marriage to Bassanes would constitute adultery. The precontract thus provides Ford with a legal framework with which to critique arranged, loveless marriage. Knowledge of the spousal law is therefore necessary in order to understand the complexities of sixteenth and seventeenth century marriage, and of the ways in which it is represented in plays of the time.

The study of historical wife sales shows that they cannot always be viewed as a manifestation of the belief that women were property, a reading which denies women the opportunity for agency and frames them solely as passive objects of

exchange. Women like Margaret Cheyne found in the wife sale a means to create a second, affectionate match, providing further evidence of female self-regulation in marriage at this time. In the plays which include a wife transaction plot - Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, Middleton's *The Phoenix*, Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life* and Ford's *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* - the economic aspect is central, and the sale is part of the playwrights' larger exploration of marriage and economics. In these plays - five of which are city comedies - male characters try to sell their wives (the Captain and Knavesby), or else try to buy the wife of another (Hammon). Their actions are presented as illegal and unnatural; the wife sale is therefore a means for these playwrights to explore and critique the belief that women could be bought and sold like goods. And, since the female characters are given the space in which to enact legitimised autonomy, the possibility is made open to the audience.

This study has also shown that women who married at this time, either in historical cases or in dramatic representations, were not necessarily ultimately constrained to the dominant hegemony. The two neglected plot-lines explored in Chapters Two and Three reveal images of maids, widows and wives legitimately guiding the plot and negotiating a space for themselves within marriage: they reject parental authority, choose their own husbands, marry for love, attempt to have equality within marriage (and, in the case of Chapman's Margaret, succeed) and refuse to obey their husbands. Private conscience is placed above duty to family and to the church (Margaret and the Duchess of Malfi), and also above duty to husbands (Sibyl Knavesby). These female characters do not reject marriage, but, in finding ways to have some control over it, they can be viewed as transforming male expectations of it. This thesis therefore extends understanding of the range of possibilities for the portrayal of female roles on the public stage, including less familiar characters such as Chapman's Margaret and Middleton's Sibyl Knavesby, in addition to the well-known example of the Duchess of Malfi.

In this thesis, analysis of female characters was placed alongside an examination of the only women who appeared on stage at this time: Queen Anna and her court ladies. Anna's retinue was a separate female space, class specific and exclusive, consisting of women who were elite, educated and, for the most part, living at court. The majority of these women were trying to control their



lives: however, as shown in Chapter Four, they were not simply interested in advancing their own interests within a male dominated society. Rather they were part of a group of similarly strong-minded, oppositional and unconventional women, all of whom were, to one extent or another, supported by the Queen and by other members of the retinue; for example, Anne Clifford in her legal battle, Susan de Vere and Arbella Stuart in their choices of husband and Penelope Rich in her decision to live with a man whom she loved rather than with her husband. Some of Anna's women are now well-known (Lucy Russell and Mary Wroth), while others are less familiar, for example Elizabeth and Susan de Vere, Elizabeth Hatton, Alatheia Howard, Elizabeth Grey, Mary Neville and Lady Ruthven. Certain women remained a constant part of Anna's female network, such as the de Vere sisters, while others, in particular Elizabeth Hatton, moved in and out of favour. In addition, at times the Queen's personal liking for her women transcended political concerns, as with Frances Carr and Elizabeth Ramsay.

The new evidence of homosocial bonding and mutual support found within this group of women striving to control their lives is of value. Firstly, it shows women creating alliances and the role which these friendships played in their ability to have agency. Secondly, it provides an important extension to previous explorations of the court masques commissioned by Queen Anna since the Queen used the masques, not only to display her royal authority, but also to honour her women and visibly support their oppositional stances, through her choice of who was to dance and which roles they were to present. For example, Penelope Rich's adulterous love affair with Charles Blount was highlighted and legitimised by her presentation as Venus, Goddess of Love in Samuel Daniel's *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604). The following year, in *The Masque of Blackness*, Penelope portrayed purity, thus destabilising the patriarchal association of purity with chastity and married fidelity. The skilful and successful businesswoman Elizabeth de Vere was presented in *Twelve Goddesses* as Proserpina, Goddess of Riches, while in *Tethys' Festival*, Anne Clifford's role connected her to her father's lands, lands which she was at that time trying to claim as her rightful inheritance. Looking at the masques from the perspective of all of the women who danced in them is therefore central to an understanding of the potential of the masque-in-performance. The conclusion is that in the original performances, the masques would have been read as pro-Anna and her women, rather than pro-James, within

a token framework of respect to the monarch. The text, too, contributes to this meaning.

One of the most interesting contributions of reading the text, spectacle and women who danced, is the relationship of *The Masque of Beauty* to the previous *Masque of Blackness*. The first masque figured the limited roles which were available to Renaissance women, the wife and the whore. After the destabilisation of these roles, as analysed in Chapter Five, the second masque displayed the capabilities of these women: this was achieved via the dancing, the spectacle and by the inclusion of specific women, and was also argued for in Jonson's poetry. Therefore the challenge to patriarchal authority appears as a connected and continuing process. This subversion involved every aspect of the performance and worked on group dynamics, rather than, as has been argued in the past, only focusing on the Queen.

The display of the united female group in *The Masque of Queens* found fresh expression in *Tethys' Festival*, in which the Queen was displayed as the genetrix of a sorority. This is despite the fact that Arbella Stuart danced. The conclusion is, that even though problems arose in Anna's relationships with some of her women, she nevertheless had a desire to present her circle as a separate, united female group. The strength of this group may have been satirised by Ben Jonson in *Epicoene*, and this possibility provides a likely reason why Anna chose Daniel for her 1610 masque, of all her masques the one which explicitly presented a female community. Yet Mary Wroth provides a different reading of this group, exploring positive female relationships in *Love's Victory*, mirroring the support of Anna's group and placing it within a non-hierarchical framework which could not have existed at the Jacobean court. Both *Tethys' Festival* and *Love's Victory* therefore present idealised images of female community, and can be considered closet records of sorority. A more factual and less idealised closet record of sisterhood is Anne Clifford's *Diary*, in which she documented her many female friendships. All three texts celebrate female homosocial bonding, and can be usefully placed within the context of the women's experiences as part of Queen Anna's retinue.

The plays and masques analysed in this thesis were written and/or performed in the first two decades of the seventeenth century. During this time it appears there was a backlash against women: from 1603 this was to some extent

led by King James, whose emphasis on the monarch as the father/husband can be viewed in part as a reaction to fifty years of successful female rule. There are those who argue, however - notably Barbara Lewalski - that despite an increase in misogynist texts, there were in fact more opportunities for women during the Jacobean era than there had been when Elizabeth was on the throne.<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced, for example, by the increase in original works written and published by women at this time, such as Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam*, the first play written by a woman (written in 1604, published in 1614), Amelia Lanyer's book of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (published in 1611), Elizabeth Clinton's mother's manual, *The Countess of Lincoln's Nursery* (1622) and of course, Mary Wroth's sonnets, prose-romance and play.

As discussed in the introduction, 'woman' is not a stable category, and the experiences of women at this time were not universal. However, it appears that during the first two decades of the seventeenth century some historical women had an opportunity for increased agency, a situation which was reflected in the dramatic representation of women in public plays. The argument is that, while Elizabeth I may have been a woman on the throne, in many ways she was acting as a man, and did not increase possibilities for other women.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the separate court of Queen Anna provided a royal female focus displaced from - and often oppositional to - that of the monarch. Leeds Barroll has demonstrated that Anna was the head of a network of patronage of the arts. In addition, it has been shown in this thesis that Anna was also the head of a group of proactive women who were supported, displayed and honoured through the court masques which the Queen commissioned. While the intention here is not to argue that Anna and her women were consciously interested in changing the position for women outwith their elite group, the Queen's separate female court and her involvement in cultural activities would have been known of outside the court, thus providing a strong female reference point. For example, Amelia Lanyer, a gentlewoman, dedicated her book of poems - which is described by Lewalski as having a 'remarkable feminist conceptual frame'<sup>3</sup> - to Anna and members of the Queen's retinue. Further, there is the possibility that Anna's ideas were disseminated through the theatre, as it is well-known that the Queen patronised two boys' companies and attended public theatres.

There is much of positive worth to be gained by looking at women and agency through the different, but complementary, lenses of marriage and female alliances and it is hoped that this study will stimulate more research into Renaissance Englishwomen's ability to operate successfully within this patriarchal society. As scholars continue to analyse parish records – for example, Martin Ingram for Wiltshire – more documents will be uncovered relating both to marriage practice and to the different ways in which women interacted with each other. Women are often hidden in records, but examples of female autonomy are there to be found. One of the aims of this thesis was to foreground neglected or unknown Renaissance women, and the experiences of such women, lower class as well as aristocratic, must continue to be recovered and interrogated. Only then will it be possible to build a more richly-layered picture of the way in which women lived at this time, and of the different opportunities they had for agency.

In terms of dramatic representations of women and agency, two areas in particular provide the opportunity for further research. Firstly, it has already been argued that analysing more plays from the perspective of the spousal plot would be of value: many plays incorporate a precontract, some of which, like Thomas Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, have in general been neglected, and the spousal may provide a useful way into examining them. Secondly, the portrayal of female homosocial bonding on the public stage is a fertile area for investigation. The community of shopkeepers' wives in *The Roaring Girl* and the cross-class bonding and mutual support of Sibyl Knavesby and Mistress Cressingham in *Anything for a Quiet Life* are two examples which were touched on in this thesis. There are, however, many more still to be explored.<sup>4</sup>

The pro-female readings of the plays and masques discussed in this thesis were grounded in the socio-historical context of the period: this was found to be a valuable approach, as the relationship between history and literature is a two-way process – each can be used to inform the other. Examining the ways in which female characters are depicted, both in relation to men and in relation to other women, and comparing this with the experiences of women who lived at this time, increases our knowledge and understanding of the cultural representation of (and attitudes to) Renaissance women, and of the ideological construction of 'woman' throughout history.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Leeds Barroll, 'The Court of the First Stuart Queen' in Linda Levy Peck, *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 191; Martin, *Women Writers*, p. 4. For a contrasting view, see Elizabeth A. Brown, "'Companion me with my Mistress': Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and their Waiting Women' in Frye & Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses*.

<sup>3</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the relationship between Portia and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice* and the female bonding in *Love's Labours Lost*.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1**  
**List of non-Shakespearean plays which incorporate a**  
**spousal plot (alphabetically by author)**

**Anonymous**

*Fair Em* (c.1590).

**George Chapman**

*The Gentleman Usher* (1602-4).

*The Widow's Tears* (1605).

**Thomas Dekker**

*I The Honest Whore* (with Middleton) (1604).

*The Noble Spanish Soldier* (1622-30).

**John Fletcher**

*Love's Pilgrimage* (c.1622).

**John Ford**

*The Broken Heart* (1629).

*The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635-6).

**Thomas Heywood**

*The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (1604).

*The English Traveller* (1625).

**John Marston**

*Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600).

**Thomas Middleton**

*The Family of Love* (with Dekker) (1603).

*A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1605).

*A Mad World, My Masters* (1605).

*A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605).

*The Roaring Girl* (with Dekker) (1611).

*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613).

*The Witch* (1613).

*The Widow* (1616).

*The Spanish Gypsy* (with Ford and William Rowley) (1623).

*A Game at Chess* (1624).

**William Sampson**

*The Vow Breaker, or The Fair Maid of Clifton* (1636).

**Wentworth Smith**

*The Hector of Germany* (1615).

**Cyril Tourneur**

*The Atheist's Tragedy* (1607-11).

**John Webster**

*The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-14).

*The Devil's Law-case* (post-1614).

**George Wilkins**

*The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1607).

**Mary Wroth**

*Love's Victory* (c.1620s).



## Appendix 2

### *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*

Six months after the production of *Tethys' Festival*, for the Christmas season 1610/11, Anna commissioned Ben Jonson to write what would be his fourth and last masque for her, *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*. This masque needs to be analysed for what it reveals of Anna's continuing use of the form. In addition, in light of the criticism of female community found in *Epicoene* (written the year previously), the question arises as to whether a shift can be detected in Jonson's writing for Anna in this last masque. *Love Freed* was performed on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1611 and opened with an argument between Cupid (the 'Love' of the title) and his captor, the Sphinx (who symbolised Ignorance). Cupid explains that the eleven Daughters of the Morn, led by their queen and accompanied by Cupid as their 'guard and aid' (l. 82) had set out from the east to seek Phoebus the sun god, whom the queen was to marry. However, the travellers were captured by the Sphinx who 'to prison of the night/ Did condemn those sisters bright' (ll. 108-9). The only way for the women to be freed was to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, or by Cupid sacrificing himself for them, and thus depriving the world of love. The daughters would not let Cupid do this but, confident of success, he 'waged/ With the monster that if I/ Did her riddle not untie/ I would freely give my life/ To redeem them and the strife' (ll. 125-9). In answering the riddle<sup>1</sup> incorrectly as 'mistress', Cupid is about to be taken away by twelve Follies - the children of the Sphinx - when the Muses' Priests appear. They tell Cupid that in order to find the answer, the Muses 'bid that thou should'st look/ In the brightest face here shining' (ll. 242-3). This yields the correct answer 'Albion' (a reference to James, also figured as Phoebus), the Sphinx is defeated and the daughters freed.

Until recently *Love Freed* had been all but ignored by historians and literary critics. Orgel in *The Jonsonian Masque* (1965) mentions it once briefly, while Limon in *The Masque of Stuart Culture* (1990) makes passing reference to it.<sup>2</sup> This lack of attention can in part be attributed to the fact that Jonson had written another masque at the same time, *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, for Prince Henry, which has been the subject of much critical debate, in part due to Jonson's attempt to balance praise of King James with praise of Henry, the future monarch. As

Leeds Barroll argues, *Oberon* has 'effectively eclipsed' interest in *Love Freed*.<sup>3</sup> Recently, however, Barbara Lewalski has examined the poetry of the printed text of *Love Freed*, while Barroll has analysed the circumstances surrounding the performance of it; interestingly, both critics come to different conclusions regarding the level of Queen Anna's involvement. Lewalski argues that *Love Freed* marked the end of Anna's subversive masquing activities as it 'constrain[ed her] firmly to the King's ideology and interests': in contrast to previous masques

the Queen's influence seems little in evidence in the conception of this work ... the masquing ladies have no power to affect the action: the King is unambiguously the source of the power to free love and beauty, and he is the right object of the ladies' quest. The subversions of a decade have been quelled in this elaborate Neoplatonic masque - from which all signs of the Queen's 'authorship' have been excised.<sup>4</sup>

Examination of Jonson's text seems to reinforce this conclusion: while Anna is portrayed as 'the Queen of the Orient' (ll. 65-6), she is not central to *Love Freed*, nor is her royalty reinforced by either poetry or spectacle.<sup>5</sup> Instead it is James-as-Phoebus who is praised: he is 'the sun thron'd in the west' (l. 339). In addition, Lesley Mickel argues that Cupid - a speaking character and therefore present within the masque, unlike Phoebus/James - can be viewed as 'a figurative representation of the monarch':<sup>6</sup> 'With the sceptre called your bow .../ No sooner you do draw/ Forth a shaft, but is a law' (ll. 4-11). At the end Cupid is crowned, not the Queen of the Orient: 'A crown, a crown for Love's bright head' (l. 269).

In this masque Anna's women are 'the daughters of the Morn' (l. 62), described as the personification of Beauty: 'Ne'er were brighter bevy born/ Nor more perfect beauties seen' (ll. 63-4). This connects *Love Freed* with Jonson's earlier masque, *The Masque of Beauty*, and the masques are structurally similar.<sup>7</sup> Both involve a journey and the two quests parallel each other: in *Beauty* the daughters of Niger had travelled from the east to become white; in *Love Freed* the daughters of the Morn travelled from the East 'hither to the farthest west' (l. 84). In both the end destination is Britain and in both the masquers are imprisoned: in *Beauty* Night has trapped the women with 'charms of darkness' (l. 77); in *Love Freed* the Sphinx 'to prison of the night/ Did condemn those sisters bright' (l. 109).<sup>8</sup> But, while *Beauty* demonstrated examples of female empowerment which

refuted male assumptions, the Daughters of the Morn are passive and their capabilities are not displayed.<sup>9</sup> *Love Freed* can thus be viewed as a shadow of the former masque and analysis of the poetry reinforces Lewalski's conclusion that 'the Queen's influence seems little in evidence in [its] conception'.

By contrast, Barroll, concentrating on the performance rather than the printed text, argues that Anna was still using the masque form to promote her queenly authority. Both *Oberon* and *Love Freed* were intended to be part of the 1610/11 Christmas festivities at the Jacobean court, but *Love Freed* was postponed until February, and Lewalski concludes that this was to give precedence to *Oberon*.<sup>10</sup> Barroll, however, points out that at this time the Jacobean court was awaiting the arrival of the French Ambassador, Marshal Laverdin, in order to conclude negotiations for an Anglo-French treaty. Laverdin, expected in December 1610, did not arrive in England until January 1611. Each time the ambassador was delayed, so too was *Love Freed*, which was finally performed for him on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. It would appear that Anna's masque had been postponed in anticipation of Laverdin's arrival: as 'it was the queen's, not Henry's masque that was meant to garnish an extremely delicate diplomatic situation', this indicates that *Love Freed* had political significance.<sup>11</sup> Further, Barroll argues that the performances of *Oberon* and *Love Freed* show Anna continuing to display her queenship by publicly aligning herself - as she had in *Tethys' Festival* - with Prince Henry, the future king of England: for Barroll, if *Love Freed* is considered

in light of Anna's - not Jonson's - connection to Henry, *Oberon* and *Love Freed* actually suggest an arrangement between Anna and her son jointly to present masques in this (and probably subsequent) Christmas seasons.<sup>12</sup>

Barroll shows that, in contrast to the evidence of the written text, the performance was carefully orchestrated by the queen to emphasise her royalty. He also argues that the queen had not intended *Love Freed* to be her last masque as the year after 'Anna and her ladies were ... rehearsing a masque for this Christmas' (1612) which had to be cancelled due to the death of the Spanish queen consort.<sup>13</sup> The fact that Anna had decided to continue producing masques indicates that she felt her aims were still being served by them and this, in conjunction with Barroll's reading of the performance of *Love Freed*, allows for the possibility that the queen

was more involved than analysis of the poetry suggests. But, in contrast to other masques, in Jonson's printed version of *Love Freed* there is no preface and no cast list; in addition, the names of all collaborators have been omitted, and the stage directions and notes are minimal. This study will briefly examine the consequences of, and reasons for, these omissions.

In *Love Freed* the only reference to Anna and the only indication from the printed text that this was a masque which she commissioned, is on the title page: the words 'A Masque of her Majesty's' precede the title of the masque. As well as omitting a preface, as mentioned, Jonson also chose to exclude the names of all his 'co-authors'. However, it is clear from the payment list for the masque that, despite their absence from the printed text, Inigo Jones and Alfonso Ferrabosco (among others) did take part in the creation of *Love Freed*. The omission of their names allows for the possibility that Anna was also as involved as she had been in the past.

In addition, although it is more than likely that, as before, Anna would have chosen the participants for this masque, Jonson did not include a cast list.<sup>14</sup> In the absence of any other indication as to who danced, *Love Freed* does not provide a closet record of the individual worth of the women who danced. This means that in contrast to previous masques, the reader cannot draw conclusions regarding the implications and significance of the inclusion of specific women. A potential source of information on the dynamics of Anna's community of women at this time has been lost. The result of the omission of both preface and cast list is that, with regard to the creation of *Love Freed*, no permanent record of the queen's involvement or otherwise in the conception or ideas of the masque exists.

This raises the question, why did Jonson decide to omit almost everything except the poetry in his printed text of *Love Freed*? Limon has usefully divided the masques published in Jonson's 1616 Folio into two groups, those with elaborate notes and those without:

The first group belongs to the early phase, or to the years 1605-9, the second to 1610-15. Significantly, all the masques belonging to the first group were first published in quarto editions, a feature that is not shared by any of the masques belonging to the second group.<sup>15</sup>

The masques of *Blackness* and *Beauty* had been published together with *The Haddington Masque* in quarto in 1608, then in the 1616 Folio, while *Queens* was printed in quarto in 1609, then was reproduced in the 1616 Folio. However, *Love Freed* (performed in 1611) only appeared in the 1616 Folio. As the evidence shows that it was exclusively masques published in quarto which incorporated long descriptions, this is one explanation for why the printed text of *Love Freed* contains only minimal notes. However, it does not explain why, when Jonson's previous three masques for the queen had been published in quarto, *Love Freed* was not. The answer may lie in the other masque which Jonson had written at this time, *Oberon*. Jonson had begun annotating *Oberon*, indicating that he was preparing it for publication in quarto. The fact that Jonson chose to do so with *Oberon* rather than *Love Freed* indicates that he considered the latter masque secondary and that at this time he wished to cultivate Henry as a patron rather than Queen Anna, as shown by his notes to *Queens*. In the end, the death of Prince Henry in 1612 meant there was no reason for Jonson to continue with either the notes or immediate publication.<sup>16</sup> Nor did Jonson publish the queen's masque as an alternative. There is always the possibility that Jonson did not have the time, or else felt that by 1612 it was too late to publish *Love Freed* in quarto. However, if he was actively seeking Anna's favour it seems likely he would have published her masque in quarto, and the evidence suggests that by this time Jonson no longer wanted to write for (or praise) his female patron and her retinue.<sup>17</sup>

Jonson's play *Epicoene*, written for Anna's Boys' Company only a year before *Love Freed*, revealed the antithesis to the perspective of the community of women to that in the masques. The argument in the past has been that Jonson himself chose to divide his perspective, between satire in the public theatre and adulation in court masques. However, Jonson sought court favour, which may explain why he chose to allow his perspective in masque writing to be so altered. The evidence for *Blackness* and *Beauty* in particular is that Anna was very much guiding his hand and dictating the content. Though the subtleties of devising multiple signs in *Blackness* and in *Beauty* may have appealed to Jonson creatively, *Epicoene*, chronologically, was his final word on Anna's court. The contrast and Jonson's own description strongly suggest that, for *Blackness* and *Beauty* he was relaying Anna's plots. The example of *Epicoene* can therefore be said to endorse

the evidence in Jonson's descriptive prefaces to *Blackness* and *Beauty* that his masque writing for Anna before *Love Freed* expressed Anna's view rather than Jonson's own. It would appear that in *Love Freed* the only way in which Anna's interests could be served was by appearing publicly on stage, as before, surrounded by her strong-minded, unconventional and proactive women.

<sup>1</sup> The Sphinx's riddle reads: '... you must cast about/ To find a world, the world without,/ Wherein what's done, the eye doth do,/ And is the light and treasure too./ This eye still moves and still is fixed,/ And in the powers thereof are mixed/ Two contraries which Time, till now,/ Nor Fate knew when to join or how./ Yet if you hit the right upon,/ You must resolve these all by one' (ll. 146-55).

<sup>2</sup> Orgel, *Jonsonian Masque*, p. 195; Limon, *Masque*, pp. 39-40, 43, 74, 115. See also Bevington & Holbrook, *Politics*, pp. 12, 116n., 143n., 146, 148, 241n. Lesley Mickel has recently discussed *Love Freed* in her study of Jonson's antimasques, analysing his use of carnival and the grotesque. *Ben Jonson's Antimasques*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 148-57.

<sup>3</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 126; cf. Orgel, *Jonsonian Masque*, pp. 82-91.

<sup>4</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Only one set design has been attributed to *Love Freed*. It shows the eleven masquers seated in a pyramidal formation on a cloud, above their prison. It is not clear if they are sitting on a throne, as they did in *Beauty* and as Anna did in *Tethys' Festival*.

<sup>6</sup> Mickel, *Antimasques*, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> See also ll. 45-6, l. 118, l. 276, l. 296, l. 301. This is reinforced by Jonson's notes (*LF*, p. 91) which state that 'these ladies [are] the perfect issue of Beauty and all worldly grace'.

<sup>8</sup> In Cupid's first speech he alludes to the belief that Love was the first God to leap from Chaos: 'without me/ All again would chaos be' (ll. 26-7). This echoes *Beauty*: 'When Love, at first did move/ From out of Chaos brightn'd/ So was the world, and lightn'd' (ll. 248-50).

<sup>9</sup> In both masques the women's beauty is figured as everlasting day. In *Beauty* the image is of the women as empowered rulers: 'it was for Beauty that the world was made,/ And where she reigns, Love's lights admit no shade' (ll. 255-6). By comparison, the image in *Love Freed* - 'for where such Beauty shines is ever day' (l. 296) - is much weaker. The Phoebus/James reference is stronger than the day/Beauty reference. As in *Beauty* the women are also associated with heaven: 'For Beauty hath a living name,/ And will to heav'n from whence it came' (*Love Freed*, ll. 329-30). However, as with the previous parallel, the image in *Love Freed* is weaker.

<sup>10</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Barroll, *Anna*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126. Barroll argues that for *Oberon* Prince Henry unexpectedly took his mother out to dance three times. Therefore, with the two productions 'not only was Anna paying public deference to [Henry], but he himself seems to have been making a point of recognising the royalty of his queen mother'. *Anna*, pp. 128-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> In light of the evidence of previous masques it is probable that certain women of Anna's inner circle were included in *Love Freed*, such as Lucy Russell, the Somerset sisters, and the de Vere sisters (although by this time Elizabeth may have been too preoccupied with administering the Isle of Man) but it is impossible to know. It would have been interesting to know, for example, whether Anne Clifford was included for a fourth year running.

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<sup>15</sup> Limon, *Masque*, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Oberon* was printed in the 1616 Folio with Jonson's incomplete annotations. *Queens* was therefore the last of Jonson's pre-1616 masques to be published in quarto. Dutton argues (*Masques I*, p. 117) that one reason for Jonson not publishing his masques in quarto after the aborted attempt at *Oberon* was because 'the masque form was changing'. He also suggests that after Henry died there was no point in continuing because Henry was the only one interested in detailed notes. However, Orgel has argued ('Marginal Jonson', p. 170) that Anna was also a discerning patron. Further, *Blackness* and *Beauty* were annotated, but not at the request of Henry, who in 1608 was only fourteen years old.

<sup>17</sup> It would have been interesting to know whether Anna commissioned Jonson for her cancelled masque of 1611/12. It seems unlikely - if the poetry had been written by the time the masque was cancelled, the evidence suggests that Jonson would still have printed it (as he was to do with *Neptune's Triumph* (1624), a masque which was never performed), and there is no record of this.



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